

A Celestial Burning

A selective study of the writings of
Shoghi Effendi

J.A. McLean

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DEDICATION

Shoghi Effendi Rabbaní was a man marked by destiny. While still recovering from his grandfather's unexpected death in Haifa on 28 November 1921, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's eldest grandson received a second blow when the Will and Testament was read and he learned of his appointment as "Guardian of the Cause of God." At age twenty-four, the bereaved young man suddenly found himself charged with ministering to the complex affairs of a growing world religion.

To prepare himself for the duties of sacred office, the new Guardian made an eight-month retreat into the Bernese Mountains of Switzerland, where he struggled to accept his calling. He later captured the outcome in a memorable phrase spoken to his executive secretary, Hand of the Cause of God, Leroy Ioas, "I fought with myself, until I conquered myself. Then I turned myself over to God and became the Guardian." He asked that every Bahá'í fight the same battle with self.

Born on 1 March 1897, in the ancient city of Acre, Palestine, into a family of Persian exiles who had been banished to the province of Syria, in a far corner of the collapsing Ottoman Empire, the former Oxonian belonged to both East and West. He was endowed with a rare combination of spiritual, intellectual, administrative, and creative gifts that were all offered up, as was his entire being, in the service of the Bahá'í Faith. The word *charisma*, so carelessly used today, truly applies to him. Many believe that the wide range of his talents and proven abilities merit the title of genius.

While the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith was not a prophet, and his station essentially human, the pattern of Shoghi Effendi's life resembles the fate of the prophets of old. Outside the Bahá'í community, he was little known. The members of his immediate family, and most of his relatives, by their own choosing, deliberately obstructed the course of his work, attempted to misguide his faithful friends, and inflicted upon him decades of suffering by their relentless intrigues and opposition. The world, torn by two global conflicts, remained oblivious to the steady stream of divine guidance that flowed from his pen, his sacred offering to remedy the dire ills of a sorely divided humanity. The present generation only dimly realizes the full measure of his contribution.

It is certain, however, that future generations will more befittingly recognize Shoghi Effendi's rightful place in the history of religion, not only as the distinguished twentieth-century head of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh but also as one of the most brilliant luminaries of any age. Excepting the Prophets themselves and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that great Mystery of God, it is no exaggeration to say that by virtue of his unique endowments and prodigious accomplishments, Shoghi Effendi's place in religious history outshines any comparable figure of the past or present.

The Guardian was no seeker after glory, but neither was he afraid of assuming the monumental tasks with which he had been entrusted. While he exacted much from himself and expected much from those whose lives he directed, those who were blessed to have served with Shoghi Effendi in Haifa, or who were counted among the host of passing pilgrims, observed that a remarkable attitude of selflessness and humility graced the execution of his sacred duties. The life of "your true brother," as he preferred to call himself, clearly demonstrated, as had the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá before him, that the path of greatness lies only in sacrifice and service.

More than half a century has elapsed since the Guardian's sudden and unexpected passing in the early hours of 4 November 1957, in a hotel room in Knightsbridge, London. I hope that in the coming years this book may add something to the luster of this "priceless pearl," as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has so aptly called him. For Shoghi ("he who yearns") Effendi was well named. As the man who was the yearning of his grandfather and who yearned after the things of God, the Guardian labored intensively for three and a half decades to supervise the construction of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh in which the happiness, peace, and security of the nations shall be, at last, firmly established. Of him, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has well and truly written, "Well is it with him that seeketh the shelter of his shade that shadoweth all mankind."

Leaders of religion, exponents of political theories,
governors of human institutions, who at present are witnessing
with perplexity and dismay the bankruptcy of their ideas, and
the disintegration of their handiwork, would do well to turn
their gaze to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and to meditate
upon the World Order which, lying enshrined in His teachings,
is slowly and imperceptibly rising amid the welter and
chaos of present-day civilization.

—Shoghi Effendi

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The title of this book, *A Celestial Burning*, has been borrowed from Sylvia Plath’s incandescent little poem, “Black Rook in Rainy Weather,” which speaks of a rare, epiphanic moment, of a “Long wait for the angel/For that rare random descent.” In it, the poet writes that “A certain minor light may still/Leap incandescent/Out of kitchen table or chair/As if a celestial burning took/Possession of the most obtuse objects now and then.” The American poet’s phrase, wrenched from one of those singular moments of grace and illumination, in a life that ultimately proved beyond bearing, aptly describes the spirit animating the writings of Shoghi Effendi. It is an inexplicable consolation that Sylvia Plath’s felicitous phrase has found its way into the title of this book.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank all those friends and colleagues who expressed interest in this project while it was in the making. I hope that this book will stimulate further interest in the budding field of Shoghi Effendi studies, enrich the intellectual and spiritual life of its readers, and further the worthy goal of Bahá’í learning.

POINTS ON FORM

1. Italicization. To emphasize the Guardian's writings, the *ipsissima verba* of Shoghi Effendi have been italicized. Those letters written on his behalf are not italicized.

2. Dating. Dates are given by the Common Era.

3. Biblical and Quranic Quotations. Unless otherwise indicated, biblical quotations are taken from the King James Version. Quranic citations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from Rodwell's translation.

4. Capitalization of Personal Pronouns. Shoghi Effendi's practice of capitalizing the first letter of the pronouns "He," "Him," and "His" when referring to the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá has been followed. I have followed this practice in referring to other prophets.

5. Gender Pronouns. The simplest solution used by others writers of using both masculine and feminine pronouns has been adopted.

6. Person and Voice. Manuals of style usually advise the use of the active rather than the passive voice. However, while the active voice has been used as much as possible, the passive voice has been sometimes adopted to avoid the constant repetition of "Shoghi Effendi wrote. . ." or "The Guardian wrote. . ." or "The Guardian taught. . ." or similar phrases. In a book that uses the names "Shoghi Effendi" and "the Guardian" hundreds of times, repetition remains a risk. To add variety, the phrase "our author" has also been used. To be consistent with the voice of literary analysis, some reference has been made to "readers" as well as "believers." (Shoghi Effendi himself addressed "the reader" on occasion.) But, as has been pointed out in the Retrospective and Conclusion, believers fall into a special category of reader.

7. The Editorial "We." When the editorial "we" is used, it assumes that a consensus exists between readers and this author on the point in question.

When a particular viewpoint or original argument is being made, the use of the first person singular “I” has been used.

8. “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh.” The Guardian indicated that this text, analyzed in the present book’s first chapter, was his most important work, despite its brevity. It was originally written separately on 8 February 1934, and published that same year. It was reissued as a booklet in 1960. However, Horace Holley’s editorial decision was to include it as the sixth letter of the World Order letters published as *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* in 1938. Since this book is more readily available to readers, all quotations from “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” will be sourced from *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*.

9. The Use of American Spelling. To avoid the discrepancies in my usual Canadian spelling, which is a hybrid mix of British and American usage, for uniformity’s sake, I have decided to adopt American spelling for this book. Shoghi Effendi used both spellings depending on his recipient. His usage has not been edited here.

INTRODUCTION AND PARAMETERS

An Interdisciplinary Approach Philosophical Theology and Literary Criticism

This book is a selective analysis of the English-language writings of Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), the former head and Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. His wife, companion, and personal secretary, Hand of the Cause of God, Rúhíyyih Rabbaní (née Mary Sutherland Maxwell, 1910–2000), identifies Shoghi Effendi's writings as one of four great accomplishments¹ of his thirty-five-year ministry (1922–1957).² Within this literary heritage, Rúhíyyih Rabbaní identifies “above all, a masterly orientation of thought towards the concepts enshrined in the teachings of the Faith and orderly classification of those teachings. . . .”³ In her judgment, the World Order letter of 1931 entitled, “The Goal of a New World Order,” demonstrated “a new mastery and assurance in its tone, [that] rises above the level of a letter to co-workers in a common field and begins to reflect the extraordinary power of exposition of thought that must characterize a great leader and a great writer.”⁴ *A Celestial Burning* explores the content of this “masterly orientation of thought” and the style of Shoghi Effendi the writer from the dual perspective of philosophical theology and literary criticism. Philosophical theology and literature derive from *logos* and *mythos* respectively but, as word, share a common medium. This study also includes some structural considerations of form that are intrinsic to any literary work as an organic whole.

While the Guardian's writings are the main focus, the following analysis occasionally strays into considerations of the Báb's, Bahá'u'lláh's, or 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings, where pertinent. Although the Guardian's writings have been correlated to literary and theological scholarship, the method of correlation being recommended by Shoghi Effendi himself (see chapter 7, “The Critique of Hegel, the Method of Correlation, and the Divine Economy”), no reductive treatment is found here as in some theoretical,

secular analysis of “Shoghi Effendi’s writings as literature.” To analyze the Guardian’s writings strictly as literature, without recognizing the belief and value system that frames and grounds them, would devitalize, if not deform, their very foundation and the contents of this sacred literature itself.

Except for his great chronicle *God Passes By* (1944), which outlines the events of the first century of the Bábí-Bahá’í Era (1844–1944), Shoghi Effendi’s writings are largely epistolary, but he has expanded this genre to include features that normally belong to more formal types of expository writing such as the treatise⁵ or extended essay. The Guardian penned his core works⁶ while executing the many onerous responsibilities of sacred office, which included devising plans for the worldwide expansion of the Bahá’í community and overseeing its complex, internal administrative affairs. Consequently, while the Guardian’s writings may be analyzed for their intellectual, spiritual, and artistic merit, it should be borne in mind that they were not written primarily as works of art, but rather to provide guidance, deepen the understanding, and to motivate the Bahá’í community to accomplish the tasks he had set before it. In this sense, all the Guardian’s writings are functional. Notwithstanding these practical functions, their intellectual, spiritual, and artistic merits deserve careful consideration.

Interdisciplinary Studies

While interdisciplinary studies seem to be experiencing a current lull,⁷ despite the initial enthusiasm which once greeted them, modern scholars are increasingly producing works that answer the description of “blurred genres,”⁸ to use the handy phrase of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz. The French writer and literary critic Roland Barthes has reminded us in “From Work to Text” that interdisciplinary studies break down the solidity of old disciplines that were once hermetically sealed from one another and create new perspectives, what he calls “a new object and a new language”:

Interdisciplinary activity, valued today as an important aspect of research, cannot be accomplished by simple confrontations between various specialized branches of knowledge. Interdisciplinary work is not a peaceful operation: it begins *effectively* when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down—a process made more violent, perhaps, by the jolts of fashion—to the benefit of a new object and a new language, neither of which is in the domain of those branches of knowledge that one calmly sought to confront.⁹

While this study has not been undertaken for academic fashion's sake, it does follow a trend that moves beyond the strictures of one discipline only, to embrace larger horizons of analysis. The multidisciplinary approach found increasingly in innovative scholarship today is creating new, interconnected perspectives among diverse fields of knowledge. As far back as 1935, T. S. Eliot advocated the necessary cultivation of a certain dynamic tension that ought to exist between literature and religion. In his essay "Religion and Literature," Eliot maintained that literature and literary criticism should be supplemented with theology and ethics for their completion. Although theology and literature are likely to remain separate disciplines, much is to be gained from an interpenetration of the two fields, an interpenetration that has already begun in earnest, as a steadily growing literature attests.

Selection of the Material: Five Core Works

Five core works have been selected for study: "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" (1934);¹⁰ the World Order letters (1929–1936) published as *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (1938); *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1939); *The Promised Day Is Come* (1941); and *God Passes By* (1944). The Guardian's epilogue to *Nabíl's Narrative of the Dawn-Breakers* has also been considered in chapter 12, "The History of the Apostolic Age." In addition to these volumes, references have been made throughout to various letters written either by Shoghi Effendi or on his behalf to individuals or to local or national communities.

These writings are the Guardian's principal published works in English, written in his own hand. Unlike the more than 26,000 answers to queries from individuals, and local and national communities that were answered through corresponding secretaries, not to mention his thousands of cables,¹¹ these works remain self-standing, integral compositions.¹² They will interest all those who seek to understand the past or present history of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith, its belief and value system, its *Weltanschauung*, the root causes of the grave conditions afflicting contemporary society, and the remedies that Shoghi Effendi prescribes. While each of these five core works consists of interrelated subthemes, each one has an overall theme, concept or "ideology."¹³

Regarding the criteria used for the selection of topics in each of the five volumes, this writer had to face *l'embaras du choix*, a dilemma that was solved intuitively by following a more careful or "close reading"¹⁴ of the text. In some cases, the themes or motifs discussed are central to the work in question. In other cases, I have dilated on questions that some readers

might view as being minor or peripheral, but which struck me as being significant. Since this book is not a thesis, but rather a more wide-ranging, comprehensive study, no one particular angle, other than the methodology selected, or narrow argument drives its contents. Many authors have been selected and correlated to the Guardian's writings, rather than any particular school. Any critic of my methodology should keep in mind the target audience for whom this book is intended: the thoughtful members of the Bahá'í community and any member of the reading public who is interested in furthering an intellectual and spiritual understanding of Shoghi Effendi's orientation of thought and literary art. Since selectivity by nature must always be limited and subjective, I have no doubt neglected to do justice to some major question or questions that deserve closer attention than I have been able to give within the confines of this book. Such lacunae will, I hope, prompt other scholars to investigate those questions that I have been unable to cover adequately in a one-volume study.

Correlation Between Bahá'í and Non-Bahá'í Thought

Correlation between Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í thought is a method specifically recommended by Shoghi Effendi (see chapter 7, "The Critique of Hegel, the Method of Correlation, and the Divine Economy") and does not, consequently, require justification. However, while engaging the non-Bahá'í pole of the material, this study has served as a reference point to consider wider theological, philosophical, and literary issues. I recognize that some of this material enlarges on the Guardian's writings to an extent that the purist would judge to be irrelevant. Be that as it may, the material presented from non-Bahá'í authors has been chosen carefully to provide a larger context and to supplement and elucidate the *ipsissima verba* of Shoghi Effendi. It should be born in mind that this process is a two-way street. It is not only true that historical, literary and theological scholarship, when judiciously applied, casts further light on his thought, but it is also the case that his writings, in addition to their specifically Bahá'í concerns—their first order of business—offer his own perspective on a host of spiritual and intellectual themes that have preoccupied modern writers. Scholarship, like other forms of literature, must retain its outreaching, allusive quality.

English as the Language of Interpretation

Excluding hostile or prejudicial approaches, any analyst of Shoghi Effendi's writings becomes a de facto advocate. Such an advocate explains the writings of the Guardian so that their thought-motifs can be better understood. One

of the reasons that led to the writing of *A Celestial Burning* was the noticeable lack, aside from a few instructive articles,¹⁵ of any global treatment of the Guardian's writings. How do we account for such scarcity while studies of the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh in light of their Islamic antecedents are multiplying nicely? The still formative state of Bahá'í scholarship may be the simplest explanation. But one has to infer a general myopia resulting from our historical proximity to Shoghi Effendi, a myopia that has blurred the full realization of his several accomplishments, literary or other.

One also suspects that familiarity has bred neglect. For some scholars, the Guardian's English-language writings may not hold the same fascination as those in Persian and Arabic, the two languages of revelation of the Bahá'í Faith, languages that possess outstanding literary qualities with their fluid lyricism, moving power, and eloquent authority. But although he was an accomplished master of both Persian and Arabic, his two native tongues, Rúhíyyih Rabbaní writes that the Guardian put years of "careful study. . . into mastering a language he loved and revelled in. For him there was no second to English."¹⁶ Although, for obvious historical reasons, the Islamic background to the Guardian's writings is clearly present, particularly in his history of the first century of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith, *God Passes By* and in certain sections of *The Promised Day Is Come*, in which he accounts for the "falling fortunes of Shi'ih Islam," because he was writing in English, the Guardian's expositions contain copious references to Western history and society, and religio-literary allusions to the Judeo-Christian tradition. This is only fitting in light of his intended community of believers/readers. This current book consequently has the biases of a Western Bahá'í coming from a Judeo-Christian background who read Christian theology and comparative religion at university, and who is also a poet.

Other implications arise for the field of Bahá'í studies. Since his core works were written in English, English becomes the primary source language for Shoghi Effendi studies. Consequently, the question of not being proficient in Persian or Arabic, a point that is sometimes argued in order to qualify an individual for doing serious Bahá'í studies—a very doubtful notion as a generalization—does not arise. For while mastery of Persian and Arabic is a requisite for scriptural study, and for studies of the Guardian's writings found in those languages, it is no less true that English remains the language of interpretation in the Bahá'í Faith, since the bulk of the Guardian's writings are found in English, rather than in Persian or Arabic.

Given that the Guardian's writings are vast and include several fields, Shoghi Effendi studies, as I see it, require some knowledge of English literature and literary critical theory in its various aspects: a familiarity with literary devices, principles of rhetoric and stylistics, the use of metaphor and symbol, the place of narrative and drama. Certain notions of myth are also helpful. Familiarity with the Judeo-Christian tradition would also be required in order to afford an understanding of the many biblical allusions that are interspersed throughout the Guardian's writings, some of which have been explored in this book. One can envisage, however, future more ambitious studies that would compare and contrast the Guardian's writings in English with those in Persian or Arabic, studies that would yield, inter alia, any common elements in Shoghi Effendi's religious symbolism and/or would identify common or distinctive rhetorical patterns. Such a prospect augurs well for the collaborative nature of interdisciplinary multilingual studies.

The Biographical Aspect

While this book is not a biography, it does contain certain biographical references to the life of Shoghi Effendi in order to place his writings within a historical context. The New Criticism approach to literature, now somewhat dated, has it that textual study should exclude references to the author's personality, biographical considerations, or any social or historical factors that may have influenced the writing of the text. Such an approach is unnecessarily restrictive and doctrinaire. However, *A Celestial Burning* is above all a textual study, and thus the biographical data that are included are intended to supplement the text. Biographies supplemental to Rúhíyyih Rabbání's seminal work *The Priceless Pearl* are, of course, extremely valuable. Riaz Khadem's *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford*, a periodization study, provides some useful information regarding the formative period in Shoghi Effendi's life that immediately preceded his appointment to the Guardianship, a period that helped to prepare him for the onerous responsibilities which were suddenly thrust upon him at the unexpected death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on 21 November 1921.

Shoghi Effendi's Writings and Contemporary Society

Advanced studies of Shoghi Effendi's writings are needed to move scholarship beyond the vital and still valuable concerns with the translation and commentary of Bábí-Bahá'í scripture into the contemporary world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and its current needs and preoccupations. The Guardian's writings are especially relevant to the Bahá'í

Faith's view of the modern age since they address modernity's grave crisis. The modern Bahá'í Faith can neither be fully understood nor conditions in the contemporary world accurately assessed and solutions offered without recourse to Shoghi Effendi. His writings are indispensable for a better understanding of the dilemmas of modernity.

Authority of Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

While this book mainly studies the holographic¹⁷ literature of the Guardian, some letters written on his behalf are also included. It would be useful, consequently, to clarify the authority of such letters. This question was addressed in a memorandum by the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice of 13 October 1994.¹⁸ It was written in response to an individual who had queried the reason for a statement by Phillip Hainsworth in the introduction to *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'í Community of the British Isles*. The editors of this volume had decided to exclude both the names and letters written by secretaries who "had caused him much suffering" and included only those letters "which carried the Guardian's handwriting as a footnote or contained words which indicated they were writing as instructed by him. . . ."¹⁹ However, the Guardian made it clear in another communication that all letters were read and approved by him before being sent from Haifa. In a postscript to one such inquiry, Shoghi Effendi wrote, "*I wish to add and say that whatever letters are sent in my behalf from Haifa are all read and approved by me before mailing. There is no exception whatever to this rule.*"²⁰ This clarification was written in response to the question, "Can you make a statement which would establish the authenticity of your letters written by Ruhi or Soheil with P.C. [*sic*] attached. There are still some people who continue to feel that these letters are not authorized by you and only express the personal opinions of the above writers."

The other extract, written by the Guardian's secretary and quoted in the memorandum of the Research Department, establishes the authoritative nature of letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi but makes a distinction in terms of degrees of authority: "Although the secretaries of the Guardian convey his thoughts and instructions and these messages are authoritative, their words are in no sense the same as his, their style certainly not the same, and their authority less, for they use their own terms and not his exact words in conveying his messages."²¹ The defining principle here would seem to be that only the letters written under the signature of Shoghi Effendi

could carry the *full* authority of the Guardianship. But this does not mean, as his response indicated, that the letters written on his behalf are not authoritative or that their accuracy is questionable. The memorandum of the Research Department also states that in letters written on his behalf there is no delegation of interpretive authority by Shoghi Effendi, i.e., any secretary could not have been writing *qua* Guardian.

A biographical note from Rúhíyyih Rabbaní gives a first-person account of this process when she first began serving as Shoghi Effendi's corresponding secretary in 1941. Her note reveals that the Guardian was closely involved in the supervision of letters written on his behalf. Based on Rúhíyyih Rabbaní's frequently repeated account, Violette Nakhjavání, her friend and travel companion, wrote:

In those early days of training, Shoghi Effendi would tell her exactly what to write but when she showed him the finished letter he would take one look at its length, tear it up, and say, "Be brief! Be brief!" She used to say with a chuckle that she quickly learned her lesson. In the early years, he would write down the points he wanted her to incorporate in pencil at the bottom of the letter he had received, but later on, when he saw how well she wrote, he would just tell her what to answer verbally. However, she always stressed the fact that he read every single letter she wrote for him before appending his own postscript.²²

Present and Future Shoghi Effendi Studies

The approach that has been taken in this book is only *one* of several approaches that will eventually be employed to gain a better understanding of Shoghi Effendi's extensive body of writing. Since the Guardian's works are multigenred, wide-ranging, and allusive, it only stands to reason that in addition to the biographies that will be written, present and future studies will delve more deeply into the historical, literary, theological, spiritual, social, and administrative issues that he raises. We all look eagerly forward to the publication of such works.

Endnotes

1. The four accomplishments are: (1) his translations of the sacred writings and Nabíl's narrative, (2) his own writings, (3) the expansion and consolidation of all material assets of the Bahá'í Faith whose most outstanding feature is the "beautification of the Bahá'í Holy Places at the World Centre," and (4) a doctrinal ordering of the Bahá'í teachings (see Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 226).
2. The dates of the Guardianship are often given in Bahá'í publications as 1921–1957; that is thirty-six years. In fact, Rúhíyyih Rabbaní writes that the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not read officially until 3 January 1922 and that "the provisions of the Will were not made known until it was first read to Shoghi Effendi. . ." (*The Priceless Pearl*, p. 45). Consequently, by the Gregorian calendar reckoning, the Guardian was in office for a period of thirty-five years, not thirty-six as is often written. However, thirty-six years is also correct if the dates of the Guardianship have been determined by the Jalálí solar calendar reckoning that is used in Iran.
3. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 226. The same passage is textually reproduced in Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith*, p. 97.
4. In her chapter entitled, "The Writings of the Guardian," *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 212.
5. For example, while the form of "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" (1934) is epistolary, its content clearly identifies it as a theological treatise. Such an indicator points to the difficulty of clearly assigning the Guardian's writings to one genre or another.
6. For an explanation of the selection of the core works see the next section below.
7. However, New York University's current president at the time of this writing, Dr. John Sexton, still favors interdisciplinary activity. In a public speech given to the university in June 2003, Sexton envisioned "frequent interaction with each other [students and faculty members] and between departments to promote serendipity and to guard against loss of intellectual momentum." In his mission statement, Sexton vowed a university of "common enterprise." The renewed vision is working. Sexton has recruited eager students and professors "from the Ivies, Britain, Australia, Argentina, China, Japan, Germany and elsewhere." See "Ivory tower dons urged to drop snob values" in *The Guardian Weekly*, May 29–June 4, 2003.
8. See "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," *The American Scholar* 49.2 (1980): 165–79.
9. "From Work to Text" in *Textual Strategies, Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, p. 73. Italics in original. "From Work to Text" is a chapter in Barthes's *Image Music Text*.
10. "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" was published along with the other World Order letters in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, but it is primarily a theological document and as such deserves separate treatment.
11. In the introduction to their book *Studying the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*, editors Morten Bergsmo and Kishan Manocha write that "some 26,000 are in the current possession of the Bahá'í World Centre" (p. 1). In their essay "The Life of Shoghi

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- Effendi,” Helen, John, and Amelia Danesh assert “thousands of cables” p. 25.
12. *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá’í Revelation* was, of course, an edited translation.
 13. The word ideology is used here without prejudice. As defined by T. R. Wright in *Theology and Literature*, it refers to “a set of concepts and practices which form our understanding of ourselves and the world” (p. 16).
 14. I am using this expression in a general, rather than a technical, sense. This expression was used by the formalist and traditionalist poet and theorist John Crowe Ransom (1888–1974), one of the founders of the New Criticism, in his book *The New Criticism*. New Criticism, which arose in the 1930s, became the dominant literary critical school by the 1950s. It insisted on greater rigor in its formalistic, close analysis, i.e., “close reading” of texts in which the critic focused on “the words on the page,” rather than on anecdotal or biographical information about the author. It discounted influences outside the work itself such as historical, social, or economic conditions. It also contributed a number of analytical devices, that is, a method, to the study of literature that greatly influenced the classroom teaching of literature. These included form, texture (consistency of imagery), “intentional and affective fallacy,” narrative voice and point of view, paraphrase, and such key terms as tension, irony, and paradox. In short, it brought analysis to appreciation. See chapter 2, “The Formalistic Approach,” in *Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, pp. 62–115. Among Bahá’í scholars, John S. Hatcher of the University of South Florida makes pervasive use of the formalistic approach in his literary analysis of the Bahá’í writings.
 15. I am referring here to a study of the Guardian’s writings per se, not to biographical, administrative, or other considerations. Among these early articles are Glenford E. Mitchell’s 1972 article “The Literature of Interpretation: Notes on the English Writings of Shoghi Effendi,” *World Order* 7.2 (Winter 1972–73): 12–37. For a literary focus, see Anne Boyles’s “The Epistolary Style of Shoghi Effendi” in *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi*, pp. 9–18. For a philosophical and theological perspective, see William S. Hatcher’s “An Analysis of *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*” in that same volume. For yet another perspective, I should also mention June Manning Thomas’s specialized study of the Guardian’s strategic planning method, *Planning Progress: Lessons from Shoghi Effendi*. The Association for Bahá’í Studies’ compendium *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi* contains 19 essays on the life and work of Shoghi Effendi, as well as personal reminiscences by Hands of the Cause, A. A. Furútan, A. M. Varqá, Z. Khádem, and John A. Robarts.
 16. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 37.
 17. Meaning written in the hand of the author.
 18. This memorandum can be viewed at <http://www.bahai-library.org/uhj/authenticity.texts.html> (accessed 20 August 2011).
 19. *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá’í Community: The Messages of the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith to the Bahá’í Community of the British Isles*, p. xvii.
 20. *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, letter of 7 December 1930, p. 89.
 21. Letter of 25 February 1951 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles in *Unfolding Destiny*.
 22. Violette Nakhjavání, *A Tribute to Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánun*, p. 45.

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“THE DISPENSATION OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH” A THEOLOGY OF THE WORD¹

A Proactive Theological Document

About the Text

In 1934 Shoghi Effendi wrote what he considered to be his preeminent work, “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh.” The Guardian describes “*the scope and purpose*” of this document as “*an exposition of the fundamental verities of the Faith.*”² This exposition clarifies the “*station*”³ of the “*Three Central Figures*”⁴ and delineates the distinguishing features of the Administrative or New World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. With the exception of *God Passes By*, and like his other major works, “The Dispensation” is an extended letter that became what Rúhíyyih Rabbaní has aptly described as a “weighty treatise.”⁵ Her comment indicates that this text created a quantum leap in the intellectual and spiritual understanding of the Bahá’í community. Her judgment echoes the impressions of any Bahá’í who has carefully studied “The Dispensation” and underscores the importance that Shoghi Effendi himself attached to this treatise:

The weighty treatise known as *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*, written in 1934, burst upon the Bahá’ís like a blinding white light. I remember when I first read it I had the most extraordinary feeling as if the whole universe had suddenly expanded around me and I was looking out into a dazzling star-filled immensity; all the frontiers of our understanding flew outwards; the glory of this Cause and the true station of its Central Figures were revealed to us and we were never the same again. One would have thought that the stunning impact of this one communication from the Guardian would kill puniness of soul forever! However Shoghi Effendi felt in his inmost heart about his other writings, I know from his remarks that he considered he had said all he had to say, in many ways, in the *Dispensation*.⁶

While the use of the once problematic word *theology* in the Bahá'í community has largely gained acceptance, it was for some time viewed with suspicion, mainly because of its priestly associations with monolithic dogmatism and its long, divisive, often bloody doctrinal history that finds echoes in the Latin phrase *odium theologicum*.⁷ Even though the word *theology* is nowhere used in “The Dispensation,” it is clearly the only appropriate qualifier to describe the overall “tenor”⁸ of this treatise, particularly parts one to three (of four). Aside from other arguments that could be made, the thorough theological content of “The Dispensation” assures the legitimacy of theology on the Bahá'í academic curriculum.

William S. Hatcher in his paper, “An Analysis of *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*,”⁹ makes one of the more helpful observations with the topic sentence, “Rarely, if ever, have subtle and vexatious theological questions been settled at an early stage in the history of a revealed religion.”¹⁰ One of the outstanding features of “The Dispensation” has been its proactive role of greatly strengthening both the doctrinal unity and understanding of the Bahá'í Faith from the only appointed Interpreter/Expounder who has arisen, or ever will arise, during its Formative Age. If we use Christianity as a point of comparison, christology, which refers to the theology of the metaphysical and ontological nature of Jesus Christ, was the very question that bedevilled Christian theologians in the primitive church and fractured Christian unity. The creeds that ultimately defined the Christ-nature

underwent a long historical development that was not uncontested. They were finally elaborated in their present form after four centuries of acrimonious theological quarrelling that necessitated four [seven for the orthodox church] world councils of the church—those of Nicaea, Ephesus, Constantinople and Chalcedon—that brought in their wake bloody warfare¹¹ among Christian factions. These christological controversies resulted in the fragmentation of the churches of Asia Minor from those of Greek Orthodox Constantinople, a fragmentation that has continued to this day.¹²

While this is not the place to enter into the details of the christological controversies, we can retain from this lesson in church history a few observations about the nature of theology that have been largely resolved in “The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.” Because of its close links to philosophy, theology can be a very abstruse or speculative exercise with widely divergent conclusions being drawn, however logically rigorous the argument.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has rightly referred to "the complex matters of religious doctrine."¹³ Difficult questions, to name only two from among a vast selection, such as the ontological nature of the Godhead and the Divine Manifestation, which are treated in "The Dispensation," are not empirical matters subject to easy scrutiny. The Guardian's incisive understanding of Bahá'í scripture, coupled with his authoritative interpretations, has placed his theological definitions on an unassailable foundation. These words of Bahá' u' lláh, as valid today as when they were written in 1861,¹⁴ aptly describe both the state of theology and the practice of religion, "For opinions have sorely differed, and the ways unto the attainment of God have multiplied."¹⁵ "The Dispensation of Bahá' u' lláh" has vastly reduced any potential differences that might have arisen among Bahá'ís attempting to understand such abstruse questions. Believers consequently owe a debt of gratitude to Shoghi Effendi for having clearly established the doctrinal foundations of such potentially vexing questions.

Inspiration and Inerrancy in the Guardianship

The requirements of a sound, true knowledge of Bahá'í history and scripture, and the vital necessity of an irreproachable character befitting the guardianship, have been met in the person of Shoghi Effendi. The Guardian's nomination by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament is fully a divine appointment. While the Guardian's writings are not divine revelation, they carry the same authority.

The Universal House of Justice writes that the interpretations of Shoghi Effendi are "equally binding as the Text itself."¹⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá declared, "He is the Interpreter (*mubáyyin*) of the Word of God. . . ."¹⁷ He affirms further that the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice "are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both)."¹⁸ Both Shoghi Effendi's appointment as well as his interpretations have the highest authority and consequently inspire great confidence.

The terms *inspiration* and *inerrancy* need some clarification vis-à-vis the Guardian's writings. Holy scripture—as has been said of all great artistic or literary works—is inspired by God (Lat. *inspiro*, *in+spiro*, breathe in). While Shoghi Effendi's writings are not scripture, the same divine afflatus that inspires scripture also pervades his writings and interpretations. Inerrancy, at least in Christendom, is a more modern and polemical concept, dating from the nineteenth century. However, the Guardian's conferred infallibility was limited to those spheres he has himself defined. The most comprehensive statement on the Guardian's infallibility is the following from the Universal

House of Justice. It takes up Shoghi Effendi's own reply to this question:

Shoghi Effendi was asked several times during his ministry to define the sphere of his operation and his infallibility. The replies he gave and which were written on his behalf are most illuminating. He explains that he is not an infallible authority on subjects such as economics and science, nor does he go into technical matters since his infallibility is confined to 'matters which are related strictly to the Cause'. He further points out that 'he is not, like the Prophet, omniscient at will', that his 'infallibility covers interpretation of the Revealed Word and its application', and that he is also 'infallible in the protection of the Faith'. Furthermore, in one of the letters, the following guideline is set forth:

It is not for individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guardian's authority, or to judge when they have to obey the Guardian and when they are free to reject his judgment. Such an attitude would evidently lead to confusion and to schism. The Guardian being the appointed interpreter of the Teachings, it is his responsibility to state what matters which, affecting the interests of the Faith, demand on the part of the believers, complete and unqualified obedience to his instructions.¹⁹

The commonsensical understanding of the sentence, "It is not for individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guardian's authority," is not, of course, a contradiction that extends the authority of the guardianship to all matters. It refers to those areas of authority, and exclusions, that Shoghi Effendi has himself already defined. However, we must exclude from the definition of infallibility any pretension that would exempt the Guardian from making factual errors. On those matters of fact that appear in the historical subjects he treated, or in the letters he wrote, Shoghi Effendi was dependent upon the accuracy of the documents and sources and information available to him. In sum, the Guardian has clarified 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement of "unerring guidance" to mean that in matters of doctrine, and in the application of the Bahá'í teachings, which obviously included any moral definitions or rulings, in the execution of the Divine Plan and the protection of the Faith, he was infallible. This does not mean, as he himself has pointed out (see "Hermeneutical Pointers" below), that his conferred infallibility confers a station co-equal to that of those whose words he had been appointed to interpret.

Elegant Form: “Less is More”

On first reading—and this point has also been made by William Hatcher²⁰—one can be fooled by a certain deceptive simplicity of “The Dispensation.” Readers of academic theology are accustomed to dense text, learned references, and sometimes obfuscation rather than clarification—obfuscation that can lead to misunderstanding, generated by internal contradiction, ambiguity or simple error. In contemporary Christian theology, the trend has been to increasingly novel, provocative, and sometimes far-fetched theses that have moved further and further away from scriptural roots. Theology, like literary criticism, has become an end in itself, a discourse of its own making. However, the mind that constructs its argument throughout “The Dispensation” is moving and lucid, the logic incisive and compelling, the style admirable, and its scriptural grounding solid. The neat, quotable saying, attributed variously to the poet Robert Browning, the American architect Philip Johnson, and the famous German modernist, minimalist architect Mies van der Rohe, comes to mind as an apt descriptor of “The Dispensation”—“Less is more.”²¹ William Hatcher writes:

Thus, at least as first glance, the structure of *The Dispensation of Bahá' u' lláh* appears to be extremely simple and straightforward. However, this initial impression is quickly dispelled by the power and density of Shoghi Effendi's writing, by the number and complexity of the themes treated in the course of the exposition, by the abundant citations from both Bahá' í and non-Bahá' í sources, and finally the frequent and sometimes subtle literary and historical allusions.²²

With this document—and this is true for each of the Guardian's letters—every sentence, every phrase, indeed, each individual word, has been carefully selected to convey the author's thought. Just as in physics a plenum is space filled with matter, Shoghi Effendi's literary space, while it allows room for further reflection, contains a plenum of significance. The Guardian's exposition maximizes the meaning with a minimum of words.

As mentioned above, the structure of “The Dispensation” consists of a four-part division of some sixty-odd pages. The bulk of the text, approximately three-quarters, is devoted to an exposition of the rank, nature, and function of what the Guardian calls the “*Three Central Figures*” of the Bahá' í Faith. This key phrase, the “*Three Central Figures*,” has come to form one of the basics of Bahá' í vocabulary, as does his use of the word *station*, the closest English equivalent to the Persian-Arabic *maqám*. In a larger sense, one of the great contributions of the Guardian's writings is to have created a specialized

language of discourse that reflects the Bahá'í worldview without which the Bahá'í Faith as a world religion could not function effectively. In addition, Shoghi Effendi's writings, with their wealth of contemporary insights, have carried the Bahá'í Faith forward into the stream of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and with their forward-looking vision, they anticipate future world developments as humanity inches painfully toward "*the consummation of all ages, which must signalize the coming of age of the entire human race. . .*"²³

The Guardian reverses the chronological order of the three Central Figures by presenting the orthodox understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's station first. This is no doubt an indication that the Guardian wishes to emphasize the supreme station of the Promised One of all ages, "*Dominating the entire range of this fascinating spectacle towers the incomparable figure of Bahá'u'lláh, transcendental in His majesty, serene, awe-inspiring, unapproachably glorious.*"²⁴ Aside from the careful theological elucidations that follow, the descriptive power of this one sentence alone succinctly captures the heavenly majesty of the Persian Prince. Moreover, Shoghi Effendi's short descriptions of the three Central Figures wed descriptive power to discursive theology. Consider this word picture of Bahá'u'lláh's herald, the Báb:

*Allied, though subordinate in rank, and invested with the authority of presiding with Him over the destinies of this supreme Dispensation, there shines upon this mental picture the youthful glory of the Báb, infinite in His tenderness, irresistible in His charm, unsurpassed in His heroism, matchless in the dramatic circumstances of His short yet eventful life.*²⁵

The same is true of this partial description of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

*He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being "round Whom all names revolve," the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation—styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name 'Abdu'l-Bahá.*²⁶

History, Text, and Theology Creating Historical Consciousness

As in all of the Guardian's compositions, the introduction, a six-paragraph section, should not be passed over lightly. It reveals Shoghi Effendi's à propos sense of the dramatic unfolding of the current events of Bahá'í history as "*its march*" gathers momentum:

To the beloved of God and the handmaids of the Merciful throughout the West Fellow-laborers in the Divine Vineyard:

*On the 23rd of May of this auspicious year the Bahá'í world will celebrate the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. We, who at this hour find ourselves standing on the threshold of the last decade of the first century of the Bahá'í era, might well pause to reflect upon the mysterious dispensations of so august, so momentous a Revelation. How vast, how entrancing the panorama which the revolution of four score years and ten unrolls before our eyes! Its towering grandeur well-nigh overwhelms us. To merely contemplate this unique spectacle, to visualize, however dimly, the circumstances attending the birth and gradual unfoldment of this supreme Theophany, to recall even in their barest outline the woeful struggles that proclaimed its rise and accelerated its march, will suffice to convince every unbiased observer of those eternal truths that motivate its life and which must continue to impel it forward until it achieves its destined ascendancy."*²⁷

A sense of exaltation sustains the historical retrospective. Shoghi Effendi, and the reader with him, are awed by the succession of moving events that have taken place over these ninety years, "*How vast, how entrancing the panorama which the revolution of four score years and ten unrolls before our eyes! Its towering grandeur well-nigh overwhelms us.*" But we are not merely moved. We are also moved to conviction. The events that have already unfolded "*will suffice to convince every unbiased observer*" of the Bahá'í Faith's spiritual vitality and ultimate future success. In "*the woeful struggles that proclaimed its rise,*" we find a recurring theme: crisis leads to victory; adversity is the oil that fans the flame of God's Cause.

It is characteristic of Shoghi Effendi's sense of the auspicious passing of Bahá'í history to pause for a timely retrospective. This retrospective,

usually made on an anniversary or holy day, provides the occasion for an evaluation or a summing up of the events that have carried the Bahá'í Faith into the present. In 1934, as the passing years approached within a decade of the 1944 centenary of the Declaration of the Báb, the Guardian engaged his readers in a review of the previous ninety years. This period is viewed as one of remarkable achievements. The successes won are based upon two major factors that become cornerstones in his view of history: (1) any present accomplishments are built upon the solid achievements of the past; and (2) any successful movement in history must be grounded in divine truth. His faith in the ultimate ascendancy of the Bahá'í Cause is based upon a firm conviction that the movement has taken root in the fertile soil of what the Greek founders of the apostolic church called the *logos spermatikos*,²⁸ which described the fecundating power of the Holy Word. Seed imagery is not, of course, exclusive to the Christian tradition. In the Persian *Bayán*, the Báb writes, "Today the Bayán is in the stage of seed; at the beginning of the manifestation of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' its ultimate perfection will become apparent . . ." ²⁹ Shoghi Effendi makes use of this seed imagery to indicate evolution or gradation, in a process of gradual unfoldment with respect to the Three Ages of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith: "*The period in which the seed of the Faith had been slowly germinating [Heroic Age] is thus intertwined both with the one which must witness its efflorescence [Formative Age] and the subsequent age in which that seed will have finally yielded its golden fruit*" [Golden Age].³⁰

As mentioned above, while engaging in this backward glance, the Guardian assures his readers that the events that have transpired within the 90-year period are a sufficient guarantee of any future successes that the Faith will achieve:

*. . . to visualize, however dimly, the circumstances attending the birth and gradual unfoldment of this supreme Theophany. . . will suffice to convince every unbiased observer of those eternal truths that motivate its life and which must continue to impel it forward until it achieves its destined ascendancy.*³¹

Periodization

Shoghi Effendi reminds his readers that with the passing of Bahíyyih Khánúm (1932), the sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and his own beloved great-aunt, "*the most Exalted Leaf*,"³² "*the well-beloved and treasured Remnant of Bahá'u'lláh*,"³³ that the First Great Age had drawn to a close:

... there draws to a close the first and most moving chapter of Bahá'í history, marking the conclusion of the Primitive, the Apostolic Age of the Faith of Bahá' u' lláh. It was 'Abdu'l-Bahá Who, through the provisions of His weighty Will and Testament, has forged the vital link which must for ever connect the age that has just expired with the one we now live in—the Transitional and Formative period of the Faith—a stage that must in the fullness of time reach its blossom and yield its fruit in the exploits and triumphs that are to herald the Golden Age of the Revelation of Bahá' u' lláh.³⁴

With this statement, periodization, a basic technique of historiography, is assigned to Bahá'í history, supplying a necessary gauge by which Bahá'ís may situate themselves within the temporal flux of their dispensation. Periodization serves two useful purposes: (1) it allows for the significant assessment of past events in order to better understand their import; and (2) it sensitizes one to the importance of the present moment and to the necessity of seizing present opportunities since they in turn will become the “stuff of history.” If we correlate “The Dispensation” to *God Passes By* (1944), we find that the Guardian devotes a considerable portion of the foreword of the latter work to the establishment of periodization (pp. xiii–xvi). There he varies somewhat the nomenclature assigned to the divisions of time. The second age is called “*the Formative, the Transitional,*” or “*Iron Age*”³⁵ (the added designation is Iron Age). In addition to these divisions, Shoghi Effendi assigns to the first century of the Bahá'í Era (1844–1944) four proper “*periods,*” which I have compressed from *God Passes By*:

- (1844–1853) This period centers in the person of the Martyr-Herald, the Báb, from the time of His declaration that witnessed the massacre of upwards of 20,000 Bábís by the combined forces of the Persian church-state.
- (1853–1892) This period centers in “*the august figure of Bahá' u' lláh*” from the time of the dawning of Bahá' u' lláh's messianic consciousness in the “*stygian gloom*” of the *Síyáh-Chál* of Tehran in the ninth and final year of the Báb's dispensation. This period witnessed the proclamation and expansion of the new faith that aroused the implacable opposition of two oriental potentates as well as the Sunni and Shiite ecclesiastical hierarchies. It ends with the ascension of Bahá' u' lláh.
- (1892–1921) This period “*revolves around the vibrant personality of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*” and witnessed the establishment of the Covenant

and the first implantation of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in North America and the four corners of the world. It ended with the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

- (1921–1944) This period witnessed “*the birth of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Era*” and the establishment of the Administrative Order which is “*at once the harbinger, the nucleus and pattern of His World Order.*” The pattern of opposition and hostility, although less intense, continued during this period but led to the further emancipation and recognition of the Bahá'í Faith throughout the five continents of the globe.

In addition to assigning periods and ages, the Guardian has also subdivided these ages into epochs. The Universal House of Justice determined, in its message of 16 January 2001 to the Bahá'ís of the world, that they were entering the fifth epoch of the Formative Age.³⁶ While it is beyond the scope of this study to give a detailed account of the determination of these epochs,³⁷ one must bear in mind the following point in order to avoid confusion. A two-track chronology of epochs is unfolding concurrently. While each of the Three Great Ages of the Bahá'í Faith is subdivided into epochs, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, as contained in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* addressed to the North American Bahá'ís (1916-1917), inaugurated another series of epochs.³⁸ The dates of the first epoch of this Divine Plan are 1937-1963, corresponding to the inception of the First Seven Year Plan (1937-1944) and concluding with the Ten Year World Crusade/Plan (1953-1963). In the year 2011, Bahá'ís are in the second epoch of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, begun in 1964 with the Nine Year Plan of the Universal House of Justice.

Historical Process: Evolution, Order, and Holism

Coupled with assigning periods and epochs, and while drawing attention to the signal accomplishments of each one, Shoghi Effendi's schema reflects a particular understanding of Bahá'í history—orderly, holistic, and evolutionary growth that drives toward self-fulfillment:

To isolate any one of them from the others, to dissociate the later manifestations of one universal, all-embracing Revelation from the pristine purpose that animated it in its earliest days, would be tantamount to a mutilation of the structure on which it rests, and to a lamentable perversion of its truth and of its history. . . . These four periods are to be regarded not only as the component, the inseparable parts of one stupendous whole, but as progressive

*stages in a single evolutionary process, vast, steady and irresistible. For as we survey the entire range which the operation of a century-old Faith has unfolded before us, we cannot escape the conclusion that from whatever angle we view this colossal scene, the events associated with these periods present to us unmistakable evidences of a slowly maturing process, of an orderly development, of internal consolidation, of external expansion, of a gradual emancipation from the fetters of religious orthodoxy, and of a corresponding diminution of civil disabilities and restrictions.*³⁹

A vital link has connected these periods. As was reported above, the *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* “has forged the vital link which must for ever connect the age that has just expired [Primitive/Apostolic/Heroic Age] with the one we now live in—the Transitional and Formative period of the Faith. . . .”⁴⁰ The forces latent within the Twin Manifestations of the Báb and Bahá' u'lláh, released into the world in 1844, continue to be diffused as the Formative Age of the Bahá' í Dispensation gradually unfolds:

*Dearly-beloved friends! The onrushing forces so miraculously released through the agency of two independent and swiftly successive Manifestations are now under our very eyes and through the care of the chosen stewards of a far-flung Faith being gradually mustered and disciplined. They are slowly crystallizing into institutions that will come to be regarded as the hall-mark and glory of the age we are called upon to establish and by our deeds immortalize. For upon our present-day efforts, and above all upon the extent to which we strive to remodel our lives after the pattern of sublime heroism associated with those gone before us, must depend the efficacy of the instruments we now fashion—instruments that must erect the structure of that blissful Commonwealth which must signalize the Golden Age of our Faith.*⁴¹

In Shoghi Effendi's view of history, then, there can be no real separation of past, present, and future. As the above passage also makes clear, it is the Bahá' ís themselves who must shape the events and build the institutions of the present and future generations. To return to the holistic, that is, interconnected wholeness of the periods in Bahá' í history, and to the influence of the past on the present, this one great continuum of all history has been addressed in my essay, “The Metaphysics of History and Fine Art” in *Under the Divine Lote Tree: Essays and Reflections* (1999):

All history radiates onward as one flowing stream of spiritual energy, as fluctuations of a wave. . . . One speaks, for example, of “the dead weight of the past” as if past events were buried and inert. But the paradox of history is one that makes the past both dead and alive. History is dead in the sense that the self-same event can never be relived exactly as it was. But it remains alive and moving in the major events that shape the present age and in the everyday gestures of individuals as well as in the life of nations. History is alive in the present tense of current events and in individual lives, for the happenings of the past, for well or ill, perpetuate themselves into the present and have to a great extent determined what we are doing now.⁴²

The Stations of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb

The Introduction: Judeo-Christian Allusions

Three expressions in particular indicate that Shoghi Effendi was fully conscious of the Judeo-Christian background of his readers: “*Fellow-laborers in the Divine Vineyard*,” “*the revolution of four score years and ten*,” and “*supreme Theophany*.” Of these, the first and the third are significant and invite brief comment. The second elevates the tone of the passage and lends a certain scriptural ambiance to the exposition.

(a) “*Fellow-laborers in the Divine Vineyard*”

This phrase or its variation, “*fellow-workers in the Divine Vineyard*,” is found in the salutation of a number of communications to Western believers. What are some of its scriptural allusions? The vine or vineyard is one of the most ancient metaphors running through both the Hebrew Bible and the Gospel. This salutation has scores of scriptural antecedents and a literary history that is grounded both in scripture and the agricultural practices of the ancient Middle East. We encounter it first in the Book of Genesis with the prophet Noah: “And Noah began to be a husbandman and he planted a vineyard. . .” (9:20). The vineyard is used by Jesus as the setting for his three parables of the kingdom: Matthew 20:1–16 (God is just and does as He wills); Matthew 21: 33–44 (the wicked husbandmen are punished by the lord of the vineyard for slaying his son/heir, and he gives it as an inheritance to others); Mark 12:1–11, which is equivalent to the parable in Matthew. Luke 20:9–18 is another equivalent to Matthew 21 and Mark 12.

It is noteworthy that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s interpretation of Matthew 21:33–44 identifies the slaying of the son, the heir of the Lord of the Vineyard, as

foretelling the nefarious activities of the Covenant-breakers against Himself that defines the entire context of “The Master’s Last Tablet to America.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote, “And in the 21st chapter and 38th verse of the Gospel of Matthew, He says, ‘But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, this is the heir, come let us kill him and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him.’”⁴³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is clearly referring to Himself as the rightful heir to Bahá’u’ lláh (the Lord of the Vineyard) and to His covenant, which occasioned the implacable opposition of the Covenant-breakers at the very moment He was composing the tablet.

While the parables of Jesus have multiple meanings, the moral of the parable of the Lord of the Vineyard is faithfulness to the Covenant; the workers in the vineyard (the believers in each dispensation) must be faithful to the Lord of the Vineyard (the Divine Manifestation) by accepting his heirs or successors (successive Manifestations or appointees) when they appear. Otherwise, they lose their spiritual birthright and find themselves in great loss. However, Shoghi Effendi actually did locate “the vineyard of God” in space-time, thus giving it a more literal, concrete interpretation. He identified “the vineyard of God” with Mt. Carmel where the shrines of the Báb and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the world administrative center of the Bahá’í Faith are located.⁴⁴ Thus the layers of spiritual meaning in the parable have a corresponding counterpart in the physical presence of the true “Garden of God” located in space-time.

Shoghi Effendi regarded himself as one of many “*Fellow-laborers.*” The italicized phrase indicates, moreover, that the Guardian viewed service to the Bahá’í Faith as a work ethic. In many of his letters he refers to “the work of the Cause.”⁴⁵ Now labor is purposeful and dedicated work involving strenuous effort, the dispensing of the energies of body and spirit. Labor in its biblical sense referred to either physical or mental toil,⁴⁶ and this attitude is quite concordant with Shoghi Effendi’s sense of working in the divine vineyard of the new dispensation. Just as the vine was a symbol of the nation of Israel and of Christ as “the true vine,”⁴⁷ the vineyard here is a metonym for the Bahá’í Faith itself and its “field” of service. Viticulture was the most labor-intensive of all agricultural activities in the ancient Near East and involved several onerous operations (tillage, fencing, construction of the watchtower, surveillance, harvesting, pressing, etc.). The vineyard is consequently a particularly fitting metaphor to describe the execution of the many activities involved in the “*external expansion*” and “*internal consolidation*”⁴⁸ of the Bahá’í Faith, which was always the Guardian’s preeminent concern.

(b) “*supreme Theophany*”

With the word *theophany* (*zuhúr*) the reader is placed directly into, not only a Judeo-Christian-Islamic theological context but also one that is central to the Bahá’í Faith itself—that of manifestation theology, succinctly dubbed “theophanology” by Juan Ricardo Cole in his instructive monograph, “The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá’í Writings,”⁴⁹ a study that examines this central concept in light of Islamic religious traditions and Greek and Hellenistic philosophy. Curiously, Cole’s study makes no reference to Shoghi Effendi’s mention of a “*supreme Theophany*,” but it is clear that the Guardian is drawing on a central theological concept that has a historical and phenomenological commonality with its sister Abrahamic religions.⁵⁰ Generally, a theophany (Gk. *theo* + *phainomai*, to appear) is a manifestation of God (small *m*). In a Bahá’í context, theophany derives from the Divine Manifestation and signifies the presence of God and divine guidance.⁵¹ In biblical terms, theophany can take on either human or nonhuman form and assume either temporary or permanent aspects. Samuel A. Meier defines it simply as “[a] deity’s physical manifestation that is seen by human beings.”⁵² Voices, dreams, angelic visitations, even earthquakes and thunderstorms are all theophanic events through which the voice of God speaks. In the Mosaic dispensation, the most outstanding examples of theophanies occurred when Yahweh spoke from within the Burning Bush (Ex. 3:2–3), in the Pillar of a Cloud by day (Ex. 13:21) and the Pillar of Fire by night (Ex. 13:21). These were the unmistakable signs of guidance to the Israelites in the wilderness. Theophanic visitation came also in the manifestation of Yahweh speaking to Moses in “thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount” (Ex. 19:16) and in smoke and fire atop Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:18).

Fleeing the wrath of the Phoenician Queen Jezebel, who had vowed to take his life, and looking for consolation in signs from God on Mt. Horeb (Sinai), the prophet Elijah found “but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12)⁵³ In Pauline theology, theophany signifies the incarnation of Christ, the belief that “[f]or in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily” (Co. 2:9, cf. 2 Cor. 5:19, Col. 1:15), a heterodox teaching for Bahá’ís. There is an indication in the Mosaic dispensation of a greater theophany to come. While it is stated in Numbers 12:8 that Moses spoke with God “mouth to mouth” and in Deuteronomy 34:10 that Moses was the prophet “whom the Lord knew face to face,” nonetheless the Pentateuch contains seemingly contradictory statements. Exodus 33:20 reads: “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.” And

v. 23 states that “thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.” In v. 18, Moses beseeches God, “. . . show me thy glory.”

In its most concrete, personal, and consequential sense, a theophany refers to God's Presence indwelling (not incarnating) a prophetic figure or Divine Manifestation (*mazhár-i-iláhí*) who appears on earth “in the noble form of the human temple,”⁵⁴ as Bahá'u'lláh says. A Manifestation of God indicates the Presence of God among men, so that God “will dwell in the midst of thee [Israel]” (Zech. 2:10). The gradual passage from earlier, more spectacular, nature-based theophanies to the indwelling Presence of God found in the Prophet is, in any case, the biblical pattern. The Divine Manifestation/Prophet indwelling the human temple is the apotheosis of theophany.

The Station of Bahá'u'lláh: Caution Against Triumphalism

The qualifying adjective in “*supreme Theophany*” is, of course, a superlative. Its selection by Shoghi Effendi is based upon a well-considered theological value-judgment that has been made following his understanding of scripture. But the Guardian warns the Bahá'ís not to fall into the trap of an overly triumphalistic theology. The fuller disclosure of divine power at this time in history, the much brighter intensity of the divine light, should not be taken as indication of any moral or spiritual superiority of the Bahá'í Faith over the great world religions of the past. While Shoghi Effendi unabashedly expatiates on “*the incomparable greatness of the Revelation*”⁵⁵ “*as the culmination of a cycle, the final stage in a series of successive, of preliminary and progressive revelations*”⁵⁶ that have found their fulfillment in “*that Day of Days in which He Who is the Promise of All Ages should be made manifest*,”⁵⁷ he nonetheless cautions against any unbalanced, separative approach. For such an approach would be not only morally untenable but also theologically incorrect, and the Guardian feels moved to issue his own “*word of warning*.”⁵⁸ Shoghi Effendi's admonition concerns both the station of Bahá'u'lláh vis-à-vis the Divinity and the relationship of the Bahá'í Faith to the religions of the past. Concerning the station of Bahá'u'lláh, the Guardian writes:

*That Bahá'u'lláh should, notwithstanding the overwhelming intensity of His Revelation, be regarded as essentially one of these Manifestations of God, never to be identified with that invisible Reality, the Essence of Divinity itself, is one of the major beliefs of our Faith—a belief which should never be obscured and the integrity of which no one of its followers should allow to be compromised.*⁵⁹

Regarding the relationship between the Bahá'í Faith and the religions of the past, the Guardian has written the following magisterial statement that constitutes a veritable seedbed of a theology of the great world religions, a theology that has yet to be written. And here I must content myself simply with citation:

Nor does the Bahá'í Revelation, claiming as it does to be the culmination of a prophetic cycle and the fulfillment of the promise of all ages, attempt, under any circumstances, to invalidate those first and everlasting principles that animate and underlie the religions that have preceded it. The God-given authority, vested in each one of them, it admits and establishes as its firmest and ultimate basis. It regards them in no other light except as different stages in the eternal history and constant evolution of one religion, Divine and indivisible, of which it itself forms but an integral part. It neither seeks to obscure their Divine origin, nor to dwarf the admitted magnitude of their colossal achievements. It can countenance no attempt that seeks to distort their features or to stultify the truths which they instill. Its teachings do not deviate a hairbreadth from the verities they enshrine, nor does the weight of its message detract one jot or one tittle from the influence they exert or the loyalty they inspire. Far from aiming at the overthrow of the spiritual foundation of the world's religious systems, its avowed, its unalterable purpose is to widen their basis, to restate their fundamentals, to reconcile their aims, to reinvigorate their life, to demonstrate their oneness, to restore the pristine purity of their teachings, to coordinate their functions and to assist in the realization of their highest aspirations. These divinely-revealed religions, as a close observer has graphically expressed it, "are doomed not to die, but to be reborn. . . . 'Does not the child succumb in the youth and the youth in the man; yet neither child nor youth perishes?'"⁶⁰

Lest We Forget: The Station of the Báb

Due to considerations of space, I have had to content myself with the few comments above on Shoghi Effendi's treatment of the station of Bahá'u'lláh. Here I offer a few observations on the Guardian's great contribution to securing the place of the Báb in Bahá'í history. While taking "The Dispensation" into consideration, I am going beyond it to consider some basic and well-known facts but whose historical significance needs to be sharpened. Early on in the

Formative Age of the Bahá'í Faith (1921/1932–),⁶¹ the Guardian was solely responsible for clarifying the station of the Báb in light of His own claims and those statements contained in the writings of Bahá' u' lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He greatly heightened our consciousness of the Báb, His mission, and His station in the following ways: (1) by completing the superstructure over the Shrine of the Báb and thus enshrining the sacred memory of His presence on earth; (2) by translating *Nabíl's Narrative*, the dramatic history of the tumultuous days of the Bábí dispensation (1844–1853); and (3) by clarifying the station of the Báb in “The Dispensation of Bahá' u' lláh” and by translating certain passages of His writings.

Completing the Holy Shrine⁶²

The unique shrine flanking Mt. Carmel that, in Richard St. Barbe Baker's lovely phrase, “rose over Haifa like a sun”⁶³ on the ninth day of Ridván during Holy Year 1953, had been completed only after more than a half-century of arduous sacrifice and painstaking care and attention. After the Báb's mangled remains had been rescued from the edge of a moat outside the city gate of Tabriz in 1850 and had been housed in a number of clandestine locations for 59 years, 'Abdu'l-Bahá laid them to rest, in a moment of high dignity and heartrending pathos,⁶⁴ during an interment ceremony on Mt. Carmel on the first day of Naw-Rúz, 1909. It is a significant measure of this event that Shoghi Effendi devoted the entire eighteenth chapter of *God Passes By*, “Entombment of the Báb's Remains on Mt. Carmel,” to this episode about which he wrote, “*The act indeed deserves to rank as one of the outstanding events in the first Bahá'í century.*”⁶⁵ The Guardian also remarks that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had fixed this act for Himself “*as one of the three principal objectives*”⁶⁶ of His ministry. 'Abdu'l-Bahá needed only to have said to the young Shoghi Effendi, “The sublime Shrine has remained unbuilt. . . .”⁶⁷ His wish was His grandson's command.

The first undertaking in 1928 was to excavate the solid rockface of Mt. Carmel from behind the shrine in order to add three more “extra, massive, vaulted and high-ceiling-rooms”⁶⁸ to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's original six to make a square and lay the foundation for the arcade over which the superstructure would repose. That the work was a slow process is indicated by the fact that it was not until 1942 that the Guardian commissioned his father-in-law, the well-known Canadian architect William Sutherland Maxwell, resident of Haifa, to begin the design of the superstructure. Hand of the Cause of God, Leroy Ioas (1896–1965), who served Shoghi Effendi at various tasks as assistant-secretary from March 1952–1957,⁶⁹ was given “full charge of the construction work on the Shrine. . . .”⁷⁰ Hand of the Cause of God, Dr. Ugo

Giachery, had the specific task of supervising in Italy “the cutting, carving and shipping of all the marble needed to erect the superstructure of the Shrine.”⁷¹ All three men had doors of the Shrine named after them, a practice first observed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Ugo Giachery recalled that this project had the highest priority for the Guardian, “. . . erection of the Shrine of the Báb was of paramount importance in his mind; it was a subject he favoured most and he expressed his ideas with deep conviction and much expectation.”⁷² It transcended in sacredness, he said, “*any collective undertaking launched in the course of the history of the hundred year old Faith.*”⁷³

The importance of this project was so monumental, and not to be arrested under any circumstances, that the superstructure was completed only after a two-year period of fiscal austerity imposed by Shoghi Effendi, first on the North American Bahá’ís, a period that was subsequently extended for another two years to the entire Bahá’í world. In a cablegram to the fourth and final Intercontinental Conference at New Delhi in October of the Holy Year 1953, the Guardian announced the completion of the shrine. His proud message is a concise gem of pure, triumphal poetry: “QUEEN OF CARMEL ENTHRONED GOD’S MOUNTAIN, CROWNED GLOWING GOLD, ROBED SHIMMERING WHITE, GIRDLED EMERALD GREEN, ENCHANTING EVERY EYE FROM AIR, SEA, PLAIN, HILL.”⁷⁴ This cablegram conveys the point that the station of the Báb impresses, as much as anything, by the sheer visual impact of the majesty of the shrine, which Shoghi Effendi always referred to, according to Ugo Giachery, as “*the throne of the Lord.*”⁷⁵

The Editing and Translation of *The Dawn-Breakers*

In January or February of March 1931, Shoghi Effendi completed his translation and editing of part one of *The Dawn-Breakers*, the 800-page narrative⁷⁶ written by the immortal flame and ardent Apostle of Bahá’u’lláh, Nabíl-i-A’zam (Mullah Muhammad-i-Zarandí), the shepherd-poet-chronicler. Shoghi Effendi explained in the *Dispensation* that “*the chief motive*” that impelled him to undertake this demanding project was to more befittingly recognize the station of the Báb:

*Indeed the chief motive actuating me to undertake the task of editing and translating Nabíl’s immortal Narrative has been to enable every follower of the Faith in the West to better understand and more readily grasp the tremendous implications of His [the Báb’s] exalted station and to more ardently admire and love Him.*⁷⁷

This work exhausted the Guardian. In a letter to Martha Root dated 3 March 1931, he wrote, “*I must stop and lie down.*”⁷⁸ Shoghi Effendi

writes in the same letter that the translation itself required eight months of “*continuous and hard labour*,” while Rúhíyyih Rabbaní writes that the full scope of it exacted “almost two years of research, compilation and translation.”⁷⁹ Shoghi Effendi wrote, again in the same letter to Martha Root, that “[t]he record is an authentic one and deals chiefly with the Báb.” In the introduction, which was written with the help of an unnamed “English correspondent,”⁸⁰ the Guardian frames the narrative:

*The main features of the narrative (the saintly heroic figure of the Báb, a leader so mild and so serene, yet eager, resolute, and dominant; the devotion of his followers facing oppression with unbroken courage and often with ecstasy; the rage of a jealous priesthood inflaming for its own purpose the passions of a bloodthirsty populace)—these speak a language which all may understand.*⁸¹

This last phrase, “*which all may understand*,” indicates the universal appeal of the work. One also notices the resolution of the spiritual opposites that are combined in the above description of the Báb. Mildness and serenity are not usually intermingled with resolution and domination, but on this rare spectrum of human and divine attributes, they are harmoniously combined in one person. Another point is worth noting. Modern approaches to the academic curriculum are normally separative with each discipline being its own speciality. But in *The Dawn-Breakers* sacred history, drama, heroism, tragedy, devotion, and spirituality are combined in one volume. The following cablegram emphasizes how this exemplary work, now much neglected, can take a broad role in inspiring interdisciplinary studies. Simply put, *Nabíl's Narrative* serves the functions of study, teaching, spirituality, and creativity. Of particular note is the inspirational nature of this work recommended “*in all literary and artistic pursuit*,” a point which impresses upon the reader that literature and art, and all creative movements of the soul, can be inspired by the stirring example of the heroic and sacrificial deeds of the early Bábí-Bahá'ís. This realization also closes the gap between the secular and sacred functions of the arts. “Secular” works of art can be inspired by spiritual events without being in themselves overtly religious. Shoghi Effendi's 1932 cablegram to the North American Bahá'ís on this subject read:

FEEL IMPELLED APPEAL ENTIRE BODY AMERICAN BELIEVERS TO HENCEFORTH REGARD NABIL'S SOUL-STIRRING NARRATIVE AS ESSENTIAL ADJUNCT TO RECONSTRUCTED TEACHING PROGRAM, AS UNCHALLENGEABLE TEXTBOOK IN THEIR SUMMER SCHOOLS, AS SOURCE OF INSPIRATION IN ALL LITERARY AND ARTISTIC PURSUITS, AS AN INVALUABLE

A Celestial Burning

*COMPANION IN TIMES OF LEISURE, AS INDISPENSABLE PRELIMINARY TO FUTURE PILGRIMAGE TO BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S NATIVE LAND, AND AS UNFAILING INSTRUMENT TO ALLAY DISTRESS AND RESIST ATTACKS OF CRITICAL, DISILLUSIONED HUMANITY.*⁸²

That the Guardian had properly safeguarded the station of the Báb is dramatically illustrated by the testimony of the French diplomat and orientalist A. L. M. (Alphonse Louis-Marie) Nicolas who translated the Báb's Bayán into French "and who might correctly be described as a Bábí."⁸³ Rúhíyyih Rabbání commented that "[f]or many years he was under the impression that the Bahá'ís had ignored the greatness and belittled the station of the Báb."⁸⁴ Shoghi Effendi's befitting recognition of the Báb's true station produced a dramatic sense of relief in the French orientalist, as evidenced in Nicolas's letter to Edith Sanderson, an American who was a member of the original circle of leading Bahá'ís in France and who carried a letter to Nicolas from Shoghi Effendi. His response to Ms. Sanderson is poignant indeed because it reveals that this patient and devoted scholar suffered alone for many years with his misunderstanding, in a state of mind that had been accompanied by an acute sense of anguish. Nicolas's torment was suddenly relieved by the messenger of joy who came to confirm that his ardent, unflagging faith in "the Point of the Bayán" was shared by all Bahá'ís:⁸⁵

Now I can die quietly. . . . Glory to Shoghi Effendi who has calmed my torment and my anxiety, glory to him who recognizes the worth of Siyyid 'Alí Muhammad called the Báb. I am so content that I kiss your hands which traced my address on the envelope which brought me the message of Shoghi. Thank you Mademoiselle, thank you from the bottom of my heart.⁸⁶

The Proof from History

At the outset of his exposition, Shoghi Effendi makes a fundamental statement about the station of the Báb. It is twofold: (1) that of an inspired Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh and (2) that of an independent Manifestation of God. This "*twofold station. . . . constitutes the most distinctive feature of the Bahá'í Dispensation.*"⁸⁷ (We are often in the presence of superlatives when reading the Bahá'í writings for 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that the appointment of a Center of the Covenant is "the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.")⁸⁸ The first point brings the inevitable comparison with John the Baptist; the second point effectively destroys such comparisons, for Shoghi Effendi writes:

That He is not to be regarded merely as an inspired Precursor of the Bahá'í Revelation, that in His person, as He Himself bears

*witness in the Persian Bayán, the object of all the Prophets gone before Him has been fulfilled, is a truth which I feel it my duty to demonstrate and emphasize.*⁸⁹

Another proof of the Báb's station is presented in a form that the Guardian calls "evidence," an evidence that some might view as being more oblique than traditional logical proofs with their appeal to reason or authoritative proofs based on scripture. This is the proof from history. It is, of course, understood that any such proof from history is not a proof in its exact, mathematical, incontrovertible sense. (This is perhaps why the Guardian used the word *evidence* rather than proof). This notion of proof falls under the rubric of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá called "spiritual proofs."⁹⁰ Shoghi Effendi writes:

*The marvelous happenings that have heralded the advent of the Founder of the Bábí Dispensation, the dramatic circumstances of His own eventful life, the miraculous tragedy of His martyrdom, the magic of His influence exerted on the most eminent and powerful among His countrymen, to all of which every chapter of Nabíl's stirring narrative testifies, should in themselves be regarded as sufficient evidence of the validity of His claim to so exalted a station among the Prophets.*⁹¹

The Guardian's argument is that the Báb's deeds are sufficient proof of the validity of His station. One can envisage the statement breaking down into two parts: (1) those events touching mainly on the life of the Báb, Himself and (2) the effect of events connected with His life on others. The second point brings us into the arena of historical and personal transformation. Here one must emphasize that personal transformation is an intrinsic part of historical transformation. Shoghi Effendi's and Nabíl's views of history are not just a matter of sequential events that are recorded in a sterile, detached manner. They were written, to put Winston Churchill's celebrated words to a different use, with the "blood, toil, tears and sweat"⁹² of a generation of accused heretics that had recognized the *Sáhibu'z-Zamán*, the Lord of the Age.

Less arbitrary than rational argument, more subjective than the appeal to a disciplined philosophical argument, more aligned with story and drama, Shoghi Effendi's "evidence" looks to the undeniable transformative effect of the personality of the Báb on those whose lives were touched by his magnetic influence. This view of history is written by the cosmic *Manus*, the Hand of God that reaches down and sets the stage for a modern day *taziyah*, a Persian miracle play that directs the players in their parts. It is,

consequently, not the technical history of the academic. However, this type of history cannot be so easily minimized or dismissed as simple hagiography, an idealized version of the life of saints written by saints. For this history of the life of the Báb and the vast company of all His “*heroes and martyrs*” is presented as being grounded in that rarest of circumstances in which the ideal and the incredible are made demonstrably real and believable by the living presence of the Promised One.

This theologically engaged history is written from the point of view of those who are making it and by those who are its heirs. Living witnesses themselves participate in the epoch-making events of which they tell. From this standpoint, it is, in the German historian Leopold von Ranke’s well-known phrase “*was ist eigentlich gewesen*,” what actually happened. For Shoghi Effendi there *was*, undeniably, many an incident of both magic and miracle in this *mêlée* of massacre, martyrdom, and holy war. To the modern secular mind, this history may seem uncomfortably crowded with extraordinary events. To the believer, however, these events unfold within a divinely ordained framework of compressed time, in which the Báb’s resounding proclamation has irretrievably shattered the old order, as each gathering episode drives the plot ineluctably forward to the Ultimate Event that took place in a barracks square in Tabriz at noon on 9 July 1850.

The clinician’s approach to this singular history, while valid in the academy, will not do for the Guardian’s reading of these events. The sanitized approach will not do precisely because erudite histories, written in a detached, detailed, and analytical voice cannot—nor are they intended to—do full justice to the spiritual revolution set in motion by the declaration of the Báb in 1844 in Shiraz. Shoghi Effendi’s reference to “*the magic of His influence exerted on the most eminent and powerful among His countrymen*” indicates that the Báb’s charisma penetrated the highest circles of government. This statement speaks, not only of historical events but also of spiritual transformation; it explains the presence of literary and dramatic elements, along with matters of record, in Shoghi Effendi’s and Nabíl’s historical narratives.

It may seem surprising to say that there is nothing intrinsic to the *bruta facta* of the history of the Báb that would serve the cause of religious values per se. What one makes of this story depends entirely on the point of view of the reader of Shoghi Effendi and Nabíl, and whether or not one is merely curious onlooker or detached observer, or again, seeker or avowed believer. As literary critic Hayden White has pointed out, any historical event can be configured “from a particular point of view or from within the context of a

structured set of events. . . .”⁹³ For the detached historian, Babism, were he or she not to take into account its growth into a bona fide world religion as the Bahá' í Faith, might otherwise be viewed as nothing but a momentary religious heresy that disturbed the late Qajar dynasty between 1844–1853, then went down to the dust. But Shoghi Effendi's position is clear. He is a partisan. His view of the historical record cannot but eulogize the historical evidence of the Divine Presence that manifested itself as true heroism and sacrifice.

The history of the Báb elicits another pressing question. It is this: to whom shall we give the last word? Who shall determine the ultimate meaning of these events? In Shoghi Effendi's reading, the last word belongs, not to the detached observer, but to the participants engaged in this titanic struggle, how they defined themselves and understood the meaning of the events in which they themselves participated. To remain neutral in the face of such a bloody and unequal contest of oppressors against oppressed would be untenable. To come to the point of this argument—in Shoghi Effendi's view of history, we have to side either with the Báb and His chosen company of heroes, saints, and martyrs, or sympathize with the Shah, the Shiite clergy, and their company of villains, tyrants, cowards, and executioners. The abdication of value judgment is not required in this reading of history. On the contrary, the record of such extraordinary events requires partisanship. Both *God Passes By* and Nabíl's histories loudly proclaim that if the reader is not moved by these events, he or she shall be moved by no others.

The foregoing considerations, I should hasten to add, are not intended as a wholesale condemnation of academic histories. That would be a complete misunderstanding of my argument. What I am suggesting, rather, is that the “blurred genres” and polyphonic voices of theology, history, and drama found in *God Passes By* and *Nabíl's Narrative* should be examined on their own terms, rather than being discounted as unreliable because of their partisan, impassioned point of view. For this is a history seen from the inside out, not from the outside in.

Ultimately, “the proof of history” in Shoghi Effendi's sense of it, requires that we see with the eyes of the believer. Only then does his cosmological statement⁹⁴ that the proof of the Báb's claim to prophethood can be found in the deeds He performed and in their influence on His countrymen begin to make sense. This may well require a “leap of faith,” a suspension of disbelief, made in an attempt to go beyond our own inherited cultural prejudices, secular values, and norms in order to attempt to see with the eyes of those who freely gave up their lives for the Báb.

The Báb and those who participated in His history were witnesses who gave testimony. Avery Cardinal Dulles, holder of the Lawrence J. McGinley Chair of Religion and Society at Fordham University from 1988 until his death in 2008, writes that the newer form of apologetics, which he advocates, relies on the credibility of “the witness.” This personal testimony—and *God Passes By* and *Nabíl’s Narrative* are replete with it—requires a different sort of epistemology than that of the scientist or the secular academic. For the scientist and the academic historian, the data are “to be investigated as a passive object to be mastered and brought within the investigator’s intellectual horizons. The interpretations offered by others are not accepted on authority but are tested by critical probing.”⁹⁵ However, the proof that comes from witnesses, and their testimony is something quite different. Cardinal Dulles explains:

The event is an interpersonal encounter, in which the witness plays an active role, making an impact upon us. Without in any way compelling us to believe, the witness calls for a free assent that involves personal respect and trust. To reject the message is to withhold confidence in the witness. To accept it is a trusting submission to the witness’s authority. To the extent that we believe, we renounce our autonomy and willingly depend on the judgment of others.⁹⁶

While, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahá’í theology rejects miracles as a universal and binding proof of the divine mission of the Prophet,⁹⁷ with the histories of Shoghi Effendi and Nabíl, we have nonetheless clearly entered the arena of the miraculous. This sense of the miraculous, with the notable exception of the martyrdom of the Báb (see chapter 12, “The History of the Apostolic Age”), is not a “miracle” in the conventional sense of the word, viz., the suspension of the fixed natural order by the direct intervention of Providence in a specific situation. The “*magic*” of which the Guardian writes points to an extremely rare phenomenon of divine inspiration, inexplicable in any other terms than that of the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. The superhuman deeds of the Bábís, inspired by the charismatic life and sacrificial death of that “cruel charmer”⁹⁸ from Shiraz, as Táhirih once poetically described the Báb, take on mythic proportions. While the Muslim oppressors and executioners no doubt believed that they had inflicted a well-deserved punishment on the Báb by putting Him to death and had thus successfully stamped out the spreading flame of the new faith, in reality, their barbaric cruelty only served to put into evidence the transformative power of the Báb on these precious souls. Bahá’u’lláh gave the decisive word on this proof from history:

Could such a thing be made manifest except through the power of a divine Revelation, and the potency of God's invincible Will? By the righteousness of God! Were any one to entertain so great a Revelation in his heart, the thought of such a declaration would alone confound him! Were the hearts of all men to be crowded into his heart, he would still hesitate to venture upon so awful an enterprise. . . .⁹⁹ If these companions, with all their marvellous testimonies and wondrous works, be false, who then is worthy to claim for himself the truth? I swear by God! Their very deeds are a sufficient testimony, and an irrefutable proof unto all the peoples of the earth, were men to ponder in their hearts the mysteries of divine Revelation.¹⁰⁰

This last sentence tells us that we have to revise our notion of proof. It tells us that a proof may be “irrefutable” once we are willing to enter into a process of ponderation, of search and discovery, of sounding out what at first hand may seem to be an irrational or overly dramatic chapter taken from the religious history of nineteenth-century Persia. It would appear self-evident, as William James argued in more elaborate form, that “the will to believe” is determinative in our selection of the moral and cognitive truths that we choose to espouse. Without this will, any proof, demonstrable though it may be, will not be accepted. Bahá' u' lláh affirms that this proof from history cannot be fully understood unless a willing attempt is made to apprehend the mystery of the unrestrained power that created this history and to enter into its Spirit, a power that was able to call forth superhuman deeds that both transcended and defied the slaughter of the innocents.

The Station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The Language and Logic of Fundamental Theology¹⁰¹

The term “fundamental theology” is derived from the Guardian’s statement that “The Dispensation” treats some of “*the fundamental verities of the Faith.*”¹⁰² These fundamental verities form the basis for Bahá' í apologetics. Certain Bahá' í scholars, in forcing a distinction between apologetics and scholarship, have become wary of apologetics, since it is viewed by them as a facile, overly ambitious, triumphal enterprise that lacks the critical, historical, and “objective” skills and methods used in the academy. However, this is an oversimplification of the apologetic enterprise itself, which has proven itself capable of successfully combining critical, historical, and scientific methods with the rational explanation of Bahá' í teachings. The valuable work of

Udo Schaefer exemplifies such an approach. It is, rather, more probable that Bahá'í apologetics has scarcely begun. The negative view of apologetics held by certain Bahá'í scholars, where it exists, has likely been formed from pressures exerted by the academies, both secular and sacred.

About the middle of the twentieth century, except for evangelicals, apologetics had all but been abandoned within Christianity itself. The Roman Catholic Church rebaptized the discipline as “fundamental theology.” Unlike the practice of an earlier age, fundamental theology addressed itself mainly to believers, instead of appealing to nonbelievers, but the older term still appears in current Roman Catholic publications and appears to be making a resurgence as evidenced by a number of publications that appeared in the 1990s and after the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁰³ Protestant theological faculties do not use this term but continue to refer instead to apologetics or dogmatics/dogmatic theology, although these terms have declined somewhat in use. Roman Catholic fundamental theology bases its analysis on very wide, comprehensive foundations (philosophical, anthropological, historical, biblical, cultural), and its traditional divisions are faith, revelation, and Church.¹⁰⁴ In a Bahá'í context, by theology I mean rational explanation of the knowledge of God, and more properly, the knowledge that is text-rooted in the Bahá'í sacred writings.

In Christian terms, fundamental theology has a “dogmatic” element. This term refers to those authoritative teachings that must be taught and handed down in order to qualify one for belief. However, Bahá'í parlance names those binding teachings coming from the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice as “authoritative.” The word *dogmatic* has, of course, a foreboding, negative connotation; some may be discomfited to see it associated in any way with “The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.”

However, the Latin word *dogma*, deriving from the Greek, originally meant “opinion,” and the word *orthodox* translated literally from the Greek simply means “correct opinion.” As with other theological terms, the word *dogmatic* came to assume particular meanings in its own historical development that are not pertinent to this study. Prior to the Reformation, theologians of the Middle Ages referred instead to *articuli fidei*, articles of faith (of the confession).¹⁰⁵ If one were looking for parallels, such articles of faith would be somewhat closer in tenor to statements of Bahá'í belief, teachings, or principles. Fundamental theology in reference to “The Dispensation” indicates authoritative teachings intended to be handed down

intact. Such an orientation is predetermined by the inspired nature and veracity of Shoghi Effendi's interpretations and judgments, rather than being a blind appeal to authority for authority's sake or an intransigent coercing of doctrinal unity. These "fundamental verities" are also grounded in historical experience, that is, they are not purely theoretical constructs but derive from, and are intimately connected to, the sacred lives and events that occurred in the historical development of the Bahá'í Faith.

A broad historical parallel occurs—and I emphasize the word *broad*—between the theology of "The Dispensation" and the evolution of church dogma. Both theologies were formulated at a particular time in the historical development of the respective faiths in response to misunderstandings that had arisen in the community. In the case of both religions, defectors had perturbed the unity of the faiths, and Shoghi Effendi was no doubt concerned with the possible widening influence of such defections. It is quite clear from the internal evidence of "The Dispensation" itself that Shoghi Effendi felt that serious misunderstandings were abroad in the community regarding the station of the three Central Figures and the nature and functions of the Administrative Order. Thus, "The Dispensation" came to be written as a proactive, preventative initiative as well as being an ad hoc response to misunderstanding. The broad historical parallel being drawn here does not suggest any parity between the teachings of "The Dispensation" and the dogmas of the church. The point is that in both cases, the laying down of authoritative teachings arose because of the exigencies of historical circumstances that required a definitive response to dispel misunderstandings and to preserve the unity of the respective religion.

Demonstrative Reason, Orthodoxy, and Moral Integrity

Although Shoghi Effendi was not a trained theologian or moral philosopher, but rather the guide and head of an expanding world religion, "The Dispensation" reveals that his interpretations of the station of the three Central Figures and of the nature and function of Administrative Order reflect an incisive but nonetheless practical theological reasoning. Although his judgments are apodictic, they are accompanied nonetheless by a certain demonstrative reason. Demonstrative reason does not imply, of course, its narrow, technical sense of sequential, deductive logic to prove a proposition. It means, rather, that his theological judgments are based on reason, as well as divine authority, and are susceptible of further demonstration or proof. Demonstrative reason includes statements of value, statements of fact, and statements of policy.

A “dialectical” element may be seen to inhere in the Guardian’s reasoning by virtue of his dispensing with hypotheses and proceeding from divinely revealed first principles, the “fundamental verities” that are rooted in scripture. This proceeding from established first principles or axioms was characteristic of Plato’s understanding of dialectical reason, which he viewed as the basis of all knowledge and whose application led to the knowledge of the forms.¹⁰⁶ The Canadian theologian Bernard Lonergan (1904–1984) has pointed out that another function of dialectic is the resolution of ideological conflict.¹⁰⁷ Shoghi Effendi clearly had in mind to resolve some of the conflicting or misapprehended beliefs that existed during his lifetime about the three Central Figures and the Administrative Order.

The Guardian uses demonstrative reasoning to judge the truth or falsity of a doctrine or doctrines, either to establish a truth statement or series of truth statements or to deny a doctrine, belief, or assumption. He proceeds through a dynamic that moves either in cumulative fashion, progressing from truth to truth [positive @ positive] or by demolition in an “erase-replace” manner, one that abolishes falsehood and moves to truth [negative (false) @ positive (true)]. However, several of his theological judgments, both positive and negative, are simply mentioned in passing, i.e., his rejection of pantheism, anthropomorphism, and incarnation theology, and his affirmation of the accomplishments of the great world religions.¹⁰⁸ These affirmations or negations will serve as a seedbed for present and future theological reflection.

His declarations, statements, or conclusions are accompanied by categorical theological judgments, and the assumption of their contrary is sometimes accompanied by strong words of reproach, markedly atypical in contemporary theology, but befitting one who, as Defender of the Faith, was responsible, not only for the propagation but also for the protection of the integrity of the Bahá’í teachings. Such strong phrases as “*open blasphemy*,” “*shameless betrayal*,” “*heretical belief*,” “*direct violation*,” “*unpardonable usurpation*,” “*emphatically repudiate*,” “*tantamount to a betrayal of its cause*,” “*violating one of its basic and sacred principles*,” “*manifest betrayal*,” “*reprehensible*,” and “*erroneous conception*” are expressed in anticipation of any violation of the interpretations he presents.

Shoghi Effendi, however, does not exempt himself and the Guardianship from his own remarks. He writes, for example, in those passages of part four of “The Dispensation” that define the limitations of the Guardianship, in light of the greater station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, that any present or future Guardian “*cannot, if he wishes to remain faithful to his trust, arrogate*

to himself, under any pretense whatsoever, the rights, the privileges and prerogatives which Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to confer upon His Son."¹⁰⁹ The Guardian goes on to say, "For my own part to hesitate in recognizing so vital a truth or to vacillate in proclaiming so firm a conviction must constitute a shameless betrayal of the confidence reposed in me by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and an unpardonable usurpation of the authority with which He Himself has been invested."¹¹⁰

Shoghi Effendi's righteous indignation is not intended to be simply an arbitrary control mechanism. Another dynamic is at work. Adherence to Bahá'í belief demands not only intellectual honesty but also moral integrity. His strong remonstrances and/or condemnations indicate that there can be no real separation between the intellectual and moral/spiritual spheres of a believer's life, a point that has been made explicit by the Universal House of Justice: "We cannot separate spirit from method and character."¹¹¹ His offense at the false doctrine erases the line between the intellectual and moral error. His taking umbrage at what some might view as a pious overreaction to simply the "wrong idea" springs from what he viewed, not only as a desecration of sacred truth but also as a moral failure.

While such views and sentiments may seem forbidding to the proponents of academic freedom and the postmodern, relative outlook, they are nonetheless integral to Shoghi Effendi's understanding of Bahá'í orthodoxy. The foregoing should be nuanced with this observation. While exercising the duties of sacred office, the Guardian was "uncompromising in essentials but flexible in non-essentials."¹¹² In his personal dealings with pilgrims and with those who served as his assistants and co-workers in Haifa, he manifested to a remarkable degree the virtues of "a catholicity of spirit," "lack of fanaticism," "humility," "compassion and kindness," "generosity" and "courtesy," attributes all falling under that magnanimity of soul that is called "nobility."¹¹³ But for purposes of defining and maintaining "unity of doctrine,"¹¹⁴ he remained strictly categorical.

Logical Consequences

The Guardian exposes and corrects a major misconception that was circulating among some American Bahá'ís regarding the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the ranking order of the three Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith. The main thrust of his argument, stated negatively, is "[t]hat 'Abdu'l-Bahá is not a *Manifestation of God*."¹¹⁵ To believe the contrary is an "unwarranted inference."¹¹⁶ The reasons for this misconception are clearly explained.¹¹⁷ Two scriptural statements substantiate the rejection of the error that once

mistook ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for a Prophet: (1) In His *Most Holy Book*, Bahá’u’lláh warns that no prophet shall appear “ere the expiration of a full thousand years.” This statement itself excludes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from prophethood.¹¹⁸ (2) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own categorical self-understanding as nothing other than Servant of Bahá also excludes such an interpretation.¹¹⁹

However, other conclusions drawn from these two statements are incidentally instructive. Once we are disabused of the false notion of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prophethood, it occurs that a self-generative, that is, a degenerative process, can inhere in deductive logic. A false premise generates, not only a series of false beliefs but also, more importantly, it can produce real adversity. Beliefs are not mere abstractions; they have real-life consequences. Shoghi Effendi explained that those who overestimated ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s station produced real hardship for His faithful friends:

*Indeed, as I have already stated, those who overestimate ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s station are just as reprehensible and have done just as much harm as those who underestimate it. And this for no other reason except that by insisting upon an altogether unwarranted inference from Bahá’u’lláh’s writings they are inadvertently justifying and continuously furnishing the enemy with proofs for his false accusations and misleading statements.*¹²⁰

What Shoghi Effendi refers to, inter alia, is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s half-brother, “the arch Covenant-breaker”¹²¹ Mirzá Muhammad-‘Alí’s and his followers’ false charge that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had laid claim to the station of Divinity. In his so-called epistle of repentance, Bahá’u’lláh’s youngest son, Mirzá Badí’u’lláh (d. 1950), who had thrown his support behind the older brother Mirzá Muhammad-‘Alí, described the misdeeds committed by the older brother. They included the serious crime of interpolating Bahá’u’lláh’s sacred writings in order to belittle the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and to exalt his own.¹²² Somewhat like the doubting Thomas who was Christ’s apostle (John 20: 26–29), the youngest son was a wavering Badí’u’lláh. According to tradition, however, the critically minded and skeptical Thomas, unlike Badí’u’lláh, remained faithful and died a martyr’s death.¹²³ The parallel to Badí’u’lláh, regrettably only *one of* the faithless sons, while not exact, is perhaps closer to Judas. His brief moment of repentance was soon followed by a relapse into rebellion and faithlessness. The letter of repentance makes clear that among these “*false accusations*,”—and this despite ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s repeated and explicit written denials¹²⁴—was Muhammad-‘Alí’s allegation that “the Master

claims to be the embodiment of Divinity.”¹²⁵ In a tablet that outlines some of the misdeeds committed by the younger brother, and which stigmatizes him as “the Centre of Sedition,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to this very accusation: “Another day he would raise an uproar, saying that the oneness of God had been denied, since another Manifestation had been proclaimed, prior to the expiration of a thousand years.”¹²⁶

Shoghi Effendi makes three other deductions¹²⁷ that necessarily follow from the statement that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is not a Manifestation of God: (1) He corrects the misapprehension that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá enjoys a “*mystic unity*”¹²⁸ with Bahá' u' lláh. To hold such a belief “*would constitute a direct violation of the oft-repeated principle of the oneness of God’s Manifestations — a principle which the Author [Bahá' u' lláh] of these same extracts is seeking by implication to emphasize.*”¹²⁹ However, the principle of mystic unity would legitimately apply to the relationship between God and His Prophet. Shoghi Effendi has in mind to prevent the same type of regressive error that crept into early Christianity. (2) “*It would also amount to a reversion to those irrational and superstitious beliefs which have insensibly crept, in the first century of the Christian era, into the teachings of Jesus Christ, and by crystallizing into accepted dogmas have impaired the effectiveness and obscured the purpose of the Christian Faith.*”¹³⁰ What the Guardian may have in mind here is a reference to the dogma of the trinity, which was itself subject to a historical process—this may explain the reference to “*dogmas*”—with its divinization of Jesus the Son who has been elevated to the station of God the Father. (3) To maintain a belief in the mystic unity of Bahá' u' lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would result in an unconscionable, strange reversal. It would lower the station of the Báb:

*Furthermore, the inescapable inference from the belief in the identity of the Author of our Faith with Him Who is the Center of His Covenant would be to place ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in a position superior to that of the Báb, the reverse of which is the fundamental, though not as yet universally recognized, principle of this Revelation.*¹³¹

It is noteworthy that the belief that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was not a prophet was “*not as yet universally recognized,*” a misconception that was understandable perhaps in light of “*the vibrant, the magnetic personality of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*” with its “*glory and power with which They who are the Manifestations of God are alone endowed.*”¹³² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, however, chose instead to define His own station in terms of pure servitude to Bahá' u' lláh. In a famous declaration, He wrote:

My name is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My qualification is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My reality is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My praise is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Thralldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious and refulgent diadem, and servitude to all the human race my perpetual religion. . . . No name, no title, no mention, no commendation have I, nor will ever have, except ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This is my longing. This is my greatest yearning. This is my eternal life. This is my everlasting glory.¹³³

While this was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s definitive self-understanding, the pens of Bahá’u’lláh and Shoghi Effendi added another dimension to His station: the Mystery of God (*sir’u’lláh*). In the person and in “*the magic name ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,*”¹³⁴ this divine name is forever preserved. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is “a secret for which no answer can be found.”¹³⁵ He was, and shall remain, a living paradox since the existence of a perfect human being is a contradiction in terms. “This Branch of Holiness”¹³⁶ will continue to confound all attempts to fathom His mysterious being:

*He is, above and beyond these appellations, the “Mystery of God”—an expression by which Bahá’u’lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.*¹³⁷

Hermeneutical Pointers

Certain features of demonstrative reason are not the only rational tools that emerge in Shoghi Effendi’s clarification of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s station. Some principles of hermeneutics, the art of interpretation, especially of authoritative writings, can also be found. The erroneous belief in a “mystic unity” between Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was made by an unjustified inference taken out of context.

Shoghi Effendi explains that the unity of God with the Divine Manifestations, as implied in the phrase “He is Myself,” which appears in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*,¹³⁸ was misappropriated and incorrectly applied to the relationship between the Father (Bahá’u’lláh) and the Son (‘Abdu’l-Bahá).¹³⁹ Now, taking a statement out of one context and applying it inappropriately in another can be evidence of the following: (1) an esotericism that is prone to fabricate speculative beliefs or ethereal concepts; (2) a fundamentalist mentality that fails to make necessary distinctions where they are required;

(3) forcing an argument; and (4) an indiscriminate leveling process that seems justified in light of such a pervasive teaching as “unity.”

[James Brown] Thornton Chase (1847-1912), the first Bahá' í in America, has left a written statement that substantiates point (1). He informs us that in the opening years of the twentieth century, some Bahá' ís were in the habit of selecting what functioned for them as scriptural codewords that they put to various personal, esoteric interpretations. It is, however, understandable that Bahá' ís of Christian background would be liable to misconceive this mystic unity since Father-Son phraseology had been basic to Christian belief for centuries and had seeped into the cultural fabric. To make his point clear, the Guardian had recourse to negative theology. He stipulated how 'Abdu'l-Bahá was *not* to be regarded by the “Christian Bahá' ís” of his time. His statement makes it clear that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in fact so regarded: “...*that He is not to be acclaimed as the return of Jesus Christ, the Son Who will come 'in the glory of the Father' . . .*”¹⁴⁰

Robert H. Stockman's archival research substantiates Shoghi Effendi's assertion. He writes that Thornton Chase, the man designated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as “the first Bahá' í in America,”¹⁴¹ complained frequently in his letters that the Bahá' ís misunderstood 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station. In a letter that does not conceal his disappointment, written 1 December 1911 to Major Wellesley Tudor-Pole, who served later with the British army of occupation in Haifa and who was a fervent admirer of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Chase wrote:

Many of those who have named themselves Bahá' ís are of an enthusiastic and emotional nature which seeks a living object upon which to lavish the wealth of their hopes. They seek out single phrases and words, occurring in various Tablets from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, give to them their own interpretations, and then set them up as a sort of authority contrary to the evident strong and oft repeated declarations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself regarding his mission and station. As though that which he emphasizes were not sufficiently great, they strive to consider and proclaim him to be the Christ, the Word Incarnate, the Savior, etc., and they bitterly antagonize those who look upon Bahá' o' lláh as the fulfiller and completer of these Offices.¹⁴²

It is to his credit that Thornton Chase understood and upheld the distinction between the stations of Bahá' u' lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá at a time when many American Bahá' ís were simply too overawed by the majesty of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's charisma to understand Him according to His own behest.

Stockman correctly points out that the question of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s station was “totally confusing to the American Christian mind. No categories existed for thinking about him.”¹⁴³ The subtleties involved in discerning how “*the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized*”¹⁴⁴ were evidently too complex for the many who met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to see him in any other light than that of prophethood.

Unlike Thornton Chase, other Bahá’ís, like the naturopath Dr. Edward Getsinger, failed to be convinced, even by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s emphatic denials. Although Getsinger spent more than six months in Akka in 1899, 1900, and 1901, he still clung to his own opinion, as one of his letters indicates. For Getsinger, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s claim of pure servitude was but a blanket of humility that could not conceal His true reality, at least as Getsinger divined it. In May, 1903, he wrote the Bahá’ís of North Hudson, New Jersey, sharing his personal doctrinal insights: “We should never cease to impress all that the Master is whom we believe He is—The Christ of this generation to the Gentiles, and not what He in His humility chooses to claim for Himself—a servant.”¹⁴⁵ Dr. Getsinger’s argument was so convincing that the North Hudson Board of Council “heartily endorsed” the doctor’s analysis in their minutes!¹⁴⁶

Ali Kuli Khan, who had spent fourteen months between 1900–1901 working as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s translator, saw the theological conundrum. If Bahá’ís say that Bahá’u’lláh is Christ, what claim can they make for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá? Upon his arrival in America in 1901, he wrote:

If you want to say that all our Christian world have been waiting the Appearance of Father & Christ, & that if you tell them Beha was Christ then you will have difficulty in proving to them ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—this is a question which you will have to write for the Master, and then He will direct you how to teach this point.¹⁴⁷

I found echoes of this completely sincere but mistaken belief about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during my interview with the noted writer/teacher Stanwood Cobb at his home at the Green Acre Bahá’í School near Eliot, Maine, in the summer of 1977. Stanwood Cobb, who was then in his nineties, shared his personal impressions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá whom he had met on five occasions: twice in Akka in 1909 and 1910, later in Boston (1912), then in Washington (1912), and finally in Paris (1913).¹⁴⁸ Responding to my question as to how he viewed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with the passing years, the tension in the air was clearly felt as he struggled with his answer. With sudden emotion, he said: “Well, if I

told you what I really thought you would find it reprehensible.” When asked for a clarification, he replied, “If ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had not specifically denied being a prophet, as far as I was concerned, He was. He moved with the ease of a king, was as free as a bird and did just as He pleased.”¹⁴⁹

Another factor may account for the adoption of the mystic unity theory. This is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s function of Interpreter of the sacred writings of Bahá’ u’ lláh. It is plausible to assume that the one who is able to interpret infallibly the writings of Bahá’ u’ lláh must also know Bahá’ u’ lláh’s mind and therefore be “unified” with it. But Shoghi Effendi’s distinction about his own function as interpreter of the sacred writings dispels this confusion. He puts believers on guard against assuming an equality of station between himself and his grandfather and great-grandfather simply because he has been authorized to interpret their words:

*The fact that the Guardian has been specifically endowed with such power as he may need to reveal the purport and disclose the implications of the utterances of Bahá’ u’ lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not necessarily confer upon him a station co-equal with those Whose words he is called upon to interpret. He can exercise that right and discharge this obligation and yet remain infinitely inferior to both of them in rank and different in nature.*¹⁵⁰

By analogy, the same principle may be extended to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s interpretation of the writings of Bahá’ u’ lláh. Being able to infallibly interpret may mean, in some sense, “knowing the mind of,” but this knowing the mind of does not imply a unity of essence with and/or a co-equal divine station.

Exclusionary Definitions

It is true that in theology, as in philosophy, we cannot know what something is until we also know what it is not. While the Guardian’s interpretations may be analyzed further, this analysis must, of course, observe the spirit and the letter of his own interpretations. With his authoritative interpretations and explications, Shoghi Effendi was, so to speak, sculpting. Gradually, he chiselled away at the vague and erroneous beliefs once held by Bahá’ ís, but once he was through cutting, shaping, and polishing, a perfect representation emerged that wedded beauty to truth.

The exposure of vague ideas and outright errors by Shoghi Effendi in “The Dispensation of Bahá’ u’ lláh” has its parallel with most orthodox theologies of past dispensations. Grey areas notwithstanding, all theology has its negative as well as its positive pole: the negative being that which must be rejected and

the positive that which can be endorsed as being true. The negative pole results in a narrowing down of the belief system; this is an integral function of any authoritative definition. To a large degree this has been true of historical Christianity from the earliest days in its orthodox struggles against Gnosticism and what it viewed later as the heresies. The respected twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich, although he deplored what he viewed as the excessive narrowing down that had taken place in the formation of Christian dogma, recognized at the same time that conceptual restriction was necessary to the elaboration of all consequential theological doctrines:

The whole history of Christian dogma is a continuing narrowing down, but at the same time a defining. And the definition is important, because without it many elements would have undercut the whole church, would have denied its existence. The dogma, therefore, the dogmatic development, is not something merely lamentable or evil. It was the necessary form by which the church kept its very identity. . . .¹⁵¹

If Tillich's idea is transposed and adjusted to the "Dispensation," *grosso modo* a similar process is taking place. By excluding, the Guardian is also defining. However, with his elucidations, Shoghi Effendi is not just applying a scalpel to Bahá'í doctrine. Although he takes away, in an "erase-replace" manner, he also adds. As was seen above, for example, the Guardian rejected the "mystic unity" theory between "Abdu'l-Bahá and Bahá'u'lláh, but it is noteworthy that he advocated instead the more positive and accurate relation of "*mystic intercourse*"¹⁵² between Father and Son.

As for the abstruse nature of the unity of the prophets, the valid form of mystic unity, this remains for all else besides them an inscrutable mystery and an effort of the human imagination, since it is entirely beyond the realm of human experience. Yet within the limitations imposed upon human speech, Bahá'u'lláh alludes to this truth in the *Súriy-i-Haykal*. The Guardian quotes Bahá'u'lláh in His relationship with the Báb, "Had the Primal Point been someone else beside Me as ye claim, and had attained My presence, verily He would have never allowed Himself to be separated from Me, but rather We would have had mutual delights with each other in My Days."¹⁵³ In other words, the Twin Manifestations were already one despite their separation from one another.

Positive and Negative Theology

Let us consider further the question of positive and negative theology, already alluded to. One of the usual meanings of negative theology, a

classical element of sacred study, is that which links it to *theologica apophatika*, apophatic theology (*via negativa*), i.e., maintaining “the strictest silence about the essence of divinity which it views as being completely unknowable, and confine itself to defining God in the negative. . . .”¹⁵⁴ In *theologica kataphatika* (cataphatic/affirmative theology), whatever is affirmed of God is simply meant to underscore the fact that God is not lacking these qualities.¹⁵⁵ Positive attributions in no way describe God.¹⁵⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encapsulates the essence of negative theology when he says, “We affirm these names and attributes, not to prove the perfections of God, but to deny that He is capable of imperfections.”¹⁵⁷ Here, however, I am using the term “negative theology” in a particular way: to draw attention to Shoghi Effendi’s exclusions, the negative pole of saying no, to define instead the true nature of the thing, its positive pole of saying yes.

Perhaps the best example of this technique of polar theology is the summary of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s station. Shoghi Effendi employs a trenchant but practical logic in defining the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Upon reflection, one becomes aware that his statement carefully balances affirmations and negations. This pattern will become clearer if [+] and [-] signs are inserted into the text. His statement consists of four balanced paratactical clauses (see chapter 8 “Style and Pattern”) that have been enumerated from [1] to [7]. The result is a juxtaposition of positive and negative elements that produce a truth statement in which, of the seven signs, four are negative and three positive:

[1][-] *That ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is not a Manifestation of God*, [2] [+] *that He gets His light, His inspiration and sustenance direct from the Fountain-head of the Bahá’í Revelation*; [3][+] *that He reflects even as a clear and perfect Mirror the rays of Bahá’u’lláh’s glory*, [4] [-] *and does not inherently possess that indefinable yet all-pervading reality the exclusive possession of which is the hallmark of Prophethood*; [5][-] *that His words are not equal in rank*, [6][+] *though they possess an equal validity with the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh*; [7][-] *that He is not to be acclaimed as the return of Jesus Christ, the Son Who will come ‘in the glory of the Father’ . . .*¹⁵⁸

Other examples may be found of this structural, positive-negative juxtaposition throughout “The Dispensation.” Here are further examples that, for brevity’s sake, will be given without quotation:

- That Bahá'u'lláh is the supreme Manifestation of God, but He is not God;¹⁵⁹
- That the Bahá'í Faith is the culmination of the world religions but does not invalidate them;
- That the Bahá'í Faith, despite the magnitude of its power, is not the final revelation from God. That the Báb is a self-sufficient Manifestation of God, not merely an inspired precursor of Bahá'u'lláh;
- That the Guardian is the permanent head of the Universal House of Justice but cannot legislate, except as an individual member of that body;
- That the exalted position of the Guardian does not make him a co-sharer in the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

End Limits: Neither Too Much Nor Too Little

With his positive-negative structural pattern, which is used in conjunction with a [statement + qualification] or [statement + caution] pattern, Shoghi Effendi considers both ends of the theological spectrum, viz., he affirms positive truths while eliminating errors. Briefly, the example used in (1) above, “That Bahá'u'lláh is the supreme Manifestation of God, but He is not God” serves as example. This is one end of the spectrum (neither too much). At the other end (nor too little), the Guardian's statement on the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá will serve again as an example.

Here, Shoghi Effendi cautions against an extreme reduction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's claim to pure servitude. Again, the intellectual error would result in moral error—lowering the dignity of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station:

From such clear and formally laid down statements, incompatible as they are with any assertion of a claim to Prophethood, we should not by any means infer that 'Abdu'l-Bahá is merely one of the servants of the Blessed Beauty, or at best one whose function is to be confined to that of an authorized interpreter of His Father's teachings. Far be it from me to entertain such a notion or to wish to instill such sentiments.¹⁶⁰

By carefully defining end limits, Shoghi Effendi prevents at the same time triumphalistic, separative, and/or demeaning views of the three Central Figures, while giving a sense of moderation and balance to Bahá'í belief.

Selected Points on the Administrative Order

Generative Imagery in Shoghi Effendi's Elucidations of the *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

The fourth and final division of "The Dispensation" is an analysis of the Administrative or World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. In explaining the mysterious origins of the Administrative Order, Shoghi Effendi employs some of the most distinctive and powerful imagery found in his treatise. The passage to which I refer reveals the mystic origins of the *Will and Testament*, which the Guardian calls "*the Charter of the New World Order which is at once the glory and the promise of this most great Dispensation.*"¹⁶¹ He explains the origin of the Will in terms of a birthing process, a process of creative generation. The passage in question is noteworthy, not just because it is another incisive interpretation. With it, the Guardian exposes a revealing hermeneutics of insight which substantiates 'Abdu'l-Bahá's declaration that the hidden things of God will be made plain with the advent of the Promised Day: "By the help of this effulgent Light all the spiritual interpretation of the Holy Writings has been made plain, the hidden things of God's Universe have become manifest, and we have been enabled to comprehend the Divine purposes for man."¹⁶²

What is unveiled to our understanding is an intimate but previously hidden glimpse of the process by which the Will was begotten as a result of a "*mystic intercourse*" between the divine minds of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the former, "*the Originator,*" who releases the active, creative impulse that initially generated the *Will and Testament*, and the latter, "*the Interpreter,*" who is its worthy and ready recipient and who brought it into being:

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. The Will may thus be acclaimed as the inevitable offspring resulting from that mystic intercourse between Him Who communicated the generating influence of His divine Purpose and the One Who was its vehicle and chosen recipient. Being the Child of the Covenant—the Heir of both the Originator and the Interpreter of the Law of God—the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá can no more be divorced from Him Who supplied the original and motivating impulse than from the One Who ultimately

*conceived it. Bahá'u'lláh's inscrutable purpose, we must ever bear in mind, has been so thoroughly infused into the conduct of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and their motives have been so closely wedded together, that the mere attempt to dissociate the teachings of the former from any system which the ideal Exemplar of those same teachings has established would amount to a repudiation of one of the most sacred and basic truths of the Faith.*¹⁶³

The Sacred Marriage Metaphor

The above passage describes the genesis of the *Will and Testament* as a mystical process. While in one sense, this process is unique since it pertains to the Bahá'í Faith alone, in a larger sense, Shoghi Effendi's language may be seen to allude to a religious discourse stemming from the Judeo-Christian tradition. The question as to whether or not this allusiveness has occurred consciously to Shoghi Effendi is left aside for obvious reasons. We should remember, however, that inspiration notwithstanding, the Guardian was addressing himself to a Western audience. It should come as no surprise, consequently, that his writing should contain some intertextual religious allusions with which Western readers would be familiar. No hard argument is being made here that the language chosen by Shoghi Effendi depends directly upon this religious background. The effectiveness of this passage is, however, greater when the religioliterary background of his readers is taken into consideration. One feature of the Guardian's epistolary style is its multilayered effect (see chapter 8, "Style and Pattern"). These additional layers from the Judeo-Christian tradition may be perceived with this text to the extent that the reader is aware of them.

The three phenomena that would resonate for Western readers would be: the concept of divine law; a nativity or birthing scene; and a sacred marriage. The reference to the "*Law*" recalls the law given by Moses on Sinai. The nativity or birthing scene has, of course, associations with the birth of the Christ Child. The concept of the sacred marriage (*heiros gamos*) has older associations that date back to classical Greece. The best-known example that was ritualistically celebrated and reenacted in various locations in ancient Greece was that of Zeus and Hera, a ritual that had fertility motives.¹⁶⁴ Christianity, however, had its own sacred marriage in the persons of Mary and Joseph, whom the Gospel depicts as obedient and favored servants of the Lord. Sacred or spiritual marriage also has roots in the tradition of Western Christian mystics such as St. Theresa of Avila (1515–1582) in her work *The Interior Castle*¹⁶⁵ and St.

Catherine of Genoa, who founded that city's first hospital in 1477, as well as in Brother Lawrence, Ruysbroeck, Luis de León, Elizabeth de la Trinité and John Tauler. The genesis of the Will, "*the Charter of the New World Order*," through the "*mystic intercourse*" of the minds of Bahá' u' lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá is based upon a metaphor of procreation. However, Shoghi Effendi's reference to "*mystic intercourse*," while it suggests human analogies, obviously transcends gender associations since "*the Child of the Covenant*" has been generated by two male sacred figures. A more specific reference to sacred marriage is found elsewhere in the Guardian's writings. He writes that the revelation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is the fulfillment of St. John the Divine's allusion in the Apocalypse to the "Bride"¹⁶⁶ (Rev. 21: 9), "the Lamb's wife" (v. 9), which one of the seven angels shows to St. John and which the subsequent verse reveals to be nothing other than the celestial city, "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (v. 10).

When the Guardian uses the mystical language of a sacred marriage between the minds of Bahá' u' lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to explain the origins of the Will and Testament, he is harking back to an ancient biblical and post-biblical mystical symbolism that make his elucidations more susceptible to sympathetic understanding by his Western readers. To isolate examples for purposes of identification, sacred marriage, conception, and nativity imagery are reflected particularly in the expressions "*the inevitable offspring*," "*the Child of the Covenant*," and "*from the One Who ultimately conceived it*." Shoghi Effendi develops the metaphor of the divine child of the Will and Testament further when he affirms that "[*t*]he *Administrative Order*. . . may be considered as the framework of the Will itself, the inviolable stronghold wherein this new-born child is being nurtured and developed."¹⁶⁷ Sacred marriage language is reflected in such phrases as "*so closely wedded together*" and "*can no more be divorced*." Generative imagery is found further in the expressions "[*t*]he *creative energies released*" and "*the original and motivating impulse*,"¹⁶⁸ and "*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*."¹⁶⁹ Such language serves as a familiar context that situates the Bahá' í-specific discourse and facilitates identification within it.

Personal and Impersonal Modes of Speech

The Guardian's generative imagery has another noteworthy feature; the synthesis of personal and impersonal modes of speech. Conception-nativity and sacred marriage language is highly personal language, whether it refers to mother-child, husband-wife, lover-beloved, or soul-Creator relationships. In this context, however, while the loving, mystical dimensions of unity and creativity are retained between Father and Son, the generative process of "*mystic intercourse*" between two male sacred figures produces a document, the *Will and Testament* (impersonal). Yet in Shoghi Effendi's parlance, this document is "*the Child of the Covenant*" (personal). Thus, a great charter of world order becomes the offspring of the Covenant. The organic allusion is retained, nonetheless, because the divine institutions that the Will has generated are living things that bring life to humanity. The Guardian also writes that 'Abdu'l-Bahá "*incarnates an institution for which we can find no parallel whatsoever in any of the world's recognized religious systems. . .*"¹⁷⁰ This also is a synthesis of the personal and impersonal modes of discourse. While Shoghi Effendi's reference to 'Abdu'l-Bahá as an institution would be normally atypical in common speech, it reflects a sociological understanding that describes a towering figure who over successive generations exhibits a "factor of persistence."¹⁷¹ If impersonal and personal modes are juxtaposed, such things as "*Law,*" "*Instrument,*" "*Charter,*" "*New World Order,*" "*The Dispensation*" are harmonized in the same context with such images as "*Child,*" "*Heir,*" "*Exemplar,*" and "*so closely wedded together.*"

Backhanded Warnings Against Autocracy, Special Privilege, Bureaucracy, and Corruption

Arguably, Shoghi Effendi sometimes issued backhanded warnings to the Bahá'í community in his various condemnations of the ways of the old world order. The following critique of episcopal authority may contain an implicit warning for all Bahá'í institutions: "*...the total absence of episcopal authority with its attendant privileges, corruptions and bureaucratic tendencies, are further evidences of the non-autocratic character of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and of its inclination to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs.*"¹⁷² This statement may serve, not only as a point of distinction between Bahá'í and ecclesiastical governance but also as a standard of behavior for Bahá'í institutions and the officers who serve them. His words may serve as admonition that autocracy, bureaucracy, special privilege, and corruption should never be allowed to infect and impede the good functioning of the Administrative Order.

The above comparison may be extended beyond the Christian Church to include the larger record of the history of religion, which has been soiled with abuse. Taking an anti-dogmatic, anti-technocratic stance, and in a bid to unite the healing properties of psychoanalysis with the best religious ideals of East and West, Erich Fromm wrote the following in *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, a book that is still very timely. Fromm's judgment buttresses that of Shoghi Effendi:

It is the tragedy of all great religions that they violate and pervert the very principles of freedom as soon as they become mass organizations governed by a religious bureaucracy. The religious organization and the men who represent it take over to some extent the place of family, tribe, and state. They keep man in bondages instead of leaving him free. It is no longer God who is worshipped but the group that claims to speak in his name.¹⁷³

In addition to his critique of the abuses of “*episcopal authority*,” Shoghi Effendi's remarks serve both as axiom and antidote for the all-too-easy tendency of the religious institution to settle in, to become an end in itself, and to lose sight of its divine purpose: “*Now that they (the American believers) have erected the administrative machinery of the Cause they must put it to its real use—serving only as an instrument to facilitate the flow of the spirit of the Faith out into the world.*”¹⁷⁴ This exhortation requires the necessary maintenance of a synergistic relationship between spirit and form, between the unhampered forces of freely flowing inspiration and spontaneity, and the requirement to channel spiritual strivings in a productive and efficient fashion. The Guardian writes of the need to allow for “*the influxes and goings forth of the spirit*” on the one hand, and of the necessity to avoid “*disordered and disorganized activity*” on the other. His solution is the “*wisdom secured through consultation and also the lights of real unity.*”¹⁷⁵

Contrary to the inclinations of the practitioners of New Age spirituality, the Bahá'í religion is indeed organized. However, the ideal it proposes is a living, organic, growth model rather than a robotic, monolithic, and inflexible one. Once this fundamental point is understood and the distinctive principles grounding this organization are clearly apprehended, it becomes clear that the Administrative Order is designed to promote the optimal growth of the Bahá'í Faith and to serve the needs of the community with maximum efficiency. In this regard, Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf:

The N.S.A. should do all in its power to foster unity among the believers, and to educate them in the administration as this is the channel through which their community life must flow, and which, when properly understood and practised, will enable the work of the Cause to go ahead by leaps and bounds.¹⁷⁶

Canadian anthropologist Jameson Bond in his paper, “The Vision of Shoghi Effendi and the Unfoldment of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*,”¹⁷⁷ contrasts the idea of the dynamic organic growth model with the static inorganic one and points to the principle of “spiritual causality” as being the root-cause that produces “social, economic, and political effects.” He writes:

One of the theses that recurs in the Guardian’s writings is the law of spiritual causality. Those of us who live in sensate, industrialized societies are accustomed to seeing the inorganic growth model at work. We can easily become conditioned to thinking that this is the reality of growth. In fact, the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh develops through the mysterious process of organic growth. Shoghi Effendi frequently reminded the friends that causality in human affairs is spiritually determined. Thus, spiritual cause produces social, economic, and political effects.¹⁷⁸

Bearing in mind the fact that it is at present an experimental, organic growth model that develops, inter alia, through the method of trial and error, the Administrative Order remains rooted in this principle of spiritual causality.

Endnotes

1. The subtitle is based upon the *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, which says of Shoghi Effendi, "He is the expounder of the Word of God" (p. 11). The word *Interpreter* is used in an alternative translation. In the Dispensation the word *Interpreter* is also used in addition to the word *expounder* when the Guardian interprets this phrase as: "He is the Interpreter of the Word of God" p. 148.
2. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 147. Subsequent references are indicated simply by "The Dispensation," followed by the page number.
3. The word *station* is used pervasively (61 times) in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. In "The Dispensation" it is used passim.
4. "The Dispensation," p. 131.
5. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 213.
6. *Ibid.*
7. It was to legitimize the notion of Bahá'í theology that I edited *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Bahá'í Theology*. As I stated in the introduction to that volume, "While the Bahá'í sacred writings shed much light on both ancient questions and contemporary issues, there is as yet no centuries-old tradition of the theological and philosophical reflection on the Bahá'í revelation upon which to draw. Indeed, there are some who still reject the validity of the whole notion of Bahá'í theology itself, however broadly and carefully one defines the concept. The work of the present generation of scholars is consequently still very much ground-breaking, and I hope this volume will help water the seedbed that is now beginning to flourish" (p. xiii). Udo Schaefer has done more than any other scholar to legitimize the notion of Bahá'í theology over the past forty years, without which, as he has often remarked, no self-respecting world religion can be taken seriously. "Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 5.1 (March–June 1992): 25–67 was also written with this purpose in mind.
8. A term coined by the literary critic I. A. Richards that referred to the purport or general drift of thought regarding the subject of a metaphor. Its counterpart was the 'vehicle,' which referred to the image or figure that embodied the tenor. It is also used simply to refer to the direction of thought(s) or a piece or writing.
9. In *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi: Proceedings of the Association for Bahá'í Studies Ninth Annual Conference, November 2–4, 1984*, pp. 73–90.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
11. During the schism of the learned priest Arius of Alexandria early in the fourth century, "When the Arian bishop Macedonius was returned to office in Constantinople, over three thousand people lost their lives in the fighting. More Christians were slain by fellow Christians in this one contest alone than had died during the last terrible persecution of Roman Emperor Diocletian in 311" (McLean, "The Deification of Jesus," *World Order* 14.3/4 [Spring/Summer 1980]: 33, n. 31). The schism of Arius was condemned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a tablet to Roy Wilhelm, *Star of the West* 10 (5 June 1919): 95.

- However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts, “The Covenant of God shall remain stable and secure.” McLean, *ibid.*, p. 23.
13. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 26.
 14. Shoghi Effendi dated the composition of *the Book of Certitude* as being 1862 (*God Passes By*, p. 99). However, Christopher Buck in *Symbol and Secret* notes that “[t]o err on the side of caution, until specific justification for 1862 comes to light, a more conservative estimate of 1861–62 is to be preferred for purposes of academic investigation” (p. 12). Buck’s cautionary remark is based on an earlier statement by Shoghi Effendi—surpassed by the date given later in *God Passes By*—that the date of composition is 1278 AH. Buck notes that the conversion to the Gregorian calendar makes for the imprecision of either 1861 or 1862 (p.12). Subsequently, the research of Ahang Rabbani has brought to light a letter written in the hand of Khal-i-Akbar, the great-uncle of the Báb, that the *Íqán* was written in 1861. The letter was dated 5 Rajab 1277 AH and not 1278 as was previously believed by everyone, including Shoghi Effendi. This date corresponds to 17 January 1861. See Ahang Rabbani, “The Conversion of the Great-Uncle of the Báb,” 19–38.
 15. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 31.
 16. Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 52.
 17. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*, p. 11.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
 19. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 22 August 1977, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1050, p. 310.
 20. Hatcher, “An Analysis of *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*,” p. 77.
 21. In Browning’s poem *Andrea del Sarto* (1855) about the painter by the same name (1486–1531), del Sarto addresses his dull-witted and unfaithful wife Lucrezia, “Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.” In Rebecca Comay’s essay called “Almost Nothing: Heidegger and Mies,” regarding the phrases “Less is more” and “almost nothing” (*beinahe nichts*) often attributed to Mies, Comay writes, “To my knowledge Mies never actually wrote those words. She attributes “Less is more” to American modern architect Philip C. Johnson. *The Presence of Mies*, edited by Detlef Mertins, p. 179. This collection of essays relates, inter alia, Mies van der Rohe’s concept of architecture to twentieth-century philosophic concepts. Mies defenders attribute the saying to van der Rohe nonetheless.
 22. Hatcher, *idem*, *ibid.*
 23. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 117.
 24. “The Dispensation,” p. 97.
 25. *Ibid.*
 26. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
 28. Reinhold Bernhardt, “Interreligious Images and Parables,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 5(1995): 63.
 29. “The Dispensation,” p. 100.
 30. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
 31. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
 32. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
 33. Shoghi Effendi, in his tribute of 17 July 1932, to the Bahá’ís of North America announcing the passing of Bahíyyih Khánum (*Bahá’í Administration*, p. 187).

34. "The Dispensation," p. 98.
35. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, xiii.
36. "With a spirit of exultation we are moved to announce to you: the Faith of Bahá' u' lláh now enters the fifth epoch of its Formative Age."
37. For a detailed account, see the memorandum prepared by the Research Department and sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 5 February 1986, *Bahá' í Canada* 13.12 (Jamál, B.E. 158, April 2001): 13–16.
38. *Bahá' í News* 265 (March 1953): 4. Letter dated 18 January 1953 written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, cited in a memorandum of the Research Department of 5 February 1986.
39. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, xiv–xvi.
40. "The Dispensation," p. 98.
41. Ibid.
42. McLean, "The Metaphysics of History and Fine Art" in *Under the Divine Lote Tree: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 94–95.
43. Abdu'l-Bahá, "The Master's Last Tablet to America" in *Bahá' í World Faith*, p. 432.
44. See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 194, 277. Shoghi Effendi also writes, "I cannot at this juncture over-emphasize the sacredness of that holy dust embosomed in the heart of the Vineyard of God. . ." (*Citadel of Faith*, p. 95). "Carmel, the 'Vineyard of God,' is the mountain in the Holy Land where the Shrine of the Báb and the seat of the world administrative centre of the Faith are situated" (Bahá' u' lláh, *Aqdas*, note no. 114, p. 215).
45. There are 62 references to "work of the Cause" in the letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi. See the MARS (Multiple Author REFER system) CD-ROM.
46. "Labor" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, p. 51.
47. "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt" (Ps. 80:8). Also, "For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant. . ." (Isa. 5:7). In the Gospel, Christ describes himself as "the true vine" and his father as the husbandman (John 15:1–6). Here Christ refers to himself as the True One of Israel and exhorts his followers to "Abide in me. . . . As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me" (v. 4)
48. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. xv.
49. P. 2.
50. In a world religions perspective, I have briefly examined manifestation theology in the section "The Hidden and Revealed God: Negative and Manifestation Theology" (pp. 53–61) in "Prolegomena to a Bahá' í Theology," *Journal of Bahá' í Studies* 5.1 (March–June 1992): 25–67.
51. The phenomenological content of theophany below has been gleaned from the following articles: "Theophany" in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, "Presence of God" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, "Theophany" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, and "Theophany in the Old Testament" and "Theophany in the New Testament" in the supplementary volume of *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*.
52. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, s.v. "Theophany," p. 740.
53. Ibid., p. 741.
54. This phrase is taken from this seminal text of Bahá' u' lláh on the nature and function of the Divine Manifestations (Prophets). "The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of

Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace, according to His saying: “His grace hath transcended all things; My grace hath encompassed them all” hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence” (Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 99).

55. “The Dispensation,” p. 100.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Shoghi Effendi actually gave two events that signaled the end of the Primitive/Heroic/Apostolic Age: the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1921) and that of “*the Most Exalted Leaf*” Bahíyyih Khánum (1932) (“Dispensation,” p. 98). This suggests that endings are transitional and are not usually finalized in a single event.
62. Except where otherwise indicated, the material in this section is taken mainly from “The Queen of Carmel” in Anita Ioas Chapman’s *Leroy Ioas: Hand of the Cause of God*, pp. 217–28.
63. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 225.
64. See especially ¶2, p. 276 of *God Passes By*.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
66. *Ibid.*
67. Chapman, *Leroy Ioas: Hand of the Cause of God*, p. 217.
68. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 235.
69. These included: (1) “Great chunks of correspondence to answer,” (2) purchasing land for the Guardian, (3) as secretary-general of the International Bahá’í Council, (4) supervising the construction of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb, and (5) supervising the construction of the Archives building (from a letter to the author from Anita Ioas Chapman, 31 January 2000). See Chapman, *Leroy Ioas: Hand of the Cause of God* for the full account.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
71. Ugo Giachery, *Shoghi Effendi: Recollections*, appendix 9, p. 215.
72. Chapman, *Leroy Ioas*, p. 220.
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
75. Giachery, *ibid.*, p. 83.
76. This includes supplementary notes. Shoghi Effendi’s letter to Martha Root, 3 March 1931, quoted in Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 21.
77. “The Dispensation,” p. 213.
78. Quoted in Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 216.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
80. From the acknowledgments.
81. Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. xxiii–xxiv.
82. Cablegram, 21 June 1932, in *Messages to America, 1932–1946*, p. 1.
83. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 204.
84. *Ibid.*

85. One of the titles by which the Báb referred to Himself in the Persian *Bayán*. See, for example, VIII: 9 and 19; IX: 4 in the Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, pp. 79, 81, and 94.
86. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 204.
87. "The Dispensation," p. 124.
88. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 455.
89. "The Dispensation," p. 123.
90. See "Spiritual Proofs," chapter 14 in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 75-77.
91. "The Dispensation," p. 124.
92. On 13 May 1940, before the House of Commons, Churchill said during his inaugural address as newly elected prime minister of Great Britain: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." The phrase was repeated in other war speeches.
93. Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, p. 397.
94. Meaning: forming part of an ordered system of ideas.
95. Avery Cardinal Dulles, "The Rebirth of Apologetics," *First Things* 143 (May 2004): 21.
96. Ibid.
97. See "Miracles," chapter 22 of *Some Answered Questions*.
98. In a poem attributed to Táhírih and translated by Professor E. G. Browne, the Bábí poetess from Qazvin wrote: "As in sleep I lay at the break of day/That cruel charmer came to me/And in the grace of his form and face/The dawn of the morn I seemed to see" (cited by E. G. Browne in *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion*). The poem is untitled, and its first verse reads: "The thralls of yearning love constrain/In the bonds of pain and calamity/These broken-hearted lovers of thine/To yield their lives in their zeal for Thee.
99. Bahá' u' lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 230-31.
100. Ibid., pp. 226-27.
101. There is no contradiction in the meaning of terminology when I refer in the chapter title to a "Theology of the Word" and here to a "Fundamental Theology." Fundamental theology refers to the foundations or fundamentals of Bahá' í theology that are themselves rational, inspired statements of Bahá' í belief, based on text-rooted, scriptural affirmations as interpreted by Shoghi Effendi. In other words, the fundamental truths of Bahá' í theology are based upon their being situated within a theology of the Logos or Divine Word that is their larger framework. Fundamental theology is the discourse that derives from the Theology of the Divine Word, viz., the scriptural data of divine revelation.
102. "The Dispensation," pp. 98, 147.
103. See, for example, Avery Cardinal Dulles, "The Rebirth of Apologetics," *First Things* 143 (May 2004): 18-30. Dulles refers to Paul Griffith's *An Apology for Apologetics and Unapologetic Apologetics: Meeting the Challenges of Theological Studies* as outstanding examples of this resurgence.
104. See, for example, German theologian Hans Fries' very comprehensive *Fundamental Theology [Fundamentaltheologie]*, trans. Robert J. Daly, SJ, with an epilogue by Thomas M. Kelly.
105. See Fries' explanation of "Dogma," pp. 105-6.

106. "In Plato (*Republic*, Book 6), 'dialectic' is the faculty of attaining the forms in themselves, through the opposites in which they are mediated" (Walter Kern, "Dialectics," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, p. 348).
107. "Dialectic," by Bernard J. F. Lonergan in *Method in Theology*, p. 235.
108. "The Dispensation," pp. 112–19.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
110. *Ibid.*, pp. 151–52.
111. *Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith. Extracts from Letters Written on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice*, p. 44.
112. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 459.
113. *Ibid.*, pp. 459–60.
114. Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, pp. 52–53. The phrase belongs to the Universal House of Justice.
115. "The Dispensation," p. 132.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
117. *Ibid.*
118. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
119. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
120. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
121. Shoghi Effendi uses this epithet in *Bahíyyih Khanum*, p. 118.
122. Mirzá Badí' u'lláh confessed that before his own eyes he watched Mirzá Muhammad-'Alí interpolate a tablet of Bahá' u'lláh from the pre-Akka period that condemns the misdeeds of Bahá' u'lláh's younger brother Mirzá Yahyá. Muhammad-'Alí changed "My brother" (Yahyá) to "My Greatest Branch" ('Abdu'l-Bahá). Muhammad-'Alí justified this action by saying that Bahá' u'lláh had given him permission to interpolate his writings for the protection of the Cause and that he needed to do this "to check His ['Abdu'l-Bahá's] influence" (Badí' u'lláh, quoted in Adib Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá' u'lláh*, p. 153).
123. Tradition says he died by the lance.
124. The Guardian concludes his study of the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá by citing a letter from the Master written to some friends in America, "You have written that there is a difference among the believers concerning the 'Second Coming of Christ.' Gracious God! Time and again this question hath arisen, and its answer hath emanated in a clear and irrefutable statement from the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that what is meant in the prophecies by the 'Lord of Hosts' and the 'Promised Christ' is the Blessed Perfection (Bahá' u'lláh) and His holiness the Exalted One (the Báb)" (p. 139).
125. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá' u'lláh*, p. 153. Here Badí' u'lláh is quoting the words of Mirzá Muhammad-'Alí as reported in his letter of repentance.
126. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 217.
127. *Deductio*, Lat., a leading down. "In logic, inference in which a conclusion follows necessarily from one or more given premises" (*Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 74).
128. "The Dispensation," p. 137.
129. *Ibid.*, pp. 137–38.
130. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
131. *Ibid.*
132. *Ibid.*, pp. 97–98.
133. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

134. Ibid., p. 134.
135. From the article “Mystery” by David Hill in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 538. The above phrase is used by Hill to indicate the meaning of the word *mystery* in “ordinary discourse”; whereas, his article discusses the technical theological meanings primarily in the New Testament.
136. “The Dispensation,” p. 135.
137. Ibid., p. 134.
138. The actual phrase of Bahá' u' lláh, as translated by Shoghi Effendi to signify the unity of the prophets, is, “This is the significance of the tradition: ‘I am He, Himself, and He is I, myself’” (Bahá' u' lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 100).
139. “The Dispensation,” p. 137.
140. Ibid, p. 139.
141. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 257. Robert Stockman has informed me that this designation was originally recorded by Ahmad Sohrab in a tribute to Thornton Chase by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when the Master arrived in San Francisco on 4 October 1912. Thornton Chase had died a few days earlier on September 30th. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave another eulogy at the graveside of the Inglewood Cemetery in Los Angeles on 19 October 1912, at 1:00 p.m. in which he requested that “the friends of God must visit this grave and on my behalf bring flowers and seek the sublimity of the spiritual station for him...” (*Star of the West* 3.13 [4 November 1912]: 14). Stockman discusses William James’s and Edward Dennis’s becoming Bahá’ís prior to Thornton Chase’s conversion (see *Bahá’í Faith in America*, vol. 1, pp. 35–36).
142. Robert Stockman, *Bahá’í Faith in America*, vol. 2, Early Expansion, 1900–1912, appendix 3.
143. Ibid., appendix, p. 2.
144. “The Dispensation,” p. 134.
145. Quoted in the North Hudson Board of Council Minute Book, entry of 6 May 1903, p. 68. From Stockman, op. cit., appendix 3.
146. Stockman, op. cit., appendix 3.
147. Ali Kuli Khan to Hooper Harris, 28 July 1901, in Stockman, op. cit., appendix 3.
148. See “Memories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” in *In His Presence: Visits to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 25–64. In his account Stanwood Cobb relates how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cured him of severe depression. When he related this incident to me, he used the phrase “suicidal depression,” a phrase that does not figure into his account of this healing on pp. 34–35. He cites the reason as some “disciplinary troubles” (p. 34) at Robert College in Constantinople where he was teaching Latin and English. He told me that his life had been threatened by some of his students.
149. Quoted in McLean, *Dimensions in Spirituality: Reflections on the Meaning of Spiritual Life and Transformation in Light of the Bahá’í Faith*, p. 96.
150. “The Dispensation,” p. 151.
151. Paul Tillich, quoted in *Ultimate Concern*, pp. 64–65.
152. “The Dispensation,” p. 144.
153. Ibid., p. 138.
154. McLean, “Prolegomena to a Bahá’í Theology,” *Journal of Bahá’í Studies* 5.1 (March–June 1992): 54.
155. See “via negativa” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 15, pp. 252–54. Cataphatic theology admits the use of analogies to describe God but declares that these, like the

- denial of definitions in the negative theology, in no way describe Him. Thus, the *via negativa* admits of paradoxical statements in our affirmations about God. The *via negativa* is also a way of mystical union with God found in such theologians as Dionysus the Areopagite and the fifteenth-century German cardinal Nicholas of Cusa. The concept is also found in the Eastern religious traditions.
156. For an excellent overview of apophatic theology in the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Bábí and Bahá'í traditions, see Stephen N. Lambden's article, "The Background and Centrality of Apophatic Theology in Bábí and Bahá'í Scripture" in *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspective on a Bahá'í Theology*, pp. 37–78.
 157. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148 in chapter 37, "The Divinity Can Only Be Comprehended Through the Divine Manifestations."
 158. "The Dispensation," p. 139.
 159. Shoghi Effendi put the matter this simply in one of his letters: "As regards your question: Bahá'u'lláh is, of course, not God and not the Creator; but through Him we can know God. . ." (from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, 4 June 1951, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1553, p. 472).
 160. "The Dispensation," p. 133.
 161. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
 162. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 70.
 163. "The Dispensation," p. 144.
 164. Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas, vol. 1, From the Stone Age to the Eleusian Mysteries*, p. 278.
 165. Vol. 2, Seventh Mansion, chapter 2.
 166. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 213. For other references to spiritual marriage expressed variously as "bride" and "bridegroom" in both testaments, see Hos. 2:2, 14–23, 16:23, John 3:29, 2 Cor. 11:1–2, Rom. 11:1–25, 1 Cor. 12:13, Eph. 5:25–27, Rev. 19:7–9.
 167. "The Dispensation," p. 144.
 168. *Ibid.*
 169. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
 170. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
 171. "Institutions Defined," in chapter 24, *Principles of Sociology*, p. 225.
 172. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
 173. Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, pp. 82–83.
 174. Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 2.
 175. *Principles of Bahá'í Administration: A Compilation*, p. 1.
 176. Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day*, p. 106.
 177. Presented to the 1984 Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies (Ottawa). See *Vision of Shoghi Effendi*, pp. 1–7.
 178. Jameson Bond, *Selected Papers*, p. 34.

2

THE WORLD ORDER LETTERS (1929–1936) THE EMBODIMENT OF SPIRIT IN *THE WORLD ORDER OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*

Contextualizing the World Order Letters

The Epitome of Shoghi Effendi's Literary Powers

Shoghi Effendi became a master of English expression during the decade of the 1930s. While the letters of the 1920s were consistently eloquent, engagingly sincere, and fully expressive of the thoughts, feelings, and concerns that preoccupied the mind and heart of the young Guardian, the letter of 1929 and the subsequent letters of the 1930s took up challenging new themes that were global in scope and presented with convincing authority. The extraordinary creative gifts possessed by Shoghi Effendi came to the fore in a series of seven letters written between 27 February 1929 and 11 March 1936, which have become known as the “World Order letters.” Published as *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* in 1938, these letters show intellectual penetration, historical acumen, spiritual and administrative insight, and sound moral judgment. They were written from the world center of the Bahá'í Faith in Haifa, Israel (then Palestine) and were addressed mainly to a Western and/or North American audience, but in reality these letters were destined for the world.

Although certain contemporary references to world events have since passed into history, these letters will be read for generations to come. The issues they raise, and more importantly the solutions they offer, are as fresh and relevant as the day they were written. The World Order letters are, in more than one sense, historic documents. For they brought the Bahá'í Faith squarely into the realities of twentieth-century life and engaged the contemporary world fully and honestly with its lamentable deficiencies and harrowing crises.

Future generations will read them to discover how the Guardian awakened the members of the Bahá'í community, in the early years of its Formative

Age, not only to the administrative, doctrinal, and spiritual realities of their faith but also to an awakening consciousness of world affairs and a new era of planetary citizenship. This coming-of-age in global understanding was accomplished while the world was breaking apart. The letters emphasize a sharp decline in the fortunes of ecclesiastical institutions, both Christian and Islamic, the disintegration and eventual breakdown of the political structures and economic arrangements of the world, the visible signs of widespread moral decay, and the growing rumors of an impending world-war that was clearly foreshadowed in the letters of 28 November 1931 and 11 March 1936.

It bears mention that while the concept of a “new world order” has been, at this point, for some 75-odd years a familiar feature to the Bahá’í community, and even became a passing slogan for some Western politicians during the 1990s, this grand theme was indeed visionary for the 1930s. Shoghi Effendi’s view of the “*twin processes*” or the “*dual phenomenon*” of the collapse and death of the old order, with the simultaneous rise of the new, remains the binding leitmotif of this remarkable series of letters.

Three Overall Objectives

Three overall objectives drive the World Order letters: (1) To explain the framework of the Administrative Order and its operating principles to a community not yet familiar with its several basic features; (2) To analyze the sharp decline in world affairs, while pointing to the hopeful, sure signs of the coming New Age; and (3) To indicate the spiritual primacy of North America in establishing world peace and unity and its leading role in the erection of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.

The Vision of Shoghi Effendi Prior to 1937

When the first sixteen years of the guardianship are surveyed, a three-fold vision of Shoghi Effendi becomes apparent. The earliest years of the Guardianship (1922–1928) gave a foretaste of the three overall objectives mentioned above. The vision during those years may be conveyed by three key process words: internal, external, and correlative.

Internal. In the early years of the guardianship, Shoghi Effendi’s observations and directives were written largely to further an understanding of the basic structure and internal development of the Bahá’í Administrative Order and community life. To this end, he laid down a number of fundamental spiritual and administrative principles and practices to ensure the proper functioning of the emerging Local and National Spiritual Assemblies.

These principles and practices were selected and elaborated on from the two complementary charter documents of world order, the *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, which Shoghi Effendi described as “*the framework*” of the Administrative Order,¹ and the Most Holy Book, Bahá’u’lláh’s *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. These applications resulted in an active new dynamic in the modus operandi of Bahá’í affairs, i.e., the administrative function itself, seen in the light of spiritual laws and principles, a function that has come to be known increasingly as “governance.” Shoghi Effendi’s elucidation and application of these spiritual and administrative laws and principles, which he considered to be inseparable, are contained in the series of letters (1922–1932) first published in 1928 as *Bahá’í Administration*.² (The fifth revision of 1945 contained letters dated to 1932). The preoccupation with a clear understanding of the Administrative Order and its proper functioning continued in the first and second World Order letters of 1929 and 1930 and throughout part four of “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” in 1934.

External. During the period of the World Order letters (1929–1936), the Guardian took an outward-looking view of world events to consider the sharp decline of religious institutions, both Muslim and Christian, and to indict the obsolescent, dysfunctional, secular governments that proved themselves incapable of effectively remedying the ills and suffering of the world. At the same time, he condemned certain pernicious political-social ideologies and well-meaning but impotent statesmen for their inability to adjust their policies to the pressing needs of the New Age of global unity.

Correlative. A vision closely associated with the second was the correlation of catastrophic world events to the steady growth of the new world order. This period entered a new phase in 1937 with the inception of the First and Second Seven Year plans (1937–1944/1946–1953), which were conceived to ensure the multiplication and consolidation of a relatively small number of spiritual assemblies, a process Shoghi Effendi referred to as “*expansion and consolidation*.”³ Since 1937, the Bahá’í Faith moved into a period of systematic expansion.

Horace Holley: Editor of the World Order Letters

Hand of the Cause of God⁴ and Secretary of the American National Spiritual Assembly (1923–1959), Horace Hotchkiss Holley (1887–1960), highly praised by Shoghi Effendi,⁵ was himself a gifted writer, essayist, and poet. Horace Holley “edited”⁶ the World Order letters by choosing a title for the overall collection, titles for the individual communications, and inserting subtitles, for which he followed closely the lead of Shoghi Effendi’s text. Rúhíyyih

Rabbaní writes, “If this facilitated the reading of his works, and made them more intelligible to the average American believer, Shoghi Effendi saw no objection.”⁷ On the same subject, Horace Holley wrote, “The title and subtitles were not part of the original text, but have been added with Shoghi Effendi’s approval for the convenience of the reader.”⁸ Most headings are well chosen and assist the reader in selecting and highlighting salient themes that emerge from the weighty mass of the Guardian’s communications.

However, the title of the fourth letter, “The Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh” (1932), is a puzzle, at least to this writer, for it says virtually nothing about the Bahá’í Faith’s future Golden Age but treats instead certain spiritual and theological dimensions of the Administrative Order, such as the comparatively rapid emancipation of the Bahá’í Faith from its parent religion Islam; the relationship of the Bahá’í Faith to its sister world religions; the station of the Báb; the principle of complete abstinence from political affairs; the speedy completion of the building of the Wilmette Temple, “*the Mother Temple of the West*”;⁹ and North America’s contribution to the establishment of the Bahá’í Faith in the world. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní observes that the fourth letter “was a masterly exposition of the Divinity of His Faith which, Shoghi Effendi wrote, feeds itself upon “*hidden springs of celestial strength*.”¹⁰ “The Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh” is a title that could have been applied just as fittingly to the seventh letter, “The Unfoldment of World Civilization” (1936). Be that as it may, Horace Holley selected the fitting title by which these letters have become known, a title selection that is based upon the same expression used by the Guardian; he also wrote the introduction.

Blurred Genres

A study of the other letters reveals that not all of them, strictly speaking, deal solely with the theme of world order. One letter of the seven, “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh,” as was noted in chapter 1, is largely a theological treatise, and was originally published separately in 1934 and reissued as a booklet in 1960. The fourth part of that letter vexes the genre purist because it returns to the theme of the Administrative Order and exposes “*the theory on which this Administrative Order is based and the principle that must govern the operation of its chief institutions*”¹¹ while it clarifies the role and functions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice and the reciprocal relationships governing them. Shoghi Effendi’s writing is, in any case, internally cross-genred and resistant to any facile definition of style (see chapter 8, “Style and Pattern”) since it incorporates at the same time historical, political, scriptural, spiritual, theological, and administrative

elements in a multilayered discourse that is rhetorically driven.

The combining of religious, theological, and administrative questions under one cover indicates Shoghi Effendi did not intend to draw any hard and fast lines among them. This point is consistent with what he had already written regarding “*the essential unity*” of the spiritual, humanitarian, and administrative principles of the Bahá’í Faith. In his first World Order letter (1929), which established the validity of the foundations of the Administrative Order, he wrote, “*I will only confine my observations to those issues which may assist them [the American believers] to appreciate the essential unity that underlies, the spiritual, the humanitarian, and the administrative principles enunciated by the Author and Interpreter of the Bahá’í Faith.*”¹² In the same letter, in what may be construed as an argument for holism, he emphasized the point that any disassociation of the components of this interconnected spiritual-humanitarian-administrative triad “*can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself.*”¹³ Any one element becomes the sine qua non of the others. Thus, “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh,” the bulk of which is theological in nature, finds inclusion in the World Order letters because it combines spiritual and administrative matters.

The fifth letter in the series, “America and the Most Great Peace” (1933), which outlines in glowing fashion the early history of the Bahá’í Faith in North America, should be read conjointly with its later complement *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1939). This latter work makes a more detailed, critical, and challenging assessment of the state of the Bahá’í community in the 1930s to more adequately prepare it for the prosecution of the First and Second Seven Year Plans (1937–1944/1946–1953). In comparing these two documents, we realize that the early praise that was so richly poured out in “America and the Most Great Peace” became tempered with the later challenges and admonitions contained in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, although the Guardian’s glowing encomiums of “*the great Republic of the West,*”¹⁴ based on his interpretation of certain laudatory passages from the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, remain unaltered.

Milly Collins’s Walk with the Young Guardian: Awakening to World Order¹⁵

The following story is directly pertinent to this chapter and is included because of its instructive moral. It illustrates an awakening, the manner in which the consciousness of world order came to the mind of one American Bahá’í who occupied a favorite place in Shoghi Effendi’s heart. Of her Shoghi

Effendi said, “Day by day she becomes nearer and dearer.”¹⁶ While he was Guardian, except for his wife, Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, Amelia Collins was the only other person, who lived in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s house. Amelia Collins was named a Hand of the Cause of God on 23 December 1951. What transpired during her pilgrimage to Haifa between Milly, “as she was called by the beloved Guardian and by all her friends,”¹⁷ and Shoghi Effendi stands out as one of the great defining moments in the progressive understanding of the Administrative Order.

In 1923 Amelia Collins and her well-to-do husband Thomas H. Collins, who was not a Bahá’í, made a pilgrimage to the holy shrines in Haifa and Akka. Amelia E. Collins was by temperament a spiritual aspirant, personally inclined and deeply devoted to those teachings that would develop spirituality: the realities of prayer, the nature of the soul and its purification, and, most of all, the mysteries of the great world beyond. Milly’s interest in these profound questions was not just a theoretical curiosity. She longed to understand more deeply and to experience directly the things of the Spirit. Upon her arrival in Haifa, she was hoping that Shoghi Effendi would expound such heavenly realities to her, and she viewed him as “a door to the world beyond, and through him I longed to have a glimpse of that wondrous world.”

However, the Guardian was to unveil to Milly another order of the things of the Spirit. One evening during her pilgrimage, Shoghi Effendi gave Milly some papers¹⁸ and asked her to study them. No doubt thinking that the Guardian had divined her deepest desires, she relates that “with great eagerness and anticipation I hurried to my room, opened the papers, and read and read.” When Milly met with the Guardian on the following day, he asked, “What did you think of the papers I gave you to read?” But instead of having discovered great new vistas of spiritual understanding, Amelia Collins had encountered a stumbling-block. How was she to answer Shoghi Effendi? Now according to her own testimony, truthfulness and frankness were the hallmarks of Milly’s upbringing and governed her conduct in interpersonal relations. Ever since becoming a Bahá’í, she had determined to live by these virtues, speaking her truth forthrightly “without fear of consequence.” Her response was typically honest and direct. She replied, “What shall I say? I did not understand anything.”

On that very same afternoon, the young Guardian invited Milly to walk through the streets and lanes that ran close by the house of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the very streets and lanes His blessed feet had trod, near the very house that was by divine inheritance now the house of Shoghi Effendi. Let the

author of this story take up the thread:

As we were walking together he spoke of nothing except the same subjects he had written about in the papers he had given me to read. But with what a voice and with what sweetness! Words cannot describe them. He explained the details with such patience, as a father would to a child. But my idea was still lurking in my mind, and I was constantly thinking to myself that soon he would speak the words that would, each one, open a door into which the mysteries of prayer and the world of the spirit which I longed so much to know more about. . . . The Guardian, who was beginning to delineate the beginnings of the spiritual foundations of the Kingdom of God on earth, began to educate me in the administrative principles of the Faith in spite of my own desires.¹⁹

After her pilgrimage, Amelia Collins returned to America and went directly to the 1923 National Convention. She arrived there during the reading of the very message that the Guardian had asked her to study in Haifa. As a newly arrived pilgrim from Haifa, she was called to the front and later recalled:

The words that I spoke came from some deep well of consciousness. That afternoon's walk with Shoghi Effendi and those exalted statements heard from no less a person than 'Abdu'l-Bahá's successor, were like seeds that dear teacher had implanted in my mind and heart, and now each one was bursting forth into expression of these new ideas.²⁰

The Guardian's letter was circulated throughout Bahá'í communities in the United States. As Milly travelled among them, she found that her afternoon walk with Shoghi Effendi had prepared her to shed light upon the discussion, to dispel misunderstandings, and to remedy any clashes of thought that arose.

The moral of Milly's story contains three main lessons: (1) Through Milly's experience, the reader becomes aware of the awakening to an indispensable feature of the Bahá'í Faith in the mind of one early believer, a feature that was by no means either clear, or even present, in the minds of the Bahá'ís in the early twentieth century. Amelia Collins may be viewed, consequently, as the symbolic representation of virtually every Western Bahá'í vis-à-vis his or her understanding of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Milly is every Bahá'í. Her consciousness-raising encounter with Shoghi Effendi becomes the consciousness-raising of us all. Through her transformative experience, a better understanding is reached of the process of one's own deepening, one's own gradual awakening to the multiple dimensions of understanding required by the multiplicity of teachings, community practices, and administrative life.

(2) The objective presence of the world order itself as an indispensable and permanent feature of Bahá'í teaching and administration is established. (3) The pedagogical loving-kindness, patience, and perceptiveness of the young Guardian becomes apparent. In the kind and gentle but persuasive manner in which Shoghi Effendi initiated an opportune teaching moment and thereby impressed upon Milly Collins the concept of world order, the Guardian emerges as the efficacious, loving teacher who reveals the blueprint of a new world order to the mind of one American spiritual aspirant who was personally inclined to other matters.

Here another moral may be found for any one who may hold certain Bahá'í teachings as having greater importance than others, and perhaps especially for anyone who is inclined to hold in special regard otherworldly questions to the detriment of more concrete and practical worldly affairs. Shoghi Effendi impressed upon the eager pilgrim before him the necessity of understanding that one of the Holy Spirit's primary manifestations in this age is its concrete embodiment in elected, consultative, spiritual assemblies that govern a well-ordered community, the divine institutions that administer to the pressing needs of a larger world society in dire need of their guidance. The knowledge that Shoghi Effendi awakened in the mind and heart of Amelia Collins was the knowledge that she would require to advance the real interests of the Bahá'í Faith, the "Cause" or the "Movement" as it was then called, in its earliest stages of institutional growth. The last word about this defining moment will be left to that extraordinarily humble, exemplarily devoted lady who first experienced it: "I had been given by him that which was necessary for the service and advancement of the Cause, and not that which would satisfy only my own selfish desires."

Selected Topics from the World Order Letters

Preamble: Three Basic Foci

The World Order letters have three basic foci. The first two foci are identical with the explanation used in the section "Three Overall Objectives" above. One focus is internal and developmental. It concerns the explication of the origins, structure, and operation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The spirit animating this discourse, particularly in the first and second letters, may best be described with the theological word *justification*.²¹ The second focus is external and analytical. By making passing allusions to world events and societal conditions, especially in the third letter, Shoghi Effendi asserts the disintegration of a dying world order and the rise of the World Order of

Bahá'u'lláh in a correlated palingenetic²² process that the Guardian has described as a “*dual phenomenon*”²³ that is characterized by the “*death-pangs*” of the old and the “*birth-pangs*”²⁴ of the new. The third focus concerns the destiny of North America in its preeminent worldwide mission as “*the champion builders of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*”²⁵ and as the chief agent for the establishment of world peace and unity.

The First Letter: “The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh” (27 February 1929) Creation of an Institutional Matrix

First Exposure to the Administrative Order

The purpose of the Guardian's first world letter to the members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada was to draw attention to the foundations of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, its institutions, laws, and principles, as grounded in two complementary and inseparable sacred documents, the *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* and the Most Holy Book, Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, which Shoghi Effendi also referred to as his “*Book of Laws*.”²⁶ The Aqdas and the Will he described as the “*chief repository wherein are enshrined those priceless elements of that Divine Civilization*.”²⁷ The context of the first letter was provided by the utterly failed attempt by Ruth White, called a person of “*unbalanced mind*”²⁸ and a “*besotted woman*,”²⁹ to have the Will declared a forgery on the basis of the opinion of a so-called handwriting expert. Shoghi Effendi welcomed the occasion since it afforded him with “*an opportunity to familiarize the elected representatives of the believers with the origin and the character of the institutions which stand at the very basis of the World Order ushered in by Bahá'u'lláh*.”³⁰ In refuting the charge that the Will was a forgery, Shoghi Effendi received unexpected but indirect support from curious quarters. Ahmad Sohrab, formerly 'Abdu'l-Bahá's secretary who knew His handwriting well and who was himself later declared a Covenant-breaker by Shoghi Effendi,³¹ declared that the Will was genuine.³²

Creation of a New Institutional Matrix

In reviewing the background to this letter, we should recall some basic facts. Compared to today's standards, Bahá'í literature was still very scanty in the 1920s, although the Bahá'í community was by no means destitute of sacred literature as is sometimes supposed.³³ The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* was as yet unpublished in the West in its entirety (published 1992). The *Will and Testament* had been translated without delay by Shoghi Effendi, with assistance from

others, and was sent to New York to the Bahá'í Temple Unity Executive Board and was received on 25 February 1922.³⁴ According to archivist Roger M. Dahl of the National Bahá'í Archives of the United States, copies were made and sent to the secretary of each local community. The secretary either read the copy or gave believers access to it, but they were instructed not to make copies. A collection of excerpts was later published.³⁵

However, the Will was not published in its entirety by the American National Spiritual Assembly until 1944, even though Shoghi Effendi had been guiding Local and National Assemblies with administrative directives since the inception of the Guardianship in 1922. Presumably, this delay in complete publication was overseen by the Guardian since he supervised all such matters closely. It would be true to say, consequently, that in 1929 North American Bahá'ís were far from being fully informed about the contents of either the Aqdas or the Will. Shoghi Effendi's letter of 27 February was, for most believers, their first exposure to the functioning of the Administrative Order.

We should also bear in mind, as the story of Milly Collins illustrates, that the average Bahá'í would have been interested in questions of a mainly spiritual nature (the soul, life after death, prayer, spirituality, the meaning of suffering) or global issues such as world peace, world unity, the oneness of humanity, and world government. The generation of Bahá'ís still living then, who had personally known 'Abdu'l-Bahá, would have entertained a different concept of divine guidance and authority than the institutional mode of operation ordained in the Aqdas and the Will. Those privileged and respected members of the Bahá'í community would have been passionately devoted to the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and would have identified Him with the Bahá'í Faith itself. These believers would have conceived of divine guidance and authority in personal and inspirational terms, as a guiding force for their own lives, since many of them possessed tablets written to them by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They would have been less familiar with the operating principles that produced teaching plans, with their goals and strategies, arrived at through a process of consultation, resulting in decision either by unanimity or majority vote. In short, Shoghi Effendi conveyed to the Western Bahá'ís the existence of a new, institutional matrix of government, whose dynamics they did not, for the most part, know well. The Guardian's first letter provided a foundational understanding for the Bahá'ís of the early twentieth century that assisted them in understanding the laws and principles underlying the Administrative Order and in putting its requirements into practice.

**The Second Letter: “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh”
Further Considerations (21 March 1930),
Answering “Challenging Criticisms”**

The Continuing Object Lesson in World Order

The Guardian’s second letter opens with the same concern that had motivated the first letter:

Amid the reports that have of late reached the Holy Land, most of which witness to the triumphant march of the Cause, a few seem to betray a certain apprehension regarding the validity of the institutions which stand inseparably associated with the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. These expressed misgivings appear to be actuated by certain whisperings which have emanated from quarters which are either wholly misinformed regarding the fundamentals of the Bahá’í Revelation, or which deliberately contrive to sow the seeds of dissension in the hearts of the faithful.³⁶

Shoghi Effendi’s first response to the “challenging criticisms” that have been reported to him is a moral one; they come as the proverbial blessing in disguise, as illustrated by this sentence:

Instead of undermining the Faith, such assaults, both from within and from without, reinforce its foundations, and excite the intensity of its flame. Designed to becloud its radiance, they proclaim to all the world the exalted character of its precepts, the completeness of its unity, the uniqueness of its position, and the pervasiveness of its influence.³⁷

However, in contrast to the first letter, the tone has become more earnest, if not sterner. In paragraph four, the Guardian reiterates the necessity of dwelling “more fully upon the essential character and the distinguishing features of the world order³⁸ as conceived and proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh.”³⁹ The continuing campaign of disinformation on the part of those who are “wholly misinformed” or who “deliberately contrive to sow the seeds of dissension in the hearts of the faithful”⁴⁰ has become the occasion for a fuller object lesson. The stronger words of the fourth paragraph are repeated in such phrases as “I feel impelled,” “I strongly feel the urge,” “I consider it my duty to warn,” and “I pray that they may realize. . . .”

Early Warnings of More Severe Attacks

While Shoghi Effendi viewed attacks on the Bahá’í Faith as providential

blessings that pruned, strengthened, and promoted its status, he also used the occasion to make Western believers more aware that these early assaults were merely a prelude to a more concentrated and organized campaign of opposition yet to come, a contest that will produce “*enemies more powerful and more insidious than the cruellest torture-mongers and the most fanatical clerics who have afflicted it in the past.*”⁴¹ In light of this chilling prediction, Western Bahá’ís understood more clearly that the Bahá’í Faith was to face future, far more serious ordeals than the early disturbances by Covenant-breakers they were experiencing. In one stroke, the Guardian was thereby assuaging the distress of the Western believers of his time by putting their troubles with the Bahá’í Faith’s critics and “*avowed enemies*” into a more positive perspective, while notifying them of a redoubtable apocalyptic contest yet to come. Shoghi Effendi also makes the point that while the institutions of the Administrative or World Order are “*so strikingly resemblant, in some of their features, to those which have been reared by the Fathers of the Church and the Apostles of Muhammad,*” the Papacy, and the Muslim Caliphate,⁴² he argues that

*[b]oth in the administrative provisions of the Bahá’í Dispensation, and in the matter of succession, as embodied in the twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship, the followers of Bahá’u’lláh can summon to their aid such irrefutable evidences of Divine Guidance that none can resist, that none can belittle or ignore. Therein lies the distinguishing feature of the Bahá’í Revelation. Therein lies the strength of the unity of the Faith, of the validity of a Revelation that claims not to destroy or belittle previous Revelations, but to connect, unify, and fulfill them.*⁴³

The Divine Economy

A major consideration in the second World Order letter is the Divine Economy. This important theme has been treated separately in chapter 7, “The Critique of Hegel, the Method of Correlation, and the Divine Economy.”

The Third Letter: “The Goal of a New World Order” (28 November 1931) The Rapid Descent into Disorder and the Slow Ascent to Order

The Watershed Epistle

In the judgment of Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, the letter entitled, “The Goal of a New World Order” (1931) represented a watershed epistle, which demonstrated “a new mastery and assurance in its tone, [that] rises above the level of a letter to co-workers in a common field and begins to reflect the extraordinary power of

exposition of thought that must characterise a great leader and a great writer.”⁴⁴ Of the seven letters, the letter of 1931 deals most directly with the theme of world order as it pertains to the disintegration of political, social, economic, and religious conditions in the world between the two world wars. It also adeptly correlates these world conditions to such Bahá’í teachings as a world super-state, unity in diversity, the principle of the oneness of humanity, and world federation. It is this third letter that contains excerpts of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s tablet that has become known as “The Seven Candles of Unity,” (Per. *Sham*. candle), dubbed by Horace Holley in his subhead as the “Seven Lights of Unity,” and which is critical in understanding the steps leading to the creation of the Lesser Peace and beyond. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní’s use of the substantive “mastery” is apt since the Guardian turns an incisive eye, in a sweeping world analysis, to a vast panoply of worsening conditions that had created, despite “*the manifestations of confident enthusiasm in which the Plenipotentiaries at Versailles so freely indulged*,”⁴⁵ the ominous rumblings of a new global conflict in the making. While the third letter presents the relevant Bahá’í scriptures and teachings on peace and a coming federated world, unlike the first two letters, it deals little with the actual machinery of the Bahá’í institutions that constitute the Administrative Order with its governing laws and principles.

A Coming Second World War

The spirit animating this letter springs from Shoghi Effendi’s overriding concern with a coming second world war, despite the fact that the peacemakers who drafted the five treaties embodied in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles hailed it as “*the embodiment of triumphant justice and the unfailing instrument for an abiding peace. . .*” Shoghi Effendi wrote, “*Ten years of unceasing turmoil, so laden with anguish, so fraught with incalculable consequences to the future of civilization, have brought the world to the verge of a calamity too awful to contemplate.*”⁴⁶ Here again, as was his wont, the Guardian took his point of departure in the reflections of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

How poignantly some of us can recall His pregnant remarks, in the presence of the pilgrims and visitors who thronged His doors on the morrow of the jubilant celebrations that greeted the termination of the World War—a war, which by the horrors it evoked, the losses it entailed and the complications it engendered, was destined to exert so far-reaching an influence on the fortunes of mankind. How serenely, yet how powerfully, He stressed the cruel deception which a Pact,⁴⁷ hailed by

*peoples and nations as the embodiment of triumphant justice and the unfailing instrument of an abiding peace, held in store for an unrepented humanity.*⁴⁸

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s warning was clear and emphatic: “. . . another war, fiercer than the last, will assuredly break out.”⁴⁹ Shoghi Effendi’s entire analysis is based on these words of his grandfather.

Positive Signs of Coming World Order

I have already remarked in chapter 1, “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh,” that Shoghi Effendi often juxtaposes positive and negative viewpoints in his analyses. In the present context, to say that the Guardian dwells only on the disintegration of the old world order or on the mounting causes of a future world war, which he condemns in light of the Bahá’í teachings, would not correspond to his true method of exposition. While Shoghi Effendi does present a foreboding picture of world events in the decade of the 1920s—*“the first decade since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sudden removal from our midst”*—he opens the third letter with these words:

Fellow-believers in the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh: The inexorable march of recent events has carried humanity so near to the goal foreshadowed by Bahá’u’lláh that no responsible follower of His Faith, viewing on all sides the distressing evidences of the world’s travail, can remain unmoved at the thought of its approaching deliverance.

*It would not seem inappropriate, at a time when we are commemorating the world over the termination of the first decade since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sudden removal from our midst, to ponder, in the light of the teachings bequeathed by Him to the world, such events as have tended to hasten the gradual emergence of the World Order anticipated by Bahá’u’lláh.*⁵⁰

While Shoghi Effendi was distressed by the recent developments in deteriorating world conditions and events, he was also heartened by them, even if certain progressive and far-sighted measures to ensure the great peace appeared to have failed. Here is one such example of his thinking:

The fierce opposition which greeted the abortive scheme of the Geneva Protocol; the ridicule poured upon the proposal for a United States of Europe which was subsequently advanced, and

the failure of the general scheme for the economic union of Europe,⁵¹ may appear as setbacks to the efforts which a handful of foresighted people are earnestly exerting to advance this noble ideal. And yet, are we not justified in deriving fresh encouragement when we observe that the very consideration of such proposals is in itself an evidence of their steady growth in the minds and hearts of men? In the organized attempts that are being made to discredit so exalted a conception are we not witnessing the repetition, on a larger scale, of those stirring struggles and fierce controversies that preceded the birth, and assisted in the reconstruction, of the unified nations of the West?⁵²

In his ominous, albeit hopeful, survey of world conditions and events, the Guardian turns to the lessons of history to buttress the reader's hopes that the coming new world order is not just a pious hope or an idealistic dream. His two cases in point are taken from the fall of the Roman Empire in the late fifth century⁵³ and the American Civil War (1861–1865). By drawing a parallel with the first example, Shoghi Effendi foresaw in the coming world conflict more definitive results emerging than those produced by World War I, in “*the end of an epoch*” and a “*cataclysmical change*,” which would surely produce political and spiritual benefits for the human race. Among them, he refers to a future world “*religious revival*” and streaming forces of great “*spiritual energy*” that will eclipse the prodigious spiritual accomplishments of the religions of the past:

Might we not already discern, as we scan the political horizon, the alignment of those forces that are dividing afresh the continent of Europe into camps of potential combatants, determined upon a contest that may mark, unlike the last war, the end of an epoch, a vast epoch, in the history of human evolution? Are we, the privileged custodians of a priceless Faith, called upon to witness a cataclysmical change, politically as fundamental and spiritually as beneficent as that which precipitated the fall of the Roman Empire in the West? Might it not happen—every vigilant adherent of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh might well pause to reflect—that out of this world eruption there may stream forces of such spiritual energy as shall recall, nay eclipse, the splendor of those signs and wonders that accompanied the establishment of the Faith of Jesus Christ? Might there not emerge out of the agony of a shaken world a

*religious revival of such scope and power as to even transcend the potency of those world-directing forces with which the Religions of the Past have, at fixed intervals and according to an inscrutable Wisdom, revived the fortunes of declining ages and peoples? Might not the bankruptcy of this present, this highly-vaunted materialistic civilization, in itself clear away the choking weeds that now hinder the unfoldment and future efflorescence of God's struggling Faith?*⁵⁴

His second reference to history is the American Civil War, a conflict that produced the federated union of northern and southern states resulting in “the great republic of the West.” It contained these somber reflections on the eventual future world federation of humankind:

*Could anything less than the fire of a civil war with all its violence and vicissitudes—a war that nearly rent the great American Republic—have welded the states, not only into a Union of independent units, but into a Nation, in spite of all the ethnic differences that characterized its component parts? That so fundamental a revolution, involving such far-reaching changes in the structure of society, can be achieved through the ordinary processes of diplomacy and education seems highly improbable. We have but to turn our gaze to humanity's blood-stained history to realize that nothing short of intense mental as well as physical agony has been able to precipitate those epoch-making changes that constitute the greatest landmarks in the history of human civilization.*⁵⁵

Between the World Wars

In the 1931 letter, three passages present most pointedly the Guardian's analysis. For someone who was far removed from the “storm-centers” of Europe and who relied largely on newspaper reports to gather his information, as well as news from any pilgrims who came to Haifa, Shoghi Effendi's portrayal of world conditions between the wars was vivid and concise. Since purely historical analysis lies outside the framework of this study, these passing remarks will have to suffice. His observations cover the gamut of social, psychological, economic, and political factors and chiefly elucidate: (a) why the peace treaties signed at Versailles in 1919 failed; and (b) the multiplication of the foreboding conditions that led to the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Since he was no journalist, Shoghi Effendi was not writing merely to present himself as an informed commentator of world events. He

was, instead, correlating the rise of the Bahá'í Faith to the ominous developments on the international stage, albeit in a perspective of hope, while issuing, at the same time, a warning of things to come.

Failure of the Versailles Peace Treaties (1919)

Because more fundamental, far-reaching changes have not yet been realized, negotiated treaties have demonstrated a catastrophic failure to keep the peace. In *The Sane Society* (1955), Erich Fromm refers to an estimate made by one Victor Cherbulliez that from 1500 to 1860, “no less than 8,000 peace treaties were signed, each one supposed to secure permanent peace, and each one lasting on an average two years!”⁵⁶ The Treaty of Versailles fared better. It lasted twenty years, perhaps because the dire events of World War I and its consequences were still painfully fresh in memory. In the same letter, Shoghi Effendi turned his attention to one of the well-recognized causes of World War II—the harshly punitive and ultimately self-defeating conditions of the Versailles Peace Treaties:⁵⁷

That the unrest and suffering afflicting the mass of mankind are in no small measure the direct consequences of the World War and are attributable to the unwisdom and shortsightedness of the framers of the Peace Treaties only a biased mind can refuse to admit. That the financial obligations contracted in the course of the war, as well as the imposition of a staggering burden of reparations upon the vanquished, have, to a very great extent, been responsible for the maldistribution and consequent shortage of the world's monetary gold supply, which in turn has, to a very great measure, accentuated the phenomenal fall in prices and thereby relentlessly increased the burdens of impoverished countries, no impartial mind would question. That inter-governmental debts have imposed a severe strain on the masses of the people in Europe, have upset the equilibrium of national budgets, have crippled national industries, and led to an increase in the number of the unemployed, is no less apparent to an unprejudiced observer. That the spirit of vindictiveness, of suspicion, of fear and rivalry, engendered by the war, and which the provisions of the Peace Treaties have served to perpetuate and foster, has led to an enormous increase of national competitive armaments, involving during the last year the aggregate expenditure of no less than a thousand million pounds,

*which in turn has accentuated the effects of the world-wide depression, is a truth that even the most superficial observer will readily admit. That a narrow and brutal nationalism, which the post-war theory of self-determination has served to reinforce, has been chiefly responsible for the policy of high and prohibitive tariffs, so injurious to the healthy flow of international trade and to the mechanism of international finance, is a fact which few would venture to dispute.*⁵⁸

I would be remiss if I neglected to report Shoghi Effendi's didactic comment on the facts that he presents. He contends that the unrest the world was experiencing in the 1920s, which continued in the opening year of the decade of the 1930s, although it resulted from the unwisdom of the framers of the Versailles Peace Treaties, did not amount just to "*a transitory dislocation in the affairs of a continually changing world.*" Rather, he argues:

*Is it not a fact that—and this the central idea I desire to emphasize—the fundamental cause of this world unrest is attributable, not so much to the consequences of what must sooner or later come to be regarded as a transitory dislocation in the affairs of a continually changing world, but rather to the failure of those into whose hands the immediate destinies of peoples and nations have been committed, to adjust their system of economic and political institutions to the imperative needs of a rapidly evolving age?*⁵⁹

But he goes further—and this is a salient feature of his thought. These convulsing "*intermittent crises*" are due to the inability of the "*world's recognized leaders*" "*to reshape the machinery of their respective governments according to those standards that are implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's supreme declaration of the Oneness of Mankind.*"⁶⁰

The World Scene in 1931

Included in our author's survey of world events and conditions is the rise of radical forces in Europe, the rising tide of communism, resurgent nationalism, the decolonial movement in Africa, the failure of American isolationism, and even unrest in Australia:

Europe, hitherto regarded as the cradle of a highly-vaunted civilization, as the torch-bearer of liberty and the mainspring of the forces of world industry and commerce, stands bewildered and paralyzed at the sight of so tremendous an upheaval.

Long-cherished ideals in the political no less than in the economic sphere of human activity are being severely tested under the pressure of reactionary forces on one hand and of an insidious and persistent radicalism on the other. From the heart of Asia distant rumblings, ominous and insistent, portend the steady onslaught of a creed which, by its negation of God, His Laws and Principles, threatens to disrupt the foundations of human society. The clamor of a nascent nationalism, coupled with a recrudescence of skepticism and unbelief, come as added misfortunes to a continent hitherto regarded as the symbol of age-long stability and undisturbed resignation. From darkest Africa the first stirrings of a conscious and determined revolt against the aims and methods of political and economic imperialism can be increasingly discerned, adding their share to the growing vicissitudes of a troubled age. Not even America, which until very recently prided itself on its traditional policy of aloofness and the self-contained character of its economy, the invulnerability of its institutions and the evidences of its growing prosperity and prestige, has been able to resist the impelling forces that have swept her into the vortex of an economic hurricane that now threatens to impair the basis of her own industrial and economic life. Even far-away Australia, which, owing to its remoteness from the storm-centers of Europe, would have been expected to be immune from the trials and torments of an ailing continent, has been caught in this whirlpool of passion and strife, impotent to extricate herself from their ensnaring influence.⁶¹

Social, Economic, Political, and Religious Upheavals

In the following passage, the Guardian alludes to the adverse effects of minority conditions, unemployment, demoralization, the waste of much-needed public funds on the purchase of arms, depressed financial markets, and the rise of secularism:

The disquieting influence of over thirty million souls living under minority conditions throughout the continent of Europe; the vast and ever-swelling army of the unemployed with its crushing burden and demoralizing influence on governments and peoples; the wicked, unbridled race of armaments swallowing an ever-increasing share of the substance of already impoverished

nations; the utter demoralization from which the international financial markets are now increasingly suffering; the onslaught of secularism invading what has hitherto been regarded as the impregnable strongholds of Christian and Muslim orthodoxy—these stand out as the gravest symptoms that bode ill for the future stability of the structure of modern civilization.⁶²

Failure of Diplomacy, Good Will, and Human Ingenuity

After having passed in review and analyzed the steadily worsening conditions between the two world wars, Shoghi Effendi makes a categorical assertion that the remedy to the world's dire straits based on the efforts of diplomacy, good will, and human ingenuity will prove to be a failure. By a process of elimination, the Guardian discounts any political, economic, moral, intellectual, or social schemes; any international proposals; any well-motivated or dedicated efforts as being capable of rebuilding the world:

Dearly-beloved friends! Humanity, whether viewed in the light of man's individual conduct or in the existing relationships between organized communities and nations, has, alas, strayed too far and suffered too great a decline to be redeemed through the unaided efforts of the best among its recognized rulers and statesmen—however disinterested their motives, however concerted their action, however unsparing in their zeal and devotion to its cause. No scheme which the calculations of the highest statesmanship may yet devise; no doctrine which the most distinguished exponents of economic theory may hope to advance; no principle which the most ardent of moralists may strive to inculcate, can provide, in the last resort, adequate foundations upon which the future of a distracted world can be built.

No appeal for mutual tolerance which the worldly-wise might raise, however compelling and insistent, can calm its passions or help restore its vigor. Nor would any general scheme of mere organized international cooperation, in whatever sphere of human activity, however ingenious in conception, or extensive in scope, succeed in removing the root cause of the evil that has so rudely upset the equilibrium of present-day society.⁶³

In order to underscore the deplorable state into which humanity has fallen, Shoghi Effendi goes on to assert that not even the application of the principle of

world federalism, a principle advocated by the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith itself, would be sufficient to remedy the deadly disease that has befallen humanity:

*Not even, I venture to assert, would the very act of devising the machinery required for the political and economic unification of the world—a principle that has been increasingly advocated in recent times—provide in itself the antidote against the poison that is steadily undermining the vigor of organized peoples and nations.*⁶⁴

The Guardian's proposed elegant solution is the “Divine Program” enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh:

*What else, might we not confidently affirm, but the unreserved acceptance of the Divine Program enunciated, with such simplicity and force as far back as sixty years ago, by Bahá'u'lláh, embodying in its essentials God's divinely appointed scheme for the unification of mankind in this age, coupled with an indomitable conviction in the unfailing efficacy of each and all of its provisions, is eventually capable of withstanding the forces of internal disintegration which, if unchecked, must needs continue to eat into the vitals of a despairing society. It is towards this goal—the goal of a new World Order, Divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, equitable in principle, challenging in its features—that a harassed humanity must strive.*⁶⁵

In the next section of his letter, “The Guiding Principles of World Order,” Shoghi Effendi presents a dual perspective in which he combines a secular and spiritual analysis on the causes of World War I. The secular analysis could be viewed as representing the understanding of experts and the worldly wise, sufficient for the secular-minded perhaps, but an approach that the Guardian finds badly wanting. First, he gives four main causes of the Great War that resulted in the “*unrest and suffering afflicting the masses of mankind.*” (They are given here in point form.) With each cause, he indicates the adverse post-war effects on the economies of the nations and the world: (1) “*the financial obligations. . . the imposition of a staggering burden of reparations*”; (2) “*inter-governmental debts*” (disastrous effects are indicated); (3) “*the spirit of vindictiveness,*” which led to the “*enormous increase of national competitive armaments*”; and (4) “*a narrow and brutal nationalism, which the post-war theory of self-determination has served to reinforce.*” These causes are not the main point he wishes to

emphasize, for they must “*sooner or later come to be regarded as a transitory dislocation in the affairs of a continually changing world. . . .*” The failure of the “*world’s recognized leaders*” has been their inability “*to reshape the machinery of their respective governments according to those standards that are implicit in Bahá’u’lláh’s supreme declaration of the Oneness of Mankind. . . .*”

While the principle of the oneness of humanity is something that everyone, whether secularist or theist, could support, Shoghi Effendi sees more far-reaching implications in this “*chief and distinguishing feature*” of Bahá’u’lláh’s teaching. However, the Guardian specifies the inevitable consequence of such a belief which is far-reaching indeed: “*For the principle of the Oneness of Mankind, the cornerstone of Bahá’u’lláh’s world-embracing dominion, implies nothing more or less than the enforcement of His scheme for the unification of the world—the scheme to which we have already referred.*” The implementation of Bahá’u’lláh’s world order must be an inevitable consequence of the main teaching that He has proclaimed, a consequence that raises a far greater challenge than any facile espousal of the oneness of humanity. This cardinal teaching demands a recognition of the Divine Author of this teaching and the Plan that He has provided to bring about its realization. In other words, the passage from Bahá’u’lláh’s theory to the practical application of His New World Order is required. As he proceeds, the Guardian remains consistent with his own logic as he exhorts world leaders to apply the sovereign remedy:

At so critical an hour in the history of civilization it behooves the leaders of all the nations of the world, great and small, whether in the East or in the West, whether victors or vanquished, to give heed to the clarion call of Bahá’u’lláh and, thoroughly imbued with a sense of world solidarity, the sine qua non of loyalty to His Cause, arise manfully to carry out in its entirety the one remedial scheme He, the Divine Physician, has prescribed for an ailing humanity.⁶⁶

**The Fourth Letter: “The Golden Age of
the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh” (21 March 1932)
Matters Theological and Religious**

I have remarked above that a puzzle surrounds Horace Holley’s choice of the title “The Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh,” since that letter contains only one passing allusion to the “*golden age*” when Shoghi Effendi refers to the meritorious contributions of the North American believers

“towards the fulfillment of the Plan which must usher in the golden age of the Cause. . . .”⁶⁷ More specifically, the contents of this letter break down into the following four subject areas:

1. Apologetic history, i.e., the remarkable accomplishments of the Iranian and North American communities against great odds;
2. Theology and comparative religion: (a) the favorable performance of the Bahá’í Faith compared with the early days of past religious dispensations, (b) its close relationship with the religions of the past, (c) the necessity for a new revelation, and (d) the station of the Báb;
3. The principle of non-interference in politics; and
4. The pursuit of the main objective of the Teaching Plan, which was the completion of the Wilmette Temple in a suburb of Chicago.

Mystical Means of Success

In the second paragraph of the fourth letter, Shoghi Effendi reviews the remarkable successes of the Bahá’í Faith in the ten years subsequent to “*the sudden removal of an incomparable Master.*” His reflections bring him to state his belief that ample reservoirs of divine power feed the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh. His statement both places emphasis on a reliance on a “*mystic Source*” (that is, a transcendent, indefinable, and mysterious Source) and also discounts any real influence of worldly criteria and means as having any bearing upon the remarkable advances made by the Bahá’í Faith, often in the face of great obstacles. A variation on the same theme is taken up in a later paragraph:

*That the Cause associated with the name of Bahá’u’lláh feeds itself upon those hidden springs of celestial strength which no force of human personality, whatever its glamour, can replace; that its reliance is solely upon that mystic Source with which no worldly advantage, be it wealth, fame, or learning can compare; that it propagates itself by ways mysterious and utterly at variance with the standards accepted by the generality of mankind, will, if not already apparent, become increasingly manifest as it forges ahead towards fresh conquests in its struggle for the spiritual regeneration of mankind.*⁶⁸

He exemplifies his argument with a striking example from Bahá’í history—the remarkable fashion in which the Bahá’ís in Persia overcame the great odds that confronted them at the time of the birth of the Bábí revelation in the mid-nineteenth century:

*Indeed, how could it, unsupported as it has ever been by the counsels and the resources of the wise, the rich, and the learned in the land of its birth, have succeeded in breaking asunder the shackles that weighed upon it at the hour of its birth, in emerging unscathed from the storms that agitated its infancy, had not its animating breath been quickened by that spirit which is born of God, and on which all success, wherever and however it be sought, must ultimately depend?*⁶⁹

Apologetic History: Links Between East and West

The Guardian's encomiums of the Iranian and North American believers in recognition of their historical sacrifices and struggles to implant the Bahá'í Faith in Persia and around the globe (¶2, 5, 8), highlight spiritual connections between the Bahá'ís of East and West. His praise for the sacrificial deaths of the Persian martyrs during the Bábí dispensation concludes with the role of the Dawn-Breakers as having cleared the way for future victories. He links their sacrificial deaths to the rise of the Administrative Order itself:

*Suffice it to say that upon these heroes of Bahá'u'lláh's native land was bestowed the inestimable privilege of sealing with their life-blood the early triumphs of their cherished Faith, and of paving the way for its approaching victory. In the blood of the unnumbered martyrs of Persia lay the seed of the Divinely-appointed Administration which, though transplanted from its native soil, is now budding out, under your loving care, into a new order, destined to overshadow all mankind.*⁷⁰

This passage is noteworthy for two reasons, which both reflect Shoghi Effendi's concept of history: (1) the roots of present and future successes are rooted in past sacrifices; and (2) martyrdom and the rise of administrative institutions, two spheres of the religious life normally not associated, are closely tied. Phenomenologically, an earlier Christian parallel may be found to the Guardian's statement, since it is virtually identical to the saying of the African church father, Tertullian (c.160–c.225 CE), that "blood is seed,"⁷¹ sometimes attributed to him as "the blood of the martyrs is the seed [of the church]."⁷² Our author links the Bahá'ís of East and West in yet another way. The North American Bahá'ís are the "*spiritual descendants*" of "*the pioneers of the heroic age of the Cause in Persia,*" and the success of the North American Bahá'í community "*is no less meritorious in this strenuous period of its history*" than it was at the day-break of the

Bábí-Bahá'í revelations. The Guardian indicates that the North American Bahá'ís are not yet fully aware of their past accomplishments, nor are they quite cognisant of the preponderating role they are destined to play in the future establishment of the Bahá'í Faith (¶6), and he reviews eight major services rendered by this community (¶8).

Bahá'í Theology and Comparative Religion: Brief Summary

As was indicated in my introduction to this letter, its subject matter concerns in part Bahá'í theology and comparative religion. Both subjects are treated by Shoghi Effendi as apology. These sections are rich in historical, theological, and comparative religious material. The Guardian focuses on the early histories of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith compared to those of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. His historical review and comparison are done on the basis of the perceived excellence of the Bahá'í Faith vis-à-vis the performance of the religions of past dispensations⁷³ in their early days. The Guardian is not engaging here in criticism for criticism's sake, and his statements are carefully qualified. Lest his words be misunderstood as triumphalism or religious nationalism, he explicitly repudiates any intrinsic "*superior merit*" of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh as lying at the basis of his comparison. Within the limited confines of this chapter, a brief summary of the main points made by Shoghi Effendi will be explicated.

(1) He writes that any comparison between "*the slow and gradual consolidation*" of the Bahá'í Faith and "*man-created movements*" is both "*unfair*" and "*irrelevant.*" He reviews its signal accomplishments since its foundation (¶12). (2) A number of comparisons favorable to the Bahá'í Faith are made with the "*modest accomplishments that have marked the rise of the Dispensations of the past.*" Among other things, he indicates the "*stupendous*" claims advanced by Bahá'u'lláh, the transformative power "*in the lives of the apostles of the Báb,*" the evidences of the integrity and the moral and spiritual power manifested in the conduct of the "*heroes of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh,*" and the "*thrilling*" episodes arising from the early history of this "*greatest drama in the world's spiritual history.*"

Nonetheless, a certain objectivity in his *apologia* is observed: "*Where else, if not in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, can the unbiased student of comparative religion cite instances of a claim as stupendous as that which the Author of that Faith advanced, a devotion more sublime than that which He kindled, a life as eventful and as enthralling as that which He led?*" In other words, he feels justified, on the historical and scriptural evidence, to make his favorable comparisons while adhering to what he views as an objective reading of the record. The apology is

accompanied by the fervent emotion of one who has witnessed the gradual emancipation of the Bahá'í Faith from the shackles imposed upon it by an oppressive and fanatical Muslim orthodoxy, as the Bahá'í Faith claims its birthright as a young but vital and growing world religion. (3) The comparison with the early histories of Judaism and Islam allude to the “*damaging effect of the excesses, the rivalries and divisions, the fanatical outbursts and acts of ingratitude that are associated with the early development of the people of Israel and with the militant career of the ruthless pioneers of the Faith of Muhammad.*” (4) He mentions incidents of apostasy in the early church, the doctrinal admixture from non-Christian religions and philosophies with Gospel teaching, and the strong influence of the Judaizers, the Jewish wing of Christianity. Attention is drawn to the slow numerical growth of Christianity before the conversion of Constantine the Great in 312.⁷⁴ By contrast, in the early history of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith, relatively larger numbers became believers by the time of Bahá'u'lláh's passing. The Bahá'í teachings remained doctrinally pure, and the incidents of apostasy among the Bábí-Bahá'ís were rare. The Bahá'ís succeeded relatively early on in emancipating themselves from some of the restrictions imposed by their Muslim persecutors (¶12).

Close Relationship of the Bahá'í Faith to Other World Religions

However, as is typical of Shoghi Effendi's method of exposition, he adds the usual cautions or caveats. Lest anyone misunderstand his remarks, the Guardian makes an extensive statement on the close relationship of the Bahá'í Faith to the religions of past dispensations, to the oneness of religion, to progressive revelation, and to the complementarity of the world's great “*established religions.*” Here is a partial quotation:

Let no one, however, mistake my purpose. The Revelation, of which Bahá'u'lláh is the source and center, abrogates none of the religions that have preceded it, nor does it attempt, in the slightest degree, to distort their features or to belittle their value. It disclaims any intention of dwarfing any of the Prophets of the past, or of whittling down the eternal verity of their teachings. It can, in no wise, conflict with the spirit that animates their claims, nor does it seek to undermine the basis of any man's allegiance to their cause. Its declared, its primary purpose is to enable every adherent of these Faiths to obtain a fuller understanding of the religion with which he stands identified,

*and to acquire a clearer apprehension of its purpose. It is neither eclectic in the presentation of its truths, nor arrogant in the affirmation of its claims. Its teachings revolve around the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final. Unequivocally and without the least reservation it proclaims all established religions to be divine in origin, identical in their aims, complementary in their functions, continuous in their purpose, indispensable in their value to mankind.*⁷⁵

Caution Against Triumphalism

In view of the serious harm that has been done to relations among the world's religions, and to humanity itself, from the assumption of superior, exclusivist attitudes on the part of fundamentalist practitioners, a vitally important point is made by Shoghi Effendi in the comparison with past dispensations. Despite the “*stupendous*” claim made by Bahá'u'lláh, and the singularity of the Bahá'í Faith's heroic and dramatic history, its superlative teachings and other signal accomplishments in the overcoming of past obstacles, and in establishing its independent character as a world religion, he rejects any claim of superiority for the Bahá'í Faith itself. The following passage makes this point clear:

*If the Light that is now streaming forth upon an increasingly responsive humanity with a radiance that bids fair to eclipse the splendor of such triumphs as the forces of religion have achieved in days past; if the signs and tokens which proclaimed its advent have been, in many respects, unique in the annals of past Revelations; if its votaries have evinced traits and qualities unexampled in the spiritual history of mankind; these should be attributed not to a superior merit which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, as a Revelation isolated and alien from any previous Dispensation, might possess, but rather should be viewed and explained as the inevitable outcome of the forces that have made of this present age an age infinitely more advanced, more receptive, and more insistent to receive an ampler measure of Divine Guidance than has hitherto been vouchsafed to mankind.*⁷⁶

Progressive Revelation and Social Evolution

The point made by Shoghi Effendi is a subtle but critical one. It needs to be pondered, since it defines the shaping of a religious psychology that might

have otherwise led Bahá'ís—in view of the superlative claims the Guardian has reiterated for the Founders of the Bahá'í Faith, its history, spirituality, and teachings—to adopt a triumphalist attitude over their sister religions. It is important, consequently, to note the following. The Bahá'í Faith is not, he tells us “*arrogant in this affirmation of its claims.*” The point is all the more crucial since the Bahá'í Faith views itself as the culmination of a 6,000-year cycle in religious history, the Adamic Cycle whose universal prophet or manifestation is Bahá'u'lláh.⁷⁷ With such a claim in mind, it would be all-too-easy for Bahá'ís to view themselves as occupying the pinnacle of history, looking down, figuratively and literally, on the religions of the past.

However, it is axiomatic to Bahá'í belief that the intensity of the divine light emitted in any religious dispensation is proportionate to the spiritual capacity of the age to receive it, and, no less importantly, commensurate with the state of societal organization or progress. In an evolutionary process, the teachings, laws, and institutes of the great religions adapt themselves to, but at the same time promote, the growth of individuals, societies, and civilizations. The dynamic release of a series of historical, divine revelations, adapting themselves to and promoting the growth of the increasingly complex social structures of advancing societies, produces a progressive adaptation of Spirit to form. This proportionate dispensing or weighing out of the Spirit throughout history, has accomplished the successive unities of families, tribes, city states, and nations. The world state is the final stage in this evolution. The foregoing obviates any separative or triumphalist attitude vis-à-vis the Divine Theophany that burst upon the world on 23 May 1844. To use a Hegelian phrase, the whole must be seen as one world historical process.

This emitter-receptor paradigm⁷⁸ takes into account the fact that each, successive, divine revelation not only makes wise and good use of the achievements or “*fairest fruits*”⁷⁹ of the religions, societies, and civilizations that preceded it but also benefits from the labors, ingenuity, and genius of “the children of men” that it uses to advance humanity into the next stage of social and spiritual development. Consequently, the emitter-receptor paradigm “gives credit where credit is due” to the previously existing world faiths and contributions of civilization; but it also “takes credit” for the achievements and advances of the New Faith as it works out the Divine Plan in the unfolding process of progressive revelation.

Such an understanding effectively inhibits any final declaration of supremacy of the Divine Light in the Bahá'í dispensation, since it sees the

manifestations of that light as one light. The Bahá'í Faith, while it has annulled some of the secular and religious laws of the past and has enjoined others, views itself nonetheless as an integral part of the great religions gone before it as well as recognizes the great achievements of past religions and civilizations from which it has sprung. The Guardian makes the same point just as emphatically in the section entitled, "Contrast with Religions of the Past." Interpreting certain scriptures of Bahá'u'lláh that feature progressive revelation, in which the successive divine revelations are metaphorically compared to the rising sun, Shoghi Effendi states:

It is for this reason, and this reason only, that those who have recognized the Light of God in this age, claim no finality for the Revelation with which they stand identified, nor arrogate to the Faith they have embraced powers and attributes intrinsically superior to, or essentially different from, those which have characterized any of the religious systems that preceded it.⁸⁰

Rejection of Eclecticism and Syncretism

As was cited above, the Guardian wrote, "*It [the Bahá'í Faith] is neither eclectic in the presentation of its truths, nor arrogant in the affirmation of its claims.*" Eclecticism may be distinguished from its close relative syncretism, another erroneous descriptor of the Bahá'í Faith. Syncretism is a more creative and active attempt to create something new by mixing and harmonizing theological or philosophical positions that stand in opposition or misunderstanding. H. P. Blavatsky's understanding of Theosophy explicitly adopts this viewpoint when she writes, "Yet Theosophy is not Buddhism, nor is it copied from Neo-Platonic Theosophy; it holds to no religion, as to no philosophy in particular; *it culls the good found in each.*"⁸¹ However, while some authorities differ, eclecticism is usually less creative. It imports holus bolus the contradictions in doctrines or systems of thought unresolved, thus risking incoherence.⁸² Likewise, the attribution of syncretism suggests an artificial, human attempt to create a new religion, rather than a God-initiated, prophetic revelation.

The rejection of eclecticism and syncretism needs to be correlated to two other phenomena, the first being of particular concern to Shoghi Effendi: *First*, notwithstanding its recognized debt to the spiritual truths of the religions of past dispensations, which it reaffirms, the Guardian emphasizes the self-standing, independent character of the Bahá'í Faith as a fully integral and autonomous world religion. The attribution of eclecticism to the Bahá'í

Faith, if interpreted as the importation of external beliefs into its own system, would undermine its original, integral nature as a divinely revealed world religion. *Second*, eclecticism may be viewed as a violation of holism rather than as an attempt to create it. The attribution of eclecticism would compromise the holistic or unified nature of the Bahá'í Faith's history, teachings, laws, administrative principles, and practices. The interpretation or understanding of any one thing in the Bahá'í Faith has to be made in light of its relation to the interpretation of all of its teachings. The part must be related to the whole and the whole to the part.

The Bahá'í Faith does hold, of course, certain teachings or doctrines that are identical or virtually identical to some found in other religions or philosophies, particularly Islam. But careful analysis is required to differentiate in what respect(s), the Bahá'í teaching departs from the parent religion, in order to avoid this imputation of eclecticism or syncretism, and to emphasize its "*independent character*," which the Guardian repeatedly emphasized: "*The independent character of the Faith they profess and champion must, moreover, be fully vindicated through a closer adherence, on the part of the rank and file of the believers, to its distinguishing tenets and precepts, as well as through a fuller recognition by the civil authorities concerned, of the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate and of the Bahá'í Holy Days.*"⁸³ The Bahá'í Faith also rejects several widely held beliefs in the world religions such as pantheism, polytheism, anthropomorphism, incarnation theology, reincarnation, and scriptural literalism. (The understanding of these doctrines depends upon careful definitions.) The Bahá'í Faith views any commonalities that bind the world's religions as a perennial substratum or common core of spiritual truths, a *Religio perennis*,⁸⁴ issuing from the Godhead, valid at all times and climes, and views such teachings as the common property of the prophets or the wisdom of the sages and the common heritage of humanity.

Some Christian Questions

In the comparison of the early history of the Bahá'í Faith to the histories of Judaism and Islam, allusions are made to the "*excesses, rivalries and divisions*," "*fanatical outbursts*," and "*acts of ingratitude*" in these two latter faiths. Shoghi Effendi mentions "*the militant career of the ruthless pioneers of the Faith of Muhammad.*" These words should not be taken as negative value-judgments on the great foundational teachings of the religions in question but instead as matters of scriptural and historical record. Writing as the head of a growing world religion, it was a point of pride with

the Guardian that such excesses did not, with but few exceptions,⁸⁵ mar the early history of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith. In the subsequent two paragraphs, the reader's attention is directed to the early church. Again, these observations are meant to underscore the following four facts: (1) From its early beginnings, the Bahá'í Faith's doctrinal integrity remained intact; (2) The unity of the early Bahá'í Faith (unlike Christianity and despite the early attempts by the Azalis to breach the faith and later attempts by others) remained inviolate; (3) Unlike the Judaizing wing of the Jerusalem church, whose influence on the early Christians was strong, Bahá'ís of the Apostolic or Primitive Age (1844–1921) struggled against the shackles of Islamic orthodoxy in order to assert their own claims and to establish their autonomous status; and (4) The Administrative Order of the Bahá'í Faith is original, unique, and not based upon foreign or indigenous models.

It would be sufficient for my purpose to call attention to the great number of those who, in the first two centuries of the Christian era, “purchased an ignominious life by betraying the holy Scriptures into the hands of the infidels,” the scandalous conduct of those bishops who were thereby branded as traitors, the discord of the African Church, the gradual infiltration into Christian doctrine of the principles of the Mithraic cult, of the Alexandrian school of thought, of the precepts of Zoroastrianism and of Grecian philosophy, and the adoption by the churches of Greece and of Asia of the institutions of provincial synods of a model which they borrowed from the representative councils of their respective countries.

How great was the obstinacy with which the Jewish converts among the early Christians adhered to the ceremonies of their ancestors, and how fervent their eagerness to impose them on the Gentiles! Were not the first fifteen bishops of Jerusalem all circumcised Jews, and had not the congregation over which they presided united the laws of Moses with the doctrine of Christ? Is it not a fact that no more than a twentieth part of the subjects of the Roman Empire had enlisted themselves under the standard of Christ before the conversion of Constantine? Was not the ruin of the Temple, in the city of Jerusalem, and of the public religion of the Jews, severely felt by the so-called Nazarenes, who persevered, above a century, in the practice of the Mosaic Law?⁸⁶

A Necessary Qualification

It is necessary to qualify the following explanations with this observation. It would be ill-conceived to take the Guardian's mention of the extraneous influences on early Christianity as an outright condemnation of Christianity or even of the philosophical or religious movements that he mentions. Zoroaster, for example, is considered to be a True Prophet by the Bahá'ís and the founder of a world religion.⁸⁷ Obviously, no condemnation of "*the precepts of Zoroastrianism*" is intended here. Similarly, the mention of "*Grecian philosophy*" and its close relative, "*the Alexandrian school of thought*," are not being dismissed by Shoghi Effendi as spurious pagan philosophies, unworthy of attention. Platonism and Neoplatonism are both major components of the second Alexandrian "school"⁸⁸ to which the Guardian refers. Rather, Shoghi Effendi is drawing attention to the integral, independent character of the Bahá'í religion and its relative doctrinal purity, deriving from the Founders of the Bahá'í Faith, as a self-standing revelation from God that was not unduly influenced by extraneous forces. Although Bahá'ís clearly hold that Christianity is a divine revelation and an independent world religion, it is also clear that the elaboration of its early doctrines by the church fathers was heavily influenced by a variety of extra-Christian, i.e., extra-gospel, influences.

"Discord of the African Church"⁸⁹

The first three phrases of the italicized paragraph quoted under "Some Christian Questions" are a reference to the circumstances surrounding "the great persecution" of the Christians under the reign of Diocletian (284–305 CE) that occasioned serious consequences in the form of the Donatist⁹⁰ schism centering in Carthage in the fourth century and which persisted until the invasion of Islamic armies in 641. Those who "*purchased an ignominious life by betraying the holy Scriptures into the hands of the infidels*," refers especially to those bishops, who under pain of imprisonment and death, obeyed the Roman authorities by the literal handing over of their scriptures, along with liturgical books, church plate, and sacred vessels.⁹¹ These Christians were viewed as traitors by the more zealous, who refused any compromise with the government. They were consequently branded by their co-religionists as *Traditores*, those who "hand over" the scriptures.

The schism was just as much a moral-political controversy as it was a theological dispute, since it centered in the contested legitimacy of those more moderate bishops who cooperated with the Roman authorities. But it had strong theological implications because it raised the old question by Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, as to whether apostates could confer the

Spirit's gifts. Cyprian (d. 258) argued in the negative.⁹² Donatists, who followed Cyprian's widely respected theological position, maintained that those bishops who handed over their scriptures were not morally fit and should be removed from office. They appointed their own bishops instead. They also denied any efficacy to the sacraments dispensed by tainted priests. Donatist territory centered in Numidia, modern-day Algeria, and it is to this "*discord of the African church*" that Shoghi Effendi refers.

"The Alexandrian School of Thought"

Shoghi Effendi's passage contains references to various theological accretions to the early church, which might well occupy students of philosophy or the history of religions, but which can only be briefly alluded to here. The reference to the "*Alexandrian school of thought*" should not be confused with the Alexandrian cult of the ancient Egyptian religion, which included notably the popular family triad of Osiris, the father and husband; wife Isis; and Horus (Harpocrates), the child. With its holy family, father-son relations, and divine-mother worship, the Alexandrian cult had natural analogues to Christianity. There were trinitarian associations as well. The family triad figured among the Egyptian pantheon or Ennead ("the Nine") ($3 \times 3 = 9$), "a symbol of completeness,"⁹³ with Horus being the state-god of kingship, who was the mythic return of his god-king father Osiris, who eventually became ruler and judge of the underworld. H. G. Wells found the roots of the worship of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in "the identification of Mary with Isis and her elevation to a rank quasi-divine."⁹⁴ Regarding the trinitarian element in the Alexandrian cult, it is perhaps not coincidental that Tertullian, the North African church father, was to champion the trinitarian formula in his writings, which had a longstanding history in the pagan background of North Africa.

While the Alexandrian cult was influential, it is rather to the "*Alexandrian school of thought*" that Shoghi Effendi refers. This phrase is a convenient designation for the various religious philosophies and forms of mysticism that flourished at Alexandria in the opening centuries of the Christian era and which greatly influenced the early Church. The Alexandrian school was syncretistic and was identified by a number of defining elements that included:

1. Various forms of Platonism, Neo-Platonism, and Aristotelian philosophy;
2. (The belief in orthodox Christianity's great rival Christian Gnosticism, an esoteric, philosophical, or mystical knowledge that co-existed as a dualistic rival to the Christ of faith. Gnosticism held to personal or private forms of knowledge (*gnosis*) that were deemed to lead to

salvation and whose practitioners felt were more sophisticated than simple Christian faith;

3. The synthesis of Eastern religions and Western thought, i.e., of Greek philosophy with oriental religions and mysticism; and
4. The Jewish Platonism of Philo of Alexandria.

Basic to the first three points was the preponderating influence of Greek philosophy and the application of logic, allegorical methods, and rhetoric in the service of Christian teaching as well as the Christianized Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines of the soul in its mystical communion of divine love with God and/or Christ. This Greek influence is in clear evidence in the logos doctrine found in the prologue to the Gospel of John, a book that was often quoted by the Greek fathers in preference to the synoptic gospels. In the form of Middle Platonism,⁹⁵ Christian Gnosticism, and Neoplatonism, the influence of Greek philosophy on Clement of Alexandria and later on Origen—the Greek Fathers of the second and third centuries—was profound. Clement elaborated a sophisticated teaching of Christian Gnosticism insofar as he argued that faith was incomplete without the tutor of “knowledge” (*gnosis*), and he valued greatly all Greek literary and philosophical culture, which he quoted extensively, as *Praeparatio evangelica* (“preparation for the Gospel”),⁹⁶ a position also adopted by the Latin Fathers. Just how far the once venerated Origen was later judged to have strayed from Christian doctrine is indicated by the fact that his teachings were declared heretical at the church’s Third Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 553 CE.⁹⁷

“The Mithraic Cult”

The cult of Mithras (Mithra) centered in an Indo-Iranian sky and later sun god, common to Hindus, Zoroastrians, and Manichees, and who was worshipped in the time of Christ, especially by Roman legionaries. Mithraism was *the* hated rival to the early Christians.⁹⁸ Tertullian saw in it a cunning, devilish imitation of Christianity that was able to seduce the unsuspecting.⁹⁹ Although the cult of Mithras died out in the fourth century, having been overtaken by Christianity, the date of one Mithraic feast has survived down to our day—Christmas. December twenty-fifth was celebrated by devotees as the birthday of Mithras as *Sol invictus* (the invincible sun) to mark the rising sun. Unable to quell its enormous popularity, the feast day was taken over by early Christians for the celebration of Christ’s birth. But in addition to the truths of the gospel, Christianity had one clear advantage over the cult of the Persian deity. The cult excluded women and could not consequently qualify as a universal faith. By virtue of a wider appeal and the reverence evinced for

its women figures, Christianity gained the higher ground.

The followers of the cult of Mithras were less interested in doctrine than they were in ritual, moral austerity,¹⁰⁰ and the gaining of immortal life in union with their chosen deity. It was especially in its mythic elements, and in its rituals, that the Romano-Persian cult influenced the early church. The mutual recriminations and deep antagonisms that characterized the relationship between the Roman Mithrites and the early Christians are due in large part to the outward similarities between the two religions. Here are some of the numerous and remarkable parallels that have been observed by one scholar:

. . . the legends of the shepherds with their gifts and adoration; the flood and the ark; the representation in art of the fiery chariot; the drawing of water from the rock; the use of bell and candle, holy water and the communion [of bread and wine]; the sanctification of Sunday and of the 25th of December; the insistence on moral conduct; the emphasis on abstinence and self-control; the doctrine of heaven and hell; of primitive revelation; of the mediation of the Logos emanating from the divine, the atoning sacrifice, the constant warfare between good and evil and the final triumph of the former, the immortality of the soul, the last judgment, the resurrection of the flesh and the fiery destruction of the universe. . . .¹⁰¹

To this we could add the phenomena of miraculous birth,¹⁰² the use of incense, and the offering of salvation by being “washed in the blood.” In the Mithraic cult, this last phrase referred to the re-enactment of the primeval ritualistic slaying of the bull by Mithras to ensure victory over evil, a ritual that lay at the heart of Mithraism. John Hinnells comments: “One inscription refers to Mithras saving his followers by the shedding of eternal blood, so it was he alone who could save them. They shared in this salvation through the meal (of bread and wine apparently). . . .”¹⁰³ The slaying of the bull by Mithras was believed to have fructified nature by bringing forth corn and the grape vine, thereby empowering initiates who partook of them.¹⁰⁴

“The Precepts of Zoroastrianism”

When Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire, captured Babylon in 539 BCE, he allowed the Jews who had been deported there by Nebuchadnezzar the right of safe return to Palestine and to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. The esteem in which this foreign king was held by the Jews—and he is unique in this respect—is indicated by the fact that Isaiah called Cyrus “the anointed of the Lord” (45:1), a title normally reserved for the king

of Israel. It is unknown whether Cyrus was a Zoroastrian or not. If he were, it is strange that he did not mention Ahura Mazda (the wise Lord) in an inscription celebrating the fall of Babylon in which he recognized the Babylonian god Marduk and Yahweh, the God of the Jews.¹⁰⁵ But the benevolent gesture of this wise and just king had some certain effects on the religious history of ideas. It was during the Babylonian exile that the Jews came into contact with Zoroastrian eschatology and apocalyptic (lit. the ‘unveiling’ [of future things]), elements of which can be seen to crop up later in the Jewish and Christian scriptures dating from the post-exilic period. During the exile and post-exilic periods, Zoroastrian religious ideas influenced not only the Jews but also the Christians, since the latter held both testaments as being sacred.

The “*precepts*” of Zoroastrianism to which Shoghi Effendi refers can be taken in a larger sense. Although the word *precept* usually refers to a rule of conduct given as a moral maxim, it can be taken as a broader indicator synonymous with teachings. The heyday of apocalyptic and the eschatological doctrine of the ‘last things’ (Gk. *ta eschata*) occurred approximately from 175 BCE to 135 CE. Throughout the various books of the *Avesta*; the Zoroastrian canon, including the apocalyptic work the *Bahman Yasht*; and the *Gathas*, the hymns of Zoroaster, strong imaginative beliefs are laid down that have influenced both Jewish and Christian scripture. These beliefs may be reduced to four interconnected themes: (1) the cosmic battle between good and evil, light and darkness; (2) the establishment of the “kingdom” or “the good kingdom” on earth through the advent of a world-savior who will inaugurate the reign of peace; (3) beliefs pertaining to angels, the Devil, or evil spirits; and (4) the fate of the soul in the afterlife. These four points are taken up briefly.

- 1) ***The cosmic battle between good and evil, light and darkness.*** A metaphysical and ethical dualism pervades Zoroastrianism. It is metaphysical because the antagonism between Ahura Mazda (Good or Holy Spirit) and Angra Mainyu (the Evil Spirit) originates at the beginning of time. It is ethical because the polarity between good and evil originates in an ethical choice, i.e., the exercise of the free will by the two spirits to choose between opposing moral forces. The world is thus seen as a contest in which good and evil do battle both for the soul of the individual and for the fate of the world itself.
- 2) ***The establishment of the “kingdom” or “the good kingdom” on earth through the advent of a world-savior who will inaugurate the reign of peace.*** In Zoroastrian eschatology, the Kingdom of God and the reign of peace will be established by the

Saoshyant or savior, a descendant of Zoroaster, whose salvific role will be accompanied by divine judgment through which the wicked will be destroyed at the end of the age or the world-cycle.

- 3) ***Beliefs pertaining to angels, the Devil, or evil spirits.*** In post-exilic times, under the influence of Zoroastrianism, a hierarchy of angels emerged. In Judaism and Christianity seven archangels are named,¹⁰⁶ and these seven have their seven analogues in Zoroastrianism, including Ahura Mazda, where they are called the *Amesha Spentas* (Holy Immortals). These angels may be understood as names, attributes, or functions of God or eternal spiritual archetypes. The Zoroastrian *Fravashi* or heavenly spirits serve as guardian angels, but their protective function derives from the believer's own choice to observe the divine laws and to fight consciously against evil. The "evil spirit" (*Angra Mainyu Ahriman*) is surrounded by a multitude of demons (*daevas*), which are reminiscent of the "spirits of devils" (Rev. 16:14) and the "devils," which are cast out by Jesus and the apostles. Mary Magdalene, for example, was released of "seven devils" (Luke 8:2).
- 4) ***The fate of the soul in the afterlife.*** Zoroaster was the first prophet to have taught explicitly that the soul survived the death of the physical body, after which it had to face the awful divine judgment in the afterlife. After divesting itself of the body, the soul had to cross the blade-thin Chinvat Bridge where the divide took place, with the wicked being cast into the murky abyss and the righteous entering paradise, "the Abode of Song," where they shine in glory. In paradise, the soul (*daena*) meets the personification of its own good works in the form of a heavenly maiden.

**The Fifth Letter: "America and the Most Great Peace" (21 April 1933)
Consolation from the East: The Sojourn of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1912)**

Three Main Themes

This letter, completed on the first day of the most holy festival on the Bahá'í calendar, concerns, as the title indicates, North American's role in establishing the Most Great Peace. It should be read conjointly with the letter completed on Christmas day five years later, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1938). The 1933 letter has three main purposes or themes: (1) To set out the divine mission and signal accomplishments of the North American Bahá'ís, and preeminent among these is the establishment of the Administrative Order on the North American continent and around the world; (2) To present an

intimate portrait of the ties of deep love and affection existing between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Spiritual Father of the North American believers, and His spiritual children in America; and (3) To record the failed attempts of the Covenant-breakers to destroy the Bahá’í Faith’s unity, to usurp leadership for themselves, and to discredit its founders and their teachings.

To these three themes, two other subthemes may be annexed: (i) the Guardian’s concept of Bahá’í history; and (ii) the special consolation afforded to the Holy Family by the faithfulness and meritorious deeds of the Western believers during the concerted attacks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s brother, Muhammad ‘Alí, “the archbreaker of the Covenant,”¹⁰⁷ and his associates on Abdu’l-Bahá’s person and authority.

Living History

To begin in reverse order with (i) the Guardian’s concept of Bahá’í history, I have observed in chapter 1 that the Guardian views Bahá’í history as an organic whole, with the movement of phases or stages leading progressively into one another, in which the accomplishments of the present are in large part due to the achievements of the past. This holistic view of Bahá’í history is punctuated nonetheless with severe eruptions called “*crises*” or “*set-backs*,” which at first glance appear to deal grievous blows to the Bahá’í Faith, but which mysteriously propel it forward to new heights or “*victories*.” He also identifies certain parallels between Bahá’í history and both the sacred and secular histories of the past. In setting out certain events of Bahá’í history, Shoghi Effendi is not simply identifying and recording them. He is, more importantly, creating a sense of historical self-consciousness, which is a basic component of Bahá’í collective or community identity.

However, the Guardian makes clear intimations that the events of Bahá’í history, particularly American Bahá’í history, are also “personal” in the sense that they are written by real persons who were spiritually transformed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and who manifested exemplary spiritual virtues as a consequence. Thus, Bahá’í history is made, not just of reified events, ordered and interpreted from the past, but of the stuff of spiritual transformation and character. Here is Shoghi Effendi’s tribute to the first generation of North American Bahá’ís, those who had established the very early foundations of the Administrative Order in North America, who had been blessed with meeting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, both in the Holy Land (1893–1903)¹⁰⁸ and in North America, and who had remained faithful to the Covenant established with them by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, despite severe attacks by those who sought to usurp leadership for themselves:

I can never hope to interpret adequately the feelings that surged within those heroic hearts as they sat at their Master's feet, beneath the shelter of His prison-house, eager to absorb and intent to preserve the effusions of His divine Wisdom. I can never pay sufficient tribute to that spirit of unyielding determination which the impact of a magnetic personality and the spell of a mighty utterance kindled in the entire company of these returning pilgrims, these consecrated heralds of the Covenant of God, at so decisive an epoch of their history. The memory of such names as Lua, Chase, MacNutt, Dealy, Goodall, Dodge, Farmer and Brittingham—to mention only a few of that immortal galaxy now gathered to the glory of Bahá'u'lláh—will for ever remain associated with the rise and establishment of His Faith in the American continent, and will continue to shed on its annals a lustre that time can never dim.¹⁰⁹

Consolation to the East

Within Shoghi Effendi's encomiums of the early Western believers are some lines that indicate the consolation afforded to the Holy Family by the Western believers by their pilgrimages to Akka and Haifa during the first (1893–1903) of four decades (1893–1933), by their faithfulness to the covenant, and by the historic pioneering services they rendered in establishing the Bahá'í Faith at home and around the globe. This consolation is an early illustration of the East-West unity advocated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in various scriptures.¹¹⁰ Shoghi Effendi indicates that these early American pilgrims, and thereafter the memory of them, sustained the Greatest Holy Leaf throughout the remainder of her earthly life:

It was through the arrival of these pilgrims, and these alone, that the gloom which had enveloped the disconsolate members of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family was finally dispelled. Through the agency of these successive visitors the Greatest Holy Leaf, who alone with her Brother among the members of her Father's household had to confront the rebellion of almost the entire company of her relatives and associates, found that consolation which so powerfully sustained her till the very close of her life. By the forces which this little band of returning pilgrims was able to release in the heart of that continent the death-knell of every scheme initiated by the would-be wrecker of the Cause of God was sounded.¹¹¹

The Guardian also indicates that the labors and faithfulness of the first generation of American believers was a great consolation to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the evening of His life:

The share which such worthy, such stout-hearted, disciples have had in brightening the last days of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s earthly life He alone has truly recognized and can sufficiently estimate. The unique and eternal significance of such accomplishments the labors of the rising generation will assuredly reveal, their memory its works will befittingly preserve and extol. How deep a satisfaction ‘Abdu’l-Bahá must have felt, while conscious of the approaching hour of His departure, as He witnessed the first fruits of the international services of these heroes of His Father’s Faith! To their keeping He had committed a great and goodly heritage. In the twilight of His earthly life He could rest content in the serene assurance that such able hands could be relied upon to preserve its integrity and exalt its virtue.¹¹²

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in North America (1912)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s presence is written large in the 1933 World Order letter. This presentation is a more winsome one than the more “objective,” doctrinal view of Bahá’u’lláh’s Son, either as the paradoxical¹¹³ Mystery of God, Divine Institution of the Covenant, or Co-Progenitor of the New World Order, lucidly expounded in the section devoted to Him in “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh.” In this World Order letter, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is portrayed rather as the Master, the spiritual parent of an entire community, a Christ-like figure who late in life and “*bent with age*” undertakes a long and arduous journey from Palestine to appear among distant disciples in their own native land. The undisputed highpoint of the first three decades (1893–1923) of early American Bahá’í history was the arrival of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the shores of North America. Shoghi Effendi recalls the insistent entreaties made to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “*imploing Him to undertake a journey to its shores. . . His great, His incomparable, love for His own favored children impelled Him to respond.*” The Guardian poignantly captures the heroic and sanctifying spirit animating the departure of his grandfather, as He set out on the final stage of a journey that would lead to the supreme achievement in a life devoted from its inception to ministry and sacrifice: “*Though bent with age, though suffering from ailments resulting from the accumulated cares of fifty years of exile and captivity, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá set out on His memorable journey across the seas to the land where He might bless by His presence, and sanctify through His*

deeds, the mighty acts His spirit had led His disciples to perform.”¹¹⁴

The literary device of prosopopoeia, the speaking on behalf of, or through, an absent or departed one is used here. This rhetorical device is used poignantly by Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By*¹¹⁵ to recall the hardships of persecution endured by Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Center of Covenant journeyed throughout the West. (See further “Style and Pattern” chapter 8.) In his historical reminiscences of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s eight-month sojourn in North America (11 April–5 December 1912), the Guardian uses the same device. He does so to acquaint the reader with the lasting spiritual foundations established by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s mission to North America. The exemplified passage is based on the extended metaphor of the “*ploughman*,” an analogue to the image of the sower in Christ’s famous parable, “Behold a sower went forth to sow” (Mat. 13:3–8),¹¹⁶ which is based on the generative imagery of the *logos spermatikos*,¹¹⁷ of the Word of God as seed. Here too, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the sower who has gone forth to sow; He is the ploughman. In this presentation, made on the eve of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s departure from America’s shores, a hidden human–divine dimension is brought to light—the heart and mind, that is, the consciousness of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This revelation of the hitherto hidden consciousness of the Center of the Covenant creates an intimate psycho-spiritual portrait. This is another extraordinary passage in which the words of the Guardian virtually become the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It contains, all at once, mission statement, praise and exhortation, warning and prophecy, and the promise of ultimate victory:

We can dimly picture to ourselves the wishes that must have welled from His eager heart as He bade His last farewell to that promising country. An inscrutable Wisdom, we can well imagine Him remark to His disciples on the eve of His departure, has, in His infinite bounty singled out your native land for the execution of a mighty purpose. Through the agency of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant I, as the ploughman, have been called upon since the beginning of my ministry to turn up and break its ground. The mighty confirmations that have, in the opening days of your career, rained upon you have prepared and invigorated its soil. The tribulations you subsequently were made to suffer have driven deep furrows into the field which my hands had prepared. The seeds with which I have been entrusted I have now scattered far and wide before you. Under your loving care, by your ceaseless exertions, every one of these seeds must germinate, every one

must yield its destined fruit. A winter of unprecedented severity will soon be upon you. Its storm-clouds are fast gathering on the horizon. Tempestuous winds will assail you from every side. The Light of the Covenant will be obscured through my departure. These mighty blasts, this wintry desolation, shall however pass away. The dormant seed will burst into fresh activity. It shall put forth its buds, shall reveal, in mighty institutions, its leaves and blossoms. The vernal showers which the tender mercies of my heavenly Father will cause to descend upon you will enable this tender plant to spread out its branches to regions far beyond the confines of your native land. And finally the steadily mounting sun of His Revelation, shining in its meridian splendor, will enable this mighty Tree of His Faith to yield, in the fullness of time and on your soil, its golden fruit.¹¹⁸

The “Spiritual Primacy” of North America

In the opening pages of the 1933 letter, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s writings are used to validate a point which offers a “*striking parallel to this strange phenomenon*” occurring in “*primitive Christianity.*” This may be referred to as the phenomenon of acquired brilliance, i.e., that the reflection of the light of the Bahá’í revelation, born in the East, “has acquired in the West an extraordinary brilliancy.”¹¹⁹ Both the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and those of the Guardian which amplify them, covenant with the North American Bahá’ís to execute an international divine mandate to establish the Bahá’í Faith globally, to serve as instruments in the “*spiritual renaissance*” of their fellow citizens, to establish world peace, and to hasten “*the advent of the Golden Age anticipated by Bahá’u’lláh.*”

However, a prefatory word of caution about slipping into a false sense of elitism needs to be said. One of the several reasons that “America and the Most Great Peace” should be cross-read with the later more challenging work *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1938) is the important proviso stipulated by Shoghi Effendi in the latter communication regarding the enviable station of North America. It would be understandable but nonetheless mistaken to suppose that North America’s great mission had been conferred for reasons of achievement or excellence, that is, as a reward. Certain statements of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, however, would seem to suggest precisely that. For example, “For America has developed powers and capacities greater and more wonderful than other nations.”¹²⁰ While his praises of America are effuse, Shoghi Effendi’s rationale justifying the conferring of such a mission are

quite the reverse. His explanation is direct and unsparing. It applies both to the lofty station of Iran, Bahá'u'lláh's native land, and to the honorable station of the Iranian believers, and "to a lesser degree"¹²¹ to North America: "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."¹²² Despite the evils prevailing in North American society, he radiates full confidence in the ability of the American Bahá'ís to overcome them through reliance on the power of Bahá'u'lláh:

*It is by such means as this that Bahá'u'lláh can best demonstrate to a heedless generation His almighty power to raise up from the very midst of a people, immersed in a sea of materialism, a prey to one of the most virulent and long-standing forms of racial prejudice, and notorious for its political corruption, lawlessness and laxity in moral standards, men and women who, as time goes by, will increasingly exemplify those essential virtues of self-renunciation, of moral rectitude, of chastity, of indiscriminating fellowship, of holy discipline, and of spiritual insight that will fit them for the preponderating share they will have in calling into being that World Order and that World Civilization of which their country, no less than the entire human race, stands in desperate need.*¹²³

There is no hyperbole or polite flattery in the Guardian's encomiums of the North American believers. These lauds have been truly earned. In the opening decades of the twentieth century, the North American Bahá'ís had very limited numbers, capital, and resources at their disposal. When the facts he presents are considered, a fuller appreciation of Shoghi Effendi's observations is realized:

*Unsupported by any of the advantages which talent, rank and riches can confer, the community of the American believers, despite its tender age, its numerical strength, its limited experience, has by virtue of the inspired wisdom, the united will, the incorruptible loyalty of its administrators and teachers achieved the distinction of an undisputed leadership among its sister communities of East and West in hastening the advent of the Golden Age anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh.*¹²⁴

Here are the first of several congratulations that clearly establish North America's position of "*undisputed leadership*." The statement is matter-of-fact. The beleaguered Iranian Bahá'ís, suffering under the oppression of a fanatical Muslim orthodoxy, which imposed a variety of severe restrictions, were largely incapable of sending itinerant teachers and pioneers to foreign lands. Commenting on the circumstances attending and the forces released through 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "*triumphal progress through the chief cities of the United States and Canada*," which he calls upon future historians to record. Shoghi Effendi observes, "*These incidents, as we look back upon them, eloquently proclaim 'Abdu'l-Bahá's specific purpose to confer through these symbolic functions upon the first-born of the communities of the West that spiritual primacy which was to be the birthright of the American believers.*" He also writes of "*illustrious deeds*," a "*matchless record*" of service, and "*magnificent accomplishments*."

The justified pride in the North American believers is evidenced not merely in the constellating of their exemplary spiritual virtues of faithfulness to the Covenant, unity of purpose, zeal, confidence, courage, obedience, heroism, and steadfastness. In the closing paragraphs of this letter, no less than nine historic accomplishments in America's forty-year history (to 1933) are also identified. To gauge their true merit, we need to remember that these accomplishments were performed only as a result of what may be considered the greatest of all achievements: the preservation of internal unity. The religions of former dispensations had already suffered permanent internal fractures within this lapse of time; whereas, the Bahá'í community had retained its organic unity throughout this unparalleled forty-year period. Compared to the shattered record of the religions of the past, this demonstration of unity should be considered as no small feat. It is perhaps this signal, historic achievement, in a religion that places all its hopes in unity, that accounts for the glowing eulogies expressed in these pages. The letter closes with a stirring challenge, one that gives the reader pause for sober thought:

Will America allow any of her sister communities in East or West to achieve such ascendancy as shall deprive her of that spiritual primacy with which she has been invested and which she has thus far so nobly retained? Will she not rather contribute, by a still further revelation of those inherent powers that motivate her life, to enhance the priceless heritage which the love and wisdom of a departed Master have conferred upon her?

*Her past has been a testimony to the inexhaustible vitality of her faith. May not her future confirm it?*¹²⁵

The Sixth Letter: “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” (8 February 1934)
See chapter 1, pages 11-54

**The Seventh Letter: “The Unfoldment of World Civilization”
(11 March 1936) Dynamic States and Processes of Organic and
Spiritual Unity, and Teleological History**

General Characteristics

Excepting “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh,” the last of the seven World Order letters is the longest.¹²⁶ Shoghi Effendi describes the letter as a “*general survey*”; but this survey is vast, inspired, and incisive. What constitutes its main avenues of approach? Taken globally, the avenues present a five-fold synthetic approach to the Guardian’s understanding of world affairs and the Bahá’í Faith. Political, economic, social, moral, and religious considerations all figure into his analysis. These optics are situated within a twentieth-century historical perspective. The overall vision shuttles back and forth between two contrasting but interconnected poles: (i) the impact of the Bahá’í revelation on the events of world history, that is, on the “lamentably defective”¹²⁷ old world order; and (ii) certain distinctive features of the ascendant world order of Bahá’u’lláh. This bifocused vision is generally characteristic of all the World Order letters.

Unique Features of This Letter

While the third World Order letter (1931) is a watershed epistle that deals most typically with the theme of world order, demonstrating an ampler expression of the intellectual, spiritual, and literary abilities shown in previous letters, the 1936 communication is unique in several respects. It is particularly remarkable for its concluding section’s futurist comprehensive vision of the unity of the human race. The letter’s heightened, inspired tone is particularly elevated and that tone is maintained throughout. After having studied this letter attentively, my impression was that of being overwhelmed by the text, so dense is the writing, so fluent and moving the expression, in which so much is being said in a relatively short span. However, nonanalytical value-judgments do not tell much about actual content. The next section more closely examines the letter’s content.

Four Dynamic States and Processes

The letter suggests a number of dynamic states and processes inherent to the new world order’s internal pattern of expansion and consolidation, and its synergistic external interactions with world events. Process here means a

pattern of purposeful action of the Divine Will, expressed either as a systematic forward movement resulting in growth and integration, or, with the declining world order, in dysfunction and decay. Process as used here is synonymous with actuality, action, or becoming.¹²⁸ More pointedly, these states and processes are: (1) organic unity; (2) holism (both holism and organic unity point simultaneously to stasis and growth); (3) palingenesis, i.e., the dual phenomenon of concurrent destruction and integration; and (4) a concept of history that is strongly teleological, viz., movement that is directed toward the fulfillment of a specific end or goal. These four processes are not, in my view, weak eisegesis—a speculative interpretation read into the text; rather, they are strongly suggested by the conceptual fabric and wording of the text itself.

“Organic and Spiritual Unity”: The Bahá’í Faith as a “Living Organism”

One of the central concepts of the seventh letter is the presence and maintenance of “*an organic and spiritual unity*,” also described simply as “*organic unity*.” This key phrase applies, not only to the internal workings of the Bahá’í Faith and its institutions but also to the reciprocal relations among the future unified body of nations. This central concept is in turn linked to and congruent with another reality mentioned in the second World Order letter (1930), that of the “*living organism*.” Following the principle of “*strength and elasticity*” mentioned in the 1936 letter, which builds on the 1930 message, the Guardian repeats the principle mentioned by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that the Universal House of Justice is both “the initiator and the abrogator of its own laws.”¹²⁹ Shoghi Effendi comments, “*The first [function] preserves the identity of His Faith, and guards the integrity of His law. The second enables it, even as a living organism, to expand and adapt itself to the needs and requirements of an ever-changing society.*”¹³⁰ While the simile “*even as*” suggests a close parallel to natural processes, it is not a complete and perfect identification with them. Nonetheless, the comparison to a living organism provides the best understanding of this process-state. The processes of expansion and adaptation are not confined to the Universal House of Justice alone. They are characteristic of all Bahá’í institutions. Here are two other mentions of this key phase:

*The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of age of the entire human race.*¹³¹

*For well nigh a century it has, amid the noise and tumult of a distracted age, and despite the incessant persecutions to which its leaders, institutions, and followers have been subjected, succeeded in preserving its identity, in reinforcing its stability and strength, in maintaining its organic unity, in preserving the integrity of its laws and its principles, in erecting its defenses, and in extending and consolidating its institutions.*¹³²

The Organic Analogy of the Living Organism

The organic unity of the Bahá'í Faith, deriving from its being a living organism, is based on a sociological likeness to an individual human being who evolves during a lifetime and is organically constituted. It is noteworthy that Shoghi Effendi through his secretary did in fact recommend the study of sociology to a student who had queried him regarding the selection of worthwhile subjects to be studied at university:

Regarding the advice you requested from him concerning what studies you should specialize in with a view to teaching in the future: He would suggest either History, Economics or Sociology, as these are not only fields in which Bahá'ís take a great interest but also cover subjects which our teachings cast an entirely new light upon. . . .¹³³

The perspective of sociology, the study of human society, is useful in that has been used to explain the evolutionary nature of societies.¹³⁴ Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), one of the four founders of sociology, maintained that it was necessary to “accept the whole society as its unit for analysis.”¹³⁵ This affords the possibility of sociological analysis examining world society. Alex Inkeles writes that Spencer “maintained that the parts of society, although discrete units, were not arranged haphazardly. The parts bore some ‘constant relation’ and this fact made of society such a meaningful ‘entity’, a fit subject for scientific inquiry.”¹³⁶ This perspective can be applied to any living religion, organization, society, or institution. The universe itself can be taken as a living organism, a view held by some ancients, including *mutatis mutandis*, Maimonides and Aristotle.¹³⁷

While Spencer was an opponent of supernaturalism—and would have sharply diverged from any claim to the “divine origins” of a community, order, society, or organization, since he adhered strictly to scientific and naturalistic explanations—his foundational doctrine of the evolutionary nature of society was closely tied to the organic analogy of the individual. His view

of society as a living organism can be applied, nonetheless, to the new world society with its divine institutions that Bahá'u'lláh has foreseen.

'Abdu'l-Bahá likened the physical evolution of the globe to that of an individual: "Universal beings resemble and can be compared to particular beings, for both are subjected to one natural system, one universal law and divine organization."¹³⁸ Spencer argued that the analogy of society to the individual rendered the study of sociology scientific:

So completely is society organized on the same system as an individual being that we may perceive something more than analogy between them; the same definition of life applies to both. Only when one sees that the transformation passed through during the growth, maturity, and decay of a society, conforms to the same principles as do the transformations passed through by aggregates of all orders, inorganic and organic, is there reached the concept of sociology as a science.¹³⁹

Spencer advanced five points that characterize the similarities between biological and social organisms which can be generally applied to the states and processes that characterize the operation of the divine institutions constituting the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. These points are summarized and adapted from Spencer's sociological theory:

1. *Organic Growth.* The newborn grows to maturity. The "*embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*" becomes "*in the fulness of time*" a "*world commonwealth.*"
2. *Increasing Structural Complexity.* This increased complexity becomes evident either in the comparison between lower and higher organisms, e.g., single-celled organisms and the human being, or from the growing complexity of the functions within the same organism. This growing complexity is evident from the earliest origins of the operation of the Administrative Order to its present day functioning: "*The second enables it, even as a living organism, to expand and adapt itself to the needs and requirements of an ever-changing society.*"¹⁴⁰
3. *Progressive Differentiation of Function.* The progressive differentiation of function can be seen by comparing simpler living organisms with more complex ones. Within the human body each organ has its own function, but the necessary interactions between the various organs make the overall function of the body increasingly

complex. It is essential that the various organs are viable, capable of growth, adaptation, increased specialization, and harmonious functioning. Disease to the part may result in bringing disease to the whole.

4. *Possibilities of Evolutionary Development.* Evolutionary development makes advancing differences in structure and function possible. Past organic functions are perfected by the evolutionary development that makes present-day functions increasingly complex.
5. *Relationship of the Part to the Whole.* The living organism is composed of an aggregate of individual units that exist in their own right. The individual units, when multiplied, become the entire organism. In one perspective, the whole is the focus; in the other perspective, the part is the focus. The individual units, cells, or organs of the organism can live and function on their own for some time, but their continued existence depends upon the continued health of the entire organism and vice-versa.¹⁴¹

Unity and Holism

The analogy to the “*living organism*” is tied to holism. The word *holism* was coined by the South African statesman and general, Field Marshall J. C. Smuts (1870–1950) in his 1926 philosophical treatise *Holism and Evolution*. To his credit, Smuts was an early promoter of the League of Nations in his 1918 memorandum *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion*, which was supported and adopted by both Woodrow Wilson and Lloyd George. Holism is a fruitful topic that is not confined just to metaphysics, religion, and spirituality. Modern scholarly and scientific literature has produced findings on holism as applied to quantum physics, biology (vitalism), systems ecology, organic and evolutionary sociology, psychology (Gestalt), parapsychology, holistic medicine, education, and, of course, philosophy (monism, semantic holism). Holism is basic to unity.

However, in a religion whose scriptures also promote “unity in diversity,” it is important to stress that the philosophy of holism is not synonymous with an undifferentiated wholeness. In a Bahá’í perspective, holism is not a theoretical abstraction. It has strong moral and ethical underpinnings. Holism’s moral character is indicated by Shoghi Effendi’s maxim, based on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teachings: “*The welfare of the part means the welfare of the whole, and the distress of the part brings distress to the whole.*”¹⁴²

Holism must be seen to operate within the context of the Bahá'í moral code, which in turn promotes unity within the community. For unity to be maintained, either between individuals, within communities, or among nations, ethical conduct must be observed.

Basic understandings of holism stress two main ideas: (1) The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This idea is explicitly stated in the talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as, for example, in "The whole is greater than its parts."¹⁴³ (2) The part and the whole exist in an interdependent and mutually beneficial relationship or system. What impairs the one, impairs the other; what benefits the one, benefits the other. The origin of Shoghi Effendi's endorsement of holism quoted above can be found in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Here the moral import is paramount:

Regarding reciprocity and cooperation: each member of the body politic should live in the utmost comfort and welfare because each individual member of humanity is a member of the body politic and if one member of the members be in distress or be afflicted with some disease all the other members must necessarily suffer. For example, a member of the human organism is the eye. If the eye should be affected that affliction would affect the whole nervous system. Hence, if a member of the body politic becomes afflicted, in reality, from the standpoint of sympathetic connection, all will share that affliction since this (one afflicted) is a member of the group of members, a part of the whole. Is it possible for one member or part to be in distress and the other members to be at ease? It is impossible! Hence God has desired that in the body politic of humanity each one shall enjoy perfect welfare and comfort.¹⁴⁴

At least a half-dozen references to holism are present in the talks and writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá translated into English. The context of these writings varies and ranges from points on the oneness of the Divinity,¹⁴⁵ to maintaining the overall health of the human body,¹⁴⁶ the centrality of the power and influence of Bahá'u'lláh,¹⁴⁷ the unity of humanity,¹⁴⁸ the interdependence of man and nature,¹⁴⁹ and the unique station of people in relation to their interconnectedness to nature.¹⁵⁰ Consequently, the belief in holism can be applied to a wide range of issues. However, the root metaphor of holism is to be found in Bahá'u'lláh's well-known central teaching, "Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch,"¹⁵¹ which 'Abdu'l-Bahá has rephrased as "all may be seen to be the parts of the same tree—the great

tree of the human family. For mankind may be likened to the branches, leaves, blossoms and fruit of that tree.”¹⁵² The other root metaphor, already cited above, compares the diverse members of the human race or the “body politic” to the human body and to the harmonious interdependence and cooperation of its vital organs, limbs, and members.

Spiritual and Administrative Holism

In addition to Shoghi Effendi’s maxim cited in the section above, which concerns economic as well as other forms of global unity, the Guardian applied the principle of holism in a particular way. This standpoint is to be differentiated from the postmodern mindset and New Age spirituality that generally view “organized religion” as being irrelevant to, disassociated from—if not opposed to—spiritual practice. Shoghi Effendi’s categorical assertion on the interdependence of spiritual teaching, on the one hand, with laws and administrative principle and practice, on the other, suggests that the former requires direct application of the latter by the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. Although it has already been quoted in the section “Blurred Genres,” the following bears repeating here: “*To dissociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause, a separation that can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself.*”¹⁵³ But the main point to be retained in this discussion is the functional nature of the Administrative Order. Its *raison d’être* is to serve only as a channel for the Spirit, and it should never become an end in and unto itself.

Palingenesis:¹⁵⁴ Death of the Old and Birth of the New

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the old world order has been suffering a slow, agonizing death. Throughout this period, humanity and its leaders have desperately clung to the outmoded methods of obsolete institutions and their failed dysfunctional patterns of behavior. In the meantime, “*the embryonic World Order of Bahá’u’lláh,*” of which the Administrative Order is the “*nucleus and pattern,*”¹⁵⁵ has continued to implant itself imperceptibly around the world, but even to Bahá’í eyes, its progress seems slow and the impact negligible. To the world at large, this New World Order does not yet exist and, indeed, Shoghi Effendi says that it is actively gestating and has not yet been born: “*Dearly-beloved friends: Though the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh has been delivered, the World Order which such a Revelation must needs beget is as yet unborn.*”¹⁵⁶

The Guardian's writings contain a central or root metaphor: the birth of the New World Order, which is linked to its counterpart, the death of the old order. Without understanding this central motif, the World Order letters cannot be fully grasped, since the paligenetic metaphor alone provides the key to defining the relationship between the past, present, and future orders. In the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the replacement of the old order by the new is depicted by the moving image of an ancient scroll being rolled up and a new one unrolled: "Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead."¹⁵⁷ Bahá'u'lláh's striking visual image—it should not be lost on the reader—is one of revolution. The hand that furls and unfurls is the divine *Manus*, the Hand of God. "The Unfoldment of World Civilization" makes a dyadic refinement of this revolution by describing a "twofold" dynamic "process":

A twofold process, however, can be distinguished, each tending, in its own way and with an accelerated momentum, to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive. The former, as it steadily evolves, unfolds a System which may well serve as a pattern for that world polity towards which a strangely-disordered world is continually advancing; while the latter, as its disintegrating influence deepens, tends to tear down, with increasing violence, the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity's progress towards its destined goal. The constructive process stands associated with the nascent Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and is the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must ere long establish. The destructive forces that characterize the other should be identified with a civilization that has refused to answer to the expectation of a new age, and is consequently falling into chaos and decline.¹⁵⁸

The textual parallel to the first was written later in 1941 and is called a "phenomenon":

We are indeed living in an age which, if we would correctly appraise it, should be regarded as one which is witnessing a dual phenomenon. The first signalizes the death pangs of an order, effete and godless, that has stubbornly refused, despite the signs and portents of a century-old Revelation, to attune its

*processes to the precepts and ideals which that Heaven-sent Faith proffered it. The second proclaims the birth pangs of an Order, divine and redemptive, that will inevitably supplant the former, and within Whose administrative structure an embryonic civilization, incomparable and world-embracing, is imperceptibly maturing.*¹⁵⁹

The passing biblical allusions in the above passage require further comment. Our author was a “great reader of the King James version of the Bible.”¹⁶⁰ The “*birth pangs of an Order, divine and redemptive*” is language that bears the traces of a biblical reading. For example, the prophet Isaiah, whom Shoghi Effendi referred to as “*the greatest of the Hebrew prophets,*”¹⁶¹ employed the trope of a “woman with child” to symbolize Israel’s supplication to Jehovah to deliver it in time of travail: “Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight O Lord” (Is. 26:17). Here the redemption is from affliction and humiliation, which applies no less to Shoghi Effendi’s description of the postmodern world. While the Guardian’s language retains the metaphor of birth and its pangs, the image has been transposed to describe the New World Order struggling to be born. The word *womb*, another biblical word, is used, in fact, in the present letter, and later in *The Promised Day Is Come*, to refer to the New World Order stirring in the matrix of the Administrative Order: “*It is the structure of His New World Order, now stirring in the womb of the administrative institutions He Himself has created, that will serve both as a pattern and a nucleus of that world commonwealth which is the sure, the inevitable destiny of the peoples and nations of the earth.*”¹⁶² And also: “*We can, at the present moment, experience its stirrings in the womb of a travailing age—an age waiting for the appointed hour at which it can cast its burden and yield its fairest fruit.*”¹⁶³ The New World Order, as for the redemption of Israel, can be born, then, only through the agony of intense pain. In this last quoted sentence, the phraseology of the Psalmist echoes: “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved” (55:22). The phrase “*the appointed hour*” is close to the phrase “the appointed time,” which is used throughout both testaments.

The Writings of H. G. Wells: Preliminary Qualification

An important qualification to the discussion of the following sections is in order. Any similarities in diction I am showing between the writings of

H. G. Wells and those of Shoghi Effendi are not intended to indicate any substantial influence of Wells on the writings or thought of the Guardian. Generally, he used the writings of non-Bahá'í authors for the following purposes: to present historical information or current events to illustrate some aspect of present or past Bahá'í history; to make some favorable comparison of Bahá'í history, of the unique features of the Administrative Order, or of the Bahá'í teachings; to indicate that some significant world event prefigured a slow advancement toward and/or a catastrophic retreat from the laws, teachings, and prophecies enshrined in Bahá'í scripture; to formulate a vocabulary that would best suit his interpretations of the sacred writings.

In the following sections on Wells, the last reason—to formulate a vocabulary that would best suit the Guardian's interpretations of the sacred writings—is the most pertinent reason to explain the usage. Julia Kristeva's¹⁶⁴ notion of intertextuality, a word that she coined in 1966, to refer to texts that quote, influence, or allude to one another, is undoubtedly valid, if not commonsensical. The notion of intertextuality can be retained in the following discussion, but its influence is peripheral rather than central in the writings of the Guardian. It is retained here purely as a matter of interest, rather than being presented as a heavily consequential thesis.

The Shape of Things to Come (1933)

The writings of the popular and prolific science-fiction writer, novelist, modern utopian, and world federalist H. G. Wells (1866–1946) have been instrumental in determining a number of key words and phrases in Shoghi Effendi's treatment of world order. Based on some selected textual comparisons, it seems safe to conclude that our author was familiar with Wells's very popular two-volume work *The Outline of History* (1920), and his later book *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933). Both works show a number of key words and phrases that appear either verbatim in Shoghi Effendi's writings or have been slightly modified.

It is, of course, possible that the appearance of a good number of identical words or phrases in the two writers is coincidental; but it is not likely. In light of Rúhíyyih Rabbání's statement that Shoghi Effendi put "years of careful study"¹⁶⁵ into English and made vocabulary lists that included characteristic English phrases, it is only reasonable to conclude the Guardian carefully selected certain authors and studied their writings in order to create a lexicon that would best express his interpretations of Bahá'í history and teachings. The textual evidence strongly suggests that Wells was one author on Shoghi Effendi's reading list.

Any identical or similar words and phrases appearing in the Guardian's letters prior to 1933 (the publication date of Wells's futuristic, utopian study, *The Shape of Things to Come*) would preclude any influence by him. For example, Wells does use the phrase "new world order" in *The Shape of Things to Come*, but this key phrase had already been used by Shoghi Effendi in the 1931 letter, "The Goal of a New World Order." Consequently, the Guardian could not have relied on Wells for this key phrase. However, for visionary thinkers, the idea was plainly in the air. Wells's anticipation of a new world order was expressed as follows:

In our description of the failure of the League of Nations we have noted how foredoomed that experiment was, because nowhere among either the influential men of the time nor among the masses was there any sense of the necessity and the necessary form of a new world order.¹⁶⁶

In the opening paragraph of "Book the First," Wells wrote:

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the story of mankind upon this planet undergoes a change of phase. It broadens out. It unifies. It ceases to be a tangle of more and more interrelated histories and becomes plainly and consciously one history. There is a complete confluence of racial, social and political destinies. With that a vision of previously unsuspected possibilities opens to the human imagination. And that vision brings with it an immense adjustment of ideas.¹⁶⁷

In *To the Peoples of the World: A Bahá'í Statement on Peace* published in 1986 by the Universal House of Justice, the following passage from Wells's *Crux Ansata* was placed in a compendium of annotations and expresses the thoughts and sentiments of the committed world federalist. Any Bahá'í would share these sentiments, as well as the ideas expressed by Wells above:

Sooner or later mankind must come to one universal peace, unless our race is to be destroyed by the increasing power of its own destructive inventions; and that universal peace must needs take the form of a government, that is to say, a law-sustaining organization, in the best sense of the word religious—a government ruling men through the educated co-ordination of their minds in a common conception of human history and human destiny.¹⁶⁸

A Modern Utopia (1905) does not reflect, except for a few phrases, the sort of diction that can be closely identified with the Guardian's language on world order, such as we find in the later *The Shape of Things to Come*. Wells writes, for example, at the beginning of "Chapter the Third, Utopian Economics":

These modern Utopians with the universally diffused good manners, the universal education, the fine freedoms we shall ascribe to them, their world-unity, world language, world-wide travellings, world-wide freedom of sale and purchase, will remain mere dreamstuff, incredible even by twilight, until we have shown that at that level the community will sustain itself.¹⁶⁹

"The Generation of the Half-Light" and Other Things

Certain passages of Shoghi Effendi's 1936 letter spell out short-term gloom, a gloom that was soon to be visited on the world with the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Long-term doom is, however, gainsaid by the bright, futuristic vision of a gloriously united world that closes the letter. Since humanity and its leaders had rejected Bahá'u'lláh and His revelation, this letter speaks of indispensable "*intense turmoil and wide-spread suffering.*" It is here that the connection is made with H. G. Wells. Shoghi Effendi writes:

*Into such a period we are now steadily and irresistibly moving. Amidst the shadows which are increasingly gathering about us we can faintly discern the glimmerings of Bahá'u'lláh's unearthly sovereignty appearing fitfully on the horizon of history. To us, the "generation of the half-light," living at a time which may be designated as the period of the incubation of the World Commonwealth envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, has been assigned a task whose high privilege we can never sufficiently appreciate, and the arduousness of which we can as yet but dimly recognize.*¹⁷⁰

The original phrase is actually "generations of the half light." It is used by Wells in *The Shape of Things to Come* (p. 27), but it is not his. Wells is quoting another writer whose identity is not entirely clear, but the context would suggest that Professor Maxwell Brown is the author, an academic who wrote what Wells calls "an exhaustive study," entitled *Modern State Prophets Before the Great War*.

I include here a few other key words, phrases, and concepts found in the writings of both Wells and the Guardian. Regarding the “*dual phenomenon*” or “*twofold process*” that is “*constructive*” and “*destructive*” quoted earlier, Wells (referring to the “immense adjustment of ideas” required by the vision that there is only “one history” coming out of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) wrote in the second paragraph of “Book the First” entitled, “Today and Tomorrow,” a title that bears a strong resemblance to a compilation of Shoghi Effendi’s writings, entitled *Guidance for Today and Tomorrow* (1953):

The first phase of the readjustment is necessarily destructive. The conceptions of life and obligation that have served and satisfied even the most vigorous and intelligent personalities hitherto, conceptions that were naturally partial, sectarian and limited, begin to lose, decade by decade, their credibility and their directive force. The fade, they become attenuated.¹⁷¹

We come now to a little phrase “one single organism.” Wells wrote in 1933:

The body of mankind is now one single organism of nearly two thousand five hundred million persons, and the individual differences of every one of these persons is like an exploring tentacle thrust out to test and learn, to savour life in its fullness and bring in new experiences for the common stock. We are all members of one body.¹⁷²

In 1941, while a second global conflict was raging, Shoghi Effendi described the “*internecine struggle*” as a divine chastisement for the rejection of Him “*Who is the Ordainer of the Universe, the Judge of all men and the Deliverer of the nations.*” But it was, at the same time, a purifying and corrective visitation: “*The fury of its flames, on the other hand, purges away the dross, and welds the limbs of humanity into one single organism, indivisible, purified, God-conscious and divinely directed.*”¹⁷³

The “living organism” descriptor, applied to the body of humankind, also appears *mutatis mutandis* in both authors. Wells wrote, “A pathological analogy may be useful here. In the past, before the correlation of development in living organisms began to be studied, people used to suffer helplessly and often very dreadfully from all sorts of irregularities

of growth in their bodies.”¹⁷⁴ Wells’ point was that any one organ within the body (of humankind) could overgrow the others creating “hypertrophy,” causing a state of illness. In this case, he pointed out that social, political, and industrial institutions had to keep pace with the “mechanical invention” and “experimental physics” of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which had been largely outstripping them, thus advocating that social, political, and economic progress keep abreast of scientific developments. Shoghi Effendi used the simile of the Bahá’í Faith as a “*living organism*” with the “*strength and elasticity*” principle by which the Universal House of Justice is both the initiator and abrogator of its own laws. The characteristics of a living organism alluded to here would be growth, sustainability, and adaptability.

Another phrase that appears in both authors is “world sovereignty.” Perhaps Wells’s use of this phrase alludes to his once-held belief in the sovereignty of God as expressed in *God the Invisible King* (1917). In these pages he emerges as a polemicist who once had a “profound belief in a personal and intimate God.”¹⁷⁵ Wells was a free-thinking non-conformist who rejected the “outrageous mythology of incarnation and resurrection”¹⁷⁶ and a number of other dogmas, including the trinity and the virgin birth. His doctrine of God is formulated along the mystic and personal lines of an indwelling and loving Deity whose locus is the human heart and who is working out His supreme Will for the world in the social and political order that was to culminate in the “World-State.” Regarding the World-State, one of his key ideas, Wells traced back its mention to Lord Tennyson: “The idea of a coming World-State was quite familiar at the time [nineteenth century]—one finds it, for instance, as early as Lord Tennyson’s *Locksley Hall* (1842). . . .”¹⁷⁷

Interpreting some passages from Bahá’u’lláh’s tablet to Queen Victoria, Shoghi Effendi wrote, “*Some form of a world super-state must needs be evolved, in whose favor all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions.*”¹⁷⁸ “World system” and “world reconstruction” are two phrases from Wells that sound Shoghi-esque and which are quite consonant with Bahá’í scripture, but which are not used in the Guardian’s writings. However, the phrases “old order” and “common weal” are used by both authors. Another word used by both authors is *watchword*. Here is Wells: “The nineteenth century had for its

watchwords ‘individual enterprise and free competition.’”¹⁷⁹ Here is the Guardian: “*Its watchword is unity in diversity such as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself has explained. . . .*”¹⁸⁰ and “[i]ts watchword is the unification of the human race. . . .”¹⁸¹ The tentative conclusion to these cursory textual findings—and the phrase “the generation of the half-light” is the most solid indicator—is that our author had read and noted certain phrases of H. G. Wells.

A sad postscript may be added to the story of H. G. Wells. This multitalented author, who was all-inclusively a science-fiction writer, novelist, modern utopian, iconoclast of Victorian mores,¹⁸² socialist, world federalist, pacifist, and non-conformist, died a disillusioned man who had lost his faith¹⁸³ and who had renounced his dream of one federated world. The last book of this great visionary, *Mind at the End of its Tether* (1945), published the year before his death, reveals that after two devastating world conflicts, Wells had lost faith in the possibility of creating a united and peaceful world.

The Parallel of Early Christianity with the Twentieth Century

In this letter, the Guardian engages the reader in a critical commentary on the deterioration of Christian institutions that ends nonetheless on a hopeful note. Shoghi Effendi avers that “*this disintegrating tendency*” which struck Sunni and Shiah Islam has also visited Christianity, but he does not speculate as to the precise nature of this process; only that it is taking place and will continue to take place as the Bahá’í Faith grows in number and strength. The following passage suggests that the sword that will be wielded by those hostile to the new revelation will be turned upon the aggressors. This aggression will not only strengthen their intended victim but also accelerate their own final disintegration from within:

*Might not this disintegrating tendency, from which Sunní and Shí’ih Islam have so conspicuously suffered, unloose, as it reaches its climax, still further calamities upon the various denominations of the Christian Church? In what manner and how rapidly this process, which has already set in, will develop the future alone can reveal. Nor can it, at the present time, be estimated to what extent will the attacks which a still powerful clergy may yet launch against the strongholds of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh in the West accentuate this decline and widen the range of inescapable disasters.*¹⁸⁴

Then, after quoting a Presbyterian minister in the United States who advocated a return to the religion of Christ, rather than supporting an attempt to prop up a waning religion *about* Christ, he directs the reader's attention to the situation of the churches in the 1930s, which already had begun to witness significant desertions by "*the disillusioned masses,*" and whose members were already being enticed away by the alternative religions of the New Age, in itself a sign of a grave weakening in the fiber of Christianity:

*So marked a decline in the strength and cohesion of the elements constituting Christian society has led, in its turn, as we might well anticipate, to the emergence of an increasing number of obscure cults, of strange and new worships, of ineffective philosophies, whose sophisticated doctrines have intensified the confusion of a troubled age. In their tenets and pursuits they may be said to reflect and bear witness to the revolt, the discontent, and the confused aspirations of the disillusioned masses that have deserted the cause of the Christian churches and seceded from their membership.*¹⁸⁵

Shoghi Effendi goes on to draw a quasi-parallel between the modern situation he describes and the profusion of cults and philosophies that thrived in the Roman Empire in the first few centuries of the Christian Era and threatened to engulf the emperor cult that was the state religion. The Guardian's qualification of "*almost*" a parallel is explained by the fact that in the first instance, he critiques the vitality and veracity of modern Christianity in light of the many defections to alternate "religions," "*which their own bankruptcy had helped to create*"; whereas, in early Christianity it was a question of an emperor cult¹⁸⁶ that saw itself threatened by the spate of non-official religions that were tolerated by the imperial seat. The parallel continues along another line in that Shoghi Effendi seems to anticipate—although this is not explicitly stated—that the Bahá'í Faith will eventually supplant Christianity in the same way that Christianity replaced the chaos of cults in the Roman Empire:

A parallel might almost be drawn between these confused and confusing systems of thought that are the direct outcome of the helplessness and confusion afflicting the Christian Faith and the great variety of popular cults, of fashionable and evasive philosophies which flourished in the opening centuries of the Christian Era, and which attempted to absorb and pervert the

state religion of that Roman people. The pagan worshipers who constituted, at that time, the bulk of the population of the Western Roman Empire, found themselves surrounded, and in certain instances menaced, by the prevailing sect of the Neo-Platonists, by the followers of nature religions, by Gnostic philosophers, by Philonism, Mithraism, the adherents of the Alexandrian cult, and a multitude of kindred sects and beliefs, in much the same way as the defenders of the Christian Faith, the preponderating religion of the western world, are realizing, in the first century of the Bahá'í Era, how their influence is being undermined by a flood of conflicting beliefs, practices and tendencies which their own bankruptcy had helped to create. It was, however, this same Christian Religion, which has now fallen into such a state of impotence, that eventually proved itself capable of sweeping away the institutions of paganism and of swamping and suppressing the cults that had flourished in that age.¹⁸⁷

These religions and philosophies, some of which have been considered above in “The Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh,” not only vied with the state religion of Rome but also later with Christianity itself, even after the conversion of Constantine the Great in 312 CE, who in 313 gave Christianity equal status with the other religions in the Empire, but who tolerated pagan *superstitio*.¹⁸⁸ The hopeful note alluded to above is found in the next paragraph of the Guardian's assessment of early and modern Christianity. He alludes to a form of revival of the spiritual fundamentals of the Christian Church. But Shoghi Effendi seems to imply that this revival will be achieved with the help of the Urim and Thummim¹⁸⁹ of the Bahá'í revelation:

Such institutions as have strayed far from the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ must of necessity, as the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh takes shape and unfolds, recede into the background, and make way for the progress of the divinely-ordained institutions that stand inextricably interwoven with His teachings. The indwelling Spirit of God which, in the Apostolic Age of the Church, animated its members, the pristine purity of its teachings, the primitive brilliancy of its light, will, no doubt, be reborn and revived as the inevitable consequence of this redefinition of its fundamental verities, and the clarification of its original purpose.¹⁹⁰

Teleological History¹⁹¹

The fourth and last of the dynamic states and processes to be considered in this seventh letter is that of teleological history. (This topic will be more fully treated in chapter 6, “Providential History”). To speak of teleological history is to borrow and adapt a concept from Plato and Aristotle, and to apply it to Shoghi Effendi’s concept of history. *Telos* means “end” or “purpose.” It was found in ancient Greek ethics and the rudimentary Greek natural science (*physis*). Plato thought that a *telos* might transcend human activities and sensible things. For Aristotle the *telos* was mainly confined to nature. Aristotle’s most famous account of final causation included not only the “material,” “formal,” and “efficient” causes but also, and most importantly, the “final cause.” When plants and animals reproduce themselves and then die, they are living out their end purpose or goal of life. Heavenly bodies travel in orbits according to some design. Human beings act so as to fulfill definite aims or purposes. Each entity is so designed that it fulfills its own intrinsic nature. At bottom, teleology means direction and purpose. In this section, it means God-directed purposeful history.

Medieval theologians and philosophers employed Aristotle’s teleology of nature to apply it to the “higher” purposes of God by seeing God as the active agent in all things, directing and guiding them. With the rise of modern science during the Renaissance, beliefs in the invisible but observable *telos* were replaced by more empirical and sophisticated scientific laws and mechanisms. Modern philosophers have largely abandoned metaphysical discussions about the workings of internal natures or supernatural agents and prefer instead to speak of causes, functions, structures, and actions toward the fulfillment of a goal state.

In modern psychology, behaviorists have continued this line of thought and have attempted to completely eliminate any notion of goal-oriented behavior by agents or processes other than what has been determined by operant conditioning, stimulus-response, or a selection of behaviors based on consequences or reward. With Shoghi Effendi’s concept of history, however, a more ancient concept of *telos* is recovered, i.e., the presence of an internal or external drive or direction toward the fulfillment of a goal that is divine in origin and hence God-directed. Teleological history means evolutionary progress throughout specific stages to attain the final goal of human unity.

Teleological History is Providential¹⁹²

God is by definition the God of all things. His lordship must include lordship over history. Such a belief is clearly discernible in the Judeo-Christian narrative

of both testaments in which the messianic kingdom of peace and righteousness attains its culmination and is established at the “end of the world/age” despite the prevalence of widespread evil and the prosperity of “the wicked.” Bahá’ís believe that this Kingdom of God on earth has been established, and continues to be established, with the coming of Bahá’u’lláh (1817–1892), the world messianic figure for our age.

Shoghi Effendi’s writings make it quite clear that: (1) God is the Director of history, even if the divine *Manus* is not always discernible within the welter of demoralizing world events that betray, at every turn, divine law and precept; (2) Despite the flouting of divine law, turning-points are discernible on the world horizon that indicate the gradual implementation of the Divine Will; (3) The human race is in the process of attaining its maturity; and (4) This maturity of the human race will be commensurate with its unity, the end-point in humanity’s social and spiritual evolution on this planet. The following passage substantiates especially points 3 and 4:

*The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of age of the entire human race. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man’s collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture—all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Era—should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop.*¹⁹³

The sense of this passage is plain. Such phrases as “*the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man’s collective life on*

this planet” and “should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop” indicate the evolutionary nature of this process, with their end-point teleology. If this point were not clear enough, Shoghi Effendi continues to elaborate on this “coming of age of the entire human race”:

That mystic, all-pervasive, yet undefinable change, which we associate with the stage of maturity inevitable in the life of the individual and the development of the fruit must, if we would correctly apprehend the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh have its counterpart in the evolution of the organization of human society. A similar stage must sooner or later be attained in the collective life of mankind, producing an even more striking phenomenon in world relations, and endowing the whole human race with such potentialities of well-being as shall provide, throughout the succeeding ages, the chief incentive required for the eventual fulfillment of its high destiny. Such a stage of maturity in the process of human government must, for all time, if we would faithfully recognize the tremendous claim advanced by Bahá'u'lláh, remain identified with the Revelation of which He was the Bearer.¹⁹⁴

As in other passages of his writings, Shoghi Effendi turns to American history to prove his point by referring to “*the culminating stage in the political evolution of the great American republic,*” that is, to the achievement of national unity: “*Within the territorial limits of this nation, this consummation may be viewed as the culmination of the process of human government.*” He goes on to make the parallel and to be categorical in his assertion of end-point development:

No stage above and beyond this consummation of national unity can, within the geographical limits of that nation, be imagined, though the highest destiny of its people, as a constituent element in a still larger entity that will embrace the whole of mankind, may still remain unfulfilled. Considered as an isolated unit, however, this process of integration may be said to have reached its highest and final consummation.

*Such is the stage to which an evolving humanity is collectively approaching. The Revelation entrusted by the Almighty Ordainer to Bahá'u'lláh, His followers firmly believe, has been endowed with such potentialities as are commensurate with the maturity of the human race—the crowning and most momentous stage in its evolution from infancy to manhood.*¹⁹⁵

A Fourfold History: Rational, Moral, Mysterious, and Creative

Providential history is rational because: First, a Divine Plan or design can be discerned within it that configures a spiral movement of ever-widening circles of unity in the past, present, and future evolution of the family, tribe, clan, confederacy, city-state, nation-state, and world-state. Second, present-day events continue to fulfill, however fitfully, the requirements of the Major Plan of God.¹⁹⁶ The Guardian's view of history is, however, also mysterious. I have already quoted Shoghi Effendi's allusion to "[t]hat mystic, all-pervasive, yet indefinable change, which we associate with the stage of maturity inevitable in the life of the individual. . . ." Consequently, the precise steps leading to world unity are not plainly visible for all to see. And they are not plainly visible precisely because they are, to some extent, of our own choosing. Moreover, the shape of present things and their future significance are not always easy to discern because of our close proximity to them. The perspective of time is needed to understand how the pieces of the puzzle interlock. Crises, catastrophes, failures, set-backs, and reversals also make up the features of this much disturbed picture of world events. Regarding the human inability to clearly discern all the steps along the way, the Guardian writes, "*Not ours, puny mortals that we are, to attempt, at so critical a stage in the long and checkered history of mankind, to arrive at a precise and satisfactory understanding of the steps which must successively lead a bleeding humanity, wretchedly oblivious of its God, and careless of Bahá'u'lláh, from its calvary to its ultimate resurrection.*"¹⁹⁷

The weight of teleological history, then, although it adheres to the belief in the guiding Hand of God, does not deprive human beings of their free-will, either to promote or to impede the Divine Plan, as they so choose. Teleological history is ultimately creative because all willing partners who join the enterprise of achieving humanity's final stage of unity will be freely contributing to the creation of a society that has never before existed and whose form will be constructed of the pre-existing materials handed down to humanity through divine aegis. This exercise of free will in the creation of

a new human-divine artefact, designed to achieve the final *salvus*¹⁹⁸ of the nations is an essential hallmark of human ingenuity and creativity.

In their broadest outlines, philosophies of world history can take only three forms: *linear*, that history “is going somewhere”¹⁹⁹ and tends toward some specific end; *cyclical*, that patterns repeat themselves in the lives of peoples, nations, and civilizations; and *chaotic*, that history amounts to nothing more than “only the play of the contingent and the unforeseen.”²⁰⁰ The Bahá’í Faith’s view of history would be a subtle combination of the linear and cyclical theories. Visually, one could imagine this as a series of chain linkages straightened by an arrow shaft. The arrow moves toward its target (linear motion), while occurrences take place simultaneously within the links (cyclical motion). The prophetic cycles indicated by the Bahá’í sacred writings, with their culmination in Bahá’u’lláh and which give an end-point to history, give credence to both cyclical and linear theories. But the chaos theory of history, if it means that no predetermined plan has been foreseen by God and that every outcome is subject to the fits and starts of human will and the chance occurrences of the contingent moment, would have to be rejected by both the Bahá’í conception of the Deity and its understanding of providential history. Chaos theory could be admitted to the extent that it acknowledges that chaos is more apparent than real, and that chaotic patterns conceal some greater coherence that is attempting to emerge. Shoghi Effendi recognized that

*[s]uch simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other, are but aspects of a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá’u’lláh, the theater of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind.*²⁰¹

Endnotes

1. “*The Administrative Order, which ever since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ascension has evolved and is taking shape under our very eyes in no fewer than forty countries of the world, [written in 1934] may be considered as the framework of the Will itself, the inviolable stronghold wherein this new-born child is being nurtured and developed*” (*World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 144).
2. Horace Holley writes that these were “the general communications written to the American Bahá’í community by the Guardian of the Faith between 1922 and 1929” (Introduction, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. v). This book is not to be confused with *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, a compilation published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom in 1950.
3. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá passed away in 1921, there were very few Local Spiritual Assemblies in the world and only one barely functioning National Spiritual Assembly in Iran. The phrase “*expansion and consolidation*” was used frequently by Shoghi Effendi in various messages to National Spiritual Assemblies.
4. Appointed 24 December 1951.
5. In a letter of September 1926, Shoghi Effendi wrote to Horace Holley praising his services and calling him “competent,” “thorough,” “methodical,” and “alert” (Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 92). In another letter of May of the same year, the Guardian bemoans his keen loss in the death of his able assistant, Dr. J. E. Esslemont. Although Shoghi Effendi would have greatly benefited from the skills and services of Horace Holley in Haifa, as a replacement for Dr. Esslemont, he refused to release him from his duties in North America, “You cannot and should not leave your post for the present” (ibid.). Rúhíyyih Rabbání, who knew Horace Holley well, wrote in his in memoriam article that he possessed a rare combination of intellectual and artistic gifts, “Not only did he possess a brilliant, analytical mind, but at the same time he was a dreamer, idealist and mystic” (*The Bahá’í World*, 1954–1963, vol. 13, p. 850).
6. I have placed “edited” within quotation marks because Horace Holley did not edit Shoghi Effendi in the normal sense of the word, i.e., raising objections to content, posing questions, and rewriting passages. No one edited the Guardian in this sense. Horace Holley also acted as assistant editor-in-chief to Shoghi Effendi in the publication of *The Bahá’í World*, first published in 1925 under the title *Bahá’í Year Book*. Rúhíyyih Rabbání wrote that Horace Holley conceived the idea for this sort of volume, but she adds that “though I have no doubt that it was the breadth of vision of the young Guardian and the shape he was already giving to the work of the Cause in his messages to the West that, working on Horace’s own creative mind, stimulated him to the concept.” She specifies that the Guardian himself acted as editor-in-chief, and she details his various tasks in this capacity (see *The Priceless Pearl*, pp. 209–10).
7. Ibid., p. 205.
8. Introduction, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. v.
9. This phrase was used by Shoghi Effendi throughout *Citadel of Faith, Messages to*

- America, God Passes By*, and other publications. The cornerstone of the temple was laid by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1912 and was ceremoniously dedicated in 1953 at the onset of the Ten Year World Plan/Crusade (1953–63).
10. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 213.
 11. “The Dispensation,” p. 60.
 12. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 4.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
 14. A phrase that appears passim in *Citadel of Faith, God Passes By, High Endeavors, Letters to Australia and New Zealand, Messages to America, Messages to the Bahá’í World*, and *Messages to Canada*.
 15. For its historical background, the following section relies on the booklet *Milly: A Tribute to Amelia E. Collins* by Hand of the Cause of God ‘Abu’l-Qásim Faizí. Except where otherwise indicated, all quotations in the following section may be found on pp. 3–6.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
 18. The papers that the Guardian had given Milly to read were in fact a seminal letter of 12 March 1923, addressed to selected Western and Eastern Bahá’í communities on the topic of the establishment of the Bahá’í Administrative Order or embryonic World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. It dealt with such practical matters as the necessity of electing Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, the manner of their election, their duties, the establishment of the Bahá’í Fund, and the imperative of teaching the Cause. It exhorted the Bahá’ís to arise and to speedily execute the wishes of a beloved and recently departed Master.
 19. Faizi, *Milly*, pp. 4-5.
 20. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
 21. This approach is found especially in the first and second letters.
 22. Palingenesis, a scientific loan word, refers to the birth of the new out of the death of the old.
 23. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 17.
 24. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 169.
 25. A phrase used not in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* but in *Citadel of Faith*, p. 70; *Messages to America*, pp. 15, 58, 96; and *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, pp. 23 and 40.
 26. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 4.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
 28. See n. 32.
 29. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 90.
 30. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
 31. For a summary of the efforts of Ahmad Sohrab to undermine Shoghi Effendi and the Administrative Order, see Adib Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 343–47. As always, the causes of such defections are never merely doctrinal or theoretical. They involve perversions of character. Taherzadeh reports: “One of the believers, Mrs Nellie French, has recounted the reaction of Ahmad Sohrab when she communicated to him the contents of the Will. He was intensely agitated. His face turned black and pacing back and forth, he exclaimed: ‘This cannot be. Shoghi Effendi knows nothing about the Cause. He was never with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as I have been. I am the one who should have been appointed’” (*The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 343). Although Sohrab began first by attacking the basis of the Administrative Order itself and the suitability

- of Shoghi Effendi as Guardian, he eventually escalated to even attacking ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In his lectures and writings, and in the promotion of his New History Society and the Caravan of East and West, he frequently plagiarized Bahá’u’lláh and presented the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith with a bizarre admixture of his own personal beliefs and addenda from various cults and religions. He was expelled by Shoghi Effendi (1941) and died in 1958. Stories used to circulate about his monstrous ego.
32. See Loni Bransom-Lerche’s verbal report of Sohrab in her paper, “Some Aspects of the Establishment of the Guardianship,” in *Studies in the Bábí and Bahá’í Religions*, vol. 5, pp. 274–75. About White’s ludicrous charge, Shoghi Effendi wrote through his secretary, “There is no doubt that the silliest of all charges ever made is that the ‘Will and Testament’ of the Master is a forgery! It is all in His own hand, sealed in more than one place with His own seal, and was opened after His death by some members of His own family, who took it from His own safe, in this house, and from that day it has been kept in the safe under lock and key. The charges of Mrs. White were the result of an unbalanced mind. No other enemy, even those who were shrewd and clever, made this foolish accusation!” (*The Light of Divine Guidance*, vol.1, pp. 134-35).
 33. A review of the bibliography of works in English published in the *Bahá’í Year Book* (1925–1926) shows such early translations as Bahá’u’lláh’s *Íqán* (called *The Book of Assurance*), *The Seven Valleys*, and *The Hidden Words*; and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *The Mysterious Forces of Civilization (The Secret of Divine Civilization)*, *Some Answered Questions*, and *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, as well as prayers, pamphlets, and other writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In addition, compilations and works on the Bahá’í Faith and early accounts of pilgrimage had been published. See pp. 105–8.
 34. This copy is extant in the archives of the American Bahá’í Community.
 35. E-mail from Roger M. Dahl to this author, 7 January 2003.
 36. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 15.
 37. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.
 38. Unlike other instances, here the phrase “world order” is not capitalized.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
 40. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
 41. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
 42. The caliphate is considered to have begun after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 ACE with Abu Bakr acting as first caliph. It ended on 3 March 1924, when Turkey, a country that had previously accepted the caliphate as an appendage to the Sultanate for more than 400 years, summarily abolished it with the deposing of Abdu’l-Majid II (Abdu’l Meced II). The extinction of the Caliphate took place under the secularization policy of Atatürk.
 43. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 21–22.
 44. In her chapter entitled, “The Writings of the Guardian,” *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 212.
 45. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 30.
 46. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
 47. It is more likely that with his use of the word *Pact*, Shoghi Effendi is referring to the “covenant of the League of Nations,” a short and concise document consisting of 26 articles, rather than to the Treaty of Versailles itself. Interest in the creation of a League of Nations to prevent war predated World War I, but the founding of the League became

a critical part of the peace talks in Paris in 1919. President Woodrow Wilson, the U.S. representative, insisted that the creation of an “association of nations” should be among the first questions dealt with in Paris. “A general association of nations. . . affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small States alike,” was one of Wilson’s famous “fourteen points.” Shoghi Effendi praised “*the immortal Woodrow Wilson*” as being the preeminent statesman who “*voiced sentiments so akin to the principles animating the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh, and of having more than any other world leader, contributed to the creation of the League of Nations—achievements which the pen of the Center of God’s Covenant acclaimed as signaling the dawn of the Most Great Peace, whose sun, according to that same pen, must needs arise as the direct consequence of the enforcement of the laws of the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*” (*Citadel of Faith*, p. 36).

48. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 29.
49. Quoted by Shoghi Effendi in *ibid.*, p. 46.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
51. In 2002, with the exception of Great Britain, which has so far resisted a currency change, the economic union of Europe became a reality with the adoption of the Euro, a common currency.
52. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 44–45.
53. The barbarian Theodoric the Goth became King of Rome in AD 493, but there had been no Roman emperor since 476, seventeen years earlier.
54. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 32–33.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
56. Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 14. Fromm refers to H. B. Stevens in *The Recovery of Culture*, p. 221. The original source of Cherbulliez is not given.
57. Of the framers of the peace treaties at Paris, Woodrow Wilson, Lloyd George, and Georges Clemenceau, Prime Minister Clemenceau of France was the harshest. France had suffered the greatest loss of blood and treasure. Historians Carter Findlay and John Rothney write that Clemenceau was “[c]ynical and sarcastic, he cared for nothing but his martyred country. France had suffered, he believed, as a result of incurable German aggressiveness. . . .” Wilson allowed Clemenceau to impose severe penalties on Germany in return for French agreement to establish the League of Nations (*Twentieth-Century World*, pp. 76–77).
58. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 35.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.
68. *Ibid.*, ¶10, pp. 51–52.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
70. *Ibid.*
71. “*Semen est sanguis Christianorum*,” literally “The blood of Christians is seed.” From

- the *Apologeticum*, chapter 50:13. Roger Peace, “Quotations” in *The Tertullian Project*, <http://www.tertullian.org/quotes.htm>.
72. Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, vol. 1, p. 29.
73. This statement recognizes that these world religions are still very much alive in the present.
74. The accounts of Constantine’s conversion differ, but they all agree that his battle against Maxentius at the Milivian Bridge in Rome was fought in the name of the Christian God. The Christian apologist Lactantius reported that Constantine was given instructions in a dream to paint the cross on his troops’ shields, but church historian Eusebius, who learned the conversion from the Emperor himself, wrote in his *Life of Constantine* that Constantine had a vision in which he saw a flaming cross appear in the noonday sky accompanied by the inscription in Greek “By this [sign] conquer” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. “Constantine the Great” and *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed., rev. ed., s.v. “Constantine”).
75. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 57–58.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
77. The fact that Bahá’u’lláh is the Universal Manifestation of the Adamic Cycle is mentioned in the concluding line of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk, “The Universal Cycles” in *Some Answered Questions*, p. 161. The duration of the Bahá’í Cycle as 500,000 years is from a tablet addressed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to “an eminent Zoroastrian follower of the Faith” quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 102.
78. Paradigm is not meant here as indicating the social and scientific factors contributing to the revolutionary “shift” in the methodology of science à la Thomas Kuhn but simply as an example, instance, or pattern.
79. This expression of Shoghi Effendi is being used out of context. The phrase occurs in a message written by Shoghi Effendi to the North American Bahá’ís (11 April 1949) during the Second Seven Year Plan (1946–1953) regarding the importance of completing the “Mother Temple of the West” at Wilmette, Illinois: “No sacrifice can be deemed too great to insure the completion of such an edifice—the most holy House of Worship ever to be associated with the Faith of the Most Great Name—an edifice whose inception has shed such a luster on the closing years of the Heroic Age of the Bahá’í Dispensation, which has assumed a concrete shape in the present Formative stage in the evolution of our beloved Faith, whose dependencies must spring into existence in the course of successive epochs of this same Age, and whose fairest fruits will be garnered in the Age that is to come, the last, the Golden Age of the initial and brightest Dispensation of the five-thousand-century Bahá’í Cycle” (Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 69).
80. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 59.
81. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 17. Italics added.
82. On this point, see *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. “Eclecticism.” Likewise, see *Dictionary of Philosophy*.
83. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada*, p. 266.
84. Fritjof Schuon described the *Religio perennis* as “the primordial wisdom that always remains true to itself. . . . given that by its nature it in a sense involves worship and spiritual realization” (*The Essential Writings of Fritjof Schuon*, p. 534). Despite his profound knowledge, his intuition of the intrinsic unity of the world’s religions and the universality and comprehensiveness of his writings, Schuon dismissed “Bahaism,” along with “Mormonism” as having “The Problem of Evangelism” (p. 259). Despite

- his recognition of a common esoteric core at the heart of the great faiths, he did not envisage an external unity of the world religions (preface, p. xxxi).
85. Among these excesses, we might include the attempted assassination of the Shah after the martyrdom of the Báb (1852); the murder of three Azalis by seven Bahá'ís in Akka (1872), which brought much sorrow to Bahá'u'lláh; and the murder of an Azali in Tabriz (1866).
 86. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 56–57.
 87. In *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (pp. 168, 169, 197, 273, 346), 'Abdu'l-Bahá includes Zoroaster in the line of great Prophets. Shoghi Effendi, in answering a number of questions through his secretary, gave this mention of Zoroaster as a prophet: "Zoroaster was not Abraham; the Muslims, some of them, contend that they were the same, but we believe they were two distinct Prophets" (*Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand*, p. 41).
 88. Alexandria knew two schools. The first is the earlier school of poetry and science (306–30 BCE); the second is the later school of philosophy and theology (30 BCE–642 CE). It is to the second school that Shoghi Effendi refers.
 89. The compressed information on the Christian background below has been taken from a variety of sources. These include Henry Chadwick's *The Early Church*, vol. 1; Bertrand Russell's *A History of Western Philosophy*; Ringgren and Ström's *The Religions of Mankind Today and Yesterday*; *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*; *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed.; H. G. Wells's *The Outline of History*, vol. 1; *The Penguin Dictionary of Religions*; *Eerdmans' Handbook to the World's Religions*; Ninian Smart's *The Religious Experience of Mankind*; and various articles in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* relating to historical figures or schools of thought mentioned in these sections.
 90. From Donatus of Casae Nigrae, the leading bishop (of ten) who pleaded the Donatist cause against the newly elected and consecrated bishop of Carthage, Caecilian, and nine other of his fellow bishops before a commission instated by Emperor Constantine to settle the dispute. The commission decided in favor of Caecilian, which only increased the opposition of the Donatist party. After a tumultuous existence over 350 years, the sect finally died out with the invasion of the Muslim armies in the seventh century CE.
 91. Churches were also ordered to be destroyed and meetings were forbidden (Chadwick, *The Early Church*, p. 121).
 92. "For how can he who lacks the Spirit confer the Spirit's gifts?" (*ibid.*, p. 119).
 93. Ringgren and Ström, *The Religions of Mankind Today and Yesterday*, p. 46.
 94. *The Outline of History*, vol. 1, p. 432.
 95. The Platonism that was taught from the first century BCE to the second century ACE. It provided much of the Christianized intellectual framework for the early apologists, particularly Clement of Alexandria. It looked for the reconciliation of Platonic and Aristotelean teaching, insisted on the absolute transcendence of the Supreme Mind (*nous*), and maintained the body/soul distinction as found in the patristic writings and later theologians. For the Christian Middle-Platonists, Plato's Forms became Ideas in the Mind of God, as taught earlier by Philo of Alexandria.
 96. The name of a fascinating work by church historian Eusebius of Caesarea that attempts to prove the superiority of Christianity over pagan religions and philosophies. It contains a number of references to classical culture found nowhere else.
 97. The four teachings of Origen judged to be heretical were: the pre-existence of souls

- (Platonic); the human nature of Christ existed prior to the incarnation; the resurrection body shall be purely spiritual; and at the time of the end all humanity, even devils, will be saved.
98. Christians occasionally attacked Mithraic temples and destroyed their bas reliefs with axes (*Eerdmans' Handbook to the World's Religions*, p. 89).
 99. *Ibid.*
 100. The initiate into the Mithraic mysteries had to pass through seven ascending planetary spheres or heavens, each one being under the protection of a planet. This process corresponded to the ascent of the soul to divine wisdom and to union with the god. The initiate attained full communion at the fourth degree under the sign of Leo, symbolic of the element of fire.
 101. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th rev. ed., s.v. "Mithras." The 15th edition did not feature this handy comparison between Christianity and the cult of Mithras.
 102. Mithras was believed to have been born from a rock.
 103. *Eerdmans' Handbook to the World's Religions*, p. 89.
 104. Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, p. 333.
 105. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
 106. Revelation 8:2 reads: "And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets." Compare Tobit 12:15 in which Raphael describes himself as "one of the seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord." Enoch 20 names them as: Michael, Raphael, Uriel, Gabriel, Sariel, Remiel, and Raguel. Remiel is probably the same as the "archangel Jeremiel" of 2 Edras 4:36.
 107. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 246.
 108. This is the first of four decades identified by Shoghi Effendi in the early history of the Bahá'í Faith in North America. He wrote that "[t]he first of these four decades (1893–1903), characterized by a process of slow and steady fermentation, may be said to have culminated in the historic pilgrimages undertaken by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's American disciples to the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh" (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 80).
 109. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
 110. "From the remotest parts of Persia and the Orient He has caused men to come to this table to meet with the people of the West in the utmost love and affection, union and harmony. Behold how the power of Bahá'u'lláh has brought the East and West together. And 'Abdu'l-Bahá is standing, serving you. There is neither rod nor blow, whip nor sword; but the power of the love of God has accomplished this" (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 43).
 111. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 81–82.
 112. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
 113. Paradoxical because the notion of a perfect human being is a contradiction in terms.
 114. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 85.
 115. Pp. 292–94.
 116. Christ interprets his own parable in Mat. 13: 18–23.
 117. In Greek, this phrase may also be correctly written as *spermatikos logos*.
 118. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 86.
 119. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 75.
 120. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 76.
 121. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 18.
 122. *Ibid.*

123. Ibid., pp. 19–20.
124. Ibid., p. 71.
125. Ibid., p. 94.
126. At some forty-five pages, it is approximately fifteen pages shorter than “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh.”
127. The phrase is taken from CX in the *Gleanings*: “The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appeareth to be lamentably defective” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 215).
128. This description of process has been suggested by Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy.
129. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 23.
130. Ibid.
131. Ibid., p. 163.
132. Ibid., p. 195.
133. Letter of 13 March 1944, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual (*Scholarship*, p. 12).
134. Alex Inkeles, *What is Sociology? An Introduction to the Discipline and Profession*, p. 3. The other three commonly accepted as founders of the discipline are Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber.
135. The phrase belongs to Alex Inkeles in *ibid.*, p. 5.
136. Inkeles in *ibid.*, p. 5. The phrases “constant relation” and “entity” belong to Spencer. Inkeles is quoting vol. 1 of *The Principles of Sociology*, p. 442.
137. Further to this discussion, see “The Universe as an Organism” in Philipp Frank, *Philosophy of Science: The Link between Science and Philosophy*, pp. 96–100. Maimonides compared the human organism to the universe, and Aristotle compared the movements of inanimate bodies with those of humans and animals.
138. Further to this point, see chapter 47, “The Universe is Without Beginning,” in *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 180–84.
139. Based on “Social Statics,” quoted by Nicholas S. Timasheff in *Sociological Theory: Its Nature and Growth*, pp. 35–36.
140. See n. 128. This quotation applies to both points (1) and (2).
141. The above has been summarized and adapted from Nicholas S. Timasheff in *Sociological Theory*, p. 36.
142. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 122.
143. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 24.
144. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 38.
145. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, pp. 23–24.
146. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 153–54.
147. Ibid., p. 63.
148. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 16.
149. Ibid., p. 30.
150. Ibid., pp. 80, 360.
151. Lawh-i-Maqsúd in *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 164.
152. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 16.
153. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 5.
154. Strictly speaking, palingenesis refers to rebirth, but since the process of rebirth in

nature is closely tied to the process of decay and death, I am using the term to refer to both. Here, it refers to the decay and death of the old world order, and out of that death, the birth of the new.

155. “*The first epoch witnessed the birth and the primary stages in the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith—the nucleus and pattern of its World Order—according to the precepts laid down in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament, as well as the launching of the initial phase of the world-encompassing Plan bequeathed by Him to the American Bahá’í Community*” (Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 5).
156. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 168.
157. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, IV, p. 5.
158. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 170.
159. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 17.
160. “He was a great reader of King James version of the Bible. . .” (Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 37).
161. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 205.
162. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 117.
163. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 169.
164. Julia Kristeva, born in 1941 in Sliven, Bulgaria, is a French critic, psychoanalyst, semiotician, feminist, and novelist. For intertextuality, see, for example, Kristeva’s *Word, Dialogue and Novel*, a study of Russian literary theorist M. M. Bakhtin’s work on dialogue and carnival.
165. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 37.
166. H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, p. 258.
167. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
168. Cited on p. 31. Original page reference not given.
169. H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, p. 70.
170. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 168–69.
171. H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, p. 17.
172. *Ibid.*, p. 429.
173. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, p. 45.
174. H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, p. 31.
175. From the preface.
176. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
177. H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, p. 30.
178. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 40. The passages in questions are located in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, pp. 93–94.
179. H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, p. 40.
180. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 42.
181. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
182. An anti-Puritan, Wells advocated nudity, “free love,” and freedom of choice with respect to diet, drink, and dress.
183. Wells’s beliefs on God and things divine were lucidly expressed in *God the Invisible King*, but he later renounced them.
184. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 184.
185. *Ibid.*
186. Following the reigns of Julius and Augustus Caesar, the emperor cult became an

- institution. Initially, it was only the genius of the emperor that was worshipped, with his being elevated to godhead after death. But some emperors such as Nero and Domitian adopted the title *dominus et deus* (Lord and God) during each's respective lifetime. With the conversion of Constantine, the emperor became the representative of God and Christ on earth and defender of the church. The empire became God's dominion. Political considerations were at work with the earlier emperor cult since worship of the emperor was synonymous with loyalty to the empire.
187. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 184–85.
188. In 380 CE, Theodosius the Great made Christianity the state religion. The legitimization of Christianity as the only official creed strengthened the position of the Bishop of Rome, who soon became known by the title of Pope (*papa*=father).
189. Hebrew words of uncertain origin signifying the keys to divine guidance in bestowing advice. According to Exodus and Leviticus, Moses put the talismans, which may have been two stones, one white, the other black, into Aron's breast-piece. The Urim and Thummin had a priestly function and were used when the faithful came to seek divine consultation. The talismans fell into disuse when the monarchy was established.
190. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 185.
191. The following points on teleology have been gleaned from *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., s.vv. "Telos," "Teleology."
192. For a fuller discussion of Providence, see chapter 6. For this section, I have benefited from William H. Dray's *Philosophy of History* and Reinhold Niebuhr's excellent *Faith and History*.
193. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 163. The phrase the "coming of age of the entire human race" is italicized in the original and is here set in different typeface for emphasis.
194. *Ibid.*, pp. 163–64.
195. *Ibid.*, pp. 165–66.
196. Shoghi Effendi, for example, regarded the establishment of the League of Nations (and subsequently the United Nations) and its condemnation of Italy's naked and vengeful aggression into Ethiopia by Mussolini in 1935, as a partial fulfilment of the prophecy of Bahá'u'lláh of the establishment of the Lesser Peace and as unconscious conformity to His advocacy of the principle of collective security.
197. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 124.
198. From the Latin *salus, salvus*, meaning safe, well, or whole. Salvation is rescue, release, or deliverance from conditions of evil, disease, or disunity and the restoration of wholeness.
199. The expression and the three-fold breakdown are from William H. Dray, *Philosophy of History*, p. 61.
200. H. A. L. Fisher in *A History of Europe*, p. v, quoted by Dray in *Philosophy of History*, p. 61.
201. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 72–73.

3

THE PROMISED DAY IS COME **Apocalypse of Retribution and Renewal**

The Tempest: The Voice of Divine Judgment

The Title

In *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1939) Shoghi Effendi has translated the following passage selected from among the “*great mass of Bahá’u’lláh’s unpublished and untranslated writings*”:¹ “Say: O concourse of the heedless! I swear by God! The promised day is come, the day when tormenting trials will have surged above your heads, and beneath your feet, saying: ‘Taste ye what your hands have wrought!’”² These words set the theme and tone for the volume that is being considered in this chapter.

The Exordium: The Tempest Metaphor

The exordium of *The Promised Day Is Come* (1941) consists of six sweeping, trenchant sentences. The immediate reference is, of course, to World War II, but the exordium portrays a modern-day apocalypse that graphically sums up the whole deconstructive dynamic of contemporary history:

A tempest, unprecedented in its violence, unpredictable in its course, catastrophic in its immediate effects, unimaginably glorious in its ultimate consequences, is at present sweeping the face of the earth. Its driving power is remorselessly gaining in range and momentum. Its cleansing force, however much undetected, is increasing with every passing day. Humanity, gripped in the clutches of its devastating power, is smitten by the evidences of its resistless fury. It can neither perceive its origin, nor probe its significance, nor discern its outcome. Bewildered, agonized and helpless, it watches this great and mighty wind of God invading the remotest and fairest regions of the earth, rocking its foundations, deranging its equilibrium,

*sundering its nations, disrupting the homes of its peoples, wasting its cities, driving into exile its kings, pulling down its bulwarks, uprooting its institutions, dimming its light, and harrowing up the souls of its inhabitants.*³

The exordium uses an extended metaphor that likens the workings of divine justice to a devastating, world-enveloping storm. Its rolling phrases and sentences unsparingly proclaim the successive tidal waves of a world catastrophe. The mixed literary, historical, and theological threads of the text are woven into one apocalyptic language. The historical aspect tells of the ongoing destruction of the old world order and its harrowing effects on cities, peoples, nations, and institutions. The literary aspect takes on the character of a revenge drama. The theological subtext is ancient and Judaic. As in days of old, the Hand of God is dispensing divine justice: “. . . the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet” (Nahum 1:3). Humanity is reaping the whirlwind: “For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind” (Hos. 8:7). The ubiquitous “tormenting trials” spoken of by Bahá’u’lláh and announced by the prophet Isaiah have come: “Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it” (12:9).

The Guardian’s selection of the tempest metaphor to portray the actions of the Deity are reminiscent of Isaiah’s God of all nations (Is. 34:2, 40:17), the Supreme Judge (Is. 2:4, 3:13), the Lord of history who has pronounced sentence against a world that has rejected its Twin Messengers: “Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire” (Is. 29:6). The pitiful image of a powerless humanity that has become the object of God’s scathing wrath, a humanity that finds itself utterly incapable of either understanding or controlling the series of catastrophic events with which it has been visited, contrasts sharply with the untrammelled actions of Divine Omnipotence: “*Bewildered, agonized and helpless, it watches this great and mighty wind of God invading the remotest and fairest regions of the earth. . .*”

“This World-Afflicting Ordeal”: Karma or Reward and Punishment
Moderns may recoil at such a presentation of the Deity, but however obsolete and repugnant both the religious and the secular may find this concept of a punitive God, it cannot be escaped in the writings of Shoghi Effendi. The principle of reward and punishment, or karmic law in its Hindu version,

taken on a world scale, is inherent to the tempest metaphor. Apart from the symbolism associated with the tempest, it retains a very literal sense. A tempest is a violent occurrence of *nature* that functions according to predetermined laws. I have emphasized the word *nature* because the tempest metaphor suggests that the explosive and unpredictable forces of climate also figure into the meting out of divine justice. The untamed elements of nature's fury still remain one domain that refuses to submit to humanity's command. The inference is plain: this tempest is beyond human control.

The tempest trope indicates that by rejecting the Bahá'í Revelation, governments, nations, and individuals are consequently being subjected to forces beyond their control, forces that they do not understand but which, ironically, they themselves have set in motion. The karmic⁴ (*Karma*, Sk. action, deed), Judaic, and Gospel law⁵ of ethical causation, applied to this text, indicates that humanity is reaping the results of its own actions with ineluctable certainty. This same idea I have elsewhere expressed as “[s]piritual law is simply the metaphysical demonstration of the scientific principle of cause and effect.”⁶

In both Hinduism and Buddhism, and clearly here for the Bahá'í Faith, this karmic law is not limited to the individual's actions alone. Nor is it strictly confined to a future life. The tempest metaphor is a prime example of this spiritual law at work, this time on a planetary scale. Humankind has become God's victim because we are a victim of our own folly. In one of his most scholarly books to date, Deepak Chopra in *How to Know God: The Soul's Journey into the Mystery of Mysteries* takes account of this “dangerous” aspect of the Divinity in his “stage one” analysis of the nature of God. This stage one God shares certain aspects of the Divine Providence of *The Promised Day Is Come* who simultaneously punishes and blesses. Chopra writes: “For God is very dangerous in stage one; he uses nature to punish even his most favoured children through storms, floods, earthquakes, and disease. The test of the faithful is to see the good side of such a deity, and overwhelmingly the faithful have.”⁷ More will be said of the beneficent face of Shoghi Effendi's understanding of Providence in the sections that follow.

A Destructive and Constructive Process

The exordium indicates that the catastrophes humanity is currently undergoing, and will continue to undergo, are manifold. They manifest in various forms: world crises and geophysical disasters (“*rocking its foundations*”),⁸ family, civil, and national strife (“*sundering its nations, disrupting the homes of its peoples*”), war and the destruction of cities

(“*wasting its cities*”), the fall of monarchy (“*driving into exile its kings*”), the decline of religion (“*dimming its light*”), and widespread fear, anxiety, and despair (“*harrowing up the souls of its inhabitants*”). Just where and when, and in what new guise the effects of the tempest will be inflicted upon the world, no one knows with certainty. The sudden unleashing of such unpredictable, uncontrollable, and catastrophic forces make free-wheeling anxiety and a sense of confounded powerlessness widespread. But the anti-cosmic tempest (*kosmos*, Gk. order) that continues to derange the planet, while clearly punitive, is at the same time the expression of a providential Deity working out the Divine Plan to humanity’s ultimate benefit. It is purgation by fire. To see only divine wrath in these actions misrepresents the larger message. The catastrophic, global workings of the tempest manifest, as other statements in our author’s writings put it, a dual process:

*This judgment of God, as viewed by those who have recognized Bahá’u’lláh as His Mouthpiece and His greatest Messenger on earth, is both a retributory calamity and an act of holy and supreme discipline. It is at once a visitation from God and a cleansing process for all mankind. Its fires punish the perversity of the human race, and weld its component parts into one organic, indivisible, world-embracing community.*⁹

As dismaying and pitiful as are the sights presented to our eyes by this unpredictable Force of nature, we should remember that the work of deconstruction is as necessary to the process of world reform as is reconstruction. For that matter, the two processes would seem to be inseparable. Between the lines of the Guardian’s punitive moral voice may be discovered the Deity as Creative Artist. D. H. Lawrence has written of the “dual rhythm” of creating and destroying as an essentially creative process in his essay “Edgar Allan Poe” when he writes that “in true art there is always the double rhythm of creating and destroying.”¹⁰ The Dominican Matthew Fox, theologian of Creation Spirituality, refers to the prophet Jeremiah’s “‘building up and down’—a *via negativa* of another kind that must precede ‘the building and planting’ that creative transformation is about.”¹¹ The Hindu parallel to this deconstructive process is the third god in the *Trimurti* (divine triad), Shiva’s work as both destroyer and creator.¹² Destruction, then, is inextricably linked to reconstruction. This remains as true for *The Promised Day Is Come* as it does for this dual creative process and for Shiva’s maintenance of the *Rita* (world order).¹³ The fact that humanity “*can*

neither perceive its origin, nor probe its significance, nor discern its outcome,” while an indication of its bewilderment as to the cause of God’s retributive justice, produces another potentially positive psychological effect in the reader. The failure to fully understand the events that are simultaneously deconstructing and reshaping the world awakens in the thoughtful the desire to more fully understand the root cause of these same events.

Sequel to the Tablets to the Kings, Rulers, and Ecclesiastics

The Promised Day Is Come—compared to *God Passes By* (1944), which presents the internal history of the first century of the Bábí-Bahá’í Faith—analyzes the impact of Bahá’u’lláh’s proclamation letters on the kings, rulers, ecclesiastics, and humanity. It is the sequel to Bahá’u’lláh’s proclamation, a sequel that both updates and reflects on these historic documents.¹⁴ Shoghi Effendi’s admiration for these tablets is evident in the following appraisal:

*The magnitude and diversity of the theme, the cogency of the argument, the sublimity and audacity of the language, arrest our attention and astound our minds. Emperors, kings and princes, chancellors and ministers, the Pope himself, priests, monks and philosophers, the exponents of learning, parliamentarians and deputies, the rich ones of the earth, the followers of all religions, and the people of Bahá—all are brought within the purview of the Author of these Messages, and receive, each according to their merits, the counsels and admonitions they deserve. No less amazing is the diversity of the subjects touched upon in these Tablets.*¹⁵

Judgment of God on a Heedless World

In a retrospective and summary, Shoghi Effendi (1) refers to “*this world-afflicting ordeal that has laid its grip upon mankind*”; (2) characterizes the advent of the Promised Day as a “*judgment of God*” upon humanity that has been clearly announced in the writings of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh as a result of its failure to acknowledge the coming of the Promised One; (3) expatiates on the “*woeful trials*” of the three Central Figures of the Bahá’í Faith and the trials of the Bahá’í Faith itself; (4) exposes “*the tragic failure*” of humanity and its leaders either to alleviate the sufferings or “*acknowledge the claims*” of the Founders of the Faith; (5) argues that “*an awful responsibility*” rests with the kings and ecclesiastics who were the recipients of Bahá’u’lláh’s letters and that they met with “*dire punishments*” for “*their sins of omission and commission*”; and (6) quotes extensively from the

contents of these proclamation letters and enlarges “*on the consequences that have flowed from these momentous and epoch-making utterances.*”

This modern apocalypse typically engages in strong denunciations of the “*kings and ecclesiastics*” and “*the peoples of the earth*” who have ignored and rejected Bahá’u’lláh and His message. The Guardian’s entire analysis of world events, which included the extinction of the Iranian Qajar dynasty and the Ottoman caliphate, the sizeable loss of the temporal power of Pope Pius IX, “*the fate of the Napoleonic, the Romanov, the Hohenzollern, and the Hapsburg empires*” and “*the crumbling of the seemingly inviolable strongholds of religious orthodoxy*” is based upon his evaluation of world events “*as primarily a judgment from God pronounced against the peoples of the earth, who, for a century, have refused to recognize the One Whose advent had been promised to all religions, and in Whose Faith all nations alone, and must eventually, seek their true salvation.*”¹⁶

Although neither a formal history of the last century, nor as Firuz Kazemzadeh has observed “*a philosophy of history in the more technical sense of the term,*”¹⁷ *The Promised Day Is Come* is more in line with a modern-day *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history). This book will greatly assist students of the Bahá’í Faith to understand more fully “*the full blast of His Message*” and its effect on the events that shaped the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Guardian’s approach to modern history has inspired other works. *The Century of Light*, for example, published under the supervision of the Universal House of Justice, and, while more pointedly historical, is modelled to a great extent on the Guardian’s interpretation of history and his moral judgments; it presents the subsequent years of the twentieth century (1941–2000) along lines that are inspired by his voice.

The Promised Day Is Come resonates with some of the most impressive prose passages to be found in the body of Shoghi Effendi’s writings. The following lengthy example speaks volumes in its graphic portrayal of the serious consequences of the world’s tragic rejection of Bahá’u’lláh:

After a revolution of well nigh one hundred years what is it that the eye encounters as one surveys the international scene and looks back upon the early beginnings of Bahá’í history? A world convulsed by the agonies of contending systems, races and nations, entangled in the mesh of its accumulated falsities, receding farther and farther from Him Who is the sole Author of its destinies, and sinking deeper and deeper into a suicidal carnage which its neglect and persecution of Him Who is its

Redeemer have precipitated. A Faith, still proscribed, yet bursting through its chrysalis, emerging from the obscurity of a century-old repression, face to face with the awful evidences of God's wrathful anger, and destined to arise above the ruins of a smitten civilization. A world spiritually destitute, morally bankrupt, politically disrupted, socially convulsed, economically paralyzed, writhing, bleeding and breaking up beneath the avenging rod of God. A Faith Whose call remained unanswered, Whose claims were rejected, Whose warnings were brushed aside, Whose followers were mowed down, Whose aims were ignored, Whose Herald drained the cup of martyrdom, over the head of Whose Author swept a sea of unheard-of tribulations, and misfortunes. A world that has lost its bearings, in which the bright flame of religion is fast dying out, in which the forces of a blatant nationalism and racialism have usurped the rights and prerogatives of God Himself, in which a flagrant secularism—the direct offspring of irreligion—has raised its triumphant head and protruding its ugly features, in which the “majesty of kingship” has been disgraced, and they who wore its emblems have, for the most part, been hurled from their thrones, in which the once all-powerful ecclesiastical hierarchies of Islam, and to a lesser extent those of Christianity, have been discredited, and in which the virus of prejudice and corruption is eating into the vitals of an already gravely disordered society. A Faith Whose institutions—the pattern and crowning glory of the age which is to come—have been ignored and in some instances trampled upon and uprooted, Whose unfolding system has been derided and partly suppressed and crippled, Whose rising Order—the sole refuge of a civilization in the embrace of doom—has been spurned and challenged, Whose Mother-Temple has been seized and misappropriated, and Whose “House”—the “cynosure of an adoring world”—has, through a gross miscarriage of justice, as witnessed by the world's highest tribunal, been delivered into the hands of, and violated by, its implacable enemies.¹⁸

The Prophetic Voice: Warnings and Denunciations

Passages such as the one above make it clear to the reader that warnings, value judgments, and/or denunciations mark the style of our author. Such severe judgments will already be familiar to the readers of Bahá'u'lláh's

sacred writings. The Guardian renewed the denunciations of a world that, despite the passing years, had kept its back turned on its Promised Redeemer. Like an oracle of doom, he quotes, for example, these words of Bahá'u'lláh in the opening passages of his book: "The time for the destruction of the world and its people," *Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic pen has proclaimed*, "hath arrived." "The hour is approaching," *He specifically affirms*, "when the most great convulsion will have appeared." "The promised day is come, the day when tormenting trials will have surged above your heads, and beneath your feet, saying: 'Taste ye what your hands have wrought!'" "Soon shall the blasts of His chastisement beat upon you, and the dust of hell enshroud you. . . . The day will soon come," *He, referring to the foolish ones of the earth, has written*, "whereon they will cry out for help and receive no answer." "The day is approaching," *He moreover has prophesied*, "when the wrathful anger of the Almighty will have taken hold of them." Twentieth-century events have, of course, proven these words true. They prove no less true as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century.

The motif of the judgment of God is, of course, an ancient one and harkens back to the Abrahamic tradition with which it stands closely identified. Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad all pronounced divine judgments against their adversaries, as did the major and minor prophets of Israel and Judah. These warnings, pleas, complaints, promised blessings, and denunciations (the latter being a form of the "blessings and curses") answer the description of covenantal discourse. Shoghi Effendi's voice is "prophetic" in the sense that it reflects this centuries-old Judaic tradition of divine judgment, with its particular concept of God as the Omniscient, Omnipotent, Lord of history who demands requital for the cruel persecution and heedless rejection of his Chosen One, "the Best-Beloved of the worlds."¹⁹ Matthew Fox writes the following comment about prophetic anger that is pertinent to the moral outrage that is so keenly felt in the Guardian's writings as he witnessed the disastrous consequences that have resulted from the rejection of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh:

The prophet knows something about trusting anger, trusting what is intolerable. And molding that anger and outrage into creative possibilities. When Eckhart says that "all deeds are accomplished in passion," he is underlining how important a blessing anger and outrage can be. The fall/redemption tradition has made far too much of anger as a sin. In fact, anger is often necessary to see one through the interference that must be accomplished. Anger, after all, is proportionate to one's love.²⁰

Those who may be discomfited by the Guardian's severe denunciations, or who may view them as retrograde theology modelled on the vengeful God Jehovah, might do well to consider the record of the abject rejection accorded the Twin Messengers of this age:

Unmitigated indifference on the part of men of eminence and rank; unrelenting hatred shown by the ecclesiastical dignitaries of the Faith from which it had sprung; the scornful derision of the people among whom it was born; the utter contempt which most of those kings and rulers who had been addressed by its Author manifested towards it; the condemnations pronounced, the threats hurled, and the banishments decreed by those under whose sway it arose and first spread; the distortion to which its principles and laws were subjected by the envious and the malicious, in lands and among peoples far beyond the country of its origin—all these are but the evidences of the treatment meted out by a generation sunk in self-content, careless of its God, and oblivious of the omens, prophecies, warnings and admonitions revealed by His Messengers.²¹

Imagery in *The Promised Day Is Come*

In *Theology and Literature*, T. R. Wright, referring to the work of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, makes the point that the tensions that have arisen between theology and literature derive in part from the fact that literature uses an essentially poetic language which frees the text from fixed meanings; whereas, theology makes authoritative propositional statements that aim for doctrinal permanency.²² Dogmatic theology would be the ultimate expression of the attempt to fix an absolute meaning to the text through formulating reductionist doctrines and monolithic creeds. *The Promised Day Is Come* does not, of course, qualify as propositional theology, but its historical judgments are motivated nonetheless by theological beliefs. While the Guardian's authorized interpretations of Bahá'í scripture are fixed, his expository writings are replete with colorful imagery and fluid diction that are closer to poetry or poetic prose and that invite the reader to consider the metaphorical and symbolic possibilities of the text, without detriment to historical matters or to the spiritual beliefs upon which they rest. While it is not possible within the confines of this chapter to study all the types of imagery found in this book, two literary

devices strike me as being worthy of further analysis: the powerful image of Bahá'u'lláh as the Divine Ironsmith of a united humanity and crucifixion-and-resurrection imagery.

The Divine Ironsmith: Mythological Language of Unification

In the penultimate paragraph of *The Promised Day Is Come*, Shoghi Effendi employs a striking metaphor that clinches his argument and brings closure to the exposition. Although his book opens with the tempest metaphor, a powerful image of destruction, it closes with a positive image of construction. Bahá'u'lláh is depicted in these lines as the mighty Ironsmith who is capable of forging the warring fragments of a disunited humanity into a solid whole. In these closing observations, Shoghi Effendi cautions the reader not to question the ability of the Great Artisan of world unity to achieve His purpose:

*Not ours, the living witnesses of the all-subduing potency of His Faith, to question, for a moment, and however dark the misery that enshrouds the world, the ability of Bahá'u'lláh to forge, with the hammer of His Will, and through the fire of tribulation, upon the anvil of this travailing age, and in the particular shape His mind has envisioned, these scattered and mutually destructive fragments into which a perverse world has fallen, into one single unit, solid and indivisible, able to execute His design for the children of men.*²³

This metaphor is based on a mythological (*mythos+logos*, Gk. sacred story) subtext. Like so many of the Guardian's literary allusions, this myth-image says much in a short space. But unlike many refined poetic devices, this trope, with its moving, vivid images of the fire and the hammer striking the anvil, is drawn from the world of industry and the tools of manual labor. The above passage proclaims the omnipotence of the Divine Ironsmith ("with the Hammer of His Will") to accomplish His task of ineluctable world unification. Sociologist of religion Thomas F. O'Dea's observations on the mythical language of religion properly apply to this text. Mythological language makes "a dramatic assertion, not simply a rational statement."²⁴ It would be mistaken, however, to identify it as being pre-rational, or "pre-logical" as Levy-Bruhl did in his well-known study,²⁵ since its *raison d'être* is other. O'Dea refers to an explanation of philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945)²⁶ that helps to throw light on Shoghi Effendi's myth-image of Bahá'u'lláh as the all-powerful Ironsmith. Cassirer writes:

The world of myth is a dramatic world—a world of actions, of forces of conflicting powers. . . . Whatever is seen or felt is surrounded by a special atmosphere—an atmosphere of joy and

grief, of anguish, of excitement, or exultation or depression. Here we cannot speak of “things” as dead or indifferent stuff. All objects are benignant, friendly or inimical, familiar or uncanny, alluring and fascinating or repellent and threatening.²⁷

The creative act of Bahá’u’lláh in forging the elements of a disparate humanity “*upon the anvil of this tumultuous age*” corresponds to Cassirer’s description of “a dramatic world—a world of actions, of forces of conflicting powers. . . .” Reinhold Niebuhr’s distinction between “primitive myth” and “permanent myth” is also useful here to differentiate prescientific and properly mythical expression. The primitive myth would be belied by scientific criteria, i.e., the myth that explains the workings of natural phenomena by recourse to the supernatural actions of divinities. The permanent myth has to do with the human being’s orientation to the Absolute or the Divine Power or powers that determine one’s existence.²⁸ Ross Woodman observes that “Mythos as a narrative of a god brings us face to face (“the Face of God”) with another order of reality beyond the human. . . . Mythos ultimately requires the spirit of faith that transcends rational knowledge. . . . If mythos disappears, so does Bahá’u’lláh.”²⁹ The image of the Ironsmith is arguably archetypal (*arché + typos*, Gk. “stamped from the beginning”). The respected historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, for example, considers the archetype in its Augustinian sense to be an exemplary model or paradigm.³⁰ If this image of Bahá’u’lláh as the Divine Ironsmith qualifies in any sense as an archetype, it would have to be as *the* model of the Divine Artisan.

Shoghi Effendi’s metaphor is built on four basic components, three of them earthly and one heavenly. The hammer, fire, and anvil—the three earthly images—are employed as implements of the Divine Will, whose heavenly attribute is supreme power. The metaphor conveys the superior strength of the Ironsmith who has been empowered to achieve a herculean task—to unite the broken and scattered iron fragments of a divided humanity “*into one single unit.*” The “*fire of tribulation*” serves as the catalyst. Although remaining unchanged, the fire changes all, melting together through its heat and flame the peoples of the world in a crucible of suffering. This metaphor is well suited to convey Bahá’u’lláh’s mission, since it contains all the elements necessary to convey the actions of the Creative Artisan of world unity: the fire of tribulation that softens the resistant metal; the warring metallic fragments of a broken humanity; and the supernatural powers of the Ironsmith who forges them into a solid whole. The image is, moreover,

actively transformative. We see the Ironsmith working in the heat of the forge. We hear the din of the hammer striking the anvil. We feel the intense power and concentration of the Ironsmith as He works. The ancient, bright images of fire and light contrast with the black smoke and the cold hammer as it strikes the anvil, and, until they are melted by the heat of the flame, the dark, scattered metallic fragments of a disunited humanity. Except for the light and heat of the forge, all without is darkness.

The Greek myth of Hephaestus provides the closest correlative to Bahá'u'lláh as Ironsmith. The god-magician Hephaestus was the skillful deity of smiths who easily subdued the metallic elements and wrought them into wondrous shapes, “statues which would move of themselves, tripods which had the same wonderful power, immortal and impenetrable armour. . . thunderbolts for Zeus, arrows for Artemis, arms for some favoured hero.”³¹ Mircea Eliade tells us that Hephaestus is a “master binder,”³² but he is a binder in the negative sense. He entraps gods and goddesses with thrones, chains, and nets.³³ While the myth of Hephaestus need not be read into Shoghi Effendi’s metaphor, the mythological motif is nonetheless present in the association of Bahá'u'lláh’s Promethean mastery of fire. The fact that Bahá'u'lláh is the Master of the Fire and the Supreme Artisan gives Him supernatural powers by which He is able, not only to execute marvelous works but also to command, to govern, and to punish.³⁴ Activity and passivity, the interactive forces present in the work of God’s original creation,³⁵ likewise reappear in this image. The Ironsmith embodies the active force that works on the passive, insensible iron.

In hammering out the molten metal of a warring humanity into a “new race of men,”³⁶ Bahá'u'lláh works a miracle that far surpasses the Greek deity who was lame from birth. His Great Work, born of a singular act of the Divine Will, is the only source of heat and light in the darkened world that surrounds Him. The forge becomes the symbol of the processes by which the New World Order is being wrought. The stubborn resistance of “the children of men”³⁷ to act as willing participants in the erection of the new order, gives the Divine Ironsmith no mean task to accomplish: Bahá'u'lláh will work “*these scattered and mutually destructive fragments into which a perverse world has fallen, into one single unit, solid and indivisible. . .*” The mythological metaphor reminds us that the earth’s peoples have not just stubbornly resisted the process of unification; astonishingly, they prefer mutual destruction (“*mutually destructive fragments*”). Bahá'u'lláh is their Savior because He saves them from themselves.

Crucifixion-and-Resurrection Imagery

Since Shoghi Effendi was addressing primarily a Western audience, one might expect to find some characteristically Judeo-Christian imagery. We have already referred to the covenantal language and the ancient biblical motif of divine retribution found in his book. If by a motif a prominent or recognizable theme or pattern is intended, specifically Christian allusions do not figure greatly into *The Promised Day Is Come*. (I am not referring here to the effect of Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation on the Christian church, which together with Islam and other faiths comes under negative review.) However, passing allusions to the gospels are employed as occasional, distinctive threads that recall the passion, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. As usual, however, our author adapts these images to his own purposes. This particular diction is employed to emphasize the dire sufferings of humanity, its "death," and ultimate resurrection to glory. In referring to the human inability to clearly understand the political and spiritual process that will lead ultimately to world unity, Shoghi Effendi wrote of "*the steps which must successively lead a bleeding humanity, wretchedly oblivious of its God, and careless of Bahá'u'lláh, from its calvary to its ultimate resurrection.*"³⁸ An allusion to humanity's crucifixion, "*the disjointed, the bleeding limbs of mankind*" is also made:

*Adversity, prolonged, worldwide, afflictive, allied to chaos and universal destruction, must needs convulse the nations, stir the conscience of the world, disillusion the masses, precipitate a radical change in the very conception of society, and coalesce ultimately the disjointed, the bleeding limbs of mankind into one body, single, organically united, and indivisible.*³⁹

As noted earlier, Shoghi Effendi wrote of "*a world spiritually destitute, morally bankrupt, politically disrupted, socially convulsed, economically paralyzed, writhing, bleeding and breaking up beneath the avenging rod of God.*" The reference to "*the avenging rod of God,*" while not an exact biblical phrase, is fully biblical in wording. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his "Commentary on the Twelfth Chapter of the Revelation of Saint John" interprets the following verse as a prophecy of the Báb, "And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne" (v. 5).⁴⁰ He also interprets the phrase the "rod of iron" as being "a symbol of power and might."⁴¹ There are many textual parallels to the Guardian's phrase "*the avenging rod of God.*" In his speech answering Zophar and Naamathite, Job argues that

the very prosperity of the wicked drives them away from God. We must not consequently infer that the loss of possessions and adversity is a punishment: “Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them” (21: 9). The Psalmist writes, “If they break my statutes and keep not my commandments; then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes” (89:31–32). In his promise of the restoration of Israel in the latter days (20:33–49), Ezekiel says, “And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant” (v. 37). There are other biblical references to the rod of God.⁴²

A further word is due on Shoghi Effendi’s affirmation that there would be an “*ultimate resurrection*” for humanity following its “*calvary*”—“*from its calvary to its ultimate resurrection.*” In Christianity, the resurrection of the body is associated primarily with the Easter event, but it also applies to the individual and to the collective Christian community as part of the great eschatological happening associated with the Second Coming and the Last Judgment. The resurrection will occur either with or without the body, according to the literal-grammatical or spiritual-symbolic interpretations.⁴³ Held also by Jews, the resurrection of the body is the thirteenth and last of the articles of Maimonides’ creed and is “connected with the doctrine of Israel’s ultimate Messianic redemption. . . .”⁴⁴ In the Hebrew Bible, an early allusion to the resurrection occurred during the Hellenistic period in the Book of Daniel (c. 168 BCE). Daniel 12:2 reads: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” While Shoghi Effendi’s allusions to “*calvary*” and “*ultimate resurrection*” take the life of Christ and Christian history as their antecedents, his metaphor has become a collective one since it pertains to “*the bleeding limbs of mankind.*” While the Book of Daniel speaks of a great divide between sinners and the saved, in the Bahá’í understanding, salvation shall be ultimately universal. All humanity as the people of God shall be eventually resurrected.

Shoghi Effendi’s graphic crucifixion-resurrection imagery is not abstract or ethereal poetic language. It is based on the sensate experience of the body as a functioning, interconnected, living organism. Humanity’s sufferings are depicted as a deep-trauma that is suffered in the body and soul, in the flesh and bones. The blood-and-body language of humanity’s “*disjointed*” and “*bleeding limbs*” is reminiscent in its stark realism of medieval crucifixion portraiture. In the Guardian’s literary art, painful reality prevails over any possible offense to fine taste. Any contemporary reader would recognize in his vivid renderings a profound note of stark, unsparring realism.

However, we find more reassuring indications in the agonizing picture he presents. The “death” of humanity—while it has already and may yet still lead to mass destruction and catastrophic losses of the world’s population—is but the necessary prelude to the birth of a new global civilization. Just as spiritual or emotional trauma can cause the individual to stretch the limits of self to discover previously unknown dimensions, releasing new inner strengths or virtues, world-suffering can also be redemptive since it will awaken a profound and universal desire to experience global unity. Like John Welwood who writes of “disillusionment as a stepping stone”⁴⁵ to the fuller development of individual spirituality, Shoghi Effendi writes that “[a] diversity. . . must needs. . . disillusion the masses. . . .”⁴⁶ This necessary disillusion, this rude awakening, ultimately favors the attainment of lasting world peace. Through the resurrection metaphor, the reader is able to visualize that the broken body of humanity will become whole again. The future for a resurrected humanity contains the hope and promise of a united world “*in which the folly and tumult of strife*” will be forever stilled and transmuted into a permanent peace:

*The convulsions of this transitional and most turbulent period in the annals of humanity are the essential prerequisites, and herald the inevitable approach, of that Age of Ages, “the time of the end,” in which the folly and tumult of strife that has, since the dawn of history, blackened the annals of mankind, will have been finally transmuted into the wisdom and the tranquillity of an undisturbed, a universal, and lasting peace, in which the discord and separation of the children of men will have given way to the worldwide reconciliation, and the complete unification of the divers elements that constitute human society.*⁴⁷

The text contains another metaphor that is also associated with calvary (Lat. *calvaria*, skull), the ancient image of the brimful, bitter cup. Recalling that pathos on Calvary when Christ was offered vinegar to quench his thirst, in the Guardian’s rendering, the cup of suffering brought to humanity’s lips only adds to the large measure of its travails. Unlike the sinless Christ, “a lamb without blemish and without spot,”⁴⁸ humanity in its rejection of Bahá’u’lláh is not blameless:

Brimful and bitter indeed is the cup of humanity that has failed to respond to the summons of God as voiced by His Supreme Messenger, that has dimmed the lamp of its faith in its Creator that

*has transferred, in so great a measure, the allegiance owed Him to the gods of its own invention, and polluted itself with the evils and vices which such a transference must necessarily engender.*⁴⁹

The Gospel in fact makes no mention of a cup. Although the details of the gospel accounts of Christ's final drink vary,⁵⁰ their effect is uniformly pathetic. Shoghi Effendi's metaphor is also fatalistic. Humanity must needs drink, for without the administration of this strong medicine, necessitated by its own folly, it cannot be restored to health. Stylistically, one notes in passing an example of Shoghi Effendi's penchant for alliteration in the rhyming syllables "*Brimful and bitter.*"

Steps Leading to the "Most Great Peace"

From Justice unto Love

In the following passage, Shoghi Effendi refers to sins of commission and omission as having occasioned humanity's "*grievous ordeal*":

*It is because of this dual guilt, the things it has done and the things it has left undone, its misdeeds as well as its dismal and signal failure to accomplish its clear and unmistakable duty towards God, His Messenger, and His Faith, that this grievous ordeal, whatever its immediate political and economic causes, has laid its adamant grip upon it.*⁵¹

A closer reading, however, does not support any monolithic and unidimensional portrayal of a pervasively punitive God. I have already referred to some passages that give clear assurances of the future glory of a peaceful and united world, and a world historical process that "*is both a retributory calamity and an act of holy and supreme discipline. It is at once a visitation from God and a cleansing process for all mankind.*" Our author's depictions of divine chastisement are made within the context of the progressive establishment of a New World Order. They are not merely moralistic value judgments meant to justify the anger and punitive actions of a wrathful God. The portrayal of divine retribution does not fall so neatly, as hasty readers might suppose, into the simplistic category of justified punishment for conclusive guilt. Shoghi Effendi's value judgments are intended to make the reader more cognizant of God's methods and purposes in the gradual establishment of a divinely ordained world order. His remarks, to use Viktor Frankl's terminology,

are logo-therapeutical⁵² since they ascribe meaning to a seemingly senseless pattern of suffering, random destruction, chaos, and death. Consequently, the passages that paint a picture of divine chastisement are not ends in themselves. They point, instead, from a transitional stage of tribulation in history to a gradually emerging pacified and unified human race. They are meant to direct the reader's attention to finding meaning, and even value, in present-day chaos and to provide a framework for contemplating a more favorable future for humanity. It is an old but a true teaching that

*He chastises because He is just, and He chastens because He loves. Having chastened them, He cannot, in His great mercy, leave them to their fate. Indeed, by the very act of chastening them He prepares them for the mission for which He has created them.*⁵³

This precept is based, of course, in ancient prophetic teaching. We read, for example, in the proverbs of Solomon who is mentioned among the prophets in the Sura entitled, "The Prophets" (21:78–81): "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." (Proverbs 3:11–12). Moreover, if we read Shoghi Effendi's treatment of divine chastisement without following it through to the end point, without looking to the flower that the seed of suffering contains, we shall only mutilate his meaning. He refers to the apocalyptic sufferings of humanity as being "*not only a retributory and destructive fire, but a disciplinary and creative process, whose aim is the salvation, through unification, of the entire planet.*"⁵⁴ It is noteworthy that Shoghi Effendi combines in this context discipline with creativity. Such a thought is coherent with D. H. Lawrence's mention above of the essentially creative process found in the "dual rhythm" of creating and destroying.

Clear indications of a loving and compassionate God who attenuates the fires of divine punishment are also found in these pages. The God of retribution, Shoghi Effendi indicates, is also a God of love and mercy who will not abandon His children until His Grand Design for the salvation of humanity has been fully executed: ". . . nor will He be willing to abandon His children to their fate, and refuse them that culminating and blissful stage in their long, their slow and painful evolution throughout the ages, which is at once their inalienable right and their true destiny."⁵⁵ In the concluding triumphant section of his weighty missive, some of the features of the future world commonwealth destined to emerge "*out of the*

carnage, agony, and havoc of this great world convulsion” are envisioned. Shoghi Effendi refers to “*the love and wisdom*” of the Creator who will lead humanity to its “*ineffable destiny*”:

Then will the planet, galvanized through the universal belief of its dwellers in one God, and their allegiance to one common Revelation, mirror, within the limitations imposed upon it, the effulgent glories of the sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh, shining in the plenitude of its splendor in the Abhá Paradise, and be made the footstool of His Throne on high, and acclaimed as the earthly heaven, capable of fulfilling that ineffable destiny fixed for it, from time immemorial, by the love and wisdom of its Creator.⁵⁶

The Nine Sentences of the “Most Great Peace”

In the climactic last section of *The Promised Day Is Come*, the Guardian envisions the “*gradual process*” that will lead to the establishment of a future “*world commonwealth.*” For the sake of analysis, I am referring to this historic sequence of steps as the Nine Sentences of the Most Great Peace. They are numbered accordingly. I preface these remarks with a comment on the use of the “Most Great Peace” in the Bahá'í writings. According to Nader Saeidi, the phrase *Suhl-i-Azam* (Most Great Peace) is never used in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, although it is used in the Arabic language writings of Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'u'lláh uses either the Lesser Peace (*Sohl-i-Asghár*) or the Great Peace (*Sohl-i-Akbar*). In his translations, Shoghi Effendi did not observe literal renderings of these terms and sometimes reversed them for emphasis and distinction. Thus, in his translation of *The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, in which Bahá'u'lláh calls upon “the kings of the earth” to establish the “Lesser Peace,” the original *Sohl-i-Akbar*, which normally would be translated as Great Peace, is rendered as “Lesser Peace” by the Guardian.⁵⁷ What follows is the Guardian’s vision of the process that passes from the Lesser to the Most Great Peace:

[1] *Suffice it to say that this consummation will, by its very nature, be a gradual process, and must, as Bahá'u'lláh has Himself anticipated, lead at first to the establishment of that Lesser Peace which the nations of the earth, as yet unconscious of His Revelation and yet unwittingly enforcing the general principles which He has enunciated, will themselves establish.*
[2] *This momentous and historic step, involving the*

reconstruction of mankind, as the result of the universal recognition of its oneness and wholeness, will bring in its wake the spiritualization of the masses, consequent to the recognition of the character, and the acknowledgment of the claims, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh—the essential condition to that ultimate fusion of all races, creeds, classes, and nations which must signalize the emergence of His New World Order.

[3] *Then will the coming of age of the entire human race be proclaimed and celebrated by all the peoples and nations of the earth. [4] Then will the banner of the Most Great Peace be hoisted. [5] Then will the worldwide sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh—the Establisher of the Kingdom of the Father foretold by the Son, and anticipated by the Prophets of God before Him and after Him—be recognized, acclaimed, and firmly established. [6] Then will a world civilization be born, flourish, and perpetuate itself, a civilization with a fullness of life such as the world has never seen nor can as yet conceive. [7] Then will the Everlasting Covenant be fulfilled in its completeness. [8] Then will the promise enshrined in all the Books of God be redeemed, and all the prophecies uttered by the Prophets of old come to pass, and the vision of seers and poets be realized. [9] Then will the planet, galvanized through the universal belief of its dwellers in one God, and their allegiance to one common Revelation, mirror, within the limitations imposed upon it, the effulgent glories of the sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh, shining in the plenitude of its splendor in the Abhá Paradise, and be made the footstool of His Throne on high, and acclaimed as the earthly heaven, capable of fulfilling that ineffable destiny fixed for it, from time immemorial, by the love and wisdom of its Creator.*⁵⁸

The above passage gives a sequential overview of a long period in humanity's present and future history that outlines the momentous steps that will lead from the Lesser to the Most Great Peace. The passage may be viewed as a teleological chain of events in which each link, once secured, creates the possibility for the forging of the next link. The passage should be read with a cause-effect, dependent or conditional relationship in mind. Two momentous steps occur as a result of the establishment of the Lesser Peace. Although gradually attained, these steps will ultimately produce massive

shifts in human consciousness and world conditions. The first is “*the universal recognition*” of “*the oneness and wholeness*” of humanity. The second, consequent to the first, step is “*the reconstruction of mankind.*” This last phrase suggests the gradual restoration of the world’s economies, infrastructure, and environment through the unconscious application of Bahá’u’lláh’s world polity, which, as outlined by Christopher Buck, “overleapt Islamic boundaries” and is associated mainly with a Western worldview. In Buck’s understanding, some of these teachings and policies are “the critique of civilization and the prophecy on nuclear weapons,” “global disarmament and collective security,” “universal language,” and “agrarian reform.”⁵⁹ These points are implied by sentences [1] and [2].

In sentence [2], it is important to understand the steps in their proper sequence. Although one could easily imagine that “*the spiritualization of the masses*” would result from the universal recognition of humanity’s oneness and global reconstruction, Shoghi Effendi points rather to “*the recognition of the character, and the acknowledgment of the claims, of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh*” as being “*consequent to*” such a process of mass spiritualization (emphasis added). In other words, the spiritualization of the masses has a specifically religious character, since it results from the recognition of Bahá’u’lláh, His claims, and His teachings. This spiritualization of the masses would not appear to result from any purely secular effect deriving from a humanistic belief in a common, human solidarity. It suggests a massive, intrinsically religious shift in consciousness that will result in the spiritual regeneration of the individual and society. Still, in sentence [2] the Guardian hints at a more explicit meaning of the somewhat vaguely understood phrase “New World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.” He indicates that the recognition of Bahá’u’lláh is “*the essential condition to that ultimate fusion of all races, creeds, classes, and nations which must signalize the emergence of His New World Order.*” This is a succinct description of the New World Order as it reaches its maturation point and comes to that full bloom that was originally generated from the seed of God’s Holy Word. This late stage development of the New World Order is the *ne plus ultra* of human social and spiritual development on earth.

In sentences [3] to [9], Shoghi Effendi marks the passage to the establishment of a new world civilization. This long-awaited Golden Age is intoned as a hymn of praise that promises a fullness of life that the world has never known, nor “*can as yet conceive,*” in which all the material and spiritual forces of life converge in the creation of the Kingdom of God on

earth. Of the establishment of this System, Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure."⁶⁰

What is less clear in sentences [3] to [9] is the Guardian's repeated use of the word "*Then*" to depict the coming changes in world conditions. "Then" may be read two ways: (a) as an adverb of time signifying "at that time"; or (b) meaning "as a consequence." If it means "as a consequence,"—and this is the more plausible interpretation—each of these futuristic states would have to be read sequentially. But whatever the niceties of interpretation may be, the end-result is the same. The Guardian's anthem to a united planet, "*made the footstool of His Throne on high*" redounds all at once with celebration, proclamation, and the fulfillment of prophecy. Once the last prophecy that has inspired this passage has been fulfilled, the moving arrow of history will have at last found its target and come to rest. Then the ancient vision of prophets and seers of a heaven on earth will have been fully attained. The Nine Sentences of the Most Great Peace furnish the glimpse of the rising curtain on the last act in the divine drama of human history: "For the essence of the dramatic experience is the fascination with the progress of clashing forces toward resolution."⁶¹ Otto Reinert's remarks are directly pertinent to this passage since, in Shoghi Effendi's vision, the once clashing forces of civilization are moving toward the final resolution of "*the features of this moving drama.*"⁶²

While the future conditions leading to the creation of the New World Civilization are remarkably clear and sure in their outline, they are not accompanied by any ambitious attempt to fully describe all the steps along the checkered path that will lead to "*the Great Age, the consummation of all ages, which must signalize the coming of age of the entire human race. . . .*"⁶³ For the Guardian writes, "*Mysteriously, slowly, resistlessly God accomplishes His design, though the sight that meets our eyes in this day be the spectacle of a world hopelessly entangled in its own meshes. . . .*"⁶⁴ He says further, "*God's purpose is none other than to usher in, in ways He alone can bring about, and the full significance of which He alone can fathom, the Great, the Golden Age of a long-divided, a long-afflicted humanity. Its present state, indeed even its immediate future, is dark, distressingly dark. Its distant future, however, is radiant, gloriously radiant—so radiant that no eye can visualize it.*"⁶⁵

Endnotes

1. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 75.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
3. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 3.
4. The derived meaning is the appropriate result of actions.
5. We read in St. Paul's epistle to the Galatians (6:7): "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."
6. *Under the Divine Lote Tree: Essays and Reflections*, p. 109. Taken from the essay "In Praise of Failure," pp. 108–10.
7. Deepak Chopra, *How to Know God: The Soul's Journey into the Mystery of Mysteries*, p. 52.
8. This phrase has both literal and symbolic meanings.
9. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 4.
10. Karl Shapiro, ed., *Prose Keys to Modern Poetry*, p. 227. This essay finds Poe sadly wanting, both as artist and human being.
11. Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, p. 260.
12. Along with Brahma (Creator) and Vishnu (Preserver).
13. Rita (*Rta*) is more precisely "the force of order which correlated the cosmic and the human," Louis Renou, ed., *Hinduism*, p. 7.
14. Bahá'u'lláh's various tablets to the kings and rulers of His day are now published in a fuller translation by the Universal House of Justice as *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*.
15. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 44.
16. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 111.
17. From the preface to the 1961 edition, p. ix.
18. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, pp. 16–17.
19. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 102.
20. Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, p. 260.
21. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 7.
22. T. R. Wright, *Theology and Literature*, pp. 4–5.
23. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 124.
24. Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 41.
25. According to O'Dea, however, Levy-Bruhl was correct regarding "la participation mystique" of both tellers and listeners of the myth (*The Sociology of Religion*, p. 41).
26. Cassirer's most properly philosophical work was his *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, but his most popular books were *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (1944) and *The Myth of the State*.
27. Quoted by O'Dea in *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 42 (from Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, pp. 102–3).
28. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Truth in Myths," p. 117ff.

The Promised Day Is Come

29. From an e-mail exchange with this author on the nature of myth as it applies to the Bahá'í Faith, 7 and 8 July 2002.
30. *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, p. ix.
31. H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, p. 166.
32. "The Olympians and the Heroes" in Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1., p. 266.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., p. 267.
35. In the *Lawh-i-Hikmat* Bahá'u'lláh revealed: "That which hath been in existence had existed before, but not in the form thou seest today. The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different"(*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 140). For an excellent introduction to this topic, see Keven Brown's "A Bahá'í Perspective on the Origin of Matter," pp. 15–44.
36. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 16. The phrase "a new race of men" does not appear textually in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, but it is consistent with the interpretation of the Guardian of the kind of human race that Bahá'u'lláh envisions for the future.
37. A phrase used by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Gleanings* and the *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.
38. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 124.
39. Ibid., p. 123.
40. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 70.
41. Ibid.
42. See, for example, 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:9; Ps. 110:2; Is. 10:24; 1 Cor. 4:21; Rev. 2:27.
43. Actually, St. Paul never spoke of the resurrection of the "flesh" but of the *soma* (body). The exact nature of this body is a matter of debate, but Paul does say about the resurrection of the dead that, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15: 44) and also that "God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him. . . ." (v. 38).
44. Isidore Epstein, *Judaism: A Historical Presentation*, p. 201.
45. John Welwood, *Journey of the Heart: Intimate Relationship and the Path of Love*, p. 76.
46. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 123.
47. Ibid., p. 117.
48. This phrase alludes to the offering of the Jewish paschal lamb and is used by St. Peter in speaking of the redemptive role of Christ: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter: 18–19).
49. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 115.
50. Matthew (27:34) says the drink is vinegar "mingled with gall" but says "he would not drink." Luke (23:36) says simply the drink is vinegar, having Roman soldiers offer it in a mocking gesture. John (19:29) says it is a "spunge with vinegar...put upon hyssop" but contradicts the other three evangelists by saying that Jesus "received the vinegar" (v. 30). Mark (15:23) is atypical in saying that the drink was wine mingled with the opiate myrrh but says also that "he received it not."
51. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 115.
52. Logotherapy (existential analysis) is the key principle of Viktor Frankl's "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy" according to which: (1) the search for meaning is the primary

human motivation; and (2) Suffering is a necessary component of human happiness. The human being must find meaning in suffering in order to reduce anxiety. He or she does this by becoming an active and responsible decision-maker, even if that means nothing more than choosing the appropriate inner attitude to deal with adverse outer circumstances. Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*, based on his concentration-camp experiences in Auschwitz and Dachau, has been extraordinarily successful, has sold over nine million copies worldwide, and has changed many lives.

53. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, pp. 115–16.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 123–24.
57. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 30. E-mail communication of 29 October 2003 from Nader Saeidi to this author.
58. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 123.
59. "Bahá'u'lláh as 'World Reformer'." See pp. 55–64 of Buck's article for a more detailed presentation.
60. This sentence is annexed by Shoghi Effendi in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (p. 109) to the preceding one as follows: "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed." "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure." The quotation originally appears in ¶181 of Bahá'u'lláh's *Aqdas*.
61. Otto Reinert, introduction, *Modern Drama: Nine Plays*, p. xvii.
62. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 12.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
65. *Ibid.*

4

THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE **MORAL AND SPIRITUAL PREREQUISITES FOR A CONTINENT**

The 1930s: The Productive Years

During the 1920s, the Guardian concentrated his attention on more closely defining the essentials of Bahá'í administration, which resulted in the publication of a series of letters called *Bahá'í Administration* (1928). The 1930s were the years of major writings and great translations. Between 1930 and 1937, concurrent with the composition of the seven World Order letters, Shoghi Effendi undertook several major translations. *The Hidden Words* was an early precursor of the translation of other sacred texts, the first draft having been completed in 1922¹ but revised and published a decade later in 1932. *The Book of Certitude (Kitáb-i-Íqán)* followed in 1931 with *The Dawn-Breakers (Nabíl's Narrative)* in 1932, which Dr. Alfred Martin, a "well-known scholar and humanitarian," eulogized as "a classic and a standard for all time to come."² The *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh* appeared in 1938; *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* in 1939. The subject of this chapter, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, appeared in the same year, only one year later than the *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*. This letter was the longest thus far penned by Shoghi Effendi; it was written during a year's sojourn in Europe "owing to terrorist activities in Palestine."³

Sandra Hutchison, in her insightful article, "Shoghi Effendi and the American Dream" (1997),⁴ succinctly describes the scope and import of this letter:

The Advent of Divine Justice occupies a unique place in Shoghi Effendi's correspondence with the American Bahá'ís during the turbulent years leading up to World War II. Not only does it contain a detailed description of the mission of the American Bahá'í community in establishing the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh and of the probable role of the American nation in future world affairs, the letter offers a critique of the moral life of modern-day America and unveils, for the first time

in Shoghi Effendi's works, what could be described as a systematic Bahá'í code of ethics, universal in its possible application but designed to renovate individual and community life in America and to lend a fresh impulse to the dream embedded in the nation's beginnings.⁵

The Title: Allusions to Messianic Fulfillment

A title is particularly important because it identifies a book, attracts first notice, and suggests a theme or orientation. The titles of Shoghi Effendi's books are dramatic and telling. As Rúhíyyih Rabbaní has indicated, the Guardian's editor Horace Holley titled many of Shoghi Effendi's general letters to the West and inserted subtitles throughout the text, picking up the Guardian's phrases that were most descriptive of the general subject.⁶ If Horace Holley did in fact choose the title, he correctly selected the book's grand theme, since divine justice is the standard by which the North American believers were expected to order their lives and achieve the goals of the First Seven Year Plan (1937–1944) and beyond.

Five instances of the phrase "*divine justice*" occur in this extended letter, but it is only in the title that the complete phrase "*the advent of divine justice*" is found. Although I have not been able to find this phrase in the published English-language translations of the sacred writings of Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it can be found in the writings of the Báb in the following apocalyptic proclamation: "These are the appointed days which ye have been yearningly awaiting in the past—the days of the advent of divine justice. Render ye thanks unto God, O ye concourse of believers."⁷ For Western readers of Judeo-Christian background, the title alludes to messianic fulfillment and justice, the preeminent virtue in the Bahá'í dispensation. Historically, the Advent is, of course, associated with the annunciation of Christ's birth, as well as with the Millennium or Second Coming. While the title retains the allusion to the coming of a savior, the effect is indirect. Instead, the reign of divine justice itself is proclaimed, but it requires little reflection to realize that Bahá'u'lláh is the alluded to harbinger of the Divine Justice.

Teaching the Bahá'í Faith: Rectitude of Conduct and Moral, Social, and Racial Issues

Essential Requirements for Teaching

Whether it is a question of his authoritative interpretations, letters to individuals, or the larger core works in which his views are expounded, the Guardian's epistolary was based on a close reading of Bahá'í sacred scripture

to which he closely adhered in both letter and spirit. *The Advent of Divine Justice* was written for the immediate purpose of the execution of the First Seven Year Plan (1937–1944), which was followed closely by the Second Seven Year Plan (1946–1953). In reality, the challenging holiness code he laid down and its pointed teaching instructions are valid for all Plans and Ages of the Bahá'í dispensation. The First and Second Seven Year Plans inaugurated the first in the series of teaching plans intended to fulfill 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, as outlined in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan, Revealed to the Bahá'ís of North America in 1916–1917*.

Teaching the Bahá'í Faith, as Shoghi Effendi envisioned it, was not an impersonal or formal activity in which a knowledgeable teacher simply transmitted things previously unknown to the student/seeker. It was a type of ethos that was (is) intimately connected to the moral fiber of each individual Bahá'í and to the entire fabric of the community's social, spiritual, and institutional life. He drew attention to the “*essential requirements*” of teaching in the following passage. The Guardian felt that it was his “*duty*” to draw attention to and remedy “*deficiencies*” that were hindering the Bahá'ís in the execution of the teaching mandate handed down by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

*Surveying as a whole the most pressing needs of this community, attempting to estimate the more serious deficiencies by which it is being handicapped in the discharge of its task, and ever bearing in mind the nature of that still greater task with which it will be forced to wrestle in the future, I feel it my duty to lay special stress upon, and draw the special and urgent attention of the entire body of the American believers, be they young or old, white or colored, teachers or administrators, veterans or newcomers, to what I firmly believe are the essential requirements for the success of the tasks which are now claiming their undivided attention.*⁸

His remedy came in the setting out of some key social and moral imperatives that needed urgent and on-going attention. He emphasized, however, that these requirements must not neglect the spiritual dimension. These, “*the imponderable, the spiritual, factors, which are bound up with their own individual and inner lives, and with which are associated their human and social relationships, are no less urgent and vital, and demand constant scrutiny, continual self-examination and heart-searching on their part, lest their value be impaired or their vital necessity be obscured or forgotten.*”⁹

The Three Spiritual Prerequisites

These moral, spiritual, and social requirements are concisely expressed in the following three points: “*These requirements are none other than a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color.*”¹⁰ The essentials of “*moral rectitude,*” “*absolute chastity,*” and “*complete freedom from prejudice*” are further defined as “*spiritual prerequisites*” that are “*preeminent and vital.*”¹¹ Along with the succinct exposition of teaching methods that he was to elucidate, they constitute the pith and heart of his message. All three domains (spiritual, moral, and social) are inextricably connected. Unlike contemporary secular society, the social and moral issues addressed by the Guardian cannot be dissociated from their spiritual core, “*the imponderable, the spiritual factors.*”

As mentioned, Shoghi Effendi’s dilations on these three essential requirements are not the ratiocinations of a moral philosopher. They belong to an action-oriented, ethical pragmatist who envisions their practical demonstration in the art of teaching the Bahá’í Faith and living the Bahá’í life. As our author elucidates these three essential requirements, the reader is afforded the opportunity of observing the appointed interpreter exercising one of the duties of sacred office in exemplary fashion—that of applying the precepts of the Bahá’í sacred writings to a contemporary North American context.

“Rectitude of Conduct”

The Guardian’s moral definitions make him a clear exception to the statement of Canadian author Antanas Sileika that “[w]e don’t have leaders of morality in religious terms any more.”¹² Sileika’s comment reflects the general skepticism that has resulted from the failed behavior of certain clerics or religious leaders, or those who profess to be religious. But regrettably, not just the religious have had a demoralizing influence. Too many elected or appointed officials, those who occupy positions of public trust, have time and again betrayed that trust. This widespread moral laxity on the part of those who should be acting as role models has resulted in such a notion as the “*rectitude of conduct*” being denigrated or dismissed as being impractical, naïve, or idealistic. Shoghi Effendi, however, unabashedly places this challenge before the North American Bahá’í community in the confident hope and trust that the great spiritual capacity of North Americans, lauded by ‘Abdul-Bahá,¹³ will enable them to rise above the common level.

It is perhaps noteworthy that Shoghi Effendi did not use the more overtly religious or scriptural word *righteousness* instead of “*rectitude of conduct*.” Righteousness is a word that figures predominantly in the Hebrew Bible (Heb. *tsediqah*). Readers might have construed the word *righteousness* as being archaic or applying to the conduct of biblical figures and hence anachronistic or unattainable. The Guardian’s more contemporary-sounding “*rectitude*” confronts the believer with the more realistic goal of the humanly attainable.

The phrases “*moral rectitude*” or “*rectitude of conduct*” are strongly suggestive of what is most sound, admirable, or respectable in human relations. They suggest a stable core of virtues sometimes referred to generically as “traditional values.” These key values could be summarized by the word *probity* (tested virtue) and would include trustworthiness, truthfulness, honesty, integrity, efficiency, and reliability—in short, irreproachable conduct in all business, professional, or personal dealings. By employing these phrases, Shoghi Effendi is calling upon what is integral and commendable in the conduct of both the individual and civil society. The phrase “*rectitude of conduct*” carries, moreover, a hidden implication that ties it to the notion of obedience. The word *rectitude* (Lat. *rectitudo* > *rectus*, straight, right) connotes conformity to a standard of morality or conduct. The Guardian’s use of the word is consequently both precise and apropos, since it suggests conformity to the Bahá’í moral code.

Sexual Morality

“*Absolute chastity*” is the second feature of Shoghi Effendi’s tripartite holiness code. In chapter 5, “Letters: Ethics and Spirituality,” the moral and legal distinctions of chastity will be discussed more fully, but some preliminary observations are in order here. Huston Smith (1919–), the current (2011) venerable dean of comparative studies of religion, wrote more than forty years ago that there are “four danger areas in man’s life which can cause unlimited trouble if they get out of hand: force, wealth, sex and the spoken word.”¹⁴ Unlike animals that are regulated by “periodicity,” the sex drive can easily become an “obsessive force” in the human being. Regulation of social behavior is necessary, writes Smith, for the perpetuation of society itself. Those societies that do not regulate these four areas “do not stay around long enough to be observed.” Each society, each individual, whether “Parisian” or “Bongolander” must “regulate his appetites in some way if society is to continue.”¹⁵ The Bahá’í Faith, like all the world’s great religions, has its own particular teachings on sexual conduct. Each of the great world’s religions, for the most part, shares a common sexuality morality with the

others. This common sexual morality usually prescribes: (1) chastity before marriage; (2) fidelity during marriage; and (3) heterosexual conduct.

Let us examine more closely some of these teachings, beginning in reverse order. Bahá'u'lláh has revealed in his Book of Laws, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (*The Most Holy Book*): “Ye have been forbidden to commit murder or adultery, or to engage in backbiting or calumny; shun ye, then, what hath been prohibited in the holy Books and Tablets.”¹⁶ Homosexuality, called by its biblical name “sodomy” in *Questions and Answers* (n. 49), a supplement to *The Most Holy Book*, and by the same name in *Notes* (n. 134), is listed as one of thirty-two prohibitions (no. xviii) in *Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Paragraph 107 of the *Aqdas* reads: “We shrink, for very shame, from treating of the subject of boys. Fear ye the Merciful, O peoples of the world! Commit not that which is forbidden you in Our Holy Tablet, and be not of those who rove distractedly in the wilderness of their desires.” Shoghi Effendi interpreted this passage as a “prohibition on all homosexual relations.”¹⁷

The Guardian’s qualifying adjective “absolute” in relation to chastity is telling. It is indicative of his refusal to relativize the Bahá’í moral standard in relation to societal norms or to accommodate the laxities of the present age. Simply put, the Guardian was a strict, uncompromising moralist. However, sexual prohibitions are by no means the only ones figuring on his ethical list. His remarks also cover what is called today “lifestyle”; they include concise pronouncements on personal deportment as well as the moral implications of the creative arts:

Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one’s carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. 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.*¹⁸

It is just as important to note in this connection that Shoghi Effendi counseled against any puritanism or asceticism. This point has been discussed further below. *Qua Guardian*, Shoghi Effendi was uncompromising in his application of the Bahá'í moral law, but in his personal interactions with the pilgrims who visited Haifa between 1922 and 1957, or who worked as his assistants, "He was a mountain and an ocean of love and tenderness and generosity."¹⁹ He practiced the sin-covering eye. According to Hand of the Cause of God, Leroy Ioas (1896–1965), who served as his assistant-secretary from 1952 to 1957, Shoghi Effendi never drew attention to an individual's shortcomings but praised all liberally, "He looked at their attributes of God. He looked at their accomplishments. He looked at their deeds. He didn't look at their shortcomings. What registered before the Guardian was what a person was offering to God and not his sins and shortcomings."²⁰ Consequently, it must not be assumed from his strict moral positions that Shoghi Effendi possessed a strong subjective sense of self-righteousness. According to Leroy Ioas, "Another one of the qualities that you found in Shoghi Effendi, which actually astonished me, was his humility. . . . You knew nothing about humility until you saw Shoghi Effendi."²¹

The objective propriety of Bahá'í standards, however, he saw as his role to promote and defend. Shoghi Effendi's written prescriptions to North Americans in the still morally conservative late 1930s clearly anticipated the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the coming of the "permissive society," the loosening of parental authority, and the decline of the family. No doubt his comments came as moral reinforcement to the vast majority of Bahá'ís who first read them. The post-World War II generation would find them much more challenging. In the opening decade of the twenty-first century, his definitive pronouncements remain as timely as this morning's newspaper or daily media reports, when used to gauge the sexual devolution that has taken place in the intervening years and which continues to degenerate at a pace that astonishes even liberals.

Other positive implications can be found in Shoghi Effendi's setting of sexual limits. By defining the areas of sexual impropriety, the Guardian's ethical list leaves room for a healthy discussion of the legitimate aspects of

sexual relations. In defining the negatives, the Guardian was in effect inviting reflection on the positives. For example, “What is the nature, value and role of healthy sexuality in human relationships?” This question was answered in a shorthand version through his secretary: “The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this very purpose that the institution of marriage has been established. The Bahá’ís do not believe in the suppression of the sex impulse but in its regulation and control.”²² And again through his secretary, he said, “The Bahá’í standard is very high, more particularly when compared with the thoroughly rotten morals of the present world. But this standard of ours will produce healthier, happier, nobler people, and induce stabler marriages. . . .”²³

Societal Ills on a Mass Scale

The various prescriptions for moral rectitude are complemented by the following three telling passages that graphically portray a panoply of societal ills. The first passage, from *The Advent of Divine Justice*, is followed by two passages in a similar vein written on 28 July 1954 and published in *Citadel of Faith*.²⁴ These passages are reproduced without commentary except to say that they underscore the necessity for moral and spiritual reformation based on the power inherent in the scriptures of a divinely revealed religion:

*A world, dimmed by the steadily dying-out light of religion, heaving with the explosive forces of a blind and triumphant nationalism; scorched with the fires of pitiless persecution, whether racial or religious; deluded by the false theories and doctrines that threaten to supplant the worship of God and the sanctification of His laws; enervated by a rampant and brutal materialism; disintegrating through the corrosive influence of moral and spiritual decadence; and enmeshed in the coils of economic anarchy and strife—such is the spectacle presented to men’s eyes, as a result of the sweeping changes which this revolutionizing Force, as yet in the initial stage of its operation, is now producing in the life of the entire planet.*²⁵

The steady and alarming deterioration in the standard of morality as exemplified by the appalling increase of crime, by political corruption in ever widening and ever higher circles, by the loosening of the sacred ties of marriage, by the inordinate craving for pleasure and diversion, and by the marked and progressive slackening of parental control, is no doubt the most

arresting and distressing aspect of the decline that has set in, and can be clearly perceived, in the fortunes of the entire nation.

*Parallel with this, and pervading all departments of life—an evil which the nation, and indeed all those within the capitalist system, though to a lesser degree, share with that state and its satellites regarded as the sworn enemies of that system—is the crass materialism, which lays excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being, forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society. It is this same cancerous materialism, born originally in Europe, carried to excess in the North American continent, contaminating the Asiatic peoples and nations, spreading its ominous tentacles to the borders of Africa, and now invading its very heart, which Bahá'u'lláh in unequivocal and emphatic language denounced in His Writings, comparing it to a devouring flame and regarding it as the chief factor in precipitating the dire ordeals and world-shaking crises that must necessarily involve the burning of cities and the spread of terror and consternation in the hearts of men.*²⁶²⁶

The Most Challenging Issue

The third point of the tripartite moral code—moral rectitude, absolute chastity, freedom from prejudice—is defined as “*complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color.*” While the Guardian’s statement takes aim at four basic types of prejudice, his main concern is with racial prejudice: “*As to racial prejudice, the corrosion of which, for well-nigh a century, has bitten into the fiber, and attacked the whole social structure of American society, it should be regarded as constituting the most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá’í community at the present stage of its evolution.*”²⁷ Employing the same candor that was typical of his pronouncements on sexual morality, and lest the American Bahá’ís be lulled into self-satisfaction or be deluded by any illusions that they were free from racial prejudice, the Guardian reminded them that this was an issue “*which the American believers are far from having satisfactorily resolved.*”²⁸ Lest they be inclined to minimize its importance in relation to other vital issues confronting them, Shoghi Effendi stated that this question was endowed “*with an urgency and importance that can not be over-estimated.*”²⁹ After stating that interracial fellowship must be practiced

by each and every Bahá'í, and cautioning them that “*a long and thorny road, beset with pitfalls, still remains untravelled*” and to “*fearlessly and determinedly*”³⁰ adopt the behavior of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as their ideal Role Model, Shoghi Effendi laid down the Bahá'í position vis-à-vis racial prejudice and discrimination in a statement that reflects, not only the social conscience of every Bahá'í but also that of every enlightened soul:

*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. The consciousness of any division or cleavage in its ranks is alien to its very purpose, principles, and ideals. Once its members have fully recognized the claim of its Author, and, by identifying themselves with its Administrative Order, accepted unreservedly the principles and laws embodied in its teachings, every differentiation of class, creed, or color must automatically be obliterated, and never be allowed, under any pretext, and however great the pressure of events or of public opinion, to reassert itself.*³¹

Then the Guardian announces the principle, far-sighted and progressive for the time, of discrimination in favor of the minority. I preface his remarks with three observations: (1) The Guardian’s statement on minorities was written a full decade before the 30 articles comprising the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights was proclaimed on 10 December 1948; (2) Some nations had, and still have, tacit or declared policies of discrimination against minorities. The last two decades have witnessed the ugly rebirth of genocide, now euphemistically called “ethnic cleansing”; and (3) No world religion prior to the Bahá'í Faith can point to such an explicit and progressive policy regarding minorities. Shoghi Effendi was paying no meagre lip-service to this ideal. It was to be actively demonstrated during Bahá'í elections:

If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favor of the minority, be it racial or otherwise. Unlike the nations and peoples of the earth, be they of the East or of the West, democratic or authoritarian, communist or capitalist, whether belonging to the Old World or the New, who either ignore, trample upon, or extirpate, the racial, religious, or political minorities within the sphere of their jurisdiction, every organized community enlisted

*under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it. So great and vital is this principle that in such circumstances, as when an equal number of ballots have been cast in an election, or where the qualifications for any office are balanced as between the various races, faiths or nationalities within the community, priority should unhesitatingly be accorded the party representing the minority, and this for no other reason except to stimulate and encourage it, and afford it an opportunity to further the interests of the community.*³²

To further contextualize the Guardian's statement—it would not have occurred to a great cross-section of Americans at the time of Shoghi Effendi's writing (1938) that there was anything at all immoral about racial prejudice and discrimination. A repressive system of enforced segregation and humiliating Jim Crow laws,³³ dedicated to the control and repression of African Americans in the South and the practice of de facto segregation in the North were still in force, although the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1933-1945) initiated some progressive policies.³⁴ Until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, discrimination and segregation were simply an accepted practice of American social life. Even for many Christians "of good conscience," racial segregation, with all its inequalities and indignities, was not considered to be a violation of Christian ethics. For large segments of so-called Christian society, racial discrimination was deemed quite respectable, as long as proper etiquette was observed in the differing treatment of the two races.

The Rejection of Puritanism

Shoghi Effendi included an important qualification that accompanied his moral definitions, without which serious misunderstandings may have arisen. True to form, he issued the following caveat, caution, or warning:

*It must be remembered, however, that the maintenance of such a high standard of moral conduct is not to be associated or confused with any form of asceticism, or of excessive and bigoted puritanism. The standard inculcated by Bahá'u'lláh seeks, under no circumstances, to deny anyone the legitimate right and privilege to derive the fullest advantage and benefit from the manifold joys, beauties, and pleasures with which the world has been so plentifully enriched by an All-Loving Creator.*³⁵

Puritanism is a religiously based repression of legitimate, healthy desires and strivings. As such, it is an unnecessary injustice toward oneself and others, a milder form of asceticism. The respected existentialist-essentialist theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965) makes a cogent observation that relates directly to the Guardian’s rejection of puritanism and to the general theme of this chapter:

Justice towards oneself in this sense decides, e.g., that the puritan form of self-control is unjust because it excludes elements of the self which have a just claim to be admitted to the general balance of strivings. Repression is injustice against oneself, and it has the consequence of all injustice: it is self-destructive because of the resistance of the elements which are excluded.³⁶

The key phrase is “because of the resistance of the elements which are excluded.” Experience has shown that the repression of elemental or creative desires, which Tillich expresses euphemistically as “strivings,” will continue to be felt, unless they are successfully sublimated. According to the wisdom in a current popular psychology saying, “resist and it shall persist.” The Puritan or ascetic must be always on guard, must constantly resist that which would further enjoyment of even the simplest pleasures of life for which the spiritual soul, ironically, may give thanks to an “*All-Loving Creator*.” Shoghi Effendi has defined the Bahá’í way as being life-affirming rather than life-denying. His positive use of such substantives as “*joys*,” “*beauties*,” and “*pleasures*” are the very things that the Puritan or ascetic would self-deny—“*the legitimate right and privilege to derive the fullest advantage and benefit from the manifold joys, beauties, and pleasures with which the world has been so plentifully enriched by an All-Loving Creator.*”³⁷

With this counsel, and as always, Shoghi Effendi was closely following both the letter and the spirit of the teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who cautioned against the throttling or killing of natural desire. This type of repression has often backfired against those who use it. He counseled instead an appreciation of beautiful things. New York lawyer and Buddhist, Myron Phelps, who visited ‘Abdul-Bahá in Haifa in December of 1902, has reported a number of ‘Abdul-Bahá’s statements on spiritual transformation, which prove to be a treasure-trove on the psychology of religion. While Phelps’s book is accurate regarding the historical events of Bahá’u’lláh’s life and Bahá’í ethical teachings, it does not give an accurate presentation of what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá taught regarding reincarnation and other metaphysical subjects that Phelps doggedly interpreted through his own

filter. But the passage in question impresses by its wisdom, insight, and authority. It is a remarkable discourse on conversion or spiritual transformation, one that relates directly to our theme:

Yet while making earnest efforts to subjugate the senses man is liable to err; his nature is very complex, and to find the true path requires wisdom. If he attacks them by indiscriminate repression, as by asceticism, worse evils will be encountered; for the effort may produce serious physical or mental disorders, perhaps insanity or death; or it may result in merely diverting the uneradicated evil tendency into some other channel where it may be even more injurious to the character; and it will in any case tend to foster selfishness, which is worse than sensuality.³⁸

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s advice did include, of course, self-discipline, but He counseled a discipline that included “the flesh, the senses, and the emotions,” the appreciation of “beautiful things” and “pleasant things”:

Self-discipline is the first aim of one who desires to live a true life. But as to this do not misunderstand me; I do not mean the discipline, widely practised in old times and even by many at the present day, which consists in mortifying the flesh and deadening the emotions. Enjoy pleasant things, look with pleasure upon beautiful things, but without clinging to them, without longing to possess them, without holding them dearer than God. The flesh, the senses, the emotions, are the instruments by which we attain to the understanding of truth. But they must be kept as instruments, and not allowed to become our masters, as they are likely to do if we fail to keep guard over them.³⁹

Then quoting Bahá’u’lláh, Shoghi Effendi reminds us “for God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him.”⁴⁰ This verse is fully concordant with a phrase found in the Book of Genesis when, after creating the various kingdoms (v. 1–25), God finally created “man in our image, after our likeness. . .” (v. 26). Then God said, “. . . And, behold, it was very *good*” (v. 31)⁴¹ (emphasis mine). The italicized word means that the rich abundance of creation itself should be gratefully acknowledged as a positive, satisfying, and wholesome gift—in other words, as pure grace.

New Dimensions in Teaching

Mid-point in his letter, under the heading, “The Teaching Requirements,” the Guardian engages the reader in an extended discussion of some fundamental

teaching methods that reveals certain new key insights related to this great preoccupation of Shoghi Effendi. These pages, along with his exposition of “*the spiritual prerequisites*” discussed above, should be regarded as the second fulcrum of this historic letter. They present a variety of themes that are of ongoing relevance to the contemporary situation of the Bahá’í community. Summarized in the following 13 points, they include: (1) The true function of the Wilmette Temple, then under construction (1938), as “*no more than an instrument for a more effective propagation of the Cause and a wider diffusion of its teachings*”; (2) The supreme importance of teaching itself, which should be regarded as “*the all-pervading concern*” of every believer; (3) Universal participation in the current Plan; (4) The irresistible power of the “*God-born Force*” that will inspire and sustain every participant in the Plan; (5) The “*sad and moving spectacle*” of a convulsed world, which must “*be exploited for the purpose of spreading far and wide the knowledge of the redemptive power of Bahá’u’lláh*”; (6) An exposition of the various deepening principles that will help to prepare teachers and pioneers to more efficiently execute their task; (7) The importance of immediate action and individual initiative in arising to serve the needs of the Plan; (8) Concrete suggestions for systematically cultivating opportunities within society for teaching the Faith; (9) Counsel on the guidance of the “*seeker*” that includes a distinction between “*the direct or indirect method of teaching*”; (10) Suggestions to the teacher and pioneer for maintaining close communication with the administrative bodies of the Faith; (11) The importance of attending Summer Schools to better prepare teachers and the necessity of “*inter-community visits*”; (12) The importance of maintaining ethnic diversity in the community; (13) A directive to the National Spiritual Assembly and its committees to bring groups up to Assembly status. Many of these principles will be familiar to readers already, but a few of these points merit further consideration.

The Admonition Against Elitism

The Guardian mentions that certain members of the community have attained positions of prominence. This is probably an allusion to the elected or appointed members of Bahá’í institutions or to individuals who have attained preeminence in the teaching field. Regarding all appointees or elected officials of the Bahá’í Faith, the gist of Shoghi Effendi’s remarks seems to be: (1) They should not view teaching as a secondary but rather as a primary duty of office; and (2) They should not allow either their position or their duties to become ends in themselves that deflect from the true purpose for which they have been elected or appointed:

A high and exalted position in the ranks of the community, conferring as it does on its holder certain privileges and prerogatives, no doubt invests him with a responsibility that he cannot honorably shirk in his duty to teach and promote the Faith of God. It may, at times, though not invariably, create greater opportunities and furnish better facilities to spread the knowledge of that Faith, and to win supporters to its institutions.⁴²

Shoghi Effendi put down the following important qualification that applies to the activities of all Bahá'í teachers and administrators. His remarks may serve as admonition against the all-too-human tendency to indulge a sense of ego or elitism. Such prominence, he qualifies, does not automatically carry with it the promise of any special spiritual influence:

It does not, however, under any circumstances, necessarily carry with it the power of exercising greater influence on the minds and hearts of those to whom that Faith is presented. How often—and the early history of the Faith in the land of its birth offers many a striking testimony—have the lowliest adherents of the Faith, unschooled and utterly inexperienced, and with no standing whatever, and in some cases devoid of intelligence, been capable of winning victories for their Cause, before which the most brilliant achievements of the learned, the wise, and the experienced have paled.⁴³

It is perhaps natural to associate prominence or position with brilliance and influence. This view, however, is based on the mistaken assumption that only high-profile individuals will perform well as Bahá'í teachers. Shoghi Effendi is reminding us that if we slip into dependence upon prominent people, which reflects an elitist-specialist mentality, then we are seriously underestimating the power with which God has invested the Bahá'í Faith. He emphasizes that the power and influence of the Bahá'í Faith is not directly proportionate to the intellectual capacity or the position of influence of its most visible members. The anecdote, fortunately a true one—and the Guardian's phrase "*How often*" indicates that there are many such anecdotes—of the illiterate blacksmith confounding the learned cleric Mírzá 'Abu'l-Fadl with a theological conundrum is the classic illustration of the point.⁴⁴ We should not forget that the unsettling question posed by a simple blacksmith was the first step in 'Abu'l-Fadl's journey to belief in Bahá'u'lláh and the remarkable accomplishments that resulted.

Universal Participation

In the Abrahamic religions, individuals called variously ministers, priests, rabbis, or mullahs, have taken specialized training to become preachers, teachers, counsellors, jurists, scholars, and ceremonial officials. One of these functions is teaching, or as it was called in the early church *didaché* (instruction/teaching), a word derived from the Greek *didaktikos*, meaning “teach” (cf. English “didactic”). Since the clerical caste has been abolished by Bahá’u’lláh, no cleric exists in the Bahá’í Faith to act as intermediary or vehicle of salvation between the believer and God. However, certain functions of the clergy of yesteryear have been taken over by the Bahá’í Faith’s elected assemblies, appointed officers, and believers at large. Teaching is one of those functions. It is scripturally incumbent upon every Bahá’í. Those who serve the Bahá’í administration must avoid two mistaken assumptions: (1) administrators alone are entitled to teach (the special-privilege theory); and (2) administrators are exempt from teaching because of administrative responsibility. Although the Guardian made it clear that the teaching requirements of the Seven Year Plan were addressed to the entire body of believers, nevertheless, he felt it necessary to issue this reminder:

*To teach the Cause of God, to proclaim its truths, to defend its interests, to demonstrate, by words as well as by deeds, its indispensability, its potency, and universality, should at no time be regarded as the exclusive concern or sole privilege of Bahá’í administrative institutions, be they Assemblies, or committees. All must participate, however humble their origin, however limited their experience, however restricted their means, however deficient their education, however pressing their cares and preoccupations, however unfavorable the environment in which they live.*⁴⁵

Teaching the Bahá’í Faith is, consequently, the unconditional duty in the life of any Bahá’í. This duty is at the same time, it should be emphasized, an inestimable privilege; it should occur regardless of any material, intellectual, or spiritual impediment. It cannot be left only to those who may be deemed to be more worthy or adept. The Guardian’s qualifications also close the gap between “*neophyte or veteran*.”⁴⁶ The teacher, moreover, must view this task as “*the all-pervading concern of his life*.”⁴⁷ The great work is that of “*universal redemption*.”⁴⁸ From this last phrase, it follows that if all are to be saved, all must teach. And it seems ironic, if not visionary, on a

continent that has now become preoccupied by the need for personal security, that the purpose of the teaching campaign to “*a fallen and sore-trying generation*” is to “*offer it that complete security which only the strongholds of their Faith can provide.*”⁴⁹ The meaning of “*complete security*” is, of course, very different from the one suggested by specially created government departments and other material means. It refers primarily to that sense of safety and well-being that comes with residing in a “*citadel of faith*” and the certain assurance of having direct knowledge of the Divine Will for the present age and the loving protection that It affords.

Exploiting the Moral and Spiritual Anxiety of Our Age

In the section dealing with teaching methods, the Guardian also depicts the emotional turmoil of our time:

*The opportunities which the turmoil of the present age presents, with all the sorrows which it evokes, the fears which it excites, the disillusionment which it produces, the perplexities which it creates, the indignation which it arouses, the revolt which it provokes, the grievances it engenders, the spirit of restless search which it awakens, must, in like manner, be exploited for the purpose of spreading far and wide the knowledge of the redemptive power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and for enlisting fresh recruits in the ever-swelling army of His followers.*⁵⁰

Shoghi Effendi has highlighted this negative psychological climate for a purpose. His purpose is not merely descriptive but rather prescriptive. The moral and psychological disturbances of contemporary society, while they are apt descriptors of the anxiety and revolt of our age, are presented with the explicit purpose of exploiting the opportunities they present: “*The opportunities which the turmoil of the present age presents. . . must, in like manner, be exploited for the purpose of spreading far and wide the knowledge of the redemptive power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. . . .*” Now *exploitation* is a word that normally carries a negative connotation. Here that connotation, i.e., taking advantage to further selfish gains or ends, is naturally not intended. The word *exploited* conveys its proper meaning of deriving benefit from a situation. The perturbations of the present age can be remedied only by the “*redemptive power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. . . .*” Shoghi Effendi unabashedly presents the moral-psychological profile of contemporary society for the purpose of offering the healing message of Bahá'u'lláh and “*for enlisting fresh recruits in the ever-swelling army of His followers.*”

Considerations of Divine Justice

Justice: The All-Encompassing Virtue

The title of Shoghi Effendi's lengthy epistle confronts the reader with what is arguably, together with unity, the most powerful virtue in the Bahá'í lexicon, one that cuts across moral, spiritual, legal, and sociopolitical categories alike. This supreme attribute was highly praised by Bahá'u'lláh: "Justice and equity are twin Guardians that watch over men." "No light can compare with the light of justice."⁵¹ The word has multiple meanings, which have only recently begun to be explored by Bahá'í scholars.⁵² It might be useful to suggest what the title does *not* imply. Divine justice is not presented by the Guardian in the form of an abstract treatise. Shoghi Effendi's personality, as evidenced both by his own writings and from statements of pilgrims and associates, suggests above all a doer, a man who was not inclined to abstract theories and speculation. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní noted her impressions of Shoghi Effendi in her diary and sometimes recorded the observations of other pilgrims: "One observer said, 'Temperamentally Shoghi Effendi is a doer, a builder, an organizer, and loathes abstractions!'"⁵³ His letters to individuals who had sought his personal guidance are practical and focus on problem-solving.

The meaning of "*the advent of divine justice*" is found in the Guardian's elaboration of the holiness code set out in the spiritual-social-moral guidance that it provides. Even though *The Advent of Divine Justice* is addressed to North Americans, it should be noted that its prescriptions are universal. These prescriptions define more closely the requirements of Bahá'í spirituality and social morality, including race relations and sexual conduct, which must be seen, not only for their own intrinsic value but also for their effects on one of the main purposes for which this letter was written—"teaching." As I have mentioned above, the Guardian was to clarify the point that teaching the Bahá'í Faith was not simply the act of presenting a message; its effectiveness was intimately tied to the moral and spiritual fiber of the individual who delivered that message and, just as importantly, to the precepts of Bahá'í moral and spiritual life exemplified in the community. One of the great insights of this letter is that the practice of moral, spiritual, and social virtues belong as much to the community—not only in its relations to the external world but also in its internal relations—as it does to the individual. Moral and spiritual realities can no longer be, if they ever were, a private affair. They are necessarily social and interactive. Justice is moral rectitude in the individual and in the community.

The Conceptual Framework of Divine Justice

In Bahá'í ethics, justice, which has been treated at length by Udo Schaefer in volume 2 (ch. 39–44) of his monumental two-volume *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture*,⁵⁴ may be analyzed under four general headings. These distinctions are necessary to provide a larger framework so as to situate a closer analysis of such a comprehensive reality that can elude by its vastness:

1. *Comprehensive Justice*. These are the various norms of justice as reflected in all Bahá'í scriptural statements. These norms contain all other definitions. Comprehensive justice is revealed in this pronouncement: “The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye.”⁵⁵
2. *The Justice of God in the World*. Justice is perceived as being God's decisive actions in the world. This corresponds to God's actions within what Shoghi Effendi called the “*Major*” and the “*Minor*” plans of God. The Major Plan of God, operating at large in the world, independently of the Bahá'í community, uses “*both the mighty and lowly as pawns in His world-shaping game, for the fulfilment of His immediate purpose and the eventual establishment of His Kingdom on earth.*”⁵⁶ The Minor Plan of God operates under Bahá'í auspices for “*the execution of the Almighty's design for the redemption of mankind.*”⁵⁷
3. *Social Justice*. Justice as a function of a just social order and a harmonious and equitable ordering of society. This concept would include the establishment of full racial equality, interracial fellowship, respect for minority rights, and limitations on extremes of wealth and poverty.
4. *Individual Justice*. Justice as a cardinal virtue as practiced by the person of “*moral rectitude.*”

Social justice (3) corresponds to Shoghi Effendi's treatment of racial equality and fellowship, while individual justice (4) corresponds to “*moral rectitude.*” Point 2, while it can be found in *The Promised Day Is Come* (1941), is also found in the Guardian's treatment of “the mission of the American Bahá'í community in establishing the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh and of the probable role of the American nation in future world affairs. . . .”⁵⁸ Point (1) concerns all expressions of justice in the Bahá'í teachings and must include *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

Older Forms of Justice are Inadequate Today

The observance of the principles of divine justice in the Bahá'í community will not, of course, ensure in the short term that justice will prevail in society at large. The high standards held up by our author are meant to serve as fundamental principles in a long process of education whereby divine justice will eventually seep into the department of individuals, saturate the moral fiber of the community, and eventually permeate the nation, its law courts, and other institutions of government.

Moderns tend to restrict their view of justice to its legal, social, or political formulations. This tendency follows Aristotle's view of justice as equal proportion, "the just claim," either in "distribution" or "retribution."⁵⁹ However, institutional justice, or justice in the state, must not be disassociated from the practice of justice by the individual. Justice in the state must have, as Plato said, its correspondence in the soul.⁶⁰ The Guardian's understanding of divine justice is more far-reaching and comprehensive than such ancient notions of being fair, such as are found in Plato's critique in *The Republic* of "giving everyone his due" (Book I), although such an understanding necessarily would be included in Bahá'u'lláh's counsel to observe *ensáf* (equity). As vital and necessary as are the practice of the ancient precepts, they prove to be inadequate for the present requirements of world citizens entering the era of global unity. This "great" and "transcendental" principle of divine justice is of such magnitude, the Guardian writes, that Bahá'u'lláh has "*made justice the only basis and the permanent foundation of His Most Great Peace, and to have proclaimed it in His Hidden Words as 'the best beloved of all things' in His sight.*"⁶¹ For, fundamental notions of justice (like justice as fairness or social contract theories) have been augmented and transcended by Shoghi Effendi's definitions of individual justice as moral rectitude, social justice as interracial equality and fellowship, and close ties between justice and unity. In sum, the manifold principles of divine justice apply to any legal or moral verdicts rendered by Bahá'í assemblies; to business, domestic, and professional life; to participation in Bahá'í elections; to the observance of the principle of non-adherence to political parties and ecclesiastical organizations; to the conduct of Bahá'í travelling teachers; to all elected bodies and appointees; to the "*uncompromising adherence*" to the principles, laws, and ordinances of the Bahá'í Faith.⁶²

Paul Tillich has observed how time-honored principles can prove to be inadequate in light of present-day requirements, thus creating situations of injustice. Shoghi Effendi would have surely agreed with Tillich that older forms of justice have proven inadequate today. Tillich wrote:

There is a complaint, as old as human laws, that laws which were adequate in the past are still in force, although inadequate in the present. They do not give the form in which creative encounters of power with power are possible and a definite power of being results. . . . Laws, governing the family structure of another period in its economic relations, may destroy families and disrupt the class unity of this period. The possibilities for such discrepancies between law and actual encounter is based on the fact that the forms which once expressed the power of being, have a tendency towards self-continuation beyond the point of their adequacy.⁶³

Tillich's ontological language of the diminishing power of old laws failing to meet modern requirements has a direct bearing on the application of justice in today's world: "But the price paid for the safety in the old form is paid in terms of injustice."⁶⁴ How true this is of the old world order's economic inequalities, which may temporarily preserve order, security, and riches for the favored few, but which are bought at the expense of racial inequality, human dignity, famine, poverty, and disease, and which perpetuate religious fanaticism and sectarianism. The modern nation-state and its continued dysfunctional recourse to warfare to resolve conflict can be used as another outstanding example of Tillich's "old form paid in terms of injustice." Countless millions of lives have been sacrificed for the old lie, so eloquently penned by the Roman poet Horace:⁶⁵ *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* ("How sweet and fitting it is to die for one's country"). Shoghi Effendi has emphatically declared the necessity of abandoning the "fetish" of nationalism and the anarchy that inevitably results from clinging to state sovereignty:

*Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.*⁶⁶

Justice and Unity: Interlocking Meanings

Any hermeneutic of divine justice must be carried out in relation to the other structures of Bahá'í belief. The sacred writings themselves attest to this interpenetration of meaning. One of these other structures is unity. Bahá'u'lláh says, for example, in the "sixth leaf" of the *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* (Words of Paradise): "The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among

men.”⁶⁷ It is clear, consequently, that these two attributes (justice and unity) share a close connection, and their contextual proximity suggests that they need to be understood together, for the one is the means of establishing the other. Thus, any discussion of justice should eventually include a consideration of its relationship to unity. Narrow definitional approaches to the interpretation of Bahá’í scripture, while useful as points of departure, must eventually include a larger hermeneutic of interlocking meanings. Bahá’u’lláh says further that “[j]ustice (*adl*) and equity (*ensáf*) are twin Guardians that watch over men. From them are revealed such blessed and perspicuous words as are the cause of the well-being of the world and the protection of the nations.”⁶⁸ This passage is representative of a number of scriptures in which Bahá’u’lláh links justice to equity.⁶⁹

Justice as the Antithesis of Oppression

Once the priority of a divine attribute is established by examining its place among the multitude of virtues found in the sacred writings, its meaning may be more clearly ascertained by reference to its polar opposite. By such a contrast, the meaning of the given attribute, which is often not explicit, becomes more apparent. One application of this hermeneutical juxtaposition of opposites would be, for example, Bahá’u’lláh’s allusion to justice as being the antithesis of despotism: “The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny.”⁷⁰ Seen in light of other similar texts, the implication is that the just ruler or just government must neither deny human beings their inalienable rights nor use excessive force. Bahá’u’lláh’s meaning in this one example, moreover, may be seen to apply to persons as well as governments. No person should coerce another, nor abuse power, especially when in a position of trust. Misusing one’s personal power or authority in order to compel a weaker or disadvantaged person for personal benefit would amount to an injustice.

Bahá’u’lláh says further to the “Rulers of America and the Presidents of the Republics therein,” “Bind ye the broken with the hands of justice, and crush the oppressor who flourisheth with the rod of the commandments of your Lord, the Ordainer, the All-Wise.”⁷¹ This teaching may be seen in the light of Shoghi Effendi’s vision of “*a world federal system, ruling the whole earth*” as “*a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice. . .*”⁷² This statement alludes to Bahá’u’lláh’s principle of collective security and makes an exception to the general rule of the curtailment of armed force in international relations. Here the use of force is justified to crush those who commit acts of outright aggression.

Justice and Forgiveness among Individuals and Nations

While an accused may appeal to the court's mercy, and while the court may show leniency given certain circumstances, the function of the tribunal is to dispense justice. For the individual, the concomitant of justice is forgiveness. Reinhold Niebuhr points out that as rare as it may be for individuals to forgive one another, it is even rarer for nations to do so. The "facts of history" somehow do not bear out "the law of love"⁷³ in international relations. Niebuhr argues that the degree of love and repentance to practice forgiveness is a virtual impossibility for nations: "Only a forgiving love, grounded in repentance, is adequate to heal the animosities between nations. But that degree of love is an impossibility for nations. It is a very rare achievement among individuals; and the mind and heart of collective man is notoriously less imaginative than that of the individual."⁷⁴ Niebuhr's pessimistic statement, understandable at the time, was made in the aftermath of two world wars. But the European belligerents of those former conflicts have since re-established friendly relations. In relatively recent Middle-Eastern history, the Camp David Accords, arbitrated by President Jimmy Carter, were signed by Egyptian President Anwar El Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin on 17 September 1978, following thirteen days of secret negotiations. They declared the Sinai to be a demilitarized zone under Egyptian control. More recently still, the Berlin Wall separating East from West Germany fell on 9 November 1989, creating a new détente between the former Soviet Union and the West. These examples show that even nations can forgive one another; they bode well for future conflict-resolution precedents.

Creative Justice: Love and Obedience

In this section, obedience in its relation to love as a form of creative justice is the focus. One form of justice discussed by Tillich is "creative justice,"⁷⁵ a concept that has a certain relevance to justice in a Bahá'í perspective. Creative justice, among its other features, is a form of spiritual power. Practicing the Bahá'í moral code creates spiritual power, "an encounter of power with power";⁷⁶ in this case, a much greater power, the Divine Manifestation, with a much lesser power, the believer. Applied to the individual, divine justice as a regenerative spiritual power centers the discussion of justice, not in matters of distribution, retribution, or proportion in law, but rather in being and in the Creator's relationship with His creatures. Bahá'u'lláh has revealed that obedience to His laws through love creates a form of mystical union between the believer and Himself, thus underscoring the positive creative, dynamic aspects of justice, rather than the legalistic:

The Tongue of My power hath, from the heaven of My omnipotent glory, addressed to My creation these words: “Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty.” Happy is the lover that hath inhaled the divine fragrance of his Best-Beloved from these words, laden with the perfume of a grace which no tongue can describe.”⁷⁷

Tillich states that “creative justice is the form of reuniting love.”⁷⁸ My reading of his statement confirms that of Bahá’u’lláh: love and unity is created between the Divine Lawgiver, and the believer, once she or he lovingly obeys the prescribed laws. Just as importantly, the distribution of creative justice applies to the divine institutions of the Bahá’í Faith through which it flows. The very name, the Universal House of Justice, the head of the Bahá’í world community, bears witness to the distributive power of justice dispensed by that same institution.

In a correlative perspective, we find that in the Hebrew Bible justice occurs when the *zedikim* (the just/righteous ones) willingly submit to the divine commands of the law in an act of loving and humble obedience.⁷⁹ In Christianity, this act of obedience is motivated by love, as found in Christ’s exhortation, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15), a statement that joins obedience to love. This passage, as well as Christ’s exhortation in John 14:15, indicate that love is a higher form of obedience than fear. Through the act obedience, motivated by love and humility, both the law and the believer are strengthened. Obedience to the divine command may seem paradoxical. Although the individual may *feel* as if personal autonomy or free choice has been sacrificed, a spiritual dynamic is released which decidedly empowers and liberates. The observance of the “*spiritual prerequisites*” brings “*manifold blessings*.” Shoghi Effendi writes:

*Upon the extent to which these basic requirements are met, and the manner in which the American believers fulfill them in their individual lives, administrative activities, and social relationships, must depend the measure of the manifold blessings which the All-Bountiful Possessor can vouchsafe to them all.*⁸⁰

Synergy⁸¹ and the American Dream

The accomplished essayist, novelist, and poet, G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), a convert to Roman Catholicism (1922),⁸² once observed that America is a nation with the soul of a church.⁸³ From the time of the early

colonists who sought religious freedom from persecution in England, belief remained strong in the captivating mythos of Puritan John Winthrop's "city set upon a hill" in which "all could see the piety of the elect."⁸⁴ The evangelical fervor of that dream has not entirely died out. Even in our time, as the authors of the sociological study *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* have observed, one can still hear echoes of the biblical language that continues to be part of "American public and political discourse." Their comment that "the churches have continuously exerted influence on public life right up to the present time,"⁸⁵ is just as true in the 2010s as it was in the 1980s.

The familiar phrase "the American dream" was prompted by the title of Sandra Hutchison's article referred to above, "Shoghi Effendi and the American Dream."⁸⁶ In her article, Hutchison elaborates on the manner in which Shoghi Effendi in *The Advent of Divine Justice* alludes to a number of cultural, historical, and even mythical themes in American history and religion, themes that have a deep resonance in the American psyche and which pertain to the "glorious destiny" of what Shoghi Effendi repeatedly referred to as the "Great Republic of the West." The scriptural seeds for the Guardian's treatment of the spiritual primacy of North America, and its future historic mission in establishing world peace and unity, and in laying the foundations for the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, are to be found in "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. . . ."⁸⁷ Among them are the following:

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. . . .⁸⁸

In addition to the fifth World Order letter, "America and the Most Great Peace," an intriguing aspect of America's present and future role in world affairs is found in the concluding section of *The Advent of Divine Justice*,

subtitled, “The Destiny of America.” These pages present a type of synergy, although somewhat mysterious in its interactions, between the American nation as a whole and the Bahá’í community that resides within its borders. This synergy may be understood as the interactions between the “*Major*” or “*over-All Plan of God*” and the “*Minor*” Plan that unfold simultaneously within the world at large and the Bahá’í community respectively. Based on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prophetic pronouncements, Shoghi Effendi unveils to the American Bahá’í community its glorious birthright that is closely allied to its historic world mission, but he is just as emphatic that the spiritual destiny prophesied by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also applies to the host nation, a nation that is still largely ignorant of the claims of Bahá’u’lláh. The mission bestowed upon the American Bahá’í community cannot help but to cast its mantle of greatness over the host nation:

*The creative energies, mysteriously generated by the first stirrings of the embryonic World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, have, as soon as released within a nation destined to become its cradle and champion, endowed that nation with the worthiness, and invested it with the powers and capacities, and equipped it spiritually, to play the part foreshadowed in these prophetic words.*⁸⁹

The Guardian goes on to mention that these same “*creative energies*” have mysteriously (“*insensibly*”) influenced both the American government and people: “*These same potencies, apart from, yet collateral with these efforts and accomplishments, are, on the other hand, insensibly shaping, under the impact of the world political and economic forces, the destiny of that nation, and are influencing the lives and actions of both its government and its people.*”⁹⁰ Consequently, the divine creative energies that have been infused into the Bahá’í community, as it labors to erect the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, have also radiated out to affect the political, social, and economic life of North America and thereby the world. Whatever doubts there may be about the nature of this synergy, or however mysterious its workings, the following passage makes Shoghi Effendi’s point clear:

*For no matter how ignorant of the Source from which those directing energies proceed, and however slow and laborious the process, it is becoming increasingly evident that the nation as a whole, whether through the agency of its government or otherwise, is gravitating, under the influence of forces that it can neither comprehend nor control, towards such associations and policies, wherein, as indicated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, her true destiny must lie.*⁹¹

The final pages of *The Advent of Divine Justice* must modify, then, the Bahá'í community's perception of itself as being the unique or sole chosen instrument in executing God's purposes for humanity today. The world political and spiritual leadership that North America will provide is a shared greatness. It is shared by the Bahá'ís with those who have not yet recognized Bahá'u'lláh and who, knowingly or unknowingly, accomplish His purposes. God's actions in contemporary history, although mediated through the instrumentality of the Bahá'í community, cannot be restricted to it alone. The Guardian's caveat to the spiritual distinction conferred upon the North America Bahá'í community is relevant to this discussion. His words mitigate against any facile belief in a chosen people:

Let not, therefore, those who are to participate so predominantly in the birth of that world civilization, which is the direct offspring of their Faith, imagine for a moment that for some mysterious purpose or by any reason of inherent excellence or special merit Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to confer upon their country and people so great and lasting a distinction.⁹²

The American nation, notwithstanding its massive corruption, a corruption roundly condemned by Shoghi Effendi as “*the demoralizing influences which a corruption-ridden political life so strikingly manifests*” and “*the deceitfulness and corruption that characterize the political life of the nation and of the parties and factions that compose it,*”⁹³ has been nonetheless ordained to occupy a station of present and future greatness in world affairs.

Centrifugal and Centripetal Motion in the Divine Plan

Just as centrifugal and centripetal forces are real according to the laws of physics, these opposite motions may be applied to the synergistic workings of the Major and Minor Plans of God. If America's spiritual destiny and divine mission with respect to world affairs are considered, the Major Plan may be understood to be acting under centrifugal force because the influence of world events taking place in the periphery, i.e., outside America, circulates toward and impinges upon the United States, drawing that country into its train. The notion of centrifugal force, which moves objects toward the center of rotation, is implicit to Shoghi Effendi's metaphors of the “*whirlwind*” of the world's passion and the “*vortex*” that draws America into ominous world events: “*The world is moving on. Its events are unfolding ominously and with bewildering rapidity. The whirlwind of its passions is swift and alarmingly violent. The New World is being insensibly drawn into*

its vortex. . .” These metaphors are couched with a fatalistic sense of the inevitability of America’s involvement in the affairs of other nations. (I mention in passing that the word *whirlwind* has clear biblical associations, since it is used figuratively in the Hebrew Bible to indicate the destruction of the wicked).⁹⁴ For the poet-artist-mystic William Blake, the vortex was the image of spiritual travel with its own complex positive-negative symbolism.⁹⁵ While the image of a whirlwind or vortex encompassing an entire nation or continent staggers the imagination, it indicates the massive scale on which Providence is simultaneously deranging and rearranging the affairs of the nations in the creation of a new world order.

In contrast, the activities in which the Bahá’í community is engaged under the Minor Plan of God manifest a centripetal tendency, i.e., movement toward the periphery. The centripetal motion of these activities can be inferred from the metaphor of the Bahá’í community acting as the “leaven” of society: “*The Community of the Most Great Name, the leaven that must leaven the lump, the chosen remnant that must survive the rolling up of the old, discredited, tottering order, and assist in the unfoldment of a new one in its stead, is standing ready, alert, clear-visioned, and resolute.*”⁹⁶ The movement of leaven is a rising action from the center to the periphery. However, the “leaven” and “chosen remnant” are subject to the degenerative influences of the American nation. Shoghi Effendi remarks that the Bahá’í community “*cannot hope, at this critical juncture in the fortunes of a struggling, perilously situated, spiritually moribund nation, to either escape the trials with which this nation is confronted, nor claim to be wholly immune from the evils that stain its character.*”⁹⁷ But spiritual morbidity also brings opportunity. While the Bahá’í community is exposed to contagion from the host culture, at the same time, unique opportunities arise for spreading the Bahá’í teachings abroad, as harassed, seeking souls find their way out of the morass of “*a morally and spiritually bankrupt society, now hovering on the brink of self-destruction.*”⁹⁸

Finally, we should not lose sight of the obvious. By virtue of its designation “*Major,*” the Plan of the same name would ostensibly have greater significance than the *Minor Plan* of God. And it is remarkable that Shoghi Effendi did not designate the various Bahá’í teaching plans as the Major Plan. That he did not do so indicates both a theological judgment and a reservation. God’s Major Plan, working unrestrainedly to its own purposes in the world at large, is just as crucial to the salvation of humanity as the Minor Plan that operates under the auspices of the Bahá’í community. This

view of the Major Plan of God mitigates against the view that divine activity in world affairs is restricted to the Bahá'í community alone. For in light of the Guardian's interpretations and following his understanding of providential history, God works in mysterious ways to accomplish His purposes. Thus, any belief in the supreme importance of the Bahá'í Plan must be maintained in conjunction with the parallel belief that the Divine Ordainer works according to His own agenda and timetable in the world at large.

The Prediction of World War II: Retreat from American Isolationism

In addition to his comments on the future greatness of North America, and the Bahá'í community living within its borders, the Guardian forecast two imminent events: World War II (which was to break out in less than a year's time from the time of his writing on 1 September 1939⁹⁹) and the retreat from American isolationism that the war necessitated. His words read now like a telegraphic message, keyed out to alert the world to the ominous dangers that were soon to engulf it:

The world is moving on. Its events are unfolding ominously and with bewildering rapidity. The whirlwind of its passions is swift and alarmingly violent. The New World is being insensibly drawn into its vortex. . . . That the world is beset with perils, that dangers are now accumulating and are actually threatening the American nation, no clear-eyed observer can possibly deny. The earth is now transformed into an armed camp. As much as fifty million men are either under arms or in reserve. No less than the sum of three billion pounds is being spent, in one year, on its armaments. The light of religion is dimmed and moral authority disintegrating. The nations of the world have, for the most part, fallen a prey to battling ideologies that threaten to disrupt the very foundations of their dearly won political unity. Agitated multitudes in these countries seethe with discontent, are armed to the teeth, are stampeded with fear, and groan beneath the yoke of tribulations engendered by political strife, racial fanaticism, national hatreds, and religious animosities.¹⁰⁰

Shoghi Effendi's prediction of World War II should not be read as a demonstration of supernatural power. The Guardian was an astute and informed observer of world events, as the details of the above text indicate. Given the proximity to the outbreak of World War II, and the world conditions that he described, hostilities were imminent. However, the insight and

apocalyptic certitude that accompanies such statements give to them an authority that surpasses educated guesswork. In retrospect, the following sentence stands out as a forewarning of the sudden Japanese air attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, which marked America's entry into the war, an attack whose overhanging danger was then keenly felt, and with good reason: "*As to the American nation itself, the voice of its own President, emphatic and clear, warns his people that a possible attack upon their country has been brought infinitely closer by the development of aircraft and by other factors.*"¹⁰¹ In light of the coming war, the Guardian accurately predicted in 1938 the American retreat from its policy of entrenched isolationism. In our day, his comments seem as relevant as ever seen in the lurid light of the post-11 September 2001 attacks in New York City, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania. Once again, America has been drawn into the vortex of world affairs:

*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.*¹⁰²

The intertwined destinies of the Bahá'í community and the American nation, although following parallel, but differently scripted lines, are God-directed. Unlike Euclidean geometric parallel lines, however, one can foresee an eventual convergence in the paths of the two communities. Although Shoghi Effendi has indicated the general leading role of the American nation and the American Bahá'í community in world affairs, the precise nature of the events that will eventually fulfill the destinies of the two communities cannot be fully discerned. The world events taking place within the Major Plan of God are always characterized by a certain ambiguity of interpretation, notwithstanding the firm belief that the Will of God in establishing a peaceful world shall ultimately prevail. As for the true destiny of America, however, Shoghi Effendi is categorical: "*Nothing, however, can alter eventually that course, ordained for it by the unerring pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.*"¹⁰³

Endnotes

1. The Guardian's close friend from their days together at the Syrian Protestant College (American University of Beirut) Ali M. Yazdi states, "Mrs. Corrine True in 1922 brought back from Haifa a copy of the manuscript " (*Blessings Beyond Measure*, p. 89).
2. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 215.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
4. "Synergy and the American Dream," pp. 13–23.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
6. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, pp. 204–5.
7. The Báb, *Selections From the Writings of the Báb*, p. 161.
8. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 21.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Sileika made this comment during broadcaster-journalist Evan Solomon's television program, "Hot Type," on a panel of Canadian writers addressing issues of morality in literature (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 10 November 1996).
13. "Likewise, 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" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 62).
14. The context was defining meaning in morality in Judaism (Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, p. 270).
15. *Ibid.*, p. 271.
16. ¶19.
17. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, n. 134.
18. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 30.
19. From a tape-recorded talk given in Johannesburg, South Africa, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Quigley on 31 October 1958. Thanks to Anita Ioas Chapman, daughter of Leroy Ioas and author of *Leroy Ioas. Hand of the Cause of God* for supplying this information (letter to this author, 31 January 2000).
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. From a letter dated 5 September 1938, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, *A Chaste and Holy Life*, p. 56.
23. From a letter dated 19 October 1947, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, *ibid.*, p. 49.
24. This is the letter entitled by the editor as "American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril," pp. 122–32.
25. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 47.

26. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, pp. 124–25.
27. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 33–34.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Jim Crow was a character in a minstrel show of the 1830s, a tired, crippled old slave who portrayed many negative stereotypes of African Americans.
34. To fully appreciate Shoghi Effendi’s policy, it is helpful to remember that in the 1930s, civil equality, holding public office, and political power were still a generation away. However, under the Roosevelt administration (1933–1945), federal jobs were opened to African Americans, and Roosevelt appointed judges to the U.S. Supreme Court who favored their rights. Although sporadic protests against discrimination had begun in the North, segregation reigned supreme in the South. The Ku Klux Klan remained less active during the Great Depression of the 1930s and had shrunk to some few thousand members from its heyday in the 1920s, when it could boast some three million members, but it continued to threaten African Americans if they tried to exercise their right to vote.
35. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 33.
36. Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications*, p. 70.
37. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 33.
38. Myron H. Phelps, *The Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*; see pp. 159–64 for this *magna carta* of spiritual transformation.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 33.
41. There is clearly a weight of value expressed in the creation of male and female, for this creation was “very good”; whereas, the creation of the previous kingdoms is expressed as being merely “good.”
42. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 45.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.
44. For the story of the conversion of the learned Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl, see Taherzaedeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, vol. 3, especially pp. 93–94.
45. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 45.
46. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, p. 162.
47. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 53.
48. In addition to “universal redemption,” the Guardian refers to “redemptive power,” “the appointed time,” “specific mission,” and “crusade.”
49. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 48.
50. *Ibid.*
51. Shoghi Effendi, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 14, 28.
52. For a broader discussion of the implications of divine justice, see the series of articles in Charles O. Lerche, ed., *Toward the Most Great Justice: Elements of Justice in the New World Order*.
53. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 81.
54. Udo Schaefer’s valuable work, published in 2009, came to my attention long after my

book draft was completed. Unfortunately, circumstances were such that while my book was being readied for publication, I could not incorporate the results of Schaefer's research on justice into this section. The discussion of justice above follows my own cursory analysis, but I highly recommend his in-depth analysis of one of the most fundamental virtues in the Bahá'í lexicon.

55. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 157.
56. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 140.
57. *Ibid.*
58. See Hutchison, n. 4.
59. Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice*, p. 9.
60. In Plato's view, the three social functions of justice in the state (government, executive, productive) must have their correspondences in the faculties of instinct, reason, and the "spiritual" element (see *The Republic*, "The Three Parts of the Soul," chapter 13).
61. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 29.
62. Summarized from *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 26–27.
63. Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice*, pp. 57–58.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
65. Quintus Horatius Flaccus (8 December 65–27 November 8 BCE). Horace received an aristocrat's education, served briefly in the army and the Roman civil service but later under the patronage of Maecenas and Augustus lived the quiet life of a writer, dividing his time between Rome and a farm in the Sabine Hills. His main works are the *Odes*, *Carmen Saeculare*, the *Epistles*, the *Satires*, and *Ars Poetica*.
66. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 202.
67. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 67.
68. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 13.
69. See, for example, Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 20, 23, 28, 71, 76, 78, 111, 125, 131, 143.
70. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 66–67.
71. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶88.
72. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 204.
73. The phrases are from Paul Ramsey's essay, "Reinhold Niebuhr: Christian Love and Natural Law." "By measuring the facts of history against the law of love, Niebuhr arrives at his 'relevant impossibility'" (Paul Ramsey, *Nine Modern Moralists*, p. 137).
74. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, pp. 128–29, quoted in Ramsey, *Nine Modern Moralists*, p. 137.
75. Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice*, p. 64.
76. *Ibid.*
77. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶4, p. 20.
78. Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice*, p. 64.
79. Steven S. Schwarzchild, "Justice" in Geoffrey Wigoder, ed., *Jewish Values*, p. 194.
80. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 22.
81. The word *synergy* is defined broadly here as a process of interaction that enhances the collective benefits of the participants. In this case, it refers both to the spiritual destiny of the American nation and the American Bahá'í community.
82. After his conversion, Chesterton proved himself to be an accomplished apologist for Roman Catholicism with such works as *St. Francis of Assisi* (1923), *The Everlasting Man* (1925), *Catholic Essays* (1929), and *St. Thomas Aquinas* (1933). From 1911 to

- 1935, Chesterton wrote the popular Father Brown detective stories.
83. Reported by Stanley Hauerwas, professor of theological ethics at Duke University Divinity School. Source not given. “No, This War Would Not Be Moral,” *Time*, 3 March 2003, p. 29.
84. The phrase was contained in Winthrop’s 1630 sermon “to the Puritans who would found the Massachusetts Bay Colony” (cited in Hutchison, “Shoghi Effendi and the American Dream,” p. 14, n. 2).
85. Robert N. Bellah et al., eds., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, p. 220.
86. “Synergy and the American Dream,” pp. 13–23.
87. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 85.
88. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 85–86.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
90. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 86.
91. *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
93. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 23, 41.
94. See for example Ps. 58:9; Prov. 1:27, 10:25; Isa. 41:16. The exception to this trend would be Elijah’s ascension into heaven in a whirlwind in the presence of Elisha (2 Kings, 2:11). Some scholars think that the correct translation should be “tempest” or “storm,” since a violent wind revolving on its own axis is not necessarily indicated.
95. William Blake, *Milton*, p. 151.
96. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, p. 14.
97. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 127.
98. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, p. 120.
99. The date of Hitler’s invasion of Poland.
100. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 87–88.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
102. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 87–88.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

5

LETTERS: ETHICS AND SPIRITUALITY, VIRTUE IN STRIVING

Religion blushing veils her sacred fires/And unawares
Morality expires.

—Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad* (1728)

Ethics and Morality

This chapter reflects on the precepts¹ found mainly in the letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi. It must always be borne in mind that in any theoretical discussion of morality, the purpose of better understanding is better practice. *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1939) cannot, of course, be ignored in any treatment of morality, but this critical letter has already been considered separately in chapter 4. The terms *ethics* and *morality* will be used throughout this chapter. What is the distinction between these two terms? In his paper, “The Future of Ethics,” philosophy professor Peter Edwards explained:

‘Ethics’ is generally speaking concerned with those standards of behaviour that authorise attitudes of admiration and condemnation, respect and disdain. These standards may apply throughout a whole society, comprise a code of honour or apply to the professional practices of a particular group. *Moralis*, the Latin origin of the word *moral*, was coined by Cicero in order to translate the Greek word *ethos* (custom, habit), and derives from *mos*, *mores* meaning custom(s).²

The existence of the two terms in English, *ethics* and *morals*, derives basically from their two source languages without significant differentiation in meaning. Ethicist William K. Frankena wrote that sometimes ethics “is used as just another word for ‘morality’, and sometimes to refer to the moral code or normative theory of an individual group. . . .”³ In this chapter both *ethics* and *morality* will be used interchangeably without pretence to

fine distinctions, except that morality points more directly to the practice of the Bahá'í moral code, while ethics suggests something more theoretical, as in a philosophical approach to morality. Both *ethos* and *moralis* point to the practical aspects of human behavior, i.e., how human beings actually behave, usually following some habitual pattern. Just as importantly—and this applies especially to our author's writings—ethics indicates how human beings should behave, as does morality.

Ethical theory suggests that ideally morality is a question of habit and, to be sure, Aristotle taught in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,⁴ also called simply the *Ethics*, that virtue cannot exist other than through practice, i.e., something habitual. In book 2, chapter 2, Aristotle said, “For the object of our enquiry is not to know the nature of virtue but to become ourselves virtuous, as that is the sole benefit which it conveys. It is necessary therefore to consider the right way of performing actions, for it is actions as we have said that determine the character of the resulting moral states.”

In the writings of philosophers, theories of higher ethics were developed, and the terms *moral philosophy* and *philosophical ethics* came to be used interchangeably. Ethics or moral theories arose because, as Edwards points out, “[o]ur attitudes and evaluations need to be explained and justified.”⁵ In Shoghi Effendi's case, there is much prescription but less justification, although it is by no means entirely absent. Where such theories are text-based in the Bahá'í sacred writings, it would be correct to speak of theological ethics. Ethics and moral theory examine the constituents of virtue and vice and why the one is recommended and the other proscribed. Other questions arise. Why is being virtuous a good thing and following evil a bad thing? Which virtues should be practiced, and which are the vices to be avoided? Why, for example, is it important for a Bahá'í to practice “*moral rectitude*,” and why are there such severe prohibitions against Covenant-breaking? Why does it represent such a danger for the life of the individual soul, and for community unity and the life of the Faith itself? Why does ‘Abdu'l-Bahá attach such importance to truthfulness as “the foundation of all the virtues of the world of humanity”?⁶ These are all questions that would eventually be answered by a fuller treatment of Bahá'í ethics.

The Bahá'í view of ethics would be quite concordant with a certain Christian one, as expressed by James Luther Adams, former professor of Religious Ethics at the University of Chicago and Harvard Divinity School, as “faith seeking understanding in the realm of moral action. . . .”⁷ One of the theoretical aspects of Bahá'í ethics or moral philosophy would need to

explore morality's connections with religion. The interdependent relationship that the Bahá'í Faith sees as existing between morality and religion, with religion being the source of effective morality, is mirrored in Alexander Pope's lines from book 4 of *The Dunciad*,⁸ quoted in the epigraph of this chapter, a position not surprising perhaps for a poet born into a pious family who were members of the Roman Catholic English gentry.

Morality and Spirituality in the Letters of Shoghi Effendi

Morality and spirituality, as taught in Bahá'í scripture and the writings of Shoghi Effendi, include individual, institutional, and community aspects. As was stated, ethics and spirituality, that is, ethics and religion, are inextricably linked for a Bahá'í, a connection that is not immediately apparent in studies on New Age spirituality. Despite Gordon Melton's affirmation that one of the characteristics of the New Age is its "primal experience of transformation," there is no serious treatment of New Age ethics or morality in *Perspectives on the New Age*. It would seem that ethical transformation, or moral considerations, do not figure into spirituality for New Agers.⁹

The Guardian regarded the Bahá'í moral code, and its spiritual principles, as having a direct effect, not only on the life of the soul and individual conduct but also on the effective prosecution of the teaching work, the success of which depended greatly upon the dynamic force of individual example. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, a book that is eminently, though not exclusively, suited to a North American context, sets out the "*spiritual prerequisites*"¹⁰ for teaching, prerequisites that have been considered in the previous chapter. This letter clearly identifies the objective requirements of moral, spiritual, and social life that must be practiced by both the individual and community to enable the Bahá'ís to act as "*the leaven that must leaven the lump*":¹¹ "The Bahá'ís are the leaven of God, which must leaven the lump of their nation."¹²

The letters to individuals and to Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, together with his extended letters, are principal sources of his views on moral and spiritual life. His letters to individuals, while brief, are indispensable to understanding Shoghi Effendi's authoritative interpretations of Bahá'í morality. As can be seen from even a cursory examination of Helen Bassett Hornby's invaluable compilation *Lights of Guidance*, these answers constitute a basic moral code that provides guidance to the many questions submitted by the individuals and Bahá'í institutions who sought his guidance. The answers cover such wide-ranging topics as family life, the education of children, sexual morality, mental illness, Covenant-breaking, death, burial

and the afterlife, suicide, education, mental illness, drugs, alcohol and tobacco, crime and punishment, gambling, the laws of marriage, divorce, military service, peace, prayer and meditation, psychic phenomena, race relations, spirituality, social and economic development, personal tests and difficulties, the work ethic, youth, and the equality of men and women.

The Guardian's clear and incisive instructions, his authoritative rulings, warm encouragement, and hearty exhortations, when read jointly with Bahá'í sacred scripture, enable his readers to formulate a clearer understanding of those laws and principles that constitute Bahá'í ethics. These letters assist the reader to more clearly understand the manifold requirements of the Bahá'í life, a life that is continually beset with tests and difficulties, and constant moral and spiritual challenges, one that is often rendered more complex by human weakness and frailty, which may hinder the ability to follow the guidance already at hand.

These concise interpretations are a living seedbed and call for more profound and systematic reflection. The many and varied responses cut to the quick to provide concrete guidance that proves more immediately helpful than would tomes of abstract treatises on moral philosophy/spirituality or "how to" manuals. These letters are scripted with the "real world" in mind and with a direct view to overcoming those obstacles that individuals, local, and national communities must face while engaged in the business of daily life and/or while serving the Administrative Order.

Shoghi Effendi's Writings as a Talking Mirror of Conscience

Although it would be stretching the point to speak of a "system" in the Guardian's moral and spiritual guidance, his letters nonetheless contain a coherent body of moral definitions and spiritual prescriptions. Rúhíyyih Rabbání makes a perceptive comment that applies variously to Shoghi Effendi's personal comments to pilgrims, to his shorter letters to individuals or institutions, or to the extended letters that have become his core works. She described the Guardian as possessing an acute, intuitive sense that acted as a register or spiritual barometer for individuals, the Bahá'í community, and the nation alike, a sense that was "far deeper than intelligence or any outward information he may have. . . ."¹³ This finely tuned sensitivity, which she compared to the "tuning fork of the teachings," she went on to say, "registers the state of the individual, registers things even the individual may not be aware of."¹⁴ This mysterious spiritual barometer or sixth sense, which his wife observed frequently during her twenty-year working partnership with the Guardian, occasioned another comment: "We might well ask ourselves if this [ability]

should not always be our guide and whether, if we read his writings carefully we cannot find there the indications of our individual, our national and racial shortcomings and be warned and guided accordingly.”¹⁵

The writings of Shoghi Effendi may be read, consequently, as a “talking mirror of conscience” for the conduct of individuals, institutions, governments, races, and nations. Like a divine oracle that has come to life in the Modern Age, sounding its message from within a sacred precinct, the Guardian’s writings, although they are liberal in their praise, also challenge the individual to overcome character flaws and weaknesses. Although his eye was sin-covering regarding the conduct of the individuals who worked under his direct supervision, unless it became a threat to Bahá’í unity, his exposure of any weaknesses in the individual or national character was ultimately intended, not only to allow the individual to lead a more balanced, purposeful, and happy life but also to remove the weaknesses in personal conduct that adversely affected the execution of the teaching plans of which he was the chief architect. For it is clear that the Bahá’í Faith cannot implant itself in the minds and hearts of seekers unless its adherents exemplify the ethical and spiritual virtues that it espouses.

It would be too hasty to conclude from the imposing of high moral standards and challenging expectations that Shoghi Effendi was too demanding, unrealistic, or harsh. One should read his exposure of the weaknesses in the individual or national character as being therapeutic and responsible; viz., one cannot remedy that which is not available to consciousness and fully recognized. The long process of individual spiritual transformation and moral or national reformation requires that one must first identify what must be erased before it can be replaced. The Guardian’s writings, however challenging their standards, present a decided advantage. Shoghi Effendi almost never erases without advising how to replace. In this sense, his comments are fully constructive.

The Defining Element: A Spirituality of Striving

Spirituality develops the soul through prayer, meditation, fasting, and service. The Bahá’í sacred writings also emphasize the importance of teaching the Faith as an integral part of an active spiritual life. But the main thrust or animating spirit that drives the Guardian’s letters on individual spirituality, which is but another name for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s exhortation to “live the life,”¹⁶ derives from this fundamental precept: those who wish to become spiritual beings and who wish to live a life of moral integrity must engage in a spirituality of striving.

Striving is a euphemism for struggle. The notion of struggle or contest in our author's writings is used in two ways: (1) To indicate a global political contest. The Guardian's writings describe "a titanic, a spiritual struggle" between the emerging World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, a "constructive process," and the "destructive forces" of a disintegrating world civilization that is falling into "chaos and decline";¹⁷ and (2) To indicate a process of spiritual growth. Shoghi Effendi viewed spiritual transformation as a contest to be won by means of striving. This contest is essentially a battle with self, which Muhammad called in a hadith "the greater *jihád*" (*jihád-al-akbar*).¹⁸ The Guardian viewed spiritual development, not as an end in itself to ensure personal salvation or peace of mind, but as being inextricably linked to active service in the Bahá'í Faith. He is emphatic that spiritual development can best be served when the individual not only practices the laws of the Bahá'í Faith and participates actively in community life but also arises to serve the needs of the current Plan.

The history of the Bahá'í Faith's Heroic Age (1844–1921) played a large role in this spirituality of striving. By constantly exhorting believers to pursue the various objectives of the teaching plan, Shoghi Effendi was invoking the memory and example of the heroic spirit of the Dawn-Breakers.¹⁹ His view of individual spirituality was formed in large part by the collective historical experience of those early heroes and heroines of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith in nineteenth-century Persia. The Bahá'í Faith was born in the throes of a violent campaign of persecution (1848–1852)²⁰ that threatened its very life in which at least 20,000 souls were put to death. The process of the gradual emancipation of the Bahá'í Faith from the "fetters of Muslim orthodoxy" was won at great cost. Shoghi Effendi himself was born within the Apostolic or Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Faith (1844–1921),²¹ and the heroic struggles of Bábí history were still fresh in the collective memory of the small community of exiles to which Shoghi Effendi belonged. His translation and editing of *Nabíl's Narrative of the Dawn-Breakers* (1932) was largely a record of these heroic struggles. Struggle was, moreover, a way of life in the Guardian's ministry, both in the execution of his many, onerous responsibilities and as he faced the repeated defections and implacable opposition of his blood relatives. So this spirituality of striving derived from both the pattern of Bábí-Bahá'í history and his own personal experience.

The following letter, written on his behalf, typifies this view of spirituality and alludes to what may result when complacency sets in:

Life is a constant struggle, not only against forces around us, but above all against our own ego. We can never afford to rest on our own oars, for if we do, we soon see ourselves carried down stream again. Many of those who drift away from the Cause do so for the reason that they had ceased to go on developing. They became complacent or indifferent, and consequently ceased to draw the spiritual strength and vitality from the Cause which they should have.²²

The distinguished convert to Christianity C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), professor of Medieval and Renaissance literature, prolific author and able Christian apologist, taking a different tack but coming to the same point, distinguishes this drifting away by people of faith from those who might have been defeated by intellectual argument. Lewis writes, “If you examined a hundred people who had lost their faith in Christianity, I wonder how many of them would turn out to have been reasoned out of it by honest argument? Do not most people simply drift away?”²³ The telling phrase from the Guardian’s secretary points to a failure of the will: “. . . they had ceased to go on developing. . . .” Complacency and indifference are attitudes that are clearly linked to a defect or failure of the will.

In a passage that provides guidance on teaching, Shoghi Effendi counseled a disciplined and purposeful pursuit of the goal. His advice inextricably links the imperative of teaching with the development of certain spiritual qualities, among them: thoughtfulness, prayer, struggle, detachment, fellowship, tact, persistence, and love. It also indicates the main point being emphasized here—the need for constant effort:

The individual alone must assess its character, consult his conscience, prayerfully consider all its aspects, manfully struggle against the natural inertia that weighs him down in his effort to arise, shed, heroically and irrevocably, the trivial and superfluous attachments which hold him back, empty himself of every thought that may tend to obstruct his path, mix, in obedience to the counsels of the Author of His Faith, and in imitation of the One Who is its true Exemplar, with men and women, in all walks of life, seek to touch their hearts, through the distinction which characterizes his thoughts, his words and his acts, and win them over tactfully, lovingly, prayerfully and persistently, to the Faith he himself has espoused.²⁴

The Example of the Guardian's Own Life

I have alluded above to the element of constant struggle in Shoghi Effendi's own life and how this quality extends to the life of every believer. According to Leroy Ioas (1896–1965), Hand of the Cause of God who was assistant-secretary to Shoghi Effendi (1952–1957),²⁵ the Guardian related that he became engaged in such a titanic struggle when on 7 January 1922 the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was "read aloud to nine men, most of them members of the family of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,"²⁶ and he learned of his appointment as "guardian of the Cause of God."²⁷ Shoghi Effendi told Leroy Ioas and other pilgrims on more than one occasion that he did not consider himself worthy of such a position; that initially he did not want such onerous responsibilities; and that he knew upon assuming the guardianship that his life, as he had known it, was over.²⁸ The Guardian intimated to Leroy Ioas that during the subsequent eight-month retreat (April–December 1922) to the mountains of the Bernese Oberland: "I fought with myself until I conquered myself. Then I came back and turned myself over to God and I became Guardian." Shoghi Effendi went on to say that "[e]very Bahá'í in the world, has to do exactly the same thing." For then, "he becomes a true instrument for the service of the Cause of God, and not until."²⁹

The Spiritual Warrior

Implicit to the idea of struggle or striving is that of the soldier or spiritual warrior. Shoghi Effendi viewed the many pathologies ravaging modern society as constituting a real danger to spiritual life. He indicated, through his secretary, that the Bahá'ís were "in a way, like soldiers under attack."³⁰ But he also made it clear that any deviation from the Bahá'í standard could not be ascribed to anyone but themselves. Their own instincts, he wrote, undermined the ability to teach. His counsel was, as usual, direct and unambiguous: "*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.*"³¹ The necessity of joining spiritual battle was also indicated through his secretary to a young inquirer: "If the believers like yourself, young and eager and full of life, desire to win laurels for true and undying heroism, then let them join in the spiritual battle—whatever their physical occupation may be—which involves the very soul of man."³² In this spiritual battle, the drives of the lower self must be countered which the Guardian identified with "the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness,

brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against. . . .”³³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also underscored the importance of effort which is synonymous with a spirituality of striving: “Man must be tireless in his effort. . . . Effort in itself is one of the noblest traits of human character.”³⁴

This is an alternative vision of spirituality to Zen-like quiescence and contentment with things-as-they-are, of “sitting quietly doing nothing” and watching the grass grow by itself,³⁵ or of making that psychospiritual readjustment to realign ourselves to an ancient harmony with the pre-existent *Tao*.³⁶ While detachment is preeminent among Bahá’u’lláh’s host of virtues, as the prologue to the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* indicates,³⁷ a virtue which forms a direct link to the religions of South Asia, Shoghi Effendi’s concept of the spiritual warrior is closer to the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions. Shades of both Christian and Islamic spirituality can be found in the simile of Bahá’ís being “like soldiers under attack.” The exhortation to wage jihad (lit. struggle) “those who fight for the Cause of God” (2:186), had a literal meaning in early Islam, i.e., holy war waged against those who had opposed Muhammad in the Saudi Arabian peninsula. While the fuller meaning of jihad as struggle with self has been misunderstood by Westerners, there is no doubt that the concept of militancy has had a determining influence on Muslims and the course of Islamic history. It still determines the behavior of Islamic extremists in the post-9/11 world. Reuven Firestone, professor at the Hebrew Union College of Los Angeles, writes:

Underlying such questions is the indisputable fact that divinely justified war became an item of major importance in the earliest Islamic period, and that the concept of holy war quickly became a powerful motivator that has had an extremely important impact on the extent of Islamic empires and spheres of influence, on personal religious behaviour, political and religious policy, international economics and law, and the self-perception of individual Muslims and the universal Muslim community as a whole.³⁸

The exhortation for the Muslim to struggle or contend with self gave to jihad an ethical (*hisba*) meaning. Scholar of the Bábí Faith, Denis MacEoin, as reported by Christopher Buck, “has brought together those statements by Bahá’u’lláh that carry forward the traditional Islamic distinction between the “Greater *jihád*” of the soul’s struggle against itself and the spirit of irreligion and the “Lesser *jihád*” being actual warfare itself.”³⁹ Buck notes MacEoin’s failure to observe the distinction of the exclusionary nature of

the two expressions in Bahá'u'lláh's writings. With Bahá'u'lláh's interdiction of the literal jihad, the word takes on a "purely poetic retention."⁴⁰ Poetry perhaps. But a strong, ethical sense of moral action as contending with self is nonetheless retained. Although Bahá'u'lláh abolished the literal jihad in His tablet of *Bishárát* (Glad-Tidings) in 1863,⁴¹ the notion of striving with or against self remains central to Bahá'í spirituality. Shoghi Effendi's writings clearly reflect such antecedents.

The notion of spirituality as "sacred combat" has been used by a number of writers,⁴² both ancient and modern. The analogy to sacred combat is based, of course, on the military virtues displayed in battle. In the *Iliad of Homer*, for example, the word *aristeia*, which refers to "a special show of valour by an individual"⁴³ is sometimes used. Shoghi Effendi's metaphor of the Knight of Bahá'u'lláh is pertinent to this discussion (see chapter 9, "The Military Metaphor"). Both the medieval knight and the Knight of Bahá'u'lláh were expected to show forth courage and fortitude. Northrop Frye comments that "on a high level of integrity, where theory and practice coincide, faith is still militant, still something to be symbolized as Paul does, by armor and weapons. Its central axiom is Luther's "*Hier stehe ich*" [here I stand], an affirmation of a certain position in time and space, held in the face of death."⁴⁴ At least in this respect, so for St. Paul, so for Shoghi Effendi.

Individual, Institutional, and Community Virtues in "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh"

This section goes outside the parameters of the letters of Shoghi Effendi to examine two passages from his indispensable theological treatise, "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh," which has been more fully analyzed in chapter 1. Pertinent to this discussion, the "Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" contains two noteworthy passages that are found in section four, which is devoted to Shoghi Effendi's analysis of the Administrative Order. Our author was inclined to use contrast as a literary and didactic technique, and it is clearly exemplified in this section as he sets the bright, vibrant spirituality of the Bahá'í community over and against the dark background of the moral decay of a "*tottering civilization*." This multidimensional spirituality, which is all at once individual, communal, and institutional, is depicted in a series of upwards of a dozen virtues that are framed in one paragraph. These virtues are the outstanding positive attributes that are supposed to characterize the spiritual life of individual Bahá'ís as well as the Bahá'í community and its institutions. The structure of the passage has recourse to the paratactical clause or serial semi-colon that the Guardian frequently used (see chapter 8, "Style and Pattern"):

*The vitality which the organic institutions of this great, this ever-expanding Order so strongly exhibit; the obstacles which the high courage, the undaunted resolution of its administrators have already surmounted; the fire of an unquenchable enthusiasm that glows with undiminished fervor in the hearts of its itinerant teachers; the heights of self-sacrifice which its champion-builders are now attaining; the breadth of vision, the confident hope, the creative joy, the inward peace, the uncompromising integrity, the exemplary discipline, the unyielding unity and solidarity which its stalwart defenders manifest; the degree to which its moving Spirit has shown itself capable of assimilating the diversified elements within its pale, of cleansing them of all forms of prejudice and of fusing them with its own structure—these are evidences of a power which a disilluminated and sadly shaken society can ill afford to ignore.*⁴⁵

It would be useful to list the virtues that Shoghi Effendi enumerates above. He writes of courage, resolution, enthusiasm, fervor, self-sacrifice, vision, hope, joy, peace, integrity, discipline, unity, and solidarity. The qualifying adjectives are pointed. The joy is creative. The peace is inward. The integrity is uncompromising. The discipline is exemplary. The unity and solidarity are unyielding. The last sentence clinches the passage. That such virtues exist within the Bahá'í community is held up as tangible proof that the “*moving Spirit*” of Bahá'u'lláh has worked its transformation. He challenges “*a disilluminated and sadly shaken society*” not to ignore the source of this power. When read more closely, the virtues exemplified by the Bahá'í community can be grouped into three broad categories: moral, mystical, and social. These three may be broken down as follows:

1. Moral: “*high courage,*” “*undaunted resolution,*” “*uncompromising integrity,*” and “*exemplary discipline*”;
2. Mystical: “*the creative joy,*” “*the inward peace,*” “*unquenchable enthusiasm,*” “*undiminished fervour,*” and “*the heights of self-sacrifice*”;
3. Social: “*unyielding unity and solidarity,*” “*assimilating the diversified elements within its pale,*” “*cleansing them of all forms of prejudice,*” and “*fusing them with its own structure.*”

The contrasting passage follows immediately below the one above:

*Compare these splendid manifestations of the spirit animating this vibrant body of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh with the cries and agony, the follies and vanities, the bitterness and prejudices, the wickedness and divisions of an ailing and chaotic world. Witness the fear that torments its leaders and paralyzes the action of its blind and bewildered statesmen. How fierce the hatreds, how false the ambitions, how petty the pursuits, how deep-rooted the suspicions of its peoples! How disquieting the lawlessness, the corruption, the unbelief that are eating into the vitals of a tottering civilization!*⁴⁶

This passage names the polar opposites of the virtues listed above. In treatises on Christian moral theology, not only were positive spiritual virtues expounded but also nefarious habits or attitudes were exposed. Shoghi Effendi's approach to ethics and spirituality also contrasts the positive virtues with their polar opposites. If the list of negative attributes is drawn, the following substantives appear: volatility (“*cries and agony*”), folly, vanity, bitterness, prejudice, wickedness, divisiveness, chaos, debilitation, fear, paralysis, confusion, blindness, fierceness, hatred, ambition, pettiness, suspicion, disquiet, lawlessness, corruption, and unbelief. These disquieting words have not been set out simply to denounce certain widespread characteristics in contemporary society. They are intended to act as a stimulus for the cultivation of their polar opposites, which have been outlined in the contrasting paragraph and which are found in the Bahá'í community.

The Matrix of Spirituality: Teaching and Service in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

One fundamental point, it should be emphasized, is axiomatic to the development of Bahá'í spirituality: moral and spiritual development cannot occur independently of service to the Bahá'í Faith and to society at large. Shoghi Effendi wrote through his secretary on 6 October 1954, “An individual must center his whole heart and mind on service to the Cause, in accordance with the high standards set by Bahá'u'lláh.”⁴⁷ Service here does not stand alone but is joined to the practice of ethical conduct [“the high standards set by Bahá'u'lláh”] as the unified expression of one's spirituality. Bahá'u'lláh's abolition of the clerical caste and monasticism⁴⁸ has produced a significant reorientation in His followers to become productive members of society. While Bahá'ís are expected to be exemplary in their moral conduct, they are not called upon to live apart or to withdraw from the saner aspects of societal life.

While spiritual practice demands prayer, meditation, and study, a spirituality that does not engage society, further its development, and participate in its healthier activities is not advocated for the modern world. Service to the Bahá'í Faith means primarily assisting in the establishment of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, which signifies, in turn, participating in the creation of a new global society, “*a new race of men,*” whose genesis Shoghi Effendi called “*the supreme and distinguishing function of His Revelation,*”⁴⁹ a race that recognizes Bahá'u'lláh as “*the Judge, the Lawgiver and Redeemer of all mankind, as the Organizer of the entire planet, as the Unifier of the children of men. . . .*”⁵⁰ Such a high calling cannot be achieved without active participation in the life of society and the institutions that govern it.

Teaching and pioneering, i.e., establishing and consolidating Bahá'í communities, are the chief means of erecting this New World Order. The imperative for such an indispensable activity comes originally from Bahá'u'lláh: “. . . teaching the Cause of God must be accorded precedence, inasmuch as it is a matter of paramount importance, so that thereby all men may enter the pavilion of unity and all the peoples of the earth be regarded even as a single body. . . .”⁵¹ Here, the final outcome of teaching is nothing less than the unity of the entire human race. Underscoring its *sine qua non* quality, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described teaching as “the head corner-stone of the foundation itself.”⁵² The privileged status accorded to teaching has to do with the practical reason that the Bahá'í Faith is a world faith that seeks new adherents (according to methods that are dignified and courteous) but eschews proselytizing.

While teaching has been given high priority, it is nonetheless an activity that is somewhat distinct from the other traditional elements of spiritual life such as prayer, meditation, fasting, study, and service. Outside the group learning that exists in the current “study circles,” teaching on a one-to-one basis is a subjective interaction or dialogue in which both speaker and listener share in the learning process. The community-creating-and-sustaining function of teaching is no doubt one of the many reasons why it is accorded such importance on the scale of Bahá'í activities and values. Teaching creates the first intimations of a new spiritual identity, both for the individual and the community, which is strengthened and revitalized by every increase. Teaching is the first step in the creation of this widening circle of unity. The magnitude of the teaching process has been succinctly captured in an imaginative phrase written in 1964 by the Universal House of Justice: “When the masses of mankind are awakened and enter the Faith of God, a new process is set in motion and the growth of a new civilization begins.”⁵³

Moral Realism: Idealism with Compassion

Shoghi Effendi's orthodox definitions of the Bahá'í moral code should not be confused with any neo-Puritanism. The Puritan lifestyle is life denying rather than life affirming. The incisive critic and satirist H. L. Mencken (1880–1956) has pointedly observed, "Puritanism is the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy."⁵⁴ Such a view is the antithesis of the spirituality lived and taught by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who repeatedly stressed the importance of human happiness: "We must all be in the greatest happiness and comfort, under a just rule and regulation which is according to the good pleasure of God, thus causing us to be happy, for this life is fleeting."⁵⁵ Shoghi Effendi found his greatest joy and happiness in observing Bahá'ís around the globe fulfilling the objectives of the teaching plan, while they served in the local, national, or international teaching, pioneering, and administrative fields:

And now as I look into the future, I hope to see the friends at all times, in every land, and of every shade of thought and character, voluntarily and joyously rallying round their local and in particular their national centers of activity, upholding and promoting their interests with complete unanimity and contentment, with perfect understanding, genuine enthusiasm, and sustained vigor. This indeed is the one joy and yearning of my life, for it is the fountainhead from which all future blessings will flow, the broad foundation upon which the security of the Divine Edifice must ultimately rest.⁵⁶

The Guardian's high moral standards are nonetheless tempered by a sage realism and a sympathetic understanding of the frailty of human nature and the gap that can exist between theory and practice, as the following letter, written on his behalf, indicates:

There is a difference between character and faith; it is often very hard to accept this fact and put up with it, but the fact remains that a person may believe in and love the Cause—even to being ready to die for it—and yet not have a good personal character, or possess traits at variance with the teachings. We should try to change, to let the Power of God help recreate us and make us true Bahá'ís in deed as well as in belief. But sometimes the process is slow, sometimes it never happens because the individual does not try hard enough. But these things cause us suffering and are a test to us. . . .⁵⁷

In setting his course by the compass of “*moral rectitude*,” the Guardian sought to restore the practice of ethical principles in human relations. The unswerving course he adopted recognizes the necessity for stability in moral relations. Edward R. Lyman has made the following observation in this regard: “Principle—particularly moral principle—can never be a weathervane, spinning around this way and that with the shifting winds of expediency. Moral principle is a compass forever fixed and forever true.”⁵⁸ In redressing the moral balance, Shoghi Effendi employed an apodictic⁵⁹ approach to his understanding of Bahá’í law, rather than using the elaborate moral reasoning of the armchair ethicist. To refer to *The Advent of Divine Justice*, his pronouncements on “*the spiritual prerequisites of success*” apply not only to the teaching plan but also to all facets of Bahá’í life, whether in “*social and administrative activities*” (“*moral rectitude*”), sexual morality (“*absolute chastity*”), or “*complete freedom from prejudice*” (“*race, class, creed, or color*”).⁶⁰ As this generation of Bahá’ís seeks to follow integrally the ethical requirements of the Bahá’í life, some of these laws and precepts may seem, in light of contemporary society’s complete moral bankruptcy, like a virtually impossible task. Indeed, today’s “prophets of decadence,”⁶¹ whose wasted energies are centered in a delusional quest for personal power, wealth, fame, and freedom, based on self-gratification, expediency, and degeneracy, would reject any belief in “*moral rectitude*”⁶² as an intellectual fiction. If Shoghi Effendi’s view of morality were fully understood and integrally practiced, the counterclaim would have to be made that through “*the dynamic force of its example*”⁶³ the Bahá’í way of life makes for saner and happier people without sacrificing any of the legitimate joys and pleasures that the world has to offer. Ultimately, no arguments can be advanced to “prove” such a statement. Ethical proof is concrete and is only practically, not theoretically, demonstrable.

From Moral Theory to Moral Practice

Aristotle defined happiness as having a rational component, “. . . the activity of reason or activity in accordance with reason.”⁶⁴ While Shoghi Effendi’s moral pronouncements are made on the basis of his divine authority, they harmonize with both reason and experience. While some ethical relativists would argue that authoritarian morality is “likely to delay progress in a changing society,”⁶⁵ or may be viewed as being hopelessly idealistic or out of step with the latest trends in popular morality, the Guardian’s moral definitions correspond to what might be called traditional morality in its positive sense; a perennial core of lasting goodness, what Henry Rosemont Jr. has

called a “primordial tradition in ethics.”⁶⁶ It would be instructive to compare the Guardian’s view of morality as praxis with the reasonings of the moral philosopher. Henry Rosemont, Jr., in a *Festschrift*, presented to honor Huston Smith, one of the outstanding elder scholars of comparative religion, makes the somewhat surprising argument that “modern moral philosophy, ranging from the deontological (duty) views of Kant, through Bentham’s and Mill’s utilitarianism to Rawl’s more-recent rights-oriented moral and political philosophy. . . are, in the first instance, value-free.”⁶⁷ As Professor Rosemont puts it, the moral forest is, in the final analysis, not really about trees, i.e., choosing a course of action in a given situation. The forest refers rather to the moral theories that ground the whole, pure abstractions that have little to do with the concrete issues of “real life.” He writes:

If you address the writings of Kant asking whether you should pursue a career in politics or scholarship; if you ask how you should raise your children, be a friend, serve your community; if you should ask about aesthetic pleasures; if you should ask about these or any other questions about personal goals in life, Kant is silent. . . . for almost all other modern moral philosophers, the questions of what kind of life you should lead, what goals are good and which are bad, for example, do not fall within the compass of moral philosophy.⁶⁸

The moral philosopher, argues Rosemont, is concerned with “the determination of a moral theory.”⁶⁹ Once you possess it, then it is supposed to follow that all moral choices deriving from it will be the correct ones. Rosemont’s paper can be read as a partial critique of modern moral theory that “has increasingly abstracted a purely cognizing activity away from concrete persons, and insisted that the use of logical reasoning in a more or less disembodied ‘mind’ is the choosing.”⁷⁰ Rosemont observes further that we can be “obtuse, uncaring, insensitive, clumsy, even disgusting in much of our behavior, and yet escape moral censure.”⁷¹ We escape moral censure simply by being consistent with the moral theory of our choice: “If, when the appropriate moments arrive, moments which we must somehow intuit as those where a moral choice must be forthcoming, we take account of the situation, invoke our favorite theory, turn on our moral computer for a decision procedure, and then act on the decision.”⁷² Moral theory presupposes, of course, that the moral philosopher is correct in his or her assumptions and that we live in a society of clear-sighted intellectual elites and moral paragons perceptive enough to understand the theory and to make the right choices.

However, everyday human experience reflects an acute case of moral degeneracy. If moral theorists have any lasting influence on society's mores, it is not detectable, except perhaps in the mind of the moral philosopher.

Moreover, little unanimity is to be found among moral philosophers. Instead, a bewildering array of contradictory values and approaches is found.⁷³ Taking his cue from the *Lun Yu*, the recorded brief conversations between Confucius and his disciples, Rosemont sketches a Confucian version of morality,⁷⁴ one that places the individual in the context of acting as a personal agent who must function according to societal roles and family relationships, rather than in response to abstract ethical and metaphysical theories. The details of his argument need not concern us here. But what is worth retaining in Rosemont's analysis is the point that Western moral philosophy is unduly speculative, theoretical, and abstract; and often omits the concrete situation.

Not so for Confucius—and so we must add—for Shoghi Effendi. The Guardian's interpretations of the Bahá'í moral code are intended to be situational and practical, not theoretical, since our author addresses himself to all who are faced with making real moral choices, that is, every believer. His goal is to contribute to the well-being of the Bahá'í community and to facilitate “the progressive growth of personality”⁷⁵ by applying the letter and spirit of Bahá'í scripture to the concrete social, ethical, and sexual situation with which Bahá'ís are faced in daily life. This is not meant to suggest that one should not seek to understand the larger ethical framework of Shoghi Effendi's interpretations by positing theoretical constructs to undergird them. However, his ethical interpretations are not in themselves theoretical. They are grounded instead in the positive authority of divine law. His concern is positive action, not theory.

Like the great teachers gone before him, Shoghi Effendi teaches that ethics and religion are inextricably connected. The philosophical notions of the imperatives of the moral law, which are based on the conclusions of reason and the Kantian notion of duty (*Pflicht*), cannot be truly effective unless they are combined with an enlightened understanding of revealed religion, coupled with obedience to the ordinances of scripture and motivated by the dynamics of the love of God. In a letter to an individual who sought answers to statements made by Albert Einstein in his “Cosmic Religion,” Shoghi Effendi wrote through his secretary:

The other statement reported to have been made by Dr. Einstein to the effect that the ethical behavior of man ‘requires no support

from religion' is incompatible with the Bahá'í viewpoint which emphatically stresses the fact that no sound ethics can exist and become effective unless based on revealed religion. To dissociate ethics from religion is to render the former not only void of any firm foundation but without the necessary driving power.⁷⁶

Undercutting Moral Relativism

The Guardian's view of morality, while compassionate and understanding of the frailties of human nature, excludes moral relativism. Ernst Grünwald, one of the great synthesizers of the various currents in the German school of the sociology of knowledge (*Wissensoziologie*), writing in the 1930s on the relationship between the sociology of knowledge and epistemology, maintained that "[t]he 'middle ground' between relativism and absolutism on which relationism pretends to stand thus turns out to be an illusion. Relativism and absolutism are contradictory opposites with no more 'middle ground' between them than exists between true and false, yes and no."⁷⁷ Grünwald's statement needs to be clarified in the present context. While no middle ground is indicated in Shoghi Effendi's moral directives, the letter of 27 November 1944 cited above in "Moral Realism: Idealism with Compassion" reveals a humane and compassionate understanding of the weaknesses and frailties of human nature.

While the moral standard he advocated was absolute, it should also be understood that the human reaction to these absolute standards, particularly in the breach, should not be judgmental, absolutistic, or coercive. Any "do or die" attempts to live out the Bahá'í standard of conduct will end up being self-defeating if this compassionate, understanding, and patient view of human nature is not taken into account, particularly at the present juncture when society's morals have become widely degenerate. Sincere effort to accomplish moral and spiritual transformation must be accompanied by a sane, realistic, and compassionate understanding of human nature and a constant reliance on the mercy and forgiveness of God. C. S. Lewis has written cogently of the benefits of this "if at first you don't succeed" aspect of the practice of moral and spiritual virtue. Lewis maintains that our moral failures contain their own wisdom. His insight, while it is uncompromising, conveys the spirit of a compassionate wisdom:

For however important chastity (or courage, or truthfulness, or any other virtue) may be, this process trains us in habits of the soul which are more important still. It cures our illusions about ourselves

and teaches us to depend on God. We learn, on the one hand, that we cannot trust ourselves even in our best moments, and, on the other, that we need not despair even in our worst, for our failures are forgiven. The only fatal thing is to sit down content with anything less than perfection.⁷⁸

The Guardian's high standards should not lead, then, to the wrong conclusion that the Bahá'í moral code betrays a Pharisaic spirit of condemnation, rigid fundamentalism, or self-righteousness. For such an attitude is precisely the antithesis of the spirit of compassion and forbearance manifested by our Perfect Exemplar, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, regarding our own or others' sins and shortcomings. The words of Christ are telling in this respect. He said that harlots went into the Kingdom of God before the self-righteous "chief priests and the elders of the people" (Mat. 21:31). Advocates of virtue morality must be careful not to replace one sin with a more grievous one.

Failure as Potential for Spiritual Growth

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Mat. 5:48). Despite this high calling, and all human striving, no one is able to be perfect. What is the appropriate response to failure, when the test comes and we are found wanting, or when one lives with the full realization that one is flawed? Ernest Kurz and Katherine Ketcham, authors of *The Spirituality of Imperfection*, write in the introduction: "The spirituality of imperfection begins with the recognition that trying to be perfect is the most tragic human mistake."⁷⁹ Kurz and Ketcham counsel that "it is only by ceasing to play God, by coming to terms with errors and shortcomings" that spiritual beings can find the peace and serenity that drugs, alcohol, and other compulsive or dependent lifestyles promise but never deliver.⁸⁰

How does Shoghi Effendi, with all the high standards that he sets out for believers, envision what some might consider to be an unacceptable outcome? Contrary to his habitual stance, in certain letters, no stirring encouragements to try harder—a familiar exhortation—are made. Instead, the following letters written on his behalf strike a realistic note of acceptance, one that harmonizes with Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's counsel of living in the spirit of "radiant acquiescence"⁸¹ in time of trial. One letter reads, "While he would urge you to courageously meet and overcome the many obstacles that stand in your way, he would at the same time advise you that in case of failure and no matter what befalls you, you should remain radiantly content at, and entirely submissive to, the

Divine will.”⁸² This letter realistically acknowledges that failure is a distinct possibility. While the context refers to service in the teaching or pioneering fields, this letter also has direct moral applications, since acceptance of one’s moral failings, when it is not accompanied by a defeatist or self-condemnatory attitude, is more liable to induce moral and spiritual transformation than self-punishment or guilt. The following letter alludes to the positive value failures may ultimately prove to have:

We must always look ahead and seek to accomplish in the future what we may have failed to do in the past. Failures, tests, and trials, if we use them correctly, can become the means of purifying our spirit, strengthening our characters, and enable us to rise to greater heights of service.⁸³

This statement attributes a potential positive value to failure, a turning of the negative into its contrary. Failure is not necessarily the unthinkable event that is doomed to repeat itself. It may provide rather the opportunity for the conscientious, persistent, and growth-motivated individual to attain self-mastery and overcome obstacles while following the path of teaching and service.

Perfection as Process

The ideal of perfection has both inviting and forbidding aspects. Its inviting aspect suggests a goodness of character that betrays no hint of repugnance or fault. Its forbidding aspect is an ironic one. The “perfect person” who projects the outward appearance of being a moral paragon but who lacks genuine humanity tends to repel rather than to attract. When moral perfection becomes associated with aloofness, inhumanity, or inaccessibility, it turns cold, becomes forbidding, and consequently self-defeating. The grammatical analogy is instructive. The “perfect tense” is complete, finished, or static. Practically perfect people, in the ironic sense, have wrongly concluded that their spiritual evolution is complete. The character that truly aspires to perfection is dynamic, evolving, and still striving to achieve the unachievable.

The challenge for the person who aspires to perfection is to remain fully human and winsome: “The ‘perfect person’ without foibles, who lacks any aura of humanity, is not really very appealing.”⁸⁴ Shoghi Effendi’s secretary wrote on his behalf, “We humans are never going to become perfect, for perfection belongs to a realm we are not destined to enter. However, we must constantly mount higher, seek to be more perfect.”⁸⁵

Spiritual seekers are, consequently, faced with this prospect: for all their strivings, they never can be perfect, for this is an unattainable goal because in the absolute sense there is only one Perfect Being. But they must, within their own limitations, seek to become more perfect, paradoxically also the unattainable goal. Faced with this double negative—we are not perfect and we shall never be perfect—seekers journey on in the affirmative mood of spiritual becoming, in the spirit of the transcendentalist “sage of Concord” Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), who counseled wayfarers to “hitch your wagon to a star.”⁸⁶

This homespun wisdom of the human journey connects earth with heaven by uniting pragmatism with high idealism. Emerson’s saying contains one of those paradoxes, so typical of spiritual life, that of hitching a wagon to a star, an unrealisable feat. In conventional wisdom his saying translates as, “Aspire to reach heaven, even as you journey on earth.” Perfection is not, then, about the steady state. It refers rather to the process of growth or development in the realm of personal being. In one sense, it is reassuring to know that we are never destined to attain perfection, for it gives us a more realistic sense of what constitutes our true spiritual potential and encourages us to take those practical steps to help us to attain “self-actualization.”⁸⁷

The Labor of Conversion in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi

New York lawyer and Buddhist Myron Phelps’s book *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, mentioned above, contains a remarkable passage on psychospiritual development, which I have elsewhere called “‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Magna Carta* for Spiritual Transformation.”⁸⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá counsels a “tearing down,” of weak points in order to bring about the reformation of character in the enlightened soul: “When we find weak points in our character, we must begin to tear down;” With His unfailing wisdom, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says in the same thought, “and also we must not neglect to build up good qualities in place of the evil ones which we discard.”⁸⁹ The phrase “tearing down” should not be misunderstood, however, as an abrupt or radical program of personal reformation. It points, rather, to a gradual process of God-assisted conversion.

Shoghi Effendi’s comments throw light on the process referred to by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He wrote through his secretary that “[t]he removal of imperfections is a gradual process”⁹⁰ and that “[t]he process of becoming a Bahá’í is necessarily slow and gradual. . . . he [the new believer] should, by an act of his own will, be willing to uphold and follow the truth and guidance

set forth in the Teachings, and thus open his heart and mind to the reality of the Manifestation.”⁹¹ Elsewhere, the Guardian through his secretary said simply, “For conversion is after all a slow process.”⁹² In this last phrase, and in several other contexts, Shoghi Effendi used the Christian term “conversion.” However, while the word *conversion* in a Bahá’í context may refer simply to becoming a Bahá’í and/or to engaging in spiritual transformation, unlike its Christian counterpart, the Bahá’í view of conversion should be identified with a self-conscious, lifelong, gradual process that involves the exercise of all one’s mental and spiritual faculties, rather than any sudden, once and for all time spiritual rebirth that views itself as a finished product.

Shoghi Effendi’s vision of spirituality was that of committed service. In his letter to Grand Duke Alexander of Russia, for example, with whom he carried on an extensive correspondence in the early years of his ministry, references are found to “*the service and salvation of humanity*” as well as to the necessity for “*individual persistent effort*”:

*... I assure my dear fellow-worker in the service of God, that I too oftentimes feel overwhelmed by the rising wave of selfish, gross materialism that threatens to engulf the world, and I feel that however arduous be our common task we must persevere to the very end and pray continually and ardently that the ever-living spirit of God may so fill the souls of men as to cause them to arise with new vision for the service and salvation of humanity. Prayer and individual persistent effort, I feel, must be given greater and wider prominence in these days of stress and gloom. . . .*⁹³

The Guardian’s view of conversion, then, makes the task of spiritual development a type of work ethic, discipline, or labor, without which spiritual progress becomes fitful or without lasting results. Along with the importance of effort already cited from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as “one of the noblest traits of human character,” Shoghi Effendi’s secretary wrote on his behalf:

Effort is an inseparable part of man’s life. It may take different forms with the changing condition of the world, but it will always be present as a necessary element of our earthly existence. Life is after all a struggle. Progress is attained through struggle, and without such a struggle life ceases to have meaning; it becomes even extinct.⁹⁴

In this spirituality of striving, Shoghi Effendi was harking back to Bahá'u'lláh Himself and to *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys* in which the Divine Manifestation wrote of an “intense ardor in searching”: “Labor is needed, if we are to seek Him; ardor is needed, if we are to drink of the honey of reunion with Him; and if we taste of this cup, we shall cast away the world.”⁹⁵

Love and the Wisdom of Obedience

For any of Shoghi Effendi's moral exhortations to exert their “*dynamic force of example*,” they must be obeyed. For moderns, obedience is a formidable word. Once respectable, it has become a very doubtful virtue. Formerly, it was associated with the redoubtable divine command and with the once unquestioned authority of parents and teachers. But in our time, obedience is viewed as a milder form of subjection to tyranny; indeed, those who have insisted too much on obedience have often grossly abused it. Those who are zealous in obedience may be viewed as being mindless or weak willed. However, one of the positive models of obedience is the military one. In the armed forces, discipline and obedience are closely tied both to teamwork and to the accomplishment of the mission. Orders must be obeyed so that the strategic plan may be executed and the battle won. In military life, obedience is not viewed so much as a virtue, but as a basic requirement without which no army can function effectively. Soldierly obedience leads to the supreme sacrifice as rendered in Tennyson's lines written in “The Charge of the Light Brigade”: “Theirs not to make reply/Theirs not to reason why/Theirs but to do and die.”⁹⁶ Symbolically, the sacrificial death of the soldier may be taken to refer to the death of self, with its abandonment or overcoming of old ways of thinking, feeling, and acting; and replacing them by living the divine precepts.

Blind obedience will not enable the thoughtful believer to discover the depths of wisdom hidden within the divine command. To discover that wisdom, practice must be accompanied by reflection. The ancients and the prophets knew that obedience led first of all to the rule of self. They understood that an individual would not be fit to rule, to discharge his or her duties, or to serve as example without self-rule; and for self-rule, obedience is required. Obedience becomes, consequently, a prerequisite for being suited to the performance of a task or duty. To return to the military analogy, the general cannot command until he or she has first learned to take orders. The French essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), who greatly popularized that genre, wrote that “to obey is the proper office of a rational

soul acknowledging a heavenly superior and benefactor.”⁹⁷ Along the same lines, Thomas à Kempis (c.1380–1471) wrote that “[n]o man doth safely rule but he that hath learned gladly to obey.”⁹⁸ And he adds that obedience must be observed in gladness.

The novelist George Eliot (née Mary Ann Evans) (1819–1880), who skillfully depicted the psychological aspects of English class life and social history,⁹⁹ wrote that love must motivate obedience, “It is vain thought to flee from the work that God appoints us, for the sake of finding a greater blessing, instead of seeking it where alone it is to be found—in loving obedience.”¹⁰⁰ Eliot was, of course, echoing the words of Jesus who joined obedience to love: “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (John 15:10). At the higher levels of faith, the very bidding of God becomes a joy in itself. C. S. Lewis has observed: “Where can you taste the joy of obeying unless He bids you do something for which His bidding is the *only* reason?”¹⁰¹ Lewis is echoing the spirit of Psalm 119: “. . . thy commandments are my delights” (v. 143).

The wisdom of obedience can be found in this observation from the Universal House of Justice also containing an unsparing dose of psychological realism:

Sometimes the course may seem very hard, but one can witness, again and again, that the soul who steadfastly obeys the law of Bahá’u’lláh however hard it may seem, grows spiritually, while the one who compromises with the law for the sake of his own apparent happiness is seen to have been following a chimera: he does not attain the happiness he sought, he retards his spiritual advance and often brings new problems upon himself.¹⁰²

Elsewhere, C. S. Lewis takes a more Spartan stance: “There is nothing indulgent about the Moral Law. It is as hard as nails. It tells you to do the straight thing and it does not seem to care how painful, or dangerous, or difficult it is to do. If God is like the Moral Law, then He is not soft.”¹⁰³ God is merciful, but the law itself is as objective and impassive as cold, blue steel. However, at a higher level, a mystical rather than a voluntarist way of attaining obedience is found in “the valley of true poverty and absolute nothingness.” In this valley, the last and highest found in Bahá’u’lláh’s preeminent mystical work *The Seven Valleys* (c.1858), a valley which Bahá’u’lláh describes as “the dying from self and the living in God,”¹⁰⁴ the

transcendence of self holds the key. In this state, the mystic knower ceases to view the impositions of the moral law as an adversary which she must struggle to keep, but adopts instead an attitude of *kenosis* (Gk. emptying), humbly bending the will and emptying the self of all desires save those that the Beloved chooses to impose. This is the Christian parallel to the mystical state of *faná* (annihilation/death of self) sought by the Sufis. In St. Paul's epistle to the Philippians, he wrote that Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (2:7).¹⁰⁵ This poverty, humility, or obedience to God are all expressive of and conjoined to the observance of the moral/religious law, as Bahá'u'lláh has written, "In all these journeys, the traveller must stray not the breadth of a hair from the "Law". . . and hold fast to the cord of shunning all forbidden things, that he may be nourished from the cup of the [religious] Law (*Shari'ah*) and informed of the mysteries of truth."¹⁰⁶

Legitimate Fear

A popular idea in today's New Age spirituality is that fear should have no place in spiritual life. According to this reasoning, fear should be replaced with something akin to awe, which is touted as being a subtler combination of fear and respect. In Bahá'í belief, the acceptance of such a powerful motivator as fear is based on a rational concept of God. The fear of God is seen as a valid and effective tool in spiritual education. However, the Bahá'í writings reject any abusive fanaticism or psychological extremes in its use. Shoghi Effendi once wrote through his secretary to a believer who had questioned him on the appropriateness of explaining the fear of God to children—and his remarks are just as applicable to adults— ". . . the child should be made to understand that we don't fear God because He is cruel, but we fear Him because He is just, and, if we do wrong and deserve to be punished, then in His justice He may see fit to punish us. We must both love God and fear Him."¹⁰⁷ Bahá'í teaching is entirely coherent with the Judeo-Christian tradition, which teaches that a healthy fear of God inclines to wisdom (*Hokmah*): "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10).

Chastity: Narrowing Legal and Moral Distinctions

Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's

*carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. . . . 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.*¹⁰⁸

The distinction between ‘legal’ and ‘moral’ in the understanding and practice of chastity needs further examination for two reasons: (1) To distinguish the Bahá’í standard from that of contemporary society. By today’s standards, with the increased secularization of the law courts, and the corresponding downgrading of religious values, legal, and moral issues have become increasingly polarized. What is legal is not necessarily moral, and what is moral is not necessarily legal; and (2) In Bahá’í parlance, one hears the shorthand reference to “the law of chastity.” While this may be a convenient way of speaking and correctly points to certain laws regulating sexual conduct in the *Aqdas*, this phrase obscures and may ignore the fact that chastity is not just a law, i.e., a legal norm for which sanctions may be imposed when breached, but is also an attitude of body and mind that is fully part of the moral law. Bahá’í laws are undergirded by larger moral and spiritual purposes. To view such laws with a legalistic mindset simply as commandments to be obeyed misses the larger purposes of the moral law and the spirit that animates them.

Part of the difficulty is language based. In English, the words *legal* and *moral* tend to reinforce a distinction between a legal norm and private conduct or thinking. However, the gap in the legal/moral distinction that exists in secular society, while not entirely obliterated in Bahá’í teaching, has been greatly reduced. Chastity as a state of mind cannot be subject to legal formulations, since thoughts or desires relating to sexual conduct, unless expressed in sexual acts, remain private. However, Shoghi Effendi’s word “*clean-mindedness*” indicates that private thoughts should remain pure and/or that speech, which inevitably reflects a state of mind, should conform to the norms of chastity. The *Aqdas* does provide for certain legal sanctions resulting from a “violation of the laws of morality.”¹⁰⁹ However, in light of the formative state of Bahá’í society and its institutions, promiscuous, adulterous, and homosexual conduct is at present subject to administrative rather than the legal sanctions prescribed in the Most Holy Book.

The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* redefines adultery as any unchaste act (*Ziná*). Consequently, the definition of adultery applies to both married and unmarried persons and covers not only marital but also premarital sexual behavior and non-consensual acts such as rape. Question no. 47 of the *Aqdas* says that the dowry may be refunded if the marriage had been contracted on the basis of virginity. But if it becomes “evident” at the time of marriage that the bride is not a virgin, “to conceal and forgive the matter will, in the sight of God, merit a bounteous reward.” Bahá’u’lláh’s counsel effectively softens the rigidity of the law to make way for compassion. The collapsing of the moral distinction between premarital and extramarital intercourse clearly raises the standard of sexual conduct for present and future generations.

The moral and sexual standards outlined by Shoghi Effendi at the head of this section, support the view that the corollary of chastity is early marriage. As a celibate male who was devoted exclusively to his calling, St. Paul held the contrary view that recourse to marriage was valid only in cases of pressing sexual desire, expressed in his well-known line that “it is better to marry than to burn” (1 Cor. 7:9).¹¹⁰ Assuming a degree of maturity and economic security, early marriage may acquit parents of their family responsibilities sooner, leaving them still relatively young when their children are independent.

But to return to the legal/moral distinction: a legal sanction for adultery, for example, cannot be applied without there being also a violation of the moral law. In such cases, the moral = legal equation is exact. Unlike positive law, which establishes objective criteria in legislation (statutes) and judicial decisions (“precedents”), Bahá’í sacred law is firmly rooted in moral and spiritual values. Of course, as for legal positivism, sacred law does have a coercive effect with its strong voice of divine authority, but the wisdom of such laws is discernable both by reason and experience.

Further to the legal/moral distinction, one can hardly punish an individual for “*easy familiarity*” or “*frivolous conduct*,”¹¹¹ but they are clearly part of the “law of chastity.” Moral propriety and restraint are indicated since they impinge, not inconsiderably, upon one’s personal reputation and suitability for marriage. The moral prescriptions relating to sexual conduct laid down by Shoghi Effendi fall as much under the heading of decorum as they do of positive law and are meant to buttress the observance of the stricter laws relating to chastity. The Universal House of Justice, in its introduction to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, has well indicated the moral and spiritual purposes that

undergird the divine laws. We do well to remember them in light of the legalistic, punitive, and fanatical attitudes that have tarnished, and are still tarnishing, certain fundamentalist sects of the world's religions. Referring to the laws of Bahá'u'lláh, the Universal House of Justice writes:

He embeds His precepts in a setting of spiritual commentary, keeping ever before the mind of the reader that these laws, no matter the subject with which they deal, serve the manifold purposes of bringing tranquillity to human society, raising the standard of human behaviour, increasing the range of human understanding, and spiritualising the life of each and all. Throughout, it is the relationship of the individual soul to God and the fulfilment of its spiritual destiny that is the ultimate aim of the laws of religion.¹¹²

One may provisionally conclude that in Bahá'í law, using the particular case of its sexual norms, that the moral/legal distinction, if it has not entirely collapsed, has been greatly minimized.

The Definitive Statement

In a letter dated 24 September 1924, in a ministry at that time not yet four years old, the Guardian wrote the following words that constitute the definitive statement of his view of morality and spirituality. The context for the following passage is set in one of the periodic absences and returns to the Holy Land that Shoghi Effendi required for the maintenance of his health, the unity of the Bahá'í Faith, and the successful discharge of his duties. His letter hints at some of the reasons for his absence. They were due, not only to unnamed sources of opposition within his own family but also to the Guardian's own humanity:

*My prolonged absence, my utter inaction should not, however, be solely attributed to certain external manifestations of unharmony, of discontent and disloyalty—however paralysing their effect has been upon the continuance of my work—but also to my own unworthiness and to my imperfections and frailties.*¹¹³

The withdrawal, he explains, “*was taken with extreme reluctance and only after mature and anxious reflection as to the best way to safeguard the interests of a precious Cause.*”¹¹⁴ Shoghi Effendi then turns his thoughts to the fate of humanity and to the role the Bahá'ís must play in its regeneration:

Humanity, through suffering and turmoil, is swiftly moving on towards its destiny; if we be loiterers, if we fail to play our part surely others will be called upon to take up our task as ministers to the crying needs of this afflicted world. Not by the force of numbers, not by the mere exposition of a set of new and noble principles, not by an organized campaign of teaching—no matter how worldwide and elaborate in its character—not even by the staunchness of our faith or the exaltation of our enthusiasm, can we ultimately hope to vindicate in the eyes of a critical and sceptical age the supreme claim of the Abhá Revelation. One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.¹¹⁵

This remarkably eloquent and lucid passage underscores, for all the Bahá'í Faith's emphasis on world unity, the fact that the success of the "Abhá Revelation" depends ultimately on the character of the individual. It reminds us that neither the unique organization of its Administrative Order, nor the most effective strategies that it may adopt for the diffusion of its lofty teachings, nor intellectual brilliance, nor any show of staunchness of faith or displays of exalted enthusiasm will provide for its ultimate success. Based on this passage, religion, for Shoghi Effendi, is ultimately about inwardness, the "inner life and private character," those deep sources, the hidden springs of spirituality that must surely manifest themselves in the external world. This, alone, will ensure the vindication of the Bahá'í Faith in the eyes of "a critical and sceptical age."

Endnotes

1. By precept is intended moral instruction, including laws, rules of conduct, and spiritual principles.
2. Peter Edwards, “The Future of Ethics” in *The Future of Philosophy: Towards the Twenty-First Century*, p. 41.
3. William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, p. 5.
4. Nicomachus was the name of both Aristotle’s son and grandfather.
5. Peter Edwards, *ibid.*, p. 42.
6. *Bahá’í World Faith*, p. 384.
7. “Ethics” in *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, p. 114.
8. This work was a highly satirical response to critics of his own work. Pope did not bear criticism well and engaged in great, bitter polemics and intrigues with his opponents.
9. See James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, eds., *Perspectives on the New Age*, p. 7.
10. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 21.
11. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, p. 14.
12. From a letter dated 21 September 1957, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, revised July 1990, *Living the Life*, p. 27.
13. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 82.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 82. Underline in original.
15. *Ibid.*
16. “The first thing to do is to acquire a thirst for Spirituality, then Live the Life! Live the Life! Live the Life! The way to acquire this thirst is to meditate upon the future life. Study the Holy Words, read your Bible, read the Holy Books, especially study the Holy Utterances of Bahá’u’lláh; Prayer and Meditation, take much time for these two. Then will you know this Great Thirst, and then only can you begin to Live the life!” (*Star of the West* 20.10 [January 1930]: 314).
17. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 170.
18. According to the “Greater Jihád” hadith, after some troops had returned from battle, they went to see the Prophet who said to them: “You have come from the lesser *jihád* to the greater *jihád*.” When they asked Muhammad what was the nature of the greater *jihád*, he replied: “The servant’s struggle against his lust” (*hawah*). Muslim commentators usually broaden this description to include a generalized *jihád al-nafs* (*jihád* against the self). <www.livingislam.org/n/dgjh_e.html>, accessed 4 September 2011.
19. Specifically, the eighteen disciples of the Báb whose leaders broke the dawn of the New Day, some of them by suffering martyrdom. In a wider sense, the phrase may refer to all the faithful followers of the Báb.
20. Dating from the Mázindarán upheaval to the disastrous consequences that followed the attempt on the life of the Shah.
21. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 92.

22. Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 454.
23. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 122.
24. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 148.
25. For Leroy Ioas's exemplary contributions to the Bahá'í Faith, see his daughter Anita Ioas Chapman's biography *Leroy Ioas: Hand of the Cause of God*.
26. Rúhíyyih Khánúm, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 46.
27. *Will and Testament*, p. 11. For reasons of "ill-health as much as delicacy on his part," Shoghi Effendi was not present at the reading. Rúhíyyih Khánúm clarifies the exact manner in which Shoghi Effendi learned that he had been named Guardian. Some sources cited by Rúhíyyih Khánúm indicate that the *Will and Testament* was read on January 3rd, but Shoghi Effendi stated in a letter to an old Bahá'í a few weeks later that the document was read on 7 January 1922 (*The Priceless Pearl*, pp. 46–47).
28. Close summary of Leroy Ioas's tape-recorded talk on Shoghi Effendi made in Johannesburg, South Africa, 31 October 1958, at the home of Robert Quigley and his wife. The subsequent quotations are from the same source. Compare these remarks with the virtually identical statements written by Ioas's daughter, Anita Ioas Chapman, in *Leroy Ioas, Hand of the Cause*, p. 166.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Living the Life*, p. 17.
31. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 41.
32. Brian Kurzium, comp., *Fire and Gold: Benefiting from Life's Tests*, pp. 223–24.
33. *Living the Life*, pp. 18–19.
34. Brian Kurzium, comp., *Fire and Gold*, p. 147.
35. "Sitting quietly doing nothing/Spring comes, and the grass grows by itself" is a couplet from a Zenrin Kushi poem quoted by Allan Watts in *The Way of Zen*, p. 134.
36. This psychospiritual readjustment refers to Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism alike. The Tao or 'Way', deriving from Chinese philosophy and religion, was taught by Lao Tzu, the sage of the sixth century BCE. According to context, the word *Tao* has been translated variously as course, path, road, nature, even being, reason, and speech. Taoist scholar D. C. Lau maintains that "no term can apply to the *Tao* because all terms are specific, and the specific, if applied to *Tao* will impose a limitation on its range of functions" (*Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching*, p. 19).
37. "No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth" (p. 3).
38. Reuven Firestone, *Jihád: The Origin of Holy War in Islam*, pp. 5–6.
39. Christopher Buck, "Bahá'u'lláh as 'World Reformer'," p. 52. Buck refers to MacEoin's "From Babism to Baha'ism: Problems of Militancy, Quietism, and Conflation in the Construction of a Religion," p. 228.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
41. "O people of the earth! The first Glad-Tidings which the Mother Book hath, in this Most Great Revelation, imparted unto all the peoples of the world is that the law of holy war hath been blotted out from the Book" (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 21).
42. See, for example, John Welwood's chapter "Soulwork and Sacred Combat" in *Love and Awakening: Discovering the Sacred Path of Intimate Relationship*.
43. *The Iliad of Homer*, p. 32. From introductory chapter notes by Lattimore.
44. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 229.
45. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 155.

46. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 155.
47. *Living the Life*, p. 25.
48. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶36. Note 61 says that these verses “constitute the prohibition of monasticism and asceticism.”
49. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 16.
50. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 93.
51. *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, p. 44.
52. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*, p. 10.
53. Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 31.
54. Quoted in Linda Kavelin Popov, *Sacred Moments: Daily Meditations on the Virtues*, 23 February. References are cited by days of the month rather than by page numbers.
55. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 42.
56. Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 67.
57. Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 441, letter dated 27 November 1944.
58. Quoted in *Thoughts on Virtue: Thoughts and Reflections from History’s Great Thinkers*, p. 118.
59. Meaning: necessary, clearly established, imperative.
60. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 22.
61. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 188. The expression is already within quotation marks. Shoghi Effendi does not identify the source of the phrase.
62. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 19, 22, 29.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
64. Frederick Copleston, S. J., *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, *Greece and Rome*, part 2, p. 76.
65. Harold H. Titus, *Living Issues in Philosophy: An Introductory Textbook*, p. 378. From “Ethics and the Moral Life.”
66. Henry Rosemont, Jr., “Is There a Primordial Tradition in Ethics?” in *Fragments of Infinity: Essays in Religion and Philosophy. A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Huston Smith*, p. 241.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 246–49.
75. The phrase is not from Shoghi Effendi. Harold Titus wrote of the Christian ethical ideal: “A second closely related conception of Jesus is his principle of the progressive growth of personality” (*Living Issues in Philosophy*, p. 385).
76. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 December 1939, *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1703, pp. 506–7.
77. “The Sociology of Knowledge and Epistemology,” in *The Sociology of Knowledge: A Reader*, p. 240.
78. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 90.
79. *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Modern Wisdom from Classical Stories*, p. 5.
80. *Ibid.*

81. In His main doctrinal work, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh, in writing of the martyrs so cruelly put to death for His name's sake, says: "Instead of complaining, they rendered thanks unto God, and amidst the darkness of their anguish they revealed naught but radiant acquiescence to His will" (p. 235).
82. *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, no. 1281, letter of 9 May 1934 to an individual.
83. Letter to an individual, 14 December 1941, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 2039, p. 602.
84. From "The Laughing Saint," in McLean, *Under the Divine Lote Tree: Essays and Reflections*, p. 86.
85. Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 453.
86. In Emerson, "Civilization," *Society and Solitude*.
87. One of the major concepts in Abraham Maslow's Self-Actualization Psychology. In *Motivation and Personality*, he defined it as "the full use of exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities, etc." (p. 150). In his last book, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Maslow described eight behaviors leading to self-actualization.
88. McLean, *Dimensions in Spirituality: Reflections on Spiritual Life and Transformation in Light of the Bahá'í Faith*, p. 66.
89. From an extended talk on spiritual transformation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá according to the recollections of Myron H. Phelps in *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*. Consult pp. 159–64.
90. From "Trustworthiness: A Cardinal Bahá'í Virtue" in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, no. 2089, p. 353. This comment was written in the context of community development, but it has direct applications to the individual.
91. Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 8.
92. *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, no. 1946, p. 309.
93. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, pp. 270–71. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní tells us that the Grand Duke was interested in a movement called the "Unity of Souls," p. 270.
94. *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1870, p. 551, from a letter dated 26 December 1935.
95. The above quotation was revealed within the context of the Valley of Search. See *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, p. 7.
96. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," *The Top 500 Poems*, p. 651. Tennyson's poem immortalized the valiant charge of 673 British soldiers of the Light Cavalry Brigade who rode straight into the fire of Russian artillery batteries in the North Valley above Balaclava during the Crimean War on 25 October 1854. Of the 673 soldiers who took part in the charge, 247 were killed and wounded, 231 went missing and were presumed captured. Despite Tennyson's poetic rendering to immortalize the British soldiers who fought at Balaclava, the charge is generally considered to be one of the most useless disasters in British military history.
97. *The New Dictionary of Thoughts: A Cyclopaedia of Quotations*, s.v. "Obedience."
98. Thomas à Kempis, *The New Dictionary of Thoughts*, p. 445.
99. In such novels as *Middlemarch*, *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Silas Marner*.
100. *The New Dictionary of Thoughts*, p. 445.
101. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, chapter 9.
102. *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1209, p. 361.
103. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 36.
104. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 36.
105. The alternate translation is "slave."
106. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, pp. 39–40.

A Celestial Burning

107. From a letter dated 15 February 1957, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 790, p. 238.
108. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 30.
109. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, n. 77.
110. Chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians reveals that St. Paul's concept of marriage was that of a lesser evil. For him, it was better to marry than to fornicate: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (7:1–2). His priestly view of marriage has a decidedly negative cast in that he viewed it as potential threat to chastity (even for the married) and a possible obstacle to more unhampered service to the church.
111. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 30.
112. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, introduction, pp. 2–3.
113. Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 65–66.
114. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
115. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

6

PROVIDENTIAL HISTORY The Renewal of an Ancient Idea

The real history of man is the history of religion: the wonderful ways by which the different families of the human race advanced toward a truer knowledge and deeper love of God. This is the foundation that underlies all profane history: it is light, the soul, and the life of history and without it all history would indeed be profane.

—Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900)

When God Is and Is Not in the Act

Providential History and Secular History

This chapter sketches briefly the outline of an otherwise monumental undertaking. It outlines a global theory of the growth of a global civilization. As such, it relies on the writings of Shoghi Effendi but widens its scope to include selected passages from the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The word *theory* (Gk. *theoria*) is being used here in its original sense of an idea that results from observation and reflection, or in its theatrical sense of spectating. However, it differs from the purely theoretical approach in one important aspect: it advocates actually participating in the writing, i.e., creation of this history. The providential view of history presented here is equated with prophetic history and is defined by at least five conceptual elements that are at the same time beliefs:

- God’s lordship over all includes overlordship of history;
- A Divine Plan can be discerned within the baffling, infinite number of composite events that have occurred or are occurring within the temporal flux;
- The Prophets are the founders of civilizations, the main educators of humanity, and the main instruments of the Divine Plan;
- This Divine Plan drives history toward a *telos* or final “end”¹ (goal),

which is the unity of the human race and ultimately the birth of a world civilization; and

- Those events, which at face value appear to be adverse (disasters, crises, defeats, reverses, setbacks), prove in the end to contain some hidden wisdom and serve the ends, ways, and means of Providence.

At the outset, we should recognize that the word *history* is itself ambiguous and requires closer definition. C. S. Lewis has identified six commonly used meanings of the word *history*: the total content of time including past, present, and future; the past only “in all its teeming riches”; what is discoverable about the past from surviving evidence; the findings of professional historians; “that version of the matter so discovered which has been worked up by great historical writers,” i.e., Gibbon or Mommsen; and “that vague, composite picture of the past which floats, rather hazily, in the mind of the ordinary education man.”²² Professor Lewis would not have accepted some of the arguments advanced here, except to have acknowledged a bare metaphysical meaning to history as “a story written by the finger of God,” à la Carlyle and Novalis, “the total content of time [which] must in its own nature be a revelation of God’s wisdom, justice, and mercy.”²³ This view is not surprising since for Christians ultimate truth, and therefore real history, was contained in the Christian revelation alone and did not extend, except to a much lesser degree, to the various world faiths. For Lewis, ultimate history would have been confined to Christianity and those events associated with the life of Christ and His return.

The meaning of history in this chapter indicates primarily those advances in civilization, those noteworthy developments and significant events, the institutes that have been founded by the Prophets, and the communities established in their name. Any understanding of history must include considerations of morality, spirituality, and ethics. For as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has asserted, “A superficial culture, unsupported by a cultivated morality, is as ‘a confused medley of dreams,’ and external lustre without inner perfection is ‘like a vapor in the desert which the thirsty dreameth to be water.’”²⁴ This is one of the meanings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s secret as alluded to in the translation of the title of His treatise, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (1875); “true civilization” has an ethical and spiritual basis without which it is not worthy of the name.

Although it starts from different premises and reaches different conclusions, and diverges on critical points from secular approaches to history, this reading of providential, that is, prophetic history, does not attempt to deny or to denigrate the importance of academic or erudite secular narratives or accounts, whatever their nature or form. It offers itself as a metanarrative,

a complementary, overarching theory of the role of the Prophets and religion in the growth of civilization. The belief in the metanarrative of providential history is maintained despite the rejection by some current, mainly French postmodernists, such as Jean-François Lyotard's skepticism of the metanarrative and his radical redefinition of science, history, or art,⁵ and Derrida's rejection of the authority of logocentric discourse, on which providential history is necessarily based.

Alternate views of world history can coexist within the providential view, where they are accepted as being compatible, and all other types of historiography need not be forced into conforming to the Bahá'í view of the preponderating role of the Prophets and religion in the growth of civilizations. It seems plausible, however, that in time new forms of historical writing will emerge that will fuse the sacred and secular views of past and present events. This fusion already occurs in the writing of religious history that takes account of secular data, but the reverse has not yet taken place in any serious way. Secular histories will eventually have to come to grips with the claims of the Prophets, the teachings of divine revelation, and the establishment of the world's great religions as prime factors in making history. The other possibility is the status quo: that a two-track history will continue to be written, the one sacred, the other secular. But at some point these two forms of history will be obliged to begin a serious dialogue.

Providential History and Contemporary Society

As anyone who is basically familiar with the writings of Shoghi Effendi knows, the Guardian's moral judgments and political assessments of contemporary society generally find it sadly wanting. In his view, contemporary society has fallen into moral bankruptcy and has lost its progressive, integrative political direction because humankind's misguided leaders have rejected Bahá'u'lláh's plan for world integration. However, as we saw from the study of the World Order letters and the *Promised Day is Come*, he also gave favorable judgments of certain key events in twentieth-century history, events that have become significant milestones or turning points in the history of humanity. Despite the critical condition in which it finds itself, Shoghi Effendi nonetheless envisioned a harassed humanity making its way—however unconsciously, fitfully, and traumatically—toward the future refuge of a unified world. In his evaluation of modern history, the Guardian seizes upon some contemporary event, which in his view has unsuspected historical significance, to indicate that a great convergence has taken place between the given event and the teachings or prophecies of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Bahá'í view of providential history, while it is an ancient view of history, is taken in light of the spirit of modernity with the emergence of a new world order in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, despite, or because of, its planetary traumas. The twentieth century has been called “the century of light” by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá because the foundational development for a future united humanity, beginning with the establishment of the League of Nations, point fourteen of the “Fourteen Points” (8 January 1918)⁶ devised by “the immortal Woodrow Wilson,”⁷ was first laid early in the century now past. In a talk given on 5 July 1912 in New York City, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

If this investigation of reality becomes universal, the divergent nations will ratify all the divine Prophets and confirm all the Holy Books. No strife or rancor will then remain, and the world will become united. Then will we associate in the reality of love. We will become as fathers and sons, as brothers and sisters living together in complete unity, love and happiness; for this century is the century of light.⁸

Bahá'ís view the twentieth century as the hinge of the present and past ages, as a singular vantage point from which one can now make informed historical judgments of both past events and future possibilities. Such a vantage point has been taken by the writer or writers of *The Century of Light* (2001), a historically informed analysis of the century now gone by, a work that is inspired both by the rhetoric and writings of Shoghi Effendi, as well as being documented by allusions to twentieth-century history seen in light of the Bahá'í teachings on world unity.

Because of its moral and theological bias, this chapter may strike some readers as unacceptable revisionist history. But it is a revision that is not inconsequential. For what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi intend by the word *history* needs serious reconsideration in view of the fact that historical events, as they have been experienced by peoples and nations, and represented by historians, has now come to the point of showing a thoroughly tragic scenario. Whatever history is conceived to be, it needs serious reexamination to find those significant points of light that gleam out of this long darkness. History needs to be rewritten, not only from a pressing need to identify where “the light shineth in darkness” (John 1:5)⁹ but also from an equally dire need to rewrite history in the present. This assertion means simply to act in such a manner as to change history for the better, i.e., to further the peace, prosperity, and unity of the human race.

The History of Humanity: One Spiritual Narrative

Philosopher-historian William H. Dray, in his cogent study *Philosophy of History*, identifies three types of historical theories or non-theories as the case may be: historical nihilists, those who deny any meaning to history; historical skeptics, those who assert that we cannot know whether or not there be either pattern or meaning in history; and those who assert that meaning is found in history. This last approach, dead since the Enlightenment, was revived in the twentieth century and can be found in the works of Arnold Toynbee, Christopher Dawson, the American Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, and in the metaphysical system of G. W. F. Hegel and his dialectic of freedom and necessity.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, the Bahá'í teachings, with their particular perspective on history, fall into the third category who believe that meaning is found in history. As stated above, providential history is predicated on the role of the Prophets, the institutes of religion, and spiritual values as determining factors in the growth of civilization. There are admittedly difficulties attached to such an unconventional, theologically based theory, even for those who favor some form of providential intervention in history. The following observation by Reinhold Niebuhr in his profound study *Faith and History* is pertinent:

The meaning of history is, in short, more complex than conceived in even the profoundest philosophies of history, whether classical or modern. It is significant that historians, as distinguished from philosophers of history, usually have great difficulty with these philosophical patterns of meaning because these fail to do justice to the complexity of historical patterns and the wide variety of historical facts.¹¹

While Niebuhr cautions against the ability of philosophies of history to fully encompass the complexity of historical events, his caution has not dissuaded him from making a persuasive case for the Christian—in reality, the Judeo-Christian—view of history compared to modern secular versions of history. In one of the most telling passages on the biblical narrative as a type of universal history, Niebuhr writes:

To believe that the story of mankind is one story because the various disparate stories are under one divine sovereignty is therefore not an arbitrary procedure. On the contrary it prevents ages and cultures, civilizations and philosophies, from arbitrarily finding the center of history's meaning within their own life or achievements and from

seeking the culmination and fulfilment of that meaning prematurely in the victory of their cause or completion of their particular project.¹²

Niebuhr's words of the one story of humanity, while they ring true for a Bahá'í, also contain a certain irony, for it is precisely within the Bahá'í dispensation, Bahá'ís believe, that world history will find its fulfilment. Similarly, a Bahá'í would argue that if humanity is one, it does no violence to the writing of history to claim, from the perspective of the universal metanarrative, that its history is one. Bahá'ís are not alone in this view. The respected Canadian comparative religionist, Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916–2000), declared that “[t]hose who believe in the unity of mankind, and those who believe in the unity of God, should be prepared therefore to discover a unity of mankind’s religious history.”¹³ It can be argued, consequently, that the discovery or elaboration of the one history of humanity—which may coexist alongside a plurality of disparate secular histories, one that is integrally connected to the great world’s religions—is a valid theory that deserves serious consideration.

On the Influence of the Prophets

This “unity of mankind’s religious history” of which Cantwell Smith writes will then have sure connections with the influence of the Prophets, since one cannot imagine religious history without prophetic history. This prophetic influence is a central, predominant theme scattered throughout various Bahá'í sacred texts, but *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, a book that synthesizes religious, sociological, moral, and political elements, establishes this central belief. The following is among the most categorical statements on this question:

By the Lord God, and there is no God but He, even the minutest details of civilized life derive from the grace of the Prophets of God. What thing of value to mankind has ever come into being which was not first set forth either directly or by implication in the Holy Scriptures?¹⁴

Other passages set out the remarkable influence of the Prophets on minds, souls, character, and on civilization itself:

One Holy Soul [the Prophet or Divine Manifestation] gives life to the world of humanity, changes the aspect of the terrestrial globe, causes intelligence to progress, vivifies souls, lays the basis of a new life, establishes new foundations, organizes the world, brings nations and religions under the shadow of one standard, delivers man from the world of imperfections and vices, and inspires him with the desire

and need of natural and acquired perfections. Certainly nothing short of a divine power could accomplish so great a work. We ought to consider this with justice, for this is the office of justice.¹⁵

The following passage of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the longevity of the influence of the Prophets was contained in a tablet addressed to the distinguished Swiss psychiatrist, anatomist, and entomologist Dr. Auguste Forel (1848-1931), a tablet that has become known as “God and the Universe”:

The will of every sovereign prevaieth during his reign, the will of every philosopher findeth expression in a handful of disciples during his lifetime, but the Power of the Holy Spirit shineth radiantly in the realities of the Messengers of God, and strengtheneth Their will in such wise as to influence a great nation for thousands of years and to regenerate the human soul and revive mankind. Consider how great is this power! It is an extraordinary Power, an all-sufficient proof of the truth of the mission of the Prophets of God, and a conclusive evidence of the power of Divine Inspiration.¹⁶

At the conclusion of a talk given in response to one of many questions posed by the American-born Laura Dreyfus-Barney, née Laura Clifford Barney, during her several visits to Akka (Acco) (1904–1906), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said simply, “The gardeners of the world of humanity are the Prophets of God.”¹⁷ Although the sentence is metaphorical, its concise wisdom speaks volumes to the present theme. One must ask how can the “world of humanity” be realistically separated from the notion of civilization itself? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s telling metaphor points to the primordial role assumed by the Prophets in the growth of societies, nations, and civilizations.

The Political Conflict-Conquest Model

One should not cease from seeking and finding patterns of meaning in history, be they moral-theological or otherwise. Such an undertaking is not inimical to the task of the historian. On one side of the divide of historical methodology, Isaiah Berlin writes that the historian “can scarcely hope to avoid that minimal degree of moral and psychological evaluation which is necessarily involved in viewing human beings as creatures with purposes and motives (and not merely as causal factors in the procession of events).”¹⁸ William H. Dray observes the following about “objective” historians who shun morally or philosophically evaluative histories as being unscientific. In critiquing Herbert Butterfield’s objectivist stance Dray writes:

He tells us, for example, that “religious persecution” and “military atrocities” are phenomena which the historian should not *judge*, but simply try to understand—as if judgment were not already implicit in his characterization of fact. For the objectivists, facts and values are always quite distinct. But if we are to call persecutions and atrocities “facts”—and historians are generally prepared to do so—it is easy to see why evaluation is thought to be logically ingredient in the historian’s subject matter.¹⁹

The theory of providential history does not bend the “facts” to fit the theory. Rather, it attempts to equate spiritual and moral factors to certain developments in the growth of civilizations as true history—the story worth being told. It determines such factors, while attempting to be honest with the historical data, by recourse to such philosophical and theological concepts as God, revelation, divine law, teleology, moral and spiritual values, and meaning itself—determinative phenomena that are all located within the vast temporal flux called history. Such phenomena, it may be argued, are not creatures of history, but rather creators of it; or at the least, they work within the stage of social evolution achieved at a given point in time, to carry civilization forward to produce higher forms of organized life.

Those who favor this view will argue that much meaning is offered by the theory that the world’s great religions have been a prime factor in the growth of civilizations. Proponents of such a theory, it should be noted, are not blind to the fact that religion has been used, and is still being used, as a tool to achieve material gain and political ascendancy, or to fuel a virulent and dangerous religious fanaticism, the lust for power, and the inordinate desire to subjugate others. But it considers that religious wars, whatever their justification in past or present history, and other forms of religious controversy, are by definition an oxymoron and a perversion of one of the primary purposes of religion, i.e., to live at one with others. Thus the fault may be seen to lie—to alter a Shakespearean phrase—not with religion, but with our selves. Any scriptural justifications of so-called holy war in the past have been declared null and void in the Bahá’í dispensation.

Many historians have conceived of history mainly in political terms, as a *rapport de force*. It has been portrayed, consequently, as a series of power plays, conflicted relations, as spoils to the victor and defeat for the vanquished. Media representations of current events exacerbate the conflict model by pandering to the lust for the sensationalistic scenario in international relations, which are regrettably all too prevalent. Historians who have adopted the

conflict model of the political framework that ignores the civilizing role of religion have been coopted into perpetuating the bloodstained record of the ephemeral glory of empire-building and conquest. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has condemned the quest for battle-glory as the most pernicious of illusions:

These glorious conquests are so ephemeral! Why attach so great importance to them and to their fame, as to be willing to shed the blood of the people for their attainment? Is any victory worth the inevitable train of evils consequent upon human slaughter, the grief and sorrow and ruin which must overwhelm so many homes of both nations? For it is not possible that one country alone should suffer.²⁰

Political histories are also based on the assumption that government or empire building is a prize of great price, the highest ideal to which humans can aspire because it ensures “greatness” through the manipulation of power and the acquisition of material wealth. Consequently, these are histories of conquering peoples, great empires, great battles, and “great men.” But they are based on “*la loi du plus fort*” (lit. law of the stronger/jungle). They record periods of colonial exploitation, the subjugation and destruction of many a minority ethnic culture by a dominant one, and the slaughter of the innocents by the oppressor. And whatever the veracity of such writing—and it is only too clear that the accounts of victors and vanquished differ greatly—for the people on the ground, this history has been largely tragic and contains within it the seeds of future conflict. The great J. W. von Goethe’s comment to Luden, a German historian of his time, is apropos:

Even if you were able to interpret and investigate all sources, what would you find? Nothing but one great truth which has long been discovered and for whose confirmation one does not need to seek far; the truth, namely, that in all times and in all countries things have been miserable. Men have always been in fear and trouble, they have pained and tortured one another; what little life they had, they made sour one to the other.”²¹

Awakening from a Nightmare

Stephen Dedalus says in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awaken.”²² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá observes:

Consider how discord and dissension have prevailed in this great human family for thousands of years. Its members have ever been engaged in war and bloodshed. Up to the present time in history the

world of humanity has neither attained nor enjoyed any measure of peace, owing to incessant conditions of hostility and strife. History is a continuous and consecutive record of warfare brought about by religious, sectarian, racial, patriotic and political causes.²³

Will and Ariel Durant in their *Lessons of History*, a retrospective distillation of their ten-volume work *The Story of Civilization*, make the following observations in the final chapter (13) “Is Progress Real?” in what must be called a mixed review of the notion of progress:

We frolic in our emancipation from theology, but have we developed a natural ethic—a moral code independent of religion—strong enough to keep our instincts of acquisition, pugnacity, and sex from debasing our civilization into a mire of greed, crime, and promiscuity? Have we really outgrown intolerance, or merely transferred it from religious to national, ideological, or racial hostilities? Are our manners better or worse? . . . Have our laws given the criminal too much protection against society and the state? Have we given ourselves more freedom than our intelligence can digest?²⁴

If history is merely the record of a nightmare, then humanity needs to begin dreaming another dream. A new story needs to be told, one that will not only tell of significant points of light in humanity’s evolution but also generate hope for the collective destiny of humanity as a unified species. Such a story is not just a matter of wishful thinking. The present age’s global imperative involves a reinterpretation of the past in light of the present and the possibilities of the future. The Bahá’í view of providential history, the ancient view renewed in the light of modernity and the revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, provides such a story.

All Histories Have Bias

Before coming to a consideration of Shoghi Effendi’s views, it may be helpful briefly to further situate the theory of providential history within the larger context of historical writing. Since the time of Herodotus (c.484–425 BCE), who at least attempted impartial narratives of wars and major political events,²⁵ the history of historiography reveals that a variety of political, religious, nationalistic, and ideological influences have colored historical writing.²⁶ To cite but one example, Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859), a historian read and admired by Shoghi Effendi, as much for his grand narrative style as for his historical acumen, was the most brilliant English

historian of his day and a Whig apologist who “described the salvation of the world’s liberties through the ‘glorious revolution’ of 1688-89.”²⁷

Even the great German historian, Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), who is generally regarded as the founder of modern “scientific” or empirical historiography with his reliance on eyewitness accounts, examination of archival material, and a careful sifting of the “personal equation”²⁸ in the documents studied, did not escape bias. Ranke has been criticized, *inter alia*, for neglecting “the fundamental facts of economic and social history. . . .”²⁹ Perhaps under Hegelian influence, Ranke placed every historical epoch in relation to God and attributed to each period an end or specific accomplishment. Despite his prodigious accomplishments, Ranke has been criticized for this bias toward providential history, which was seen as a defect by later historians.³⁰ However his famous dictum, often quoted—sometimes out of context—that he was concerned only with “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*” (“what actually happened”), gave a new standard of objectivity to the writing of history. Ranke wrote, “To history has been assigned the office of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of future ages. To such high offices this work does not aspire: It wants only to show what actually happened.”³¹ For Ranke, historical writing was to be beyond the pale of instructive morality, passion, and prejudice. And yet, the theory of providential history does in fact return to more ancient notions of the lessons of history (as wisdom), which were critiqued in Ranke’s statement.

I have mentioned mainstream historians in contrast to the views presented here. This statement “mainstream historians” is itself a generalization that needs to be qualified. The writing of history has not been unaffected by the theories of postmodernism and, some historians would say, has suffered greatly at the hands of social theorists and literary critics. If, following what has been called “Derridaism,” the objective meaning of the text can be called into question so as to make objective meaning disappear, then what happens to traditional histories? If historical texts become an unending series of contextualizations and relativities, then writing history, as we have known it, must disappear. Some critics have observed that historiography in the latter part of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries “is in crisis, at an impasse,” and these critics “point to an unseemly number of unresolved controversies, a disarray of methodologies, and a confused relationship to the social sciences and psychology on the one hand and philosophy and literature on the other.”³² These comments, however, concern “objective” historiography prior to the

proliferation of the endless subjectivities that have invaded every department of organized thought with the advent of postmodernism.

Mainstream historians, with the exception of Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975) and Christopher Dawson (1889–1970), would find the idea of prophetic religion to explain the rise of civilizations to be quite out of the question. English historian of Soviet Russia, E. H. Carr (1892–1982), a proponent of modified objectivity,³³ spoke on the relationship of history, science, and morality in a series of lectures given at Cambridge (January–March 1961).³⁴ Carr argued that providential history, and what he viewed as extra-historical theories like it, should find no place on any serious historian’s agenda. Carr did not object to the theorist’s right to “erect a super-historical standard or criterion in the light of which judgement is passed on historical events or situations—whether that standard derives from some divine authority postulated by the theologians, or from a static Reason or Nature postulated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment.”³⁵ Nonetheless, he argued:

It is not that shortcomings occur in the application of the standard, or defects in the standard itself. It is that the attempt to erect such a standard is unhistorical and contradicts the very essence of history. It provides a dogmatic answer to questions which the historian is bound by his vocation incessantly to ask: the historian who accepts answers in advance to these questions goes to work with his eyes blindfolded and renounces his vocation.³⁶

Carr’s solution to this problem, at least as far as values are concerned, is a thorough historical relativism. All values, he argues, “are in fact rooted in history. . . . Every group has its own values which are rooted in history.”³⁷ For Carr there can be no absolute values apart from historical context. Carr’s Absolute, if he believed in one, since God and/or Revelation are excluded, would have to be history itself which is just as impervious to a facile definition as are the words God, religion and revelation. Moreover, Carr’s statement that all values are themselves rooted in history is begging the question (*petitio principii*). We have to ask ourselves what exactly is the nature of this history that he claims to lie at the root all values? Do the events of history create, or are they created by, such values? We must know what is cause and what is effect. These are not rhetorical chicken-egg questions. The theory of providential history answers that *values create history* and not the reverse.

Carr’s last intended historical project was to make an assessment of the present and the future based on a careful analysis of Marx and Marxism, but

the task was cut short by his death in 1982. Marx remained for him, “the most far-seeing genius of the nineteenth century and one of the most successful Prophets in history.”³⁸ Despite his anti-theological rhetoric, Carr has recourse to it here when he presents Marx as a prophetic visionary and a revolutionary social reformer. Carr did not live to see the collapse of communism, symbolized by the smashing of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and we can only speculate as to the direction in which he would have altered his understanding of history in light of the collapse of communism. However, his comment is doubly ironic in light of the nineteenth-century appearance of Bahá’u’lláh who claimed to be the True Prophet of the age. While Marxist ideology and its socialist experiment have proved to be a dismal failure, Bahá’u’lláh’s “model for world fellowship”³⁹ continues to be implemented, however imperceptible this process may be to a world that is still largely uninformed of its aims.

If the historian’s task is to inquire into the nature of events as they really happened, or as they really are, in the face of the quest for such objectivity, certain complexities arise out of the task of historical description. R. Stephen Humphreys observed that “history is the attempt to give veridical and adequate descriptions of change in human affairs.”⁴⁰ Humphreys is, of course, right that one critical function of historical writing must account for change. Yet philosopher of history Robert Eric Frykenberg raises some fundamental questions vis-à-vis Humphreys’ definition, “But exactly what, one may ask, does he mean by ‘change in human affairs’? Answers to such questions are crucial to the validity of the definition he has given us.”⁴¹ Humphreys’ notion of “veridical descriptions” raises the larger question of determining the truth content of such veridical descriptions. By whom and/or by what standards are the imputed true descriptions in history determined? Change for some may represent retrogression to others. The abolitionist movement (especially, its role in the December 1865 ratification of 13th Amendment to the Constitution) and Abraham Lincoln’s emancipation proclamation (1 January 1863)⁴² were seen by the Christian southern plantation owner as a moral affront, a violation of biblical teaching,⁴³ and as an economic disaster. Some scale of values must be applied. Within Bahá’í premises, change means rejecting war and violence, and instead adopting those effective measures that establish lasting peace.

The “Dual Phenomenon” of Our Time

The Guardian wrote that contemporary history is marked by a “*dual phenomenon*,” the simultaneous disintegration and integration of the old and new world orders. Here is his generative passage:

We are indeed living in an age which, if we would correctly appraise it, should be regarded as one which is witnessing a dual phenomenon. The first signalizes the death pangs of an order, effete and godless, that has stubbornly refused, despite the signs and portents of a century-old Revelation, to attune its processes to the precepts and ideals which that Heaven-sent Faith proffered it. The second proclaims the birth pangs of an Order, divine and redemptive, that will inevitably supplant the former, and within Whose administrative structure an embryonic civilization, incomparable and world-embracing, is imperceptibly maturing. The one is being rolled up, and is crashing in oppression, bloodshed, and ruin. The other opens up vistas of a justice, a unity, a peace, a culture, such as no age has ever seen. The former has spent its force, demonstrated its falsity and barrenness, lost irretrievably its opportunity, and is hurrying to its doom. The latter, virile and unconquerable, is plucking asunder its chains, and is vindicating its title to be the one refuge within which a sore-tried humanity, purged from its dross, can attain its destiny.⁴⁴

The motif of death and rebirth alluded to in this passage is very ancient. While the Bahá'í Faith rejects reincarnation, death and rebirth have both a scientific and conceptual usage in biology,⁴⁵ philosophy, and theology. According to Geoffrey Nash, the term used by the Romantics was *palingenesia*⁴⁶—the more usual biological term is *palingenesis*—and was employed, among others, by the Pythagoreans to indicate metempsychosis, and by Schopenhauer to designate the continued existence of the eternal will in each newborn individual.⁴⁷ The duality highlighted above by Shoghi Effendi is found elsewhere in his dyadic expressions “*death pangs/birth pangs*”⁴⁸ that characterize the twin processes that define the modern age. These sets of binary relationships are found in other passages such as the “*rise and of fall,*” “*integration and disintegration,*” and “*order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other.*”⁴⁹ With this last phrase, Shoghi Effendi has foreshadowed one of the key ideas in modern chaos theory. What first appears to the observer to be only chaos, when viewed in a longer and larger perspective, may in fact signify the emergence of a new order of things. Thus the scientific, religious, and mythic views converge on the point that order proceeds, and must proceed, from chaos. The stark contrast between these two simultaneous processes, the

one a creative affirmation of life, and the other a thanatopsis⁵⁰ of a doomed civilization, points to the profound truth that new life springs from death in the grand continuum that is called existence. The death of the old world order does not mean annihilation but resurrection.

An alternate expression to this “*dual phenomenon*” is the Guardian’s phrase “*twin processes*.” The following passage was written in 1938 on the eve of World War II. It accurately warned of “*impending disaster*” but indicated that the Bahá’í community was ready and able to assist in the unfoldment of the new order:

*Pregnant indeed are the years looming ahead of us all. The twin processes of internal disintegration and external chaos are being accelerated and every day are inexorably moving towards a climax. The rumblings that must precede the eruption of those forces that must cause “the limbs of humanity to quake” can already be heard. “The time of the end,” “the latter years,” as foretold in the Scriptures, are at long last upon us. The Pen of Bahá’u’lláh, the voice of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, have time and again, insistently and in terms unmistakable, warned an unheeding humanity of impending disaster. The Community of the Most Great Name, the leaven that must leaven the lump, the chosen remnant that must survive the rolling up of the old, discredited, tottering order, and assist in the unfoldment of a new one in its stead, is standing ready, alert, clear-visioned, and resolute.*⁵¹

Some enlightened thinkers have also been aware of the depth of the present crisis afflicting humanity. The Russian-American sociologist and philosopher Pitirim Sorokin (1889–1968), who became the first professor of sociology and founder of that department at Harvard (1930), wrote in *The Crisis of Our Age* of “the way out and beyond,” referring to the global crisis that he had already perceived. Sorokin’s comment is worth quoting at length:

The first step in this direction [of resolving the world crisis] consists in as wide, as deep, and as prompt a realization as possible of the extraordinary character of the contemporary crisis of our culture and society. It is high time to realize that this is not one of the ordinary crises which happen almost every decade, but one of the greatest transitions in human history from one culture to another. An adequate realization of the immense magnitude of the change now upon us is a necessary condition for determining the adequacy

of measures and means to alleviate the magnitude of the pending catastrophe. He is a poor doctor who treats dangerous pneumonia as a slight cold. Similarly, nothing but harm can ensue from the prevalent treatment of the present crisis as a light and ordinary maladjustment. Such a blunderous diagnosis must be forgotten as soon as possible, together with all the surface rubbing medicines abundantly prescribed by shortsighted socio-cultural physicians.⁵²

Bahá'ís will hear in Sorokin's comment a virtual echo of the words of Bahá'u'lláh written in the latter half of the nineteenth century:

The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements. We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions. We see it languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy. They have conceived the straight to be crooked, and have imagined their friend an enemy.⁵³

In the subsequent passage, “the All-Knowing Physician” prescribes His remedy: “He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful, cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body.”⁵⁴ The Universal House of Justice, building on the thought and diction of Shoghi Effendi, has referred to the “two great processes at work”⁵⁵ to paraphrase the juxtaposition of the disintegrative and integrative processes at work in contemporary world history.

The Kingdom of God and the One Story of Humanity

As a “grand theory”⁵⁶ or global theory of universal history, providential history locates those factors that may be identified as the actions of God upon societies and civilizations, working through the aegis of the Prophets

and their teachings, who in partnership with a willing humanity, “carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”⁵⁷ This global theory dates back to the origins of those early civilizations that arose within the Adamic cycle approximately six thousand years ago and closed with the termination of the Muhammadan dispensation. A new universal cycle of fulfilment began with the declaration of the Báb on 23 May 1844, inaugurating the Bahá’í cycle that will last for no less than 500,000 years.⁵⁸ This periodization is itself a scriptural datum.⁵⁹

For Bahá’ís, just as it was for the ancient Jews who first discerned such a view and for their spiritual descendants the Christians who adopted it, God has been active in history through the Great Covenant that works within dispensational religion.⁶⁰ The Bahá’í view is indebted to Judaism in that God is understood to be the One Creator who intervenes in secular affairs according to the purposes of a Divine Plan. As the God of all things, the God of history breaks into the temporal flux to awaken those individuals and nations who have ignored Him and His divine emissary. The Christian apocalyptic view of end time, which would result in the triumphal reign of Jesus, is largely Judaic in that it echoes the supremacy of a messianic kingdom over all of creation announced by the Hebrew Prophets, just as the Islamic concept of the Day of Judgment (*Yawm al-deen*) (lit. the day of doom), with its sharp contrast of the delights of heaven for believers and the tortures of hell for unbelievers,⁶¹ although differing in particulars, is also largely Judaic.

This providential view of history was first set out in the Hebrew Bible, adopted later by the Christians in the New Testament, and re-emphasized by St. Augustine in *The City of God* (*Civitas Dei*) and by later medieval church leaders. Yairah Amit, a contemporary Jewish scholar, has clearly articulated this view and how it contrasted markedly from the mythical sense of time in the religions that preceded Judaism:

The concept of divinity as developed in biblical literature is of a single universal deity who manifests himself in history, conducts a continuous dialogue, direct or indirect, with humankind, and is not only a cosmic divinity in command of nature, but also a kind of providence, supervising human history and directing it. This concept gave rise to a new attitude to history, which came to replace mythology. Reducing the pantheon of many gods to a single one meant discarding the stories of their deeds and replacing them with a description of the relations between the one God and humankind, his creatures. God is thus displaced

from the world of myth, which moves along eternal time cycles, and interest becomes focused on the connection between him and humanity, thus giving a new significance to human events. These, in turn, become means of learning and understanding God's ways.⁶²

As mentioned above, Reinhold Niebuhr in *Faith and History* has argued cogently how the idea of the "one story" for humanity has developed from the belief in "a single divine sovereignty,"⁶³ the "single universal deity" mentioned above by Amit. Niebuhr argues:

History is conceived as unity because all historical destinies are under the dominion of a single divine sovereignty. . . . It would seem, therefore, that the story of mankind is progressively becoming one story, both through an actual growth in cultural penetration and through the development of historical sciences, able to trace and analyse such interpenetrations.⁶⁴

While Niebuhr's comment reflects on the Judeo-Christian view of a Kingdom of God that governs the entire world, it is also coherent with the Bahá'í view of providential history, which is precisely a metahistory that shifts the focus away from the nationalistic, military, or technical prowess of particular nations or empires and concentrates instead on the story of the development of one human family. This perspective shifts the locus of development from the smaller "we" to the larger collective "We," to the story of us all.

By relocating the focus of social progress and material advancement into the hands of the Prophets, who as God's emissaries are viewed as the progenitors of culture and civilization, history becomes less nationalistic or ethnocentric and more universalistic, while admittedly becoming more theological, i.e., less purely secular. At the same time, the Lesser Narrative is contained within the Grand Narrative, i.e., the accomplishments of particular individuals, nations, or peoples find their own place within the larger story that is unfolding.

In addition to the belief in a Divine Plan of salvation, which derived from a belief in the supremacy of an omniscient, rational, all-seeing, and merciful God as the Overseer of both the actions of men and the deeds of the nations, the Judeo-Christian view of history offered two other unique features: a linear notion of time and the idea of a *telos* (end or goal to history). R. G. Collingwood in his generative study *The Idea of History*, which, for all its merits, neglected the Jewish contribution to the idea of history and largely subsumed it within the Christian view, has written, "Any

history written on Christian principles will be of necessity universal, providential, apocalyptic, and periodized.”⁶⁵ It is a puzzle as to why Collingwood would classify Jewish history, along with the Roman, as being “partial and particularistic history.”⁶⁶ The God of the Hebrews, as depicted in the Books of Daniel (7:14) and Isaiah (2:4, 9:6–7), fashions the end-time national destiny of the Jews into an instrument of peace and salvation for all nations. Amit’s description above of Jewish historiography largely fits Collingwood’s description of the Christian idea of history. St. Augustine’s scheme of the Six Ages in the *City of God*, at least until the time of Christ, was based on the divisions of the Hebrew Bible according to the various prophetic dispensations by which each age was supposed to last for a thousand years,⁶⁷ although Augustine repudiated this rigidity.

Linear and Cyclical Views of History

Bahá’í scripture supports both the linear and cyclical views of history, which are not mutually exclusive. The linear view of *telos*, the events of history that drive on toward a particular end or goal, i.e., the unity of the human race, takes form over long periods of historical time that evolve within relatively shorter cycles that play out within the larger Adamic cycle, which began the process. The individual prophetic cycles or dispensations are smaller cycles occurring within the larger Adamic cycle, somewhat analogous to Ezekiel’s wheel within a wheel (see Ezk. 1:15–21), and which are fulfilled in this dispensation in the coming of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. The linear and cyclical views are not irreconcilable if conceived as a chain. The straightened chain can be thought of as a line, while the individual links of the chain can be conceived as cycles within the line. The cyclical view of history, with its fated, naturalistic processes of decay, death, and rebirth or renewal is a classical, Asian, and mythical motif; whereas, the teleological view, which drives forward toward the unique, unrepeatable event, the messianic Kingdom of God, is Judeo-Christian in origin and has been taken over by the Abrahamic religions. The historian Arnold J. Toynbee represented the cyclical view of the rise and fall of civilizations by analogy with the chariot, which he equated with the higher religions. The chariot of religion drives civilization forward, while the turning wheels represent the continual rise and fall of civilizations.⁶⁸ Toynbee’s chariot analogy could be taken, however, as a reconciliation of both views. The forward motion of the chariot could represent linear or teleological history, while the revolving wheels could represent the infinitely repeatable cyclical processes of decay and renewal that take place within its forward motion.

The New Creation and Teleology

Whatever current theories of the philosophy of history may be, it is abundantly clear that Shoghi Effendi's view of history is decidedly teleological (Gr. *telos*, end, completion). But teleology, since it constitutes a predictive grand scheme, runs counter to the spirit of the postmodern mind and is currently out of intellectual favor. The incisive Northrop Frye has remarked upon the loss of this teleological sense in modern times, "One of the most striking cultural facts of our time is the disappearance of this teleological sense. We tend now to think of our lives as being, like the long poem described by Poe,⁶⁹ a discontinuous sequence of immediate experiences."⁷⁰ Philosopher of critical realism⁷¹ and poet George Santayana, in explaining Herbert Spencer's views on evolution and substance, has argued that "evolution must have a goal, it must unfold a germ in a determinate direction towards an implicit ideal; otherwise there would be no progress involved, no means of distinguishing changes for the better from changes for the worse."⁷² Teleology, in our context, means that the Mind of God had determined the end goal of human history and ultimately directs the historical process toward its achievement.

In his *Interpretation of History*, the great twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965) shed light on the linear notions of time that accompanied the revolutionary Judeo-Christian view of history. Tillich's timeline moves toward something unique, a New Creation. He writes:

Time has only one direction; it cannot be turned around; we cannot have the contents of the future as the contents of the past, nor conversely. We cannot replace reality in advance of ourselves by reality behind ourselves or vice versa. The line of time has always one and the same direction. It has the character of going toward something—more exactly something new. This very fact excludes the possibility of repetition. Each moment of the directed progress of time can occur only once.⁷³

Tillich's expression the "New Creation," reads very much like a condensation of St. John's "a new heaven and a new earth,"⁷⁴ and is reminiscent of Teilhard de Chardin's futuristic "Omega Point"⁷⁵ toward which "Mankind, born on this planet and spread over its entire surface, [is] coming gradually to form around its earthly matrix a single, major organic unity. . . ."⁷⁶ Tillich's understanding of the New Creation is the *ne plus ultra* in the divine scheme of things. For this New Creation, Tillich is willing to subordinate all else. His description of it conveys a unique sense of its ultimacy:

The New Creation—this is our ultimate concern; this should be our infinite passion—the infinite passion of every human being. This matters; this alone matters ultimately. In comparison with it everything else, even religion or non-religion, even Christianity or non-Christianity, matters very little—and ultimately nothing.⁷⁷

Bahá'u'lláh affirms that His New World Order is something never before witnessed on the timeline of history, “The world’s equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind’s ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.”⁷⁸ The Bahá’í sacred writings repeatedly affirm the reality of the New Creation brought by Bahá'u'lláh. Here is but one example from the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that can be taken as a literal fulfillment of Tillich’s great concern: “He [Bahá'u'lláh] hath laid down the foundations of the lofty Citadel, He hath inaugurated the Cycle of Glory, He hath brought forth a new creation on this day that is clearly Judgment Day—and still do the heedless stay fast in their drunken sleep.”⁷⁹ In its spiritual potentialities the New Creation already exists. In its actual existence in space–time, it already lives in embryonic form, but the current artisans of the new world order must continue, all down the generations, to bring its potentialities to full actualization.

While it is decidedly future directed, teleology, somewhat paradoxically, also claims to be the key to understanding the past. This assertion means simply that the fabric of the past and present become more discernible when a once future event becomes realized in the present. In other words, it is not until the end-goal has been reached that past and present events will become clear. Bahá'u'lláh’s reference to His own dispensation as being the key or “*the eye to past ages and centuries*”⁸⁰ is an illustration of this principle. This roving eye looks back into past ages in order to better understand them in light of the present.

The End-Point of History

As mentioned, while some postmodern theorists and conventional historians would be opposed to a predictive, end-point of history, Shoghi Effendi writes of this final stage toward which the world is inexorably moving:

The ages of its [humanity’s] infancy and childhood are past, never again to return, while the Great Age, the consummation

*of all ages, which must signalize the coming of age of the entire human race, is yet to come. The convulsions of this transitional and most turbulent period in the annals of humanity are the essential prerequisites, and herald the inevitable approach, of that Age of Ages, "the time of the end," in which the folly and tumult of strife that has, since the dawn of history, blackened the annals of mankind, will have been finally transmuted into the wisdom and the tranquillity of an undisturbed, a universal, and lasting peace, in which the discord and separation of the children of men will have given way to the worldwide reconciliation, and the complete unification of the divers elements that constitute human society.*⁸¹

Should this passage not be clear enough, the remarkable last World Order letter of 11 March 1936 entitled, "The Unfoldment of World Civilization" contains the following judgment:

*The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of age of the entire human race. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture—all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Era—should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop.*⁸²

However, as has been pointed out above, the word *end* is not being used in an absolute sense. There can be no such absolute end to history. While stages may produce the fulfillment of a Golden Age or stable plateaus,

change and contingency are inherent to the temporal world. In the longer view of time, ends are just stages in “the end that hath no end.”⁸³ The above passage makes clear that while stages in collective social and spiritual evolution may attain stability, the individual “*as a result of such a consummation*” will continue to progress indefinitely.

Writing the History of the Future: Does History End in the Present?

The Guardian’s writings indicate that Bahá’u’lláh is the Divine Author who writes the script of history. In this passage He is referred to as the “*sole Author*” who ultimately controls the destinies of the world:

*After a revolution of well nigh one hundred years what is it that the eye encounters as one surveys the international scene and looks back upon the early beginnings of Bahá’í history? A world convulsed by the agonies of contending systems, races and nations, entangled in the mesh of its accumulated falsities, receding farther and farther from Him Who is the sole Author of its destinies, and sinking deeper and deeper into a suicidal carnage which its neglect and persecution of Him Who is its Redeemer have precipitated.*⁸⁴

Unlike the impersonal mechanism of an arbitrary Reason in the Hegelian philosophy of Spirit or the self-unconscious, deterministic processes of nature, Bahá’u’lláh’s *Author-ity* as the Writer of history originates in a supreme but loving Primal Will that has fixed beneficent purposes for the individual, society, and world-state alike. But these purposes cannot be easily fulfilled unless consent is given:

My object is none other than the betterment of the world and the tranquillity of its peoples. The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established. This unity can never be achieved so long as the counsels which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed are suffered to pass unheeded.⁸⁵

The phrase “writing the history of the future” reads like an oxymoron.⁸⁶ It seems to fly in the face of logic. How can the future be written when it has not yet happened? Philosopher-historian R. G. Collingwood reminds us in his *The Idea of History* that Hegel’s concept of history as outlined in his *Philosophy of History* ended in the present. It ended more particularly in

the Prussian monarchy of Emperor Frederick William III and in the Germanic peoples, whom Hegel viewed as the apogee of culture and civilization and as the embodiment of freedom. Aside from Hegel's militantly nationalistic views on the historical destiny of the Germanic peoples, which Collingwood passes over, in principle he approves of Hegel's view of history as ending in the present:

But the historian has no knowledge of the future; what documents, what evidence, has he from which to ascertain facts that have not yet happened? And the more philosophically he looks at history the more clearly he recognizes that the future is and always must be a closed book to him. History *must* end with the present, because nothing else has happened. . . . It only means recognizing the present as a fact and realizing that we do not know what future progress will be.⁸⁷

Here the domains of the professional historian, on the one hand, and the Prophet, the philosopher, or visionary, on the other hand, clash. Collingwood's statement indicates that the historian has no right to speculate on the future, much less to declare what that future would be. Such an activity is deemed to be outside his purview. Yet this is precisely what the Prophet does. He points to a future time as the unfoldment of the Divine Plan, and He tells of the end as well as of the beginning of humanity's story on earth.

However, a commonsensical observation must be made. While historians may eschew predictions about the future, no one can seriously argue that the future must not be provided for, following some sensible forecasting and cogent planning, which are both vital to effective management. Forecasting or prediction is the secular version of historical prophecy. The various sectors of government and the economy, infrastructure needs, urban planning and development, the climatic and atmospheric changes that are the business of the geologist, meteorologist, and ecologist alike, even household management, all involve forecasting. The social scientist and the market pundit take readings of current trends and make predictions on that basis. In the personal realm, a large psychic market has become available to individuals seeking guidance with their financial affairs or intimate relationships. Forecasting is necessary to provide for present and future needs, and it appears to be inherent to the individual's desire to know.

And yet, when it comes to the future history of the world and the collective destiny of the human race, some historians seem to be saying that

it is not their business either to know what it is or to do anything about it. And yet who would be in a better position than the historian to profit from poet-philosopher George Santayana's saying, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."⁸⁸ Why, one must wonder, is the sense of knowing and planning to be excluded from the collective destiny of the human race, which involves nothing less than the survival of us all? It seems preposterous to exclude the possibility of knowing the future of the world, or of working to bring about the realization of that future, just as it would be preposterous for the individual never to plan or manage for the realization of personal goals.

It is axiomatic to the arguments presented here that the three Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, and Shoghi Effendi after them, knew this history of the future, as did the Prophets of the past, since they had access to the Mind of God and the Divine Will. Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, and Shoghi Effendi's execution of it, which continues today under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, is the chief means for the establishment of this future world. Bahá'u'lláh has foreseen that this unity may best be achieved through the aegis of one world faith—" [t]hat which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith."⁸⁹ To the extent that each individual participates in this process, will he or she participate in the writing of the future. Within this view, the dimensions of the moral stature of great and small actors in history are flattened. Carlyle's historical "Great Man" as the mover and shaper of history becomes Everyman to the extent that every man and every woman agrees to participate in this process.

The Bahá'í Faith understands the world historical process as the periodic, progressive accomplishment of a series of ever-widening circles of unity. At the same time, it teaches that the light of divine revelation has been commensurate to the degree of social evolution achieved. Shoghi Effendi observes:

Just as the organic evolution of mankind has been slow and gradual, and involved successively the unification of the family, the tribe, the city-state, and the nation, so has the light vouchsafed by the Revelation of God, at various stages in the evolution of religion, and reflected in the successive Dispensations of the past, been slow and progressive. Indeed

*the measure of Divine Revelation, in every age, has been adapted to, and commensurate with, the degree of social progress achieved in that age by a constantly evolving humanity.*⁹⁰

While Collingwood's concept of history ends in the present, there is surely one sense in which it is valid to speak of "writing the future," a metaphor that signifies "making history." That sense follows here: what is done in the present, either for the individual or the collective, will surely determine the future. To speak of writing history, in the sense of making history, is surely not a new concept, but it is one that has been acted upon only by a relative few. It should be clear by now that merely understanding the world historical process as an ever-widening circle of unity is not enough. The direct link between participation in the new world faith and the resultant growth in an emerging civilization has been made in a startling statement by the Universal House of Justice, "When the masses of mankind are awakened and enter the Faith of God, a new process is set in motion and the growth of a new civilization begins. Witness the emergence of Christianity and Islam."⁹¹ The writing of history means, then, to be active in creating history.

The Divine Plan as the *Sine Qua Non* of World Peace

According to Shoghi Effendi, world leaders, for the most part, have lacked the clear vision and effective means to bring about world unity, the functional imperative of our age. In his World Order letters, Shoghi Effendi sometimes spoke in the voice of a severe critic of those "*leaders of human institutions*" who with all their political agendas and worn rhetoric had failed to adjust their programs to the needs of a planetary society:

*How pathetic indeed are the efforts of those leaders of human institutions who, in utter disregard of the spirit of the age, are striving to adjust national processes, suited to the ancient days of self-contained nations, to an age which must either achieve the unity of the world, as adumbrated by Bahá'u'lláh, or perish.*⁹²

While Bahá'í institutions are prepared to collaborate on a non-political basis with any like-minded groups, organizations, or institutions, the Guardian was categorical that the stage of mature world government could be fully attained only by the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh and the consequent adoption

of his laws and teachings: “*Such a stage of maturity in the process of human government must, for all time, if we would faithfully recognize the tremendous claim advanced by Bahá’u’lláh, remained identified with the Revelation of which He was the Bearer.*”⁹³

In a communication written through his secretary written in 1933, Shoghi Effendi indicated that the Bahá’í approach to world peace does not involve the repudiation of other peace programs. But he made it clear that the “Bahá’í solution for world peace” is the *sine qua non* of establishing an effective and permanent peace, since it builds upon the solid foundations of the Divine Plan. The Guardian argued further that relative comparisons to other peace programs do not apply since we are dealing with “the sole effective instrument for the establishment of the reign of peace in this world”:

He is firmly convinced that through perseverance and concerted action the cause of Peace will eventually triumph over all the dark forces threatening the welfare and progress of the world today. But such purely human attempts are undoubtedly ineffective unless inspired and guided by the power of faith. Without the assistance of God, as given through the message of Bahá’u’lláh, peace can never be safely and adequately established. To disregard the Bahá’í solution for world peace is to build on foundations of sand. To accept and apply it is to make peace not a mere dream, or an ideal, but a living reality. This is the point which the Guardian wishes you to develop, to emphasize again and again, and to support by convincing arguments. The Bahá’í peace programme is, indeed, not only one way of attaining that goal. It is not even relatively the best. It is, in the last resort, the sole effective instrument for the establishment of the reign of peace in this world. This attitude does not involve any total repudiation of other solutions offered by various philanthropists. It merely shows their inadequacy compared to the Divine Plan for the unification of the world. We cannot escape the truth that nothing mundane can in the last resort be enduring, unless supported and sustained through the power of God.⁹⁴

Is Providential History a Type of Historicism?

In light of the foregoing convictions found in Judeo-Christian messianic views of history and in Shoghi Effendi’s confident assertions and predictions that history is driving, however fitfully and traumatically, toward its final

end, the question may be raised as to whether or not providential history is a type of historicism. Historicism has a number of definitions, but the one that is of interest here includes the following two elements, largely inspired by Hegelian and Marxist thought:

- History has a determined outcome, is governed by historical “laws,” and is consequently predictable; and
- The outcome of history is not generally affected in ad hoc fashion by human choice and free will.

Historicism thus expressed has come under criticism because these ideas have fuelled the growth of nationalism and national destiny philosophies or contributed to the development of totalitarian ideologies. This has led to the rejection of historicism as being a dangerous philosophy.

The main opponent of this view of historicism was Sir Karl Popper in his book, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and more explicitly in *The Poverty of Historicism*. Popper’s anti-historicist position was taken, in part, for good reasons. He argued that subscribing to an inevitable, deterministic pattern in history furthered the abdication of the individual’s democratic rights and responsibilities, and worked against everyone’s free choice to make a contribution to the evolution of society. He opposed “historical prophecies” or the more socially scientific “large-scale forecasts” and denied that there are “historical laws” or even “a law of historical development.”⁹⁵ He saw such putative laws or historical development as being pseudo-scientific since compatible with *any* course of events. Another of Popper’s concerns was the proof from history itself. So-called rational plans, all forms of “social engineering,” never turn out as expected. They succumb inevitably to historical forces they cannot control: “The real outcome will always be very different from the rational construction.”⁹⁶

But Popper’s categorical denial that no history of humanity exists must be rejected as being fragmentally postmodernistic: “There is no history of mankind, there is only an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life.”⁹⁷ Popper’s views may be contrasted with the earlier, optimistic H. G. Wells in his *Outline of History*, an extremely successful book that sold copies running into the millions. Wells perceived just such a “world history”—“history as one whole”—and he was then hopeful enough to have perceived “this present dawn of world fellowship”⁹⁸ moving into a greater era of international cooperation and world federalism.

The partial histories of which Popper wrote have led us to the point where they are now converging in a metahistory or metanarrative of humanity itself, a story whose plot was greatly advanced in the twentieth century. While Popper identifies himself as an opponent of historicism, he writes nonetheless that an absence of meaning in history creates a vacuum. History impoverishes us if the story of humanity is reduced to bare facts or to the mere reconstituting of events from documents. While Popper rejects prediction or historical prophecy, he maintained, somewhat ambiguously, that meaning can be ascribed to history:

History has no meaning, I contend. . . . Although history has no ends, we can impose these ends of ours upon it; and *although history has no meaning, we can give it a meaning*. . . . Neither nature nor history can tell us what we ought to do. Facts, whether those of nature or those of history, cannot make the decision for us, they cannot determine the ends we are going to choose. It is we who introduce purpose and meaning into nature and into history. . . . Facts as such have no meaning; they can gain it only through our decisions. . . . Instead of posing as Prophets, we must become the makers of our fate. History itself—I mean the history of power politics, of course, not the non-existent story of the development of mankind—has no end or meaning, but we can decide to give it both.⁹⁹

Beyond these broad indicators, Popper does not say what this meaning is, nor has he any project to suggest. His repetition of the same idea several times in close succession in the above passage indicates how strongly he felt about ascribing meaning to history. The former Second World War Viennese exile's phrase "the non-existent story of the development of mankind" is significant. It can have at least two meanings:

- There has literally been no development of humankind in an ideal sense; i.e., we are still behaving quite primitively as a race;
- Historians have written history such that there has been a development of humanity, but they have failed to see it; i.e., they have failed to find meaning in history.

Another question is raised by Popper's reflections. To whom does history belong? Popper's reply is that "we must become makers of our fate." The statement suggests that we must choose to be participants, that we must "make" history. Shoghi Effendi argues strongly that all must

be full participants in the historical process and that history belongs to those who execute Bahá'u'lláh's plan for world fellowship. It is they who write history, and they who will be remembered by it. Those who deny, oppose, or actively prevent it will be remembered as those who foolishly attempted to prevent the inevitable.

In sum, the answer to the question as to whether providential history is a type of historicism is both yes and no. While the final end has been determined with the setting of the Divine Plan for the complete pacification and unity of the human race, such a colossal undertaking requires willing participants. It is only to the extent that human beings participate fully and willingly in the eventual achievement of human unity will this great realization come sooner rather than later. Thus, the agencies of human will and freedom of choice are not at all destroyed in this view of providential history, nor are human beings compelled to be victims of blind or arbitrary historical forces. It is these agencies that will determine, to a degree that is admittedly difficult to measure and predict with scientific exactitude, the course (direction) and the pace (timeline) of the eventual establishment of world peace. If faith and wisdom can still be found in the midst of humanity's woeful struggles and if humans will find a way to willingly acknowledge the Primal Will, remedial actions may yet be taken that will facilitate, rather than hinder, the integration of the nations into one unified body and so alter the course of human history for the better.

Providence: The God of History

There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them
how we will.

—Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Reviving the Belief in Providence

Shoghi Effendi's theological vocabulary contains a word that was once widespread in the English-speaking world but which has largely disappeared: Providence was a name for God that was common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Evangelicals and biblical literalists were still using it in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but it has since witnessed a sharp decline. For the most part, it lingers on only as a literary fossil and in the disquisitions of the theologians and philosophers of religion. The Guardian's references to '*Providence*' refer mainly to God's intervention, protection, and foresight vis-à-vis seemingly adverse events in the world as they affect

the Bahá'í community.¹⁰⁰ These adverse events, such as World War II and the 1955 campaign of persecution inflicted upon the Iranian Bahá'í community by the government and clergy, are seen to contain some hidden wisdom or beneficial outcome. God works through “*the mysterious dispensations of His Providence.*”¹⁰¹ In some cases, the Guardian makes this hidden wisdom explicit.

Our author's use of *providence* connotes a nexus of divine attributes and functions, based on the belief in a personal God. Chief among them are God's wise, protective, and foresighted care in watching over the destinies of the growing Bahá'í Faith. The belief in providence should interest, moreover, students of comparative religion, since it is held in common, *mutatis mutandis*, by the Abrahamic religions. Generally, his usage is concordant with certain aspects of Judeo-Christian belief. While the workings of providence are not excluded from the lives of individuals, our author intends a special usage that refers to outcomes favorable to the “unfolding destiny” of the Bahá'í Faith.

Some Primary Meanings of Providence

Two of the fundamental meanings of providence survive in the common sayings, “God will provide” and “a blessing in disguise.” The root words shed further light. The Latin substantive *providentia* means “foreknowledge,” and its corresponding verb *provideo* means “to see to beforehand.”¹⁰² Belief in a providential God means that an omniscient, all-seeing Deity will see His people through tests, crises, and hardships, and will provide for their needs. Providence denotes certain divine attributes that are coherent with Shoghi Effendi's concept of the Deity as outlined in his synopsis of the themes found in *The Book of Certitude*: “. . . it [the *Íqán*] proclaims unequivocally the existence and oneness of a personal God, unknowable, inaccessible, the source of all Revelation, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent and almighty.”¹⁰³ While all of these epithets might apply to a definition of providence, the attributes “personal,” “omniscient,” “omnipresent,” and “almighty” particularly apply here. However, Michael J. Langford has pointed out in his instructive book *Providence* that providence is “only one of the characteristics of God. God can be worshipped, or thought about, without immediate reference to his active involvement in the created order.”¹⁰⁴ While Langford argues that providence is only one of the divine characteristics, his qualification establishes a primary meaning: God is active and imminent in the created order.

General and Special Providence

Langford identifies six types of activity that are implied by the existence of God: creating, sustaining, final cause, general providence, special providence, and miracles.¹⁰⁵ For our purposes, it will be helpful to focus especially on the distinction between general and special providence. General providence, writes Langford, “refers to the government of the universe through the universal laws that control or influence nature, man, and history, without the need for specific *ad hoc* acts of divine will.”¹⁰⁶ Whereas, special providence refers to God’s perceived intervention either to guide an individual, a group, or a community. While acknowledging the former, Langford gives equal stress to the latter: It “relates to government and guidance by specific acts. . . . But the recipient of special providence need not be an individual, in the sense of a solitary human being, for the providential care of a group, such as Israel, would be equally significant.”¹⁰⁷ As for individuals, Langford refers to St. Augustine as one who was providentially guided to Christianity.¹⁰⁸

Although Bahá’ís believe that Providence can and does guide individuals, Shoghi Effendi usually refers to Providence as God’s intervention in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan, i.e., God either protects the Bahá’í community from hardship or calamity, or uses it to achieve a higher purpose. In his letter of 25 October 1947 to the American believers, after succinctly reviewing the social, spiritual, political, and economic conditions prevailing in Iran, Europe, India, the Nile Valley, and the Holy Land “*on the morrow of the severest ordeal it [mankind] has yet suffered,*” the Guardian referred to the protective “*interpositions of a merciful Providence*”:

*In all these territories, whether in the Eastern or Western Hemisphere, the nascent institutions of a struggling Faith, though subjected in varying degrees to the stress and strain associated with the decline and dissolution of time-honoured institutions, with fratricidal strife, economic upheavals, financial crises, outbreaks of epidemics and political revolutions, have thus far, through the interpositions of a merciful Providence, been graciously enabled to follow their chartered course, undeflected by the cross-currents and the tempestuous winds which must of necessity increasingly agitate human society ere the hour of its ultimate redemption approaches.*¹⁰⁹

Shoghi Effendi referred to the 1955 persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís, which is examined more fully below, as a “*providence of God.*”¹¹⁰

This implies a particular design of God in a specific situation. While our author's use of *providence* supports a belief in general providence as the creator and sustainer of the universe, it generally refers to what has been called "special providence." Although the Guardian plainly believed in the just, salutary, and moulding effects of divine chastisement, as we have seen in his "apocalypse of retribution and renewal," *The Promised Day Is Come* (chapter 3), his writings amply attest that the workings of providence create circumstances that are favorable to the expansion of the Bahá'í Faith: from seeming adversity, rather than despair, success is won.

Providence as Antidote for the Death of God

It should come as no surprise that in today's secular society—which worships materialism and typically follows the promptings of the ego, a society in which science and technology enjoy such widespread prestige, while the virtues and benefits of religion have long since been abandoned—belief in a providential God should have become virtually discarded. The growing eclipse of faith was a phenomenon that Bahá'u'lláh had already observed in the nineteenth century: "The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it?"¹¹¹ Faced with the moral bankruptcy of contemporary society and the consequent loss of spiritual beliefs and values, it is no wonder that hope has faded. A sense of meaninglessness, futility, and cynicism with its "doom and gloom" outlook hangs like a pall over Western civilization. The following passage recognizes that cynicism has become widespread and that many have succumbed to a darker outlook on the fate of humanity:

*An angry Providence, the cynic might well observe, has abandoned a hapless planet to its fate, and fixed irrevocably its doom. Sore-tried and disillusioned, humanity has no doubt lost its orientation, and would seem to have lost as well its faith and hope. It is hovering, unsheltered and visionless, on the brink of disaster. A sense of fatality seems to pervade it. An ever-deepening gloom is settling on its fortunes as she recedes further and further from the outer fringes of the darkest zone of its agitated life and penetrates its very heart.*¹¹²

The pessimism of the age, echoed in the above words written in 1936, foreshadowed the Death of God theologies some thirty years later in the mid-1960s. The Death of God, a movement that was seized upon by journalists as a sensational media story, largely explaining its notoriety, was based on some theologians' perception that in a secular culture it was good to declare à la Nietzsche that God was dead. As one perceptive critic of the movement put it, "This theology is more than a diagnosis. It is also a prescription, and a prescription which offers the disease as the cure."¹¹³ The title of Gabriel Vahanian's book *The Death of God* echoed Nietzsche's famous pronouncement of the madman in *The Gay Science [Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft]* that God is dead: "Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly, 'I seek God! I seek God!' . . . 'Whither is God?' he cried. I shall tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers."¹¹⁴

The message of the Death of God theologians was unapologetic and clear. Perhaps its only merit was to have told the truth about what many religionists, living in a secular age, were already thinking and feeling. Thomas J. J. Altizer, one the key figures in the Death of God movement, wrote, "The radical Christian proclaims that God has actually died in Christ, that this death is both a historical and cosmic event, and, as such, it is a final and irrevocable event, which cannot be reversed by a subsequent religious or cosmic movement."¹¹⁵ Even William Hamilton, who along with Altizer and Vahanian was the other maker of the Death of God theology, had to admit in an interview with Ved Mehta in 1966, "I think a lot of people nowadays make it without believing in God, and without despairing about not believing in God, so God may be dead or gone. I mean the Judaeo-Christian God. But I am still waiting and hoping for God to rise up again."¹¹⁶ So the death of God theologians nonetheless offered the possibility of God's resurrection.

To return to Shoghi Effendi's observation of the cynicism and hopelessness of humanity, we discover upon reading further that a therapeutic strategy is concealed in his acknowledgement of the world's disillusionment. By recognizing the hopelessness pervading the disillusioned masses in the twentieth century, rather than demeaning such attitudes, Shoghi Effendi strikes a sympathetic chord with those who feel they have had good reasons for losing faith in an angry God who has abandoned the world and its affairs to a hapless fate. His observation echoes the ghost of

the *angst* and despair depicted by existentialist writers and philosophers since the mid-nineteenth century in what has been called “the age of anxiety.” While he empathizes with those who have succumbed to such pessimistic views, Shoghi Effendi at the same time sounds this note of hope:

*And yet while the shadows are continually deepening, might we not claim that gleams of hope, flashing intermittently on the international horizon, appear at times to relieve the darkness that encircles humanity? Would it be untrue to maintain that in a world of unsettled faith and disturbed thought, a world of steadily mounting armaments, of unquenchable hatreds and rivalries, the progress, however fitful, of the forces working in harmony with the spirit of the age can already be discerned?*¹¹⁷

One reason for the Guardian’s note of optimism sounded in 1936 was the establishment, some seventeen years earlier, of “the Covenant of the League of Nations,”¹¹⁸ which, he wrote, would “*foreshadow the triumphs which this presently constituted institution, or any other body that may supersede it, is destined to achieve.*”¹¹⁹ The verdict against and the collective sanction of an act of aggression by “*no less than fifty nations of the world, all members of the League of Nations. . . [which] in their judgment has been deliberately committed by one of their fellow-members, one of the foremost Powers of Europe*¹²⁰ [was]. . . *no doubt an event without parallel in human history. . .*”¹²¹ The Guardian viewed this historic condemnation as a “*first time*” unconscious but nonetheless direct application of Bahá’u’lláh’s and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s principle of collective security.¹²² While the League’s bid to enforce collective security was compromised by the interference of Britain and France, its condemnation of Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia was a landmark decision in world affairs.

“Synchronization” and the War Years (1939–1945)

Writing to the American and Canadian Bahá’í communities in 1938 during the prosecution of the first Seven Year Plan (1937–1944),¹²³ with characteristic foresight, Shoghi Effendi alluded to the imminent global conflict that was already smoldering on the European horizon¹²⁴ and was soon to burst into flame on 3 September 1939:¹²⁵ “*Who knows but that these few remaining, fast-fleeting years, may not be pregnant with events of unimaginable magnitude, with ordeals more severe than any that humanity has as yet experienced, with conflicts more devastating than*

any which preceded them.”¹²⁶ To fortify the Bahá’ís for the ordeals that were about to encircle the globe, Shoghi Effendi, adding to his repeated exhortations and encouragements, also intimated his views on the workings of “*synchronization*” between the upcoming catastrophic world events and the steady course of the worldwide expansion of the Bahá’í Faith. Not only were his words heartening to those who were already within earshot of the rumblings of war that were sounding on the horizons of western Europe, they also indicated his belief in the protective and foresighted actions of providence:

*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.*¹²⁷

Pared down, three key components of providence are indicated:

- Synchronization of events within and outside the Bahá’í Faith, i.e., events between the Major and Minor Plans of God are coordinated;
- Will;
- Wisdom.

The passage alludes to both the impersonal and personal aspects of the Deity: to the unseen Divine Hand working in mysterious ways behind the scene of world events and to a God who directs and controls “*the destinies of men.*” With his view of *synchronization*, Shoghi Effendi retained an optimistic and active view of the interactions of world events with the affairs of the Bahá’í Faith. With the end of the world war in 1945, the Guardian pointed to the providential outcome of the conflict, not only because it constituted a significant step in the coming unity of a global society but also for the protection it afforded to the Bahá’í World Centre while it was threatened with constant dangers, dangers to which the Guardian was personally exposed. The God who “neither slumbers nor sleeps” (Ps. 121:4) had by divine “*interposition*” protected “*the nerve center*” of the Bahá’í Faith and its Guardian from disaster. In a cablegram of 12 May 1945 he said:

*THE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES IN THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT SIGNALIZES YET ANOTHER CHAPTER IN THE TRAGIC TALE OF FIERY TRIALS PROVIDENTIALLY DECREED BY INSCRUTABLE WISDOM DESIGNED ULTIMATELY TO WELD THE MUTUALLY ANTAGONISTIC ELEMENTS OF HUMAN SOCIETY INTO A SINGLE, ORGANICALLY-UNITED, UNSHATTERABLE WORLD COMMONWEALTH. THEY GRATEFULLY ACCLAIM THE SIGNAL EVIDENCE OF THE INTERPOSITION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE WHICH DURING SUCH PERILOUS YEARS ENABLED THE WORLD CENTER OF OUR FAITH TO ESCAPE WHAT POSTERITY WILL RECOGNIZE AS ONE OF THE GRAVEST DANGERS WHICH EVER CONFRONTED THE NERVE CENTER OF ITS INSTITUTIONS.*¹²⁸

With these words, no sharp demarcation can be made between discernible “secular” history and the internal, less visible sacred events associated with the development of the Bahá’í Faith. For the Guardian, it is all one big history moving ineluctably toward its climax.

The 1955 Persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís

During the summer of 1955 the Iranian government and clergy launched a “*premeditated campaign*” of persecution against the Bahá’í community. Fuller details of this incident may be found in Shoghi Effendi’s letters of 15 and 20 August 1955.¹²⁹ The persecution included the formal outlawing of the Bahá’í Faith in the Majlis (Iranian Parliament), the banning of Bahá’í activities, the destruction of the dome of the National Center, and various abuses and atrocities committed in the provinces, which included “*the hacking to pieces*” of seven believers living near Yazd, the desecration of the Báb’s house in Shiraz, the occupation of Bahá’u’lláh’s ancestral home in Tákur, the plundering of shops and farms, the desecration of cemeteries, the forcible entry and looting of private homes, forced marriages to Muslims, rape, and murder. The Guardian, always ready to evaluate the gravity of historical events, described this persecution as “*more grievous than any of the intermittent crises which have more or less acutely afflicted the Faith since the inception, over thirty years ago, of the Formative Age of the Bahá’í Dispensation.*”

His response was both decisive and instructive, since it set a precedent concerning any future persecution. Shoghi Effendi directed the American Bahá’í Community to send appeals for protection to President Eisenhower. Local and National Spiritual Assemblies sent thousands of appeals to the Iranian government and the Shah. Appeals were lodged with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the

President of the Social and Economic Council, “copies of which were delivered to the representatives of the member nations of the Council, to the Director of the Human Rights Division, as well as to non-governmental organizations with consultative status.” The spiritual or theological overtones of the 1955 persecution are reflective of an ancient view of divine Providence. In consoling and poetic words, the Guardian wrote:

Indeed this fresh ordeal that has, in pursuance of the mysterious dispensations of Providence, afflicted the Faith, at this unexpected hour, far from dealing a fatal blow to its institutions or existence, should be regarded as a blessing in disguise, not a “calamity” but a “providence” of God, not a devastating flood but a “gentle rain” on a “green pasture,” a “wick” and “oil” unto the “lamp” of His Faith, a “nurture” for His Cause, “water for that which has been planted in the hearts of men,” a “crown set on the head” of His Messenger for this Day.¹³⁰

These homiletic tones no doubt brought comfort to the many hearts that had been devastated by this ordeal. But his purpose was not consolation alone; he sought favorable results. The 1955 persecution led to “widespread publicity” that had attracted “the notice of those in high places,” results which Shoghi Effendi viewed as a prelude to “the emancipation of these valiant sufferers from the galling fetters of an antiquated religious orthodoxy. . . . will, in varying measure, have its repercussions in Islamic countries, or may be even preceded by a similar phenomenon in neighbouring territories, hastening and adding fresh impetus to the bursting of the bonds that fetter the freedom of the followers of God’s infant Faith.”¹³¹ This prelude was eventually to

pave the way for the recognition of that Faith as an independent religion established on a basis of absolute equality with its sister religions, enjoying the unqualified protection of the civil authorities for its followers and its institutions, and fully empowered, in all matters related to personal status, to apply without any reservations the laws and ordinances ordained in the Most Holy Book.¹³²

To buttress the hearts of the suffering faithful in Iran, and “to redress the scales,” Shoghi Effendi called upon the North American community to

assume a leading role in undertaking the erection of the first Bahá'í House of Worship to be built on African soil.

“Inscrutable Providence”: The Divine Chess Game

As was noted above, Shoghi Effendi sometimes made explicit the mysteries of divine providence, but he also wrote that the designs of providence were often beyond the human ken. Providence is “*inscrutable Providence*.”¹³³ He writes, for example, to the Bahá'ís of North America as he launched them on the “*second stage*” (1948) of the Second Seven Year Plan (1946–1953): “*Not ours to speculate, or dwell upon the immediate workings of an inscrutable Providence presiding alike over the falling fortunes of a dying Order and the rising glory of a Plan holding within it the seeds of the world's spiritual revival and ultimate redemption.*”¹³⁴ Implicit to this declaration is the understanding of faith as an alert obedience to the execution of the tasks of the present hour without a full understanding of the future outcome, one that would become apparent only in “*the fullness of time*”¹³⁵ but which he assured his followers “*must reflect in its perfected form, the glories of the mission constituting their birthright.*”¹³⁶

In his second letter of 20 August responding to the 1955 persecution, Shoghi Effendi used the arresting but rather impersonal image of the chess game to express the Almighty's “*inscrutable will*” and “*invincible power*” in the accomplishment of His ends on the world stage. God uses, he wrote, “*both the mighty and lowly as pawns in His world-shaping game, for the fulfilment of His immediate purpose and the eventual establishment of His Kingdom on earth.*”¹³⁷ The actors in the Major and Minor Plans of God are used in ways that further the ends of the Divine Plan, ways and ends of which the actors are not fully conscious. Paradoxically, this statement holds true even for the providential outcome of acts committed by the enemies of the Bahá'í Faith, even as Bahá'u'lláh has declared, “*Verily God rendereth His Cause victorious at one time through the aid of His enemies and at another by virtue of the assistance of His chosen ones.*”¹³⁸ With or without the “*the assistance of His chosen ones,*” for Shoghi Effendi has written, “*Humanity, through suffering and turmoil, is swiftly moving on towards its destiny; if we be loiterers, if we fail to play our part surely others will be called upon to take up our task as ministers to the crying needs of this afflicted world.*”¹³⁹

Bahá'í belief in Providence is tied, then, to faith in a Deity who has a predetermined, unalterable Will, one that ultimately will not be thwarted. Paul Tillich, quoting Martin Luther, has reminded us that the all-pervasive

will of divine providence is exercised *trotz*, “in spite of,”¹⁴⁰ the doings of humanity. Moreover, the quotation from Shakespeare cited at the head of this section, “there’s a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will,” points to this all-compelling Will. Do what we may, says the great bard, God’s Will shall be done. The Báb has succinctly stated His firm belief in this all-compelling Will: “Whatever God hath willed hath been, and that which He hath not willed shall not be.”¹⁴¹

Summary and Conclusion

The writings of Shoghi Effendi generally support the distinction made in Christian theology between General and Special Providence without a total identification of meaning. The reality of “special providence” operated in former dispensations, for example, in the special protection or guidance granted to the House of Israel or to favored individuals. The Guardian regarded the synchronization and interaction of the Divine Plan, with events unfolding in the Major Plan of God, as the work of Providence. His belief in the “*mysterious dispensations*” of Providence, which often referred to a crisis occurring within a national or the international Bahá’í community, while it brought terrible persecution, ultimately furthered the interests of the Bahá’í Faith. Concerning individual theodicy,¹⁴² Christians were expected to manifest an attitude of “sanctified affliction” in the face of personal suffering, a belief that is coherent with Bahá’í spirituality. Keith Thomas, in his instructive exposition of providence in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, writes, “The Christian could submit himself to God, secure in the knowledge that no harm could befall him unless the Almighty permitted it, and if adversities still came his way, they were at least intended for his own good.”¹⁴³ The devotional works of the time indicated that “patience in adversity. . . and the felicity of the pious mind”¹⁴⁴ were the hallmarks of submission to the Will of God.

Shoghi Effendi maintained that the designs of providence regarding the destruction and the construction of the old and new world orders cannot be thwarted. His letter of 5 June 1947 concerning the destiny of America, in which he acclaims “*the immortal Woodrow Wilson*” and that expatiates on the “*preponderating influence*”¹⁴⁵ destined to be exerted by the United States on world affairs, refers to the inevitable but sanctifying afflictions that America is destined to suffer:

Many and divers are the setbacks and reverses which this nation, extolled so highly by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and occupying at

*present so unique a position among its fellow nations, must, alas, suffer. The road leading to its destiny is long, thorny and tortuous. The impact of various forces upon the structure and polity of that nation will be tremendous. Tribulations, on a scale unprecedented in its history, and calculated to purge its institutions, to purify the hearts of its people, to fuse its constituent elements, and to weld it into one entity with its sister nations in both hemispheres, are inevitable.*¹⁴⁶

As this passage attests, Shoghi Effendi always draws the reader's attention to the end-point. By means of crises, calamities, setbacks, and reverses, opportunities are provided to assist in the spread and eventual universal recognition of the world religion whose affairs he directed. His interventionist concept of the teleological grand scheme of human history has it that the "*Hand of Providence*" is working behind the scenes, not as an artificial, invisible deus ex machina, but rather as an Omnipotent Hand that seeks willing collaborators to participate in the ongoing development of the gestating new world order.

Endnotes

1. The word *end* is not being used in an absolute sense, i.e., that nothing of significance will occur after the establishment of world peace and the eventual flowering of a world civilization. In the vast reaches of future time, there will necessarily have to be other ends and purposes that are fixed by God through a Divine Revelator or Revelators.
2. C. S. Lewis, "Historicism" in *Christian Reflections*, p. 105. The phrase "education man" is used in the original.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
4. *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, pp. 60–61.
5. Lyotard has identified skepticism toward metanarratives as one of postmodernism's elements. These narratives are assumed to be the universal or ultimate truths that are embodied in various historical projects such as Marxism, the American or French revolutions, and may include such time-honored truths as the inalienable rights of the human being, the belief in progress and "freedom and prosperity for all." The smashing of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signified the collapse of the socialist metanarrative. This established the "end of story" for Marxism. See Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.
6. The name "League of Nations" was not used until Wilson's speech of "The Five Particulars" on 27 September 1918, and the name probably originates with Field Marshall J. C. Smuts in his 1918 *League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion*.
7. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 222.
8. *Ibid.*
9. The complete quotation reads: "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not." The phrase has served as title for Udo Schaefer's *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, a diversely thematic work that identifies what it means to be a Bahá'í, that polemicizes against Christian misrepresentations of the Bahá'í Faith, and that contains two chapters on Muhammad and the Bahá'í Faith and Islam.
10. Dray, *Philosophy of History*, pp. 60–62.
11. Niebuhr, *Faith and History. A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History*, p. 112.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
13. W. C. Smith, *Toward a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion*, p. 4.
14. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 96.
15. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 9–10.
16. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet to Auguste Forel in *Bahá'í World Faith, Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 348.
17. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 194.
18. *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, p. 269, quoted in Dray, *Philosophy of History*, p. 24.
19. Dray, *Philosophy of History*, p. 25.

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20. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 150.
21. Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*, p. 229, n. 3.
22. Quoted by Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, p. 15. From James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 35.
23. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 229.
24. Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History*, pp. 96–97.
25. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. “Historiography.”
26. See Harry Elmer Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing*, especially chapters 3–9, which cover Christian, Humanist, Rationalist, Romanticist, Liberal, and Nationalist tendencies.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*, p. 245. By “personal equation,” Ranke meant the bias of the observer that would cause him or her to prejudice his reporting of events.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
30. Critics spoke of a “pietistic bias in favor of a providential theory of history” (Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing*, p. 246).
31. Preface (1828) to Ranke’s *Histories of the Latin and Germanic Nation (1494–1514) in The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present*, edited by Fritz Stern, p. 57.
32. Sidney Monas, introduction, “Contemporary Historiography: Some Kicks in the Old Coffin,” in Kozicki, *Development in Modern Historiography*, p. 1.
33. Carr writes, “The facts of history cannot be purely objective, since they become facts of history only in virtue of the significance attached to them by the historian. Objectivity in history—if we are still to use the conventional term—cannot be an objectivity of fact, but only of relation, of the relation between fact and interpretation, between past, present, and future” (*What is History?* p. 120).
34. The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures published as “*What is History?*”
35. E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, p. 83.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
38. Written in 1933 in the *Fortnightly Review* (March): 319, quoted by R. W. Davies “From E. H. Carr’s Files: Notes towards a Second Edition of *What is History?*” in E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, p. 178.
39. See Douglas Martin, “Bahá’u’lláh’s Model for World Fellowship,” *World Order* 11.1 (Fall 1976).
40. R. Stephen Humphreys, “The Historian, His Documents, and the Elementary Modes of Historical Thought,” *History and Theory* 19.1 (January 1980): 2, quoted by Robert Eric Frykenberg in *History and Belief: The Foundations of Historical Understanding*, p. 254.
41. Frykenberg in *History and Belief. The Foundations of Historical Understanding*, p. 254.
42. The 1863 proclamation emancipated all slaves in states in arms against the Union. In December 1865 a constitutional amendment was ratified that abolished and prohibited forever slavery in the United States. Lincoln was assassinated on April 14th of the same year. Britain abolished slavery throughout its colonies in 1833.
43. In the antebellum period, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Calvinists were sects divided over the slavery question. Pamphlets were written and sermons preached on all sides justifying both pro- and anti-slavery views. One could argue that the biblical

- literalists had scripture on their side. Scriptural exhortations and laws in both testaments regulated the slave trade and master-slave relations. Slave owners were to treat their slaves justly and with kindness and, for Christians, to see them as brothers in Christ. But nowhere is there any prohibition of slavery. Paul, in fact, sent the runaway slave Onesimus back to his owner Philemon with the exhortation to receive him as a “brother beloved” and to “receive him as myself” (Philem. 1:16–17). However, Isaiah exhorted Israel, “Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?” (58:6). In ancient Israel, slaves could be redeemed by a relative and were mandatorily freed, along with their children, in Jubilee years, i.e., every 50 years (Lev. 25:47–55).
44. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 17.
 45. In biology, the term refers to the exact reproduction of ancestral features in the individual (ontogenesis).
 46. Geoffrey Nash, *The Phoenix and the Ashes: The Bahá’í Faith and the Modern Apocalypse*, p. 132.
 47. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th rev. ed., s.v. “Palingenesis.” These considerations of palingenesis are not mentioned in the 15th edition.
 48. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 17.
 49. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 72–73.
 50. From the Greek *thanatos* (death) and *opsis* (sight), meaning a reflection or musing upon death.
 51. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, pp. 13–14.
 52. Pitirim Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*, p. 256.
 53. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 213.
 54. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
 55. The Universal House of Justice wrote in *Wellspring of Guidance: Messages from the Universal House of Justice* on 8 December 1967: “We are told by Shoghi Effendi that two great processes are at work in the world: the great Plan of God, tumultuous in its progress, working through mankind as a whole, tearing down barriers to world unity and forging mankind into a unified body in the fires of suffering and experience” (p. 133).
 56. An expression used by C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination*. It was meant as a critique of such abstract social-systems theorists as Talcott Parsons.
 57. “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 215).
 58. Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 101–2.
 59. This 6,000 years is an approximate, not a historically exact, dating. It is also not to be confused with the literal reading of Genesis for the lifespan of creation as 6,000 years. Also, this cycle began, more or less, with the onset of the Neolithic Period (c. 3000 BCE) and the establishment of an agrarian economy and ground or polished stone weapons. However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has indicated the existence of pre-Adamic civilizations whose names and founders have been lost because of their remote antiquity and catastrophic geological changes: “Briefly, there were many universal cycles preceding this one in which we are living. They were consummated, completed and their traces obliterated. The divine and creative purpose in them was the evolution of spiritual man, just as it is in this cycle.” See also: “Thus there have been many holy Manifestations of

- God. One thousand years ago, two hundred thousand years ago, one million years ago, the bounty of God was flowing, the radiance of God was shining, the dominion of God was existing” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 220, 463).
60. For more on the theme of dispensational religion, see chapter 7, “The Critique of Hegel, the Method of Correlation, and the Divine Economy.”
 61. See, for example, Suras 81 (The Folded Up), 82 (The Cleaving), 84 (The Splitting Asunder), and 37 (The Ranks) of the Qur’án. For the Shi’ah this would be the *yawn al-qiyama*, the day of Qa’im when “he who will arise” will establish justice in the Day of Resurrection, which has close affinities with Judgment Day.
 62. Yairah Amit, *History and Ideology: Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 16.
 63. Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, p. 107.
 64. *Ibid.*, pp. 107–8.
 65. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 49.
 66. *Ibid.*
 67. The Six Ages in the Augustinian scheme are: Adam to Noah, Noah to Abraham, Abraham to David, David to the Babylonian captivity, the Babylonian captivity to the Incarnation, and the Incarnation to the Last Judgment.
 68. Arnold J. Toynbee, “Christianity and Civilization,” *Civilization on Trial*, pp. 234–35.
 69. Frye is referring to the long poem as a genre as analyzed by Poe in his essay, “The Poetic Principle.” According to Frye’s interpretation of Poe, the long poem was “a contradiction in terms” since long poems consisted of “connective tissues of narrative or argument which were really versified prose” (Northrop Frye, *Spiritus Mundi. Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society*, p. 32).
 70. Frye, *ibid.*, p. 33.
 71. The theory that the structure of reality, in addition to the physical and mental realms, also contains a third dimension of essences of substances.
 72. Quoted from “The Unknowable,” the Herbert Spencer Lecture, October 1923, delivered at Oxford. American writer and editor Clifton Fadiman said he considered it a “masterpiece,” and Santayana wrote of the address, “I think it is one of the most reasonable things I have written, reasonable, yet not cold, and I am encouraged to find that it has not been altogether forgotten” (letter to Clifton Fadiman quoted in *Reading I’ve Liked*, p. 211. Above quotation from p. 215).
 73. Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*, pp. 245–46.
 74. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (Rev. 21:1).
 75. In *Christianity and Evolution*, Father Teilhard de Chardin refers to two Omegas, a more detailed account of Omega than he presents in *The Phenomenon of Man*. The one Omega is the process of biological evolution; the other is Christogenesis, the sanctifying work of Christ, which, in somewhat unorthodox fashion, he calls “humanization by evolution.” The Omega Point is a theology of evolutionary spiritual consciousness, the endpoint or ultimate of humanity’s spiritual evolution on the planet, in and at which all previous evolution, both biological and spiritual, converges. The Omega Point is both a world-process and an evolution of consciousness that is at the same time the spiritual energising force that brings about the New Creation. The four attributes of Omega are: autonomy, actuality, irreversibility and transcendence. See *Christianity and Evolution* and also “The Attributes of the Omega Point” in *The Phenomenon of Man*, pp. 267–72.

- See also Thomas Corbishley's brief description of Omega in *The Spirituality of Teilhard de Chardin*, pp. 47–48.
76. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, p. 120, quoted by Geoffrey Nash in *The Phoenix and the Ashes*, pp. 94–95.
 77. Tillich, *The New Being*, p. 19.
 78. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶181, p. 85.
 79. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 13.
 80. Quoted by Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By*, p. 99.
 81. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 117.
 82. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 163.
 83. “Whomsoever He ordaineth as a Prophet, he, verily, hath been a Prophet from the beginning that hath no beginning, and will thus remain until the end that hath no end, inasmuch as this is an act of God” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 155).
 84. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 16.
 85. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 286.
 86. The strict meaning of oxymoron refers to a figure of speech, but in modern English usage it is increasingly becoming synonymous with a contradiction or paradox.
 87. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 120.
 88. *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, p. 414. The original source, without the page reference, is *Flux and Constancy in Human Nature*.
 89. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 255.
 90. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 117.
 91. Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 31.
 92. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 36.
 93. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
 94. Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter of 25 September 1933 to an individual, in the compilation *Peace*, p. 192.
 95. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, pp. 42, 41, 47.
 96. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
 97. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2, *The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath*, p. 270.
 98. Wells, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind*, vol. 1, introduction, pp. 2, 4.
 99. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, quoted in *Horizon*, “Popper: The Useful Philosopher,” 16.4 (Autumn 1974): 55. Italics in original.
 100. The Multiple Author REFER System [MARS] lists 76 references to Providence in the writings of Shoghi Effendi.
 101. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 24.
 102. Michael J. Langford, *Providence*, p. 3.
 103. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 139.
 104. Langford, *Providence*, p. 3.
 105. *Ibid.*, p. 6. These six have been slightly abbreviated.
 106. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
 107. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
 108. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.
 109. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 40.
 110. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

111. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 200.
112. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 190.
113. E. W. Shideler, "Taking the Death of God Seriously," in *The Meaning of the Death of God*, p. 113, quoted in Alistair Kee, *The Way of Transcendence: Christian Faith Without Belief in God*, p. 80.
114. Quoted from *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 126. Italics in original.
115. Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, p. 103, quoted in Kee, p. 93.
116. Quoted by Kee in *ibid.*, pp. 108–9.
117. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 191.
118. The name of the document in 26 articles that created the League of Nations.
119. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 191.
120. Shoghi Effendi refers to Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935. While the League did impose severe economic sanctions on Italy, in the end Britain and France, without consulting their fellow members, proposed a settlement to Italy and Ethiopia, which largely favored the aggressor. In May 1936 Italy annexed Ethiopia, and the League put an end to its sanctions although it continued to treat Ethiopia as an independent member of the League.
121. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 191.
122. *Ibid.*, pp. 191–92.
123. Shoghi Effendi announced this plan in a cablegram dated 1 May 1937 to that year's North American National Convention in order to "prosecute uninterruptedly teaching campaign inaugurated at last Convention in accordance with Divine Plan." and to complete the "exterior ornamentation of entire structure of Temple" (*Messages to America: 1932–1946*, p. 9).
124. The ominous events of 1938 and 1939 that foreshadowed the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939 were chiefly the acquisition of Austria, Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia, and Memelland (the City of Memell and environs) in Lithuania by Germany and the acquisition of Ethiopia and Albania by Italy. All these events were violations of the Treaty of Versailles of 28 June 1919, which was, however, an oppressively vindictive treaty of 230 pages that only "sowed the seeds of future wars." The various peace treaties with Germany concluding the First World War were "conceived in hatred, vengeance, hypocrisy, and force. . ." (J. Henry Landman and Herbert Wender, *World Since 1914*, p. 41).
125. England and France declared war on Germany on this date following the invasion of the western Polish corridor by German armies on August 31.
126. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 72.
127. *Ibid.*
128. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, pp. 80–81.
129. See pp. 132–42 of *Citadel of Faith*. Subsequent references to this incident are taken from these pages.
130. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 139.
131. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
132. *Ibid.*
133. See, for example, Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 88; *Citadel of Faith*, p. 62; *God Passes By*, p. 158.
134. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 62.
135. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

136. Ibid.
137. Ibid., p. 140.
138. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Crisis and Victory*, p. 153.
139. Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 66.
140. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, p. 161.
141. The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 190.
142. A justification of the existence of evil and suffering despite the widespread belief in the goodness of God. This concept was first philosophically explored by Leibniz in his *Theodicy* (1709).
143. *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England*, p. 94. The phrase “sanctified affliction” is also from p. 94. The source of this phrase is not identified.
144. Ibid.
145. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 36.
146. Ibid., pp. 36–37.

7

THE CRITIQUE OF HEGEL, THE METHOD OF CORRELATION, AND THE DIVINE ECONOMY

The Critique of Hegel

Contextualizing Shoghi Effendi's Critique of Hegel

The nineteenth century has been called the “age of ideology,” an age that H. G. Wells has described as “a great irruption of new social, religious, and political ideals into the European mind.”¹ Europeans were caught up in the spirit of the powerful revolutionary forces of nationalism and empire-building, expressed in dynamic symbols, slogans, and ideas. It was a time “when philosophers tended to assume the role of prophets and teachers.”² This statement is certainly true of the man whose views are critiqued in the present chapter, the philosopher of Absolute (Objective) Idealism, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). Hegel found renown during his tenure at the University of Berlin (1818–1831) where he became rector in 1830. Recognition for his services to the cultural, political, and intellectual life of Germany came in 1831 when Hegel was decorated by Emperor Frederick William III. At the time of his death, Hegel’s influence was such that his philosophy of the state had in effect become the state philosophy. Along with Goethe and Kant, Hegel took pride of place among the intelligentsia of classical Germany, and this philosopher of the Spirit established himself as one of the great conceptual system-makers of the nineteenth century.

Hegel is, of course, a major figure in the history of philosophy, and a massive scholarly literature continues to grow that expounds his writings. Figuring among his other doctrines is his monistic representation of existence in which “[t]he whole of existence is a web, a unity of which everything is an integral and indissoluble part.”³ This web takes the form of Spirit/Idea/Absolute that comes to self-consciousness in history through a dynamic, organic, developmental process that includes all human institutions, cultural activities, and historical

events—a challenging and welcome concept for those who look for the interconnectedness of all things. His writings were, moreover, highly influential in establishing the philosophy of history. His influence on theology and comparative religion was no less decisive. His view of God as Absolute Spirit in the form of the supreme Idea (*Idée*) led, on the part of one camp of his interpreters, to the systematic atheism of the nineteenth century in the work of such figures as Bruno Bauer, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Nietzsche. It is said that before Nietzsche, he opened the door to “the death of God” theologies,⁴ and, indeed, his detractors accused Hegel of atheism.

Certain select readings of Hegel yield statements that are reminiscent of some passages in the Bahá’í writings. Nader Saeidi, in his article “Faith, Reason, and Society in Bahá’í Perspective” critiques Hegel and Marx, while he simultaneously endorses Hegelian and Marxist ideologies as agreeing “with the Bahá’í position that reason is historical, truth is relative, and reason is conditioned by social and historical reality.”⁵ The prodigious American integral philosopher Ken Wilber, quotes Hegel passim in his massive study *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution*. Here are two quotations compatible with any theistic religion that believes in the power of Spirit, and/or in the monistic, unifying principle of all life: “God does not remain petrified and dead; the very stones cry out and raise themselves to Spirit”⁶ and “We could, indeed, embrace the whole in the single principle of development; if this were clear, all else would result and follow of its own accord.”⁷ But while Hegel may be correlated to Bahá’í thought in certain respects, he can just as easily be disconnected from it.

Despite Hegel’s considerable stature in the history of philosophy, a compact but decidedly negative critique of key aspects of his religious and political thought is found in the last of Shoghi Effendi’s World Order letters, “The Unfoldment of World Civilization,” in which the Guardian details the “*process of deterioration*”⁸ that had, up to 1936, undermined both Muslim and Christian institutions since the onset of the Bábí-Bahá’í Revelation in 1844. When Shoghi Effendi turns his attention to the decline of Christianity, a decline that he observes is “*too apparent for any intelligent observer to mistake or deny*,”⁹ he cites among others the influences of “*materialism*,” “*unconcealed paganism*,” “*this menace of secularism*,” “*the Communist movement*,” “*militant nationalism*,” and finally “*the excessive growth of industrialism*,”¹⁰ which he evidently regards as an off-shoot of materialism. Among the factors in the decline of Christianity and its institutions, the Guardian focuses on the following points in Hegel’s philosophy. While his comments amount to only

one paragraph, they say much in a short span. Each sentence, indeed each phrase, is packed with potential meaning. The tone of the paragraph reflects the apocalyptic certitude that is characteristic of Shoghi Effendi's analysis:

The Hegelian philosophy which, in other countries, has, in the form of an intolerant and militant nationalism, insisted on deifying the state, has inculcated the war-spirit, and incited to racial animosity, has, likewise, led to a marked weakening of the Church and to a grave diminution of its spiritual influence. Unlike the bold offensive which an avowedly atheistic movement had chosen to launch against it, both within the Soviet union and beyond its confines, this nationalistic philosophy, which Christian rulers and governments have upheld, is an attack directed against the Church by those who were previously its professed adherents, a betrayal of its cause by its own kith and kin. It was being stabbed by an alien and militant atheism from without, and by the preachers of a heretical doctrine from within. Both of these forces, each operating in its own sphere and using its own weapons and methods, have moreover been greatly assisted and encouraged by the prevailing spirit of modernism, with its emphasis on a purely materialistic philosophy, which, as it diffuses itself, tends increasingly to divorce religion from man's daily life.¹¹

In taking a hard line against Hegel, the Guardian showed himself to be an intellectual pragmatist. He does not take issue with the subtleties of some aspect of Hegel's philosophy. He is concerned, rather, with the "influence,"¹² that is, the effect of Hegel's doctrines on the church's teaching, the vitality of Christianity, the relations within and between states, and race relations. On the points that he condemns—and the word is not too strong—Shoghi Effendi found Hegel's philosophy to be markedly at odds with the Bahá'í worldview. Lest the accusation of a narrow dogmatism be leveled against our author, the reader need not take his comments as an *in toto* condemnation of all aspects of Hegel's philosophy, still less of philosophy in general. Other statements of the Guardian indicate that generally philosophy is "a sound branch of learning"¹³ and that a future task for Bahá'í philosophers would be that of "correlating philosophy with the Bahá'í teachings."¹⁴ Philosophy does not fit Bahá'u'lláh's condemnation of those fruitless sciences that "begin and end in words,"¹⁵ which the Guardian interpreted as applying to "[f]ruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splitting."¹⁶

“Metaphysical hair-splitting” is typical nonetheless of certain types of theology or philosophy, and there is some ground for it in Hegel’s case. Academics recognize that sizeable difficulties hinder a clear understanding of Hegel’s philosophy because of the highly abstract, ambiguous nature of his writings that has produced widely divergent interpretations. Hegel was reported to have said on his deathbed, “Only one man has understood me and even he did not understand me.”¹⁷ The well-known dialectical Hegelian triad (thesis, antithesis, synthesis), which is based on the key concept of *Aufhebung* (sublation) and which purports to lead the human mind to truth, easily lends itself to confusion, since the process seems to be never-ending. One has to wonder which ideas remain fixed or stable in this constant motion and revision. Hegel may have been caught in his own trap.

Let us also remember that Shoghi Effendi was interpreting Hegel ex officio. It is not unusual for a leader or leaders of any of the world’s great religions to adversely interpret doctrines that are judged to be incompatible with theirs. While he viewed Hegelianism as only *one of* a nexus of factors that had marked the decline of Christianity, it is clear that Shoghi Effendi, writing as the sole authorized interpreter of the Bahá’í teachings then living, viewed certain aspects of Hegel’s philosophy as being deleterious to the establishment of a genuinely religious, peaceful, egalitarian, and united world society. His critique is strong enough to qualify Hegelianism, in the negative points he makes, as being ideology rather than philosophy. The Guardian, I should point out, is not concerned with observing academic protocol. There is no “fair” or “balanced” presentation of both pro- and anti-Hegelian views in which the contours of a middle ground are mapped out. As we shall see, however, his was not the lone voice that attributed serious consequences for world affairs to Hegel’s philosophy. In this respect, the judgment of our author corroborates the conclusions of certain of his contemporaries.

Shoghi Effendi’s Sources

The question of sources is worth a passing mention. In addition to these preliminary observations, further research may bring other information to light. While Shoghi Effendi’s views of Hegel’s philosophy are laid down in typically categorical judgments, it would be going too far to read some supernatural intuition into his remarks. His views accurately reflect the post-World War I anti-Hegelian views of the day, and they reflect a certain familiarity with Hegel’s writings and/or those of his critics. During Michaelmas (Fall) term of October 1920 at Balliol College, Oxford, Shoghi Effendi’s personal notebook records that he read several courses in political

theory, which included Political Science, Social and Political Problems, Social and Industrial Questions, Political Economy and Logic, among others.¹⁸ It is very likely that Shoghi Effendi became acquainted with Hegel's philosophy during these lectures and came to his own conclusions.

While Absolute Idealism was by the turn of the century on the wane in Germany, and despite the rising influence of the analytical realism propounded by such thinkers as George Moore, Bertrand Russell, and Samuel Alexander, Hegelianism was being revived simultaneously in the United Kingdom as Neo-Hegelianism by such scholars as T. H. Green,¹⁹ the brothers and Gifford co-lecturers John and Edward Caird,²⁰ J. M. E. McTaggart,²¹ and Bernard Bosanquet.²² Benjamin Jowett, the renowned Oxford Platonist, who once expressed a favorable judgment of the future of the Bahá'í Faith,²³ although initially impressed by Hegel's philosophy, came to be skeptical about Hegelianism in his later years: "Jowett came to be very suspicious of the ultimate effect of German Idealism."²⁴ However, Hegel was not without other critics in Britain. Philosopher and sociologist Leonard Trelawney Hobhouse (1864–1929), published *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*, just two years before Shoghi Effendi's arrival in Oxford. Sir Karl Popper wrote that Hobhouse "fought bravely against Hegelianism,"²⁵ but his comments made scarcely a chink in the thick Hegelian armor. Hobhouse laid much of the ideological background of the First World War on Hegel's shoulders. This elicited a "[t]his seems a little extreme!" comment from historian of ideas Roland N. Stromberg,²⁶ but Hobhouse's thinking is clearly in line with the judgment of Shoghi Effendi. One other respected philosopher pointed to the Hegelian contribution, not to the Great War, as Hobhouse had done, but to the Second World War. Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), Neo-Kantian philosopher of culture,²⁷ partially validated the suggestion that Hegel's philosophy was translated into the brute facts of World War II when he wrote, "A historian recently raised the question whether the struggle of the Russians and the invading Germans in 1943 was not, at bottom, a conflict between the Left and the Right wings of Hegel's school. That may be seen to be an exaggerated statement of the problem but it contains a nucleus of truth."²⁸

"An Intolerant and Militant Nationalism"

Sir Karl Popper (1902–1994) who, to put it mildly, was no friend of Hegel, has called Hegel's brand of German nationalism "the renaissance of tribalism."²⁹ Although admirers of Hegel have found Popper's critique to be extreme, historian of ideas Ronald N. Stromberg finds that Hegel has been "convincingly refuted"³⁰ by Popper who has it that Hegel, with a canny

sense of psychological opportunism, “clearly foresaw the psychological possibilities of nationalism. He saw that nationalism answers a need—the desire of men to find and to know their definite place in the world, and to belong to a powerful collective body.”³¹ With his sense of triumphant historicism, Hegel viewed a nation’s spirit (*Volksgeist*) as the means of assuring its destiny and assuming the role of world domination. He wrote, “The self-consciousness of a particular nation. . . is the objective actuality in which the Spirit of the Time (*Zeitgeist*) invests its Will. Against this absolute Will the other particular national minds have no rights: that Nation dominates the world.”³² This clear statement needs no subtle interpretation.

Hegel viewed the Germanic peoples as being the highest embodiment of freedom, culture, and civilization. He has often been praised for his progressive sounding idea that “[t]he history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom,”³³ a sentiment that certainly seemed true while the glories of the French Revolution of 1789 still reverberated throughout Europe, as witnessed by the young Hegel. With God/Spirit/Absolute Idea in command, the universe was unfolding as it should, or at least, it seemed that way. Hegel’s nineteenth-century version of history was that what you see is what should be; moreover, it was God’s doing: “. . . what has happened, and is happening every day, is not only ‘not without God but is essentially his Work.’”³⁴ If the Absolute Spirit is in charge of history, as Hegel supposed, then it is fruitless to question either the status quo—in his case the absolute monarchy of William Frederick III—or past events. Hegel assigned to the German people the great task of understanding that freedom was “the essence of Spirit.”³⁵ In his discussion of “The Idea of Freedom,” Hegel maintained that ancient Orientals, Greeks, and Romans had not really understood the meaning of freedom, unlike the Germanic peoples of modern times: “Only the Germanic peoples came, through Christianity, to realize that man as man is free and that freedom of Spirit is the very essence of man’s nature.”³⁶ In light of the twentieth-century rise of Nazism, this statement sounds tragically ironic.

Some have found Hegel’s views of “freedom” both inconsistent and disturbing. He sharply criticized the French, Italian, and Spanish liberalizing trends of the day, but heaped lavish praise on the Prussian state bureaucracy, which many have felt was in fact “a police state that thoroughly suppressed personal freedom.”³⁷ Robert Heiss, one of Hegel’s German commentators, suggests a disparity between Hegel’s political theory of freedom and the practice of the restrictive policies of the Prussian state, although this may stem, as Heiss suggests, from Hegel’s being haunted by the after-effects of the French

Revolution that descended into the Reign of Terror.³⁸ Whatever the reason, the youthful revolutionary later came to support a certain absolutism.

“Deifying the State”

Hegel’s nationalistic views went hand-in-hand with his political ideology whose influence was once enormous, an influence that lived on throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century. While testimony to support this view is ample, another reference from Ernst Cassirer will suffice: “No other philosophical system has exerted such a strong and enduring influence upon political life as the metaphysics of Hegel.”³⁹ During World War II, Karl Popper, writing from New Zealand in a strong mood of anti-fascism, blamed Hegel for the ideological roots of the global conflict that was then ravaging the world. Popper found what he thought was convincing proof of a Hegelianism that fostered both a nationalistic and militaristic mind-set. He devoted some fifty-five pages in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*⁴⁰ to a concentrated attack on Hegel and his philosophy.⁴¹ While Popper is admittedly openly polemic in these pages, the main lines of his arguments are well supported.

Shoghi Effendi’s point that Hegel deified the state is also addressed by Popper in some detail. However, a cautionary remark is needed. Father Frederick Copleston has pointed out that Hegel’s ideas concerning the state are not without qualification. Copleston maintains that Hegel was not arguing in favor of a modern totalitarian state that suppresses human rights or is immune from criticism.⁴² But we also have to keep in mind, as Robert Heiss has argued, that the Prussian state in which Hegel lived was a virtual police state. Whether Copleston is correct in his assessment or not, one thing is clear: Hegel opened up a philosophical Pandora’s box that had serious consequences for the promotion of absolutism in the state, rising nationalism, heterodox theology, and unsavory racial theories.

Hegel deified the state because he viewed it as the highest abstract, universal, and concrete form, the “concrete universal” as he called it, the universal World Spirit (*Weltgeist*), that is, infinite energy objectified in historical time in the nation-state. The state is the Divine Idea, “the logical power of the divine.”⁴³ The state represents organized freedom that is conscious of itself, expressed through a civilization or culture that embodies a National Spirit (*Volkgeist*) that has evolved a totality of laws, institutions, art, religion, and philosophy that becomes the Absolute Spirit. Shoghi Effendi’s charge of deification stems from the fact that Hegel elevated the state to the status usually reserved for the all-powerful, transcendent Deity. For Hegel, the state was deserving of worship. But let the philosopher speak for himself:

The Universal is to be found in the State. . . . The State is the Divine Idea as it exists on earth. . . . We must therefore worship the State as the manifestation of the Divine on earth, and consider that, if it is difficult to comprehend Nature, it is infinitely harder to grasp the essence of the State. . . . The State is the march of God throughout the world. . . . To the complete State belongs, essentially, consciousness and thought. The State knows what it wills. . . . The State is real; and true reality is necessary.⁴⁴

These ideas and sentiments give full credence to Shoghi Effendi's emphatic assertion. A militant nationalism is the "logical" and natural result.

Hegel's metaphysical excogitations of the powerful evolutionary process of universal Divine Reason coming to Self-consciousness in the dialectics of world history are expressed in the militant phrase, just cited, "the march of God through the world." Here we find a politicized use of incarnation or pantheistic theology. As God marches on in the state, so must He be worshipped in His political incarnation on earth. Such nationalistic thinking plainly qualifies as one of the three "*false gods*"⁴⁵ of the Modern Age roundly condemned by Shoghi Effendi in *The Promised Day Is Come*.

For Hegel, the supreme form of government was not constitutional monarchy but absolute monarchy. According to Popper's interpretation, Hegel argues by a strange twist of logic that the "constitution" of the monarchy was the true constitution; i.e., monarchical law with few restraints.⁴⁶ It is important to note that this was not the constitutional law demanded by reformers and national liberals in the various German principalities. According to Hegel, the true "constitution" resides in the monarch himself, ". . . that of one actual decreeing Individual (not merely of a majority in which the unity of the decreeing will has no actual existence). . . . The monarchical constitution is therefore the constitution of developed reason."⁴⁷ The constitutional reform movement was strongly opposed by the Emperor Frederick William III, as his letters attest, although he was reported to have promised a constitution on 22 May 1815.⁴⁸ Hegel, who had been decorated by the monarch in 1831 and who had become the de facto Prussian state-sponsored court philosopher, supported the Emperor.⁴⁹ While the *Philosophy of Right (Law)* advocated such progressive sounding measures as "limited monarchy, with parliamentary government, trial by jury, and toleration for Jews and dissenters,"⁵⁰ there was a wide gap between Hegel's political theory and what he advocated in practice. His glowing, if not fawning, support for the monarch⁵¹ caused one of Hegel's contemporaries to charge

him with having a self-serving political agenda that placed him on “the dunghill of servility.”⁵² *The Philosophy of Right* is consequently marked by that vexing ambiguity that is so characteristic of Hegel. Robert Heiss comments, “. . . on the one hand Hegel is a sharp and unsparing critic of his times, and especially of civil society, yet on the other he defends the status quo and particularly the Prussian state.”⁵³

“*The War-Spirit*”

Shoghi Effendi charged Hegel with inculcating “*the war-spirit*.”⁵⁴ Let us situate the Guardian’s position within the context of Hegelian scholarship. In “Hegel’s Account of War,”⁵⁵ D. P. Verene summarizes three possible interpretations of this question, which originates mainly in *The Phenomenology of Mind (Spirit)*, the *Encyclopedia (Part 3)*, and the *Philosophy of Right (Law)*. As for almost all issues concerning Hegel, academics find themselves divided over his position on warfare. Verene refers to Constance I. Smith’s declaration of uncertainty in the Hegelian interpretation of warfare, based on a purported difficulty in ascertaining whether Hegel is “prescribing or describing,”⁵⁶ a difficulty Verene proposes to resolve by “a placing of Hegel’s statements on war in their proper relation to his philosophy in general.”⁵⁷ Verene presents three main interpretations of Hegel’s views on warfare: the liberal, the conservative, and the totalitarian.

- The *liberal* view gives Hegel the benefit of the doubt as to any apology for warfare, but acknowledges that he lacks a coherent plan for peace.⁵⁸
- The *conservative* view “takes Hegel’s statements as essentially descriptive. Hegel is regarded as reflecting the actual state of affairs between nations.”⁵⁹ This view acknowledges the fact that “war plays a role in the actual life of nations.” This interpretation, Verene writes, is “the standard view.”⁶⁰
- The *totalitarian* view has it that Hegel, unlike Kant, prescribes warfare as “a fundamental and glorious totalitarian activity.”⁶¹

Sir Karl Popper held this same view of Hegel, as did lesser known scholars such as Hans Kohn, who, in a history of ideas perspective, ascribed bellicose intent to the philosopher.⁶² Shoghi Effendi’s view allies itself with the totalitarian view ascribed to Hegel as expounded by Popper, Kohn, and others.

The neoscholastic historian of philosophy Frederick Copleston, SJ, in his comprehensive multivolume *History of Philosophy*, put the matter succinctly, in a view that explodes Verene’s standpoint that Hegel’s concept of war “is

something to be understood philosophically and cannot be regarded as something accidental.”⁶³ Copleston argues that Hegel was not merely “registering an obvious empirical fact in the international life of his time” but that “he goes on to justify war, as if it were an essential feature of human history.”⁶⁴ Copleston ties the metaphysical basis of Hegel’s embodiment of “universal self-consciousness or the self-conscious General Will” and the “*telos* or end of the movement of Spirit or Reason in man’s social life”⁶⁵ to Hegel’s philosophy of the state and his strife-driven dialectics of history. Hegel’s fatalistic historicism held that whatever events are occurring within the historical process are the necessary “self-actualization of Spirit or Reason,”⁶⁶ expressed as Hegel’s famous and heavily consequential statement “What is rational is real and what is real is rational.”⁶⁷ War should not be ruled out when diplomatic efforts fail. Copleston formulates a strong critique of Hegel’s views on war, “adverse comment”⁶⁸ as he euphemistically calls it:

It should be noted that Hegel is not simply saying that in war a man’s moral qualities can be displayed on an heroic scale, which is obviously true. Nor is he saying merely that war brings home to us the transitory character of the finite. He is asserting that war is a necessary rational phenomenon. It is in fact for him the means by which the dialectic of history gets, so to speak, a move on. It prevents stagnation and preserves, as he puts it, the ethical health of nations. It is the chief means by which a people’s spirit acquires renewed vigour or a decayed political organism is set aside and gives place to a more vigorous manifestation of the Spirit. Hegel rejects, therefore, Kant’s ideal of perpetual peace. Obviously, Hegel had no experience of what we call total war. And he doubtless had the Napoleonic Wars and Prussia’s struggle for independence fresh in his mind.⁶⁹

Along the same lines Robert Heiss, quoted above, remarks, “This actualized reason, finally, is harsh and rugged. Hegel did not believe in eternal peace like Kant; he was, rather, a champion of the power-state which, for instance, does not take too kindly to freedom of the press and maintains that war is inevitable.”⁷⁰ Several other passages could also be adduced as proof of the above assertions. But suffice it to say that the following passages from the *Philosophy of History* will do. Some of Hegel’s commentators and critics, on the basis of these and other passages, have concluded that he was promoting the expediency of the “might is right” principle, which has long been associated with his views.

In the *Philosophy of History*, in his discussion of “world-historical men” such as Napoleon, Caesar, and Alexander the Great, Hegel presents his standpoint of historical determinism in such a manner that could be read as approval for the use of warfare in history. What seems to matter to Hegel is that essentially such men have been powerful enough to have changed history. Full stop. As such, he views these conquerors as expedient opportunists who knew how to capitalize on the needs of the hour to satisfy their own needs and to move history, so to speak, forward:

But at the same time they were thinking men, who had an insight into the requirements of the time—*what was ripe for development*. This was the very Truth for their age, for their world; the species next in order, so to speak, and which was already formed in the womb of time.... Great men have formed purposes to satisfy themselves not others.⁷¹

What matters is that the conquering hero moves history forward according to the dynamics of a certain concentrated arbitrariness (*Willkür*). The following passage may serve as clear indication of Hegel’s approval that “might is right.” But the reader must decide whether or not Hegel is prescribing or merely describing.

A World-Historical individual is not as unwise as to indulge a variety of wishes to divide his regards. He is devoted to the One Aim, regardless of all else. It is even possible that such men may treat other great, even sacred interests, inconsiderately; conduct which is indeed obnoxious to moral reprehension. But so mighty a form must trample down many an innocent flower—crush to pieces many an object in its path.⁷²

Regardless of his intent, one has to wonder if the roots of modern totalitarian thinking are not contained in such lines. It is no doubt in light of such assertions that Cambridge historian J. B. Bury in *The Idea of Progress* counts Hegel as one whose philosophy is entirely antithetical to the idea of progress. The following statement is an accurate description of Hegel’s system within which the world-historical individual operates as a willing agent of the Absolute: “But his system is eminently inhuman. The happiness or misery of individuals is a matter of supreme indifference to the Absolute, which, in order to realize itself in time, ruthlessly sacrifices sentient beings.”⁷³ Indeed it must. For Hegel wrote in the *Philosophy of Right*—and it is a devastating and indicting sentence—“War protects the people from the

corruption which an everlasting peace would bring upon it.”⁷⁴ This statement obviously lies at the anti-pole of Bahá’í moral philosophy.

“Racial Animosity”

To substantiate Shoghi Effendi’s judgment that Hegel had “*incited to racial animosity*,” one must turn again to Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*, his metaphysical account of world history. This book is an impressive work of erudition for the time, despite its numerous factual errors. And to Hegel’s credit, in this work he served the interests of the developing field of the comparative study of religion. It is significant, however, that Hegel did not include religion as a factor in historical progress. In Lutheran fashion, he viewed progress as being social and political only. Religion belonged essentially to the private and personal sphere.⁷⁵ Hegel’s treatment of Zoroaster and what he calls “The Zend People”⁷⁶ is well presented, and he holds the ancient Persian civilization in high regard for both historical and philosophical reasons:

With the Persian Empire we first enter on continuous History. The Persians are the first Historical People; Persia was the first Empire that passed away. . . . We see in the Persian World a pure exalted Unity, as the essence which leaves the special existences that inhere in it, free;—as the Light, which only manifests what bodies are in themselves. . . . The principle of development begins with the history of Persia. This therefore constitutes the beginning of World-History.⁷⁷

The *Philosophy of History* has influenced the development of historiography right down to modern times. Hegel’s account is not simply a report; it constitutes a dynamic history that moves according to a conscious logic its own, from lower to higher forms of “freedom.” Particularly incisive is his notion that each historical period is expressive of an Idea, and that the historical process constitutes a progressive kind of unity based on an ever-expanding freedom.⁷⁸ Of course, Hegel’s originality in this regard must be qualified, for his is a philosophized version of *Heilsgeschichte* (Salvation/Sacred history), of a God whose intents and purposes may be read in the unfoldment of “freedom.” But in Hegel’s account of the historical process, the rational and unrestrained power elements of the Absolute Idea come to the fore. It is the “Idea,” “Spirit,” or “Absolute” that moves history. Hegel found the Judeo-Christian “plan” of Providence wanting for its obscurity— “[it] is supposed to be concealed from our view.”⁷⁹ However, he confidently asserted that “active Reason” will unfold the divine plan to the philosopher’s mind.⁸⁰ Metaphysics, which he viewed as being superior to religion, would

supply the method, revealed by the philosopher's mind in which Hegel placed supreme confidence. This supreme confidence in the philosopher's rational powers led Maurice Cranston to observe, "Hegel was not a modest man."⁸¹ Such hubris vis-à-vis imperious reason and his dialectical method convinced Hegel that he was capable of unsealing the secrets of history.

In *The Philosophy of History*, metaphysical concepts and original insights are interwoven with the historical account. This synthetic approach constitutes the work's originality. But despite its considerable merits, this work is everywhere flawed with harsh negative value judgments, particularly of the "Oriental" i.e., Chinese and East Indian, and especially of the African races that Hegel passes in review. In these passages, the objective, philosophical historian gives himself conspicuously away as the stern, judgmental moralist, racial and religious elitist, and German nationalist. Hegel's negative judgments of non-Caucasian peoples—their forms of government, theologies, and behavioral characteristics—are all intended to serve the thesis stated in the introduction and developed beginning in part 4 ("The German World") that the Germanic Protestant peoples are the modern salvific agents to the world of both "the Christian principle" and "freedom."⁸²

What is one to make of his prejudiced observations in light of Hegel's considerable acumen as a philosopher? Simply this: a thinker of Hegel's stature can be philosophically sophisticated but still be deeply imbued with erroneous ideas and become entrapped by the most restrictive cultural prejudices of his time. With the notable exception of Zoroaster and the "Zend People," no sound correlation seems to exist between Hegel's philosophical insight and his spirit of tolerance for other races and cultures. One might reasonably expect that someone who was so illumined with the lights of "reason" would find some reason for rising to greater heights of tolerance where the East Indians, Chinese, and Africans are concerned. Hegel's remarks are somewhat attenuated with his observation that the Absolute Spirit makes use of the spirit of a people or nation (*Volksgeist*), which takes its place on the scene of world history, makes its contribution, then disappears leaving a vacuum to be filled by the next great power. As a bare idea, this concept is not far removed from Bahá'u'lláh's statement in the *Lawh-i-Hikmat*:

For every land We have prescribed a portion, for every occasion an allotted share, for every pronouncement an appointed time and for every situation an apt remark. Consider Greece. We made it a Seat of Wisdom for a prolonged period. However, when the appointed hour struck, its throne was subverted, its tongue ceased to speak, its

light grew dim and its banner was hauled down. Thus do We bestow and withdraw. Verily thy Lord is He Who giveth and divesteth, the Mighty, the Powerful.⁸³⁸³

Bahá'u'lláh's phrase "when the appointed hour struck" would seem to be give credence to the idea that a certain historical determinism does indeed hold sway in history. Robert Heiss writes, "Each of these partial spirits of the Absolute Spirit has its place, temporally and systematically, in world history. Each appears when it is necessary, and vanishes when the necessity for its appearance has been fulfilled."⁸⁴

The ancient civilizations of China, India, Greece, Rome, and Persia are passed in review and analyzed regarding their contribution to freedom. Finally, these civilizations are contrasted with modern nations, particularly the "German nations" in which freedom has reached its apogee. About Orientals Hegel wrote, "The Orientals do not yet know that the spirit, or man as such, is implicitly free; they only know that One [the despot] is free, but on this very account such freedom is only caprice, wildness, dullness of passion, or a mildness and tameness of the same, which is itself only an accident of nature, or a caprice."⁸⁵ The Greeks and Romans fare better because they knew that "some are free," since both civilizations enjoyed aristocracy and democracy. But, according to Hegel, even Plato and Aristotle did not know that "man as such" is free: "Even Plato and Aristotle did not know this."⁸⁶ He correctly points out that these same "free" citizens of ancient Greece and Rome also owned slaves, and so had not yet fully internalized or universalized their concept of freedom. Objectively, the Romans came closer to the ideal of freedom since their state was better organized and had "a rational system of law."⁸⁷

But in the medieval and modern periods, God more fully realizes human freedom through the Germanic peoples: "The German Spirit is the Spirit of the new World. . . . The destiny of the German peoples is, to be the bearers of the Christian principle. The principle of Spiritual Freedom—of Reconciliation [of the Objective and Subjective]—was introduced into the still simple, unformed minds of those peoples. . . ."⁸⁸ The point is clear enough. The Germans developed higher notions of freedom than other peoples and had as mission to introduce it to less sophisticated surrounding nations: ". . . and the part assigned them in the service of World-Spirit was that of not merely possessing the Idea of Freedom as the substratum of their religious conceptions, but of producing it in free and spontaneous developments from their subjective self-consciousness."⁸⁹ The modern Germans will serve as the chosen people to fully complete the keystone of history—the Idea of Freedom.

Here, however, Hegel's system comes to an abrupt stop and with it the failure of his dialectical system to reach a satisfactory conclusion. While Hegel views history as being a progressive process, what may extend beyond the European state, the Prussian monarchy, and the Protestant religion is unknown. Unlike Kant, no vision of future advances in the form of a perpetual peace in a cosmopolitan world is offered.⁹⁰ Hegel describes the historical process only after the fact. The system is closed with the advent of the German monarchy of Frederick William III. Only warfare remains as the final arbitrator of the destinies of nations.

Compared with the Germans, the Chinese and the East Indians are presented as being inferior. The Chinese, if we are to believe Hegel, are totally devoid of his notion of "Spirit." "Its [the Chinese character] distinguishing feature is, that everything which belongs to Spirit—unconstrained morality, in practice and theory, Heart, inward Religion, Science and Art properly so-called—is alien to it."⁹¹ These are among the milder statements. In the same context he writes, "The Chinese, are, on the other hand, too proud to learn anything from Europeans, although they must often recognize their superiority."⁹² When Hegel comes to India, also deemed to compose "the oriental world," he ranks them above the Chinese by the dubious distinction that "they ramify from the unity of despotic power."⁹³ But alas, in so doing, "they petrify and become rigid . . . in the most degrading spiritual serfdom."⁹⁴ Hegel refers here to the caste system which he rightly criticizes, but he elsewhere unabashedly depicts "Hindoos" as being not only "pusillanimous" and "effeminate,"⁹⁵ but also indifferent practitioners of self-annihilation when he mentions the death-rite of *Suttee*.⁹⁶ The Hindu religion is presented as a weird concoction of the grossest superstitions and the wildest excesses of both asceticism and eroticism.⁹⁷ But what German of his time would even want to travel to India, much less love a Hindu after reading these lines: "Deceit and cunning are the fundamental characteristics of the Hindoo. Cheating, stealing, robbing, murdering are with him habitual. Humbly crouching and abject before a victor and lord, he is recklessly barbarous to the vanquished and subject."⁹⁸

However, the most unsettling account is reserved for the inhabitants of the African continent. W. H. Walsh's statement in the article referred to above, an article not entirely uncritical of Hegel, that "whatever his faults, Hegel was not any kind of a racist,"⁹⁹ has the ring of a patent rationalization which attempts to gainsay the obvious conclusion that must be drawn by the evidence. It is significant that Hegel's account of African history is placed in

the introduction rather than in the flow of the main historical narrative. The Africans are represented as ahistorical peoples, i.e., they do not belong in history at all: “At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit.”¹⁰⁰ At the outset of the analysis, patronizing stereotypical formulations such as this one are encountered: Africa is “the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantel of Night.”¹⁰¹

Hegel approaches his analysis of African life from the vantage points of religion, morals, and political organization. In his religious and moral observations he is largely guided by the “copious and circumstantial accounts of Missionaries,”¹⁰² as if this were a reliable and unbiased source. In any case, the starting point is that the African’s self-consciousness is subhuman, since it has not yet attained to that prized realization of the “objective,” which, along with the “subjective,” constitutes frequent bipolar reference points in Hegel’s metaphysics of the spirit: “In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence—as for example, God, or Law—in which the interest of man’s volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being.”¹⁰³ No empathetic understanding, even along the lines of Rousseau’s “noble savage,” finds place in Hegel’s categorical analysis of the Negro: “We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality—all that we call feeling—if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.”¹⁰⁴ The African’s religion is presented as nothing but a blend of magic and animism that manipulates the arbitrary powers of the psyche to control the environment. A psychological interpretation of fetishism is presented as being a fanciful projection of the mind. Even W. H. Walsh, in his attempt to rescue what he views as being rescuable in Hegel, has to conclude: “Hegel’s picture of the moral life of the native Africans could scarcely be blacker. Lacking any conception of a higher being, and with no knowledge of the immortality of the soul, they assign no value to humanity.”¹⁰⁵

“A Marked Weakening of the Church”

Shoghi Effendi also states that Hegel’s philosophy “*led to a marked weakening of the Church and to a grave diminution of its spiritual influence.*”¹⁰⁶ To understand this assertion, one has to bear in mind how Hegel viewed Christianity, vis-à-vis philosophy, since it was his philosophy that was used and abused to weaken the church and its doctrines. For Hegel, philosophy occupied a higher place than Christianity. Now it is true that Hegel did classify Christianity as the Absolute Religion, i.e., the self-

revelation of Absolute Spirit, the only true revealed religion.¹⁰⁷ While his appraisal sounded impressive to Christians, Hegel's rationalistic bias caused him to view Christianity as a lesser form of knowledge than the Absolute Knowledge that came with "scientific" Absolute Idealism.

With its symbolic and mythical rites and rituals¹⁰⁸ and religious art, Christianity was a lesser, exoteric form of metaphysics that satisfied the popular need for "*Gefühl*" (feeling) and "*Vorstellung*" (representation). For Hegel, Christianity needed to be sublated ("*aufgehoben*") into the forms of pure thought or concept (*Begriff*). His speculative philosophy was to provide the means through his dialectics. Hegel would maintain that he was not denying the Spirit of religion, but rather ensuring its fulfillment and preservation in a higher, more self-conscious form of conceptual thought. He viewed philosophy as the fulfillment of the law of the Spirit working within human consciousness. This perception has led some to conclude that for Hegel "Christianity finds its only justification in its philosophical conceptualization."¹⁰⁹ The inevitable follows. In Hegel's system, little room is left for the dynamics of faith or the realm of the personal. In brief, for Hegel, reason stands above faith. And one must ask where such an essential feature as the love of God finds place in such a massive, largely impersonal system?

While Hegel formally adhered to traditional Christian dogmas such as the fall, the atonement, the trinity, and the incarnation, he reinterpreted these teachings, according to some theologians of his time, in such a rationalistic fashion that they became heretical. The result was the well-known division of philosophers and theologians into two camps. The Right Wing Hegelians¹¹⁰ used Hegel's Idealism to reconstruct Christianity in light of modern experience. The Left Wing or Young Hegelians are remembered as the self-declared atheists Karl Marx and Ludwig Feuerbach, and the radical, pantheistic, humanist theologian, David Friedrich Strauss, who through massive scholarship, presented a mythological interpretation of the gospels. The religious philosopher Bruno Bauer, who was the friend and teacher of Karl Marx, promoted a radical atheism.¹¹¹ These thinkers, while preserving some aspects of the form, radically altered the content of Hegel's philosophy to suit their own purposes.

By way of Hegel, Marx proclaimed a world revolution of atheistic socialism and expounded a materialistic dialectic of determinism. Feuerbach, the great pioneer in what would later become the death of God theology, inspired by his readings of Nietzsche, elaborated his own version of atheistic anthropology by turning Hegel on his head. Feuerbach, who had studied with his master

Hegel for two years in Berlin, boasted that he [Feuerbach] had “turned speculative theology upside down” to arrive “at the truth in its unconcealed, pure, manifest form.”¹¹² Feuerbach’s inversion had it that spiritual substance was really material substance and that God was, in effect, human. Marx inherited from both Hegel and Feuerbach, but carried further Feuerbach’s idea of a religion of *anthros*, based on human self-consciousness, and lacking a transcendent Being, to no religion at all. Marx declared, “Man makes religion, religion does not make man. In other words, religion is the self-consciousness of self-feeling of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself. . . . Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves round man as long as he does not revolve around himself.”¹¹³

These were some of the “*preachers of a heretical doctrine from within. . .*” But the strongest charge leveled by his opponents was that Hegel and his school simply expounded a form of atheism in disguise.¹¹⁴ While such a charge cannot be proven conclusively, substantial reasons exist for arguing that Hegel’s concept of God was, at least according to orthodoxy, heretical. Hegel’s opponents also pointed to the conspicuous lack of any affirmation of the existence of the fundamental Christian doctrines of the immortal soul and an afterlife.¹¹⁵ But the more frequently repeated charge was Hegel’s pantheism.

Although a fuller discussion of these questions is beyond the scope of this chapter, Shoghi Effendi’s anti-Hegelian statement can be briefly supported by the following points. Regarding his concept of God, Hegel took the ideas of his Kantian precursors, von Shelling and Fichte, that the workings of Spirit were immanent in both human beings and the world, but he carried them much further. This immanent tendency of Spirit in Hegel’s view dislocated God as a unique, transcendent Being who was entirely other than His creation and relocated the “activities” of the Divinity within the confines of human consciousness and the temporal flux of history. Transcendence was reduced to immanence, and theology was reduced to theosophy. For Hegel, the Divine can know Itself only to the extent that It is known by humankind. Consequently, Hegel makes God’s self-knowledge (i.e., the self-knowledge possessed by Divinity) dependent upon humankind’s understanding of God. Hegel wrote in a famous passage in *The Philosophy of Mind*: “God is God only so far as he knows himself: his self-knowledge is, further, a self-consciousness in man and man’s knowledge of God, which proceeds to man’s self-knowledge in God.”¹¹⁶

Walter Kaufmann’s comments on this strange affirmation are noteworthy: “What does this mean if not that God does not know himself

until man knows him; and since ‘God is only God insofar as he knows himself,’ God comes into being only when man knows him?”¹¹⁷ Kaufmann concluded, as did Alexandre Kojève, that Hegel’s theology is only atheistic anthropology,¹¹⁸ wrote that Hegelianism is merely a form of humanism since humans become the main locus for the understanding of the divine.¹¹⁹ While in a practical sense, there can be no knowledge of God, *for humans*, without human reason and consciousness, in Bahá’í theology it is erroneous to confine the knowledge of God to humans alone. God is the First Source, as both divine Subject and Object, of His own knowledge, and by Himself alone. That Hegel believed that God, as the Absolute Idea, revealed Himself in history, and to the human mind, is reduced by the fact that he maintained that the knowledge of God, which must include God’s knowledge of Himself, exists only when this knowledge is perceived by humans. Consequently, the belief in divine independence and omniscience is effectively destroyed, or at least, greatly reduced. Hegel’s concept of God was not that of Bahá’u’lláh’s “prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God!”¹²⁰ but rather that of deified reason, a little god called logic. Walter Jaeschke put it this way:

God conceived as dialectical process, but not as a living personality to whom one can pray, and also as an incomplete God who must first come to himself and who needs not merely the world, as affirmed in Hegel’s (in fact, Hotho’s) even then oft-quoted dictum, but also humanity, without whom God remains at best a spiritless and self-less totality of moments that does not even attain to consciousness.¹²¹

This relentless use of what has been called “the violence of logic” drove Kierkegaard, the founder of modern existentialism, to accuse Hegel of depersonalizing and devitalizing Christianity. According to Kierkegaard, speculative reason drives the individual further and further away from the concrete human situation that must involve decision-making and commitment. Hegel’s portrayal of religious truths as forms of lower, inadequately expressed philosophical concepts are counterproductive to realizing “personal eternal happiness.” Kierkegaard argued:

For the speculating [philosopher] the question of his personal eternal happiness cannot present itself, just because his task consists in getting more and more away from himself and becoming objective, and thus in vanishing from himself and becoming the contemplative power of philosophy itself.¹²²

For the Danish philosopher, the insufficiencies of reason create a logical “gap” that can only be overcome by a “leap of faith” (*Springet*). According to Kierkegaard, those who seek “religious satisfaction” must leap “between an historical truth and an eternal decision.”¹²³ The passivity of historically understood truth must be translated into action by the decision to make the leap of faith. In other words, truths grasped by passive reason alone can become meaningful only if and when translated into the concrete situation that arises in the life of faith.

As for pantheism, despite his critique of the oriental doctrine, Hegel’s philosophy of substantial monism bears strong resemblance to it. On the one hand, Hegel defended pantheism on the grounds that the theologians of his day had misunderstood its true character. According to Hegel, the common idea that in pantheism “every existing thing in its finitude and particularity is held to be possessed of Being as God or as a god, and that the finite is deified as having Being”¹²⁴ was a “false” and “unworthy” misrepresentation.¹²⁵ On the other hand, he criticized pantheism “as a nullity” and from suffering from the defect of any “dialectical development.”¹²⁶ These remarks may be taken to mean that Hegel found oriental pantheism to make little or no differentiation among the necessary essential characteristics of existence (i.e., reduction to nothing), and that pantheism did not take into account historical change and development (i.e., it reflected a static view of the universe).

Hegel took his clue from a philosopher whom he greatly admired, Baruch Spinoza. Hegel esteemed Spinoza because he successfully overcame the Cartesian dualism of thought and extension in the supremacy of the One, the monism of a single substance, *Deus sive natura* (God or nature). Now monism basically holds that in any discussion of “the one and the many,” it is really the One that is the fundamental substance or reality.¹²⁷ Referring to the *Ethics*, Alan Donagan wrote, “And Spinoza’s position is that God is the only substance.”¹²⁸ Hegel was greatly attracted to this great single idea of the Cosmic All, the Great Whole or the One, that he called the Absolute or God. This Absolute/God/Spirit was not essentially distinct from the world, but was present in it as the very mind and motor of its multi-faceted unfoldment in nature, culture, history, and the state.

However, Hegel found Spinoza’s interpretation of the one substance to be too rigid and static. Spinoza purportedly identified the finite with the infinite too closely, virtually collapsing them. In Hegel’s view, Spinoza’s system did not allow for dialectical development. Hegel’s solution was to define the Absolute as Subject and Spirit/Mind, but while his system overcame the

static character of Spinoza's God as the one "rigid" Substance, Hegel's insertion of God into the dialectics of history simply substituted one kind of reductionism for another. In Spinoza's view, God does not move history. In Hegel's, God does, but in so doing becomes too closely associated with the imperfect acts of finite and fallible creatures, whose actions Hegel openly praises, such as those of the world historical figure who is usually a conquering hero who ruthlessly crushes his enemies.

Raymond Keith Williamson has proposed a "mediating middle": that Hegel's pantheism is really a form of the more acceptable doctrine of panentheism which shares affinities with the Bahá'í view of the indwelling names and attributes of God. Panentheism, a medial way between transcendent theism and divine immanence, can be defined simply as "God is in all things, but all things are not God."¹²⁹ Williamson uses the more elaborate definition of Cross and Livingston: "... the belief that the Being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe, so that every part of it exists in Him, but that His being is more than, and is not exhausted by the universe."¹³⁰ However, if Williamson was aware of the fact, he does not mention that the credit for the philosophical elaboration of panentheism must go, not to Hegel, but to Hegel's contemporary, the philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832), who coined the term in his voluminous writings and dedicated himself to an elaboration of this concept along the lines of a modified absolute idealism. The definition used by Cross and Livingston above closely follows that of Krause.

The Left Wing or Young Hegelian, David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), who elaborated his own radical view of Christian teaching in the two-volume *Die christliche Glaubenslehre* (The Christian Doctrine of Faith), argued that traditional supernaturalism should be abandoned and replaced by a purely secular Hegelian theology of Absolute Spirit. He also wrote the very influential *Leben Jesu, kritische bearbeitet* (Life of Jesus, a Critical Treatment), which helped to lay the foundations of a modern, secular perspective of New Testament criticism by finding faith-driven, supernaturalistic, and rationalistic approaches deficient for reconstructing the life of the historical Jesus. Instead, the hermeneutical key that he proposed was the mythical content of the Gospel stories based on his interpretation of Hegelian philosophy, i.e., myth interpreted philosophically. Strauss raised the vexing question that has preoccupied New Testament scholars ever since, viz., how the theological claims of the Gospel can be correlated to the findings of historical criticism; how the Jesus of history can be reconciled with the

Christ of religion. Privileging myth, he argued that the writers of the New Testament relied on a mythopoetic interpretation of the universe that was characteristic of the prescientific, prehistorical views of the Jews of Christ's time. It was in this mythical form that they presented the Messianic figure prophesied in Jewish literature.¹³¹

Finally, the Roman Catholic Church reacted strongly to Hegel's theology, which it considered to be antithetical, not only to Catholicism but also to fundamental Christian doctrines. In Italy, Hegelian ideas were adopted by anti-clerical forces and laicists who held that the state constituted a higher ethical ideal than the church. The result was a condemnation of Hegel's philosophy as a form of anti-clerical liberalism in the Vatican's 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*.¹³²

The Method of Correlation

The Bahá'í Faith and Modern Philosophy, Science, Progressive Movements, and Current Problems

In at least five letters written on his behalf during the 1930s and 1940s, Shoghi Effendi advocated a method that was both theoretical and practical, a method that would relate the Bahá'í Faith to "the modern aspects of philosophy and science," to "all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today," and to the various subjects in the university curriculum. This was the method of correlation. A congratulatory letter written on his behalf to a student read:

It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyze the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth.¹³³

This statement links the method of correlation to that most important of teachings—the independent investigation of truth—repeatedly emphasized by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his talks in Europe and North America and describes it as "the very essence" of that teaching.¹³⁴ It may be understood, consequently, from this one letter alone, that correlation is a fundamental epistemological tool or method of acquiring knowledge that applies, as other letters have made clear, not only to students but also to all scholars engaged in the scientific study of the Bahá'í Faith. In another communication through

his secretary, Shoghi Effendi also recommended the same method:

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be *au courant* with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better.¹³⁵

The following letter also links scholarship to the principle of correlation:

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.¹³⁶

In another letter written on his behalf, the Guardian indicated that

[i]f the Bahá'ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause they need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems. We need Bahá'í scholars, not only people far, far more deeply aware of what our teachings really are, but also well read and well educated people, capable of correlating our teachings to current thoughts of the leaders of society.¹³⁷

Shoghi Effendi viewed his own methodology as operating along correlative lines. The following is taken from the foreword to *God Passes By*:

*I shall seek to represent and correlate, in however cursory a manner, those momentous happenings which have insensibly, relentlessly, and under the very eyes of successive generations, perverse, indifferent or hostile, transformed a heterodox and seemingly negligible offshoot of the Shaykhí school of the Ithna-'Ashariyyih sect of Shi'ah Islam into a world religion. . . .*¹³⁸

Something more specific than a loosely related series of events is indicated here. The Universal House of Justice wrote that “Shoghi Effendi perceived in the organic life of the Cause a dialectic of victory and crisis.”¹³⁹ The concluding postscript “Retrospect and Prospect” in *God Passes By* is largely an expatiation

on this theme. The same could be said of the processes that move Bahá'í history forward in its larger interactions with the world. This process of the establishment of the Bahá'í Faith through the dialectic of crisis and victory could also be referred to, in the language of Arnold J. Toynbee, as a “challenge-and-response”¹⁴⁰ organic growth and adjustment model of civilizations.

The Guardian also perceived for Bahá'í theology the task of clarifying and correlating the various functions of the world religions in light of its and their own scriptures. His statement suggests bringing the teachings of these religions into a purposeful, coordinated, and harmonious relationship:

In conclusion of this theme, I feel, it should be stated that the Revelation identified with Bahá'u'lláh abrogates unconditionally all the Dispensations gone before it, upholds uncompromisingly the eternal verities they enshrine, recognizes firmly and absolutely the Divine origin of their Authors, preserves inviolate the sanctity of their authentic Scriptures, disclaims any intention of lowering the status of their Founders or of abating the spiritual ideals they inculcate, clarifies and correlates their functions. . . .¹⁴¹

Expanding Correlation: Seventeen Principles

In the interests of economy, a summary will be made below of some of the inferences I have drawn from the above letters. I stress that the following principles are entirely of my own making. What follows here cannot be directly tied to the Guardian's statements. However, I have inferred that they can be logically and practically deduced from the bare statements he has made.

- 1) Correlation is a method of understanding whereby scholars can bring into relationship non-Bahá'í thinkers or systems of thought with the Bahá'í writings or findings of Bahá'í scholars.
- 2) Correlation seeks to provide answers found in the Bahá'í teachings for questions raised outside the Bahá'í Faith.
- 3) There are two types of correlation, internal and external. Internal correlation is confined to quotation of and reflection on Bahá'í scripture and teaching alone. External correlation relates the Bahá'í Faith to non-Bahá'í forms of knowledge. Internal correlation is valid as deepening understanding. External correlation qualifies as scholarship.
- 4) Correlation is a universal method of inquiry. Although it is part of the scientific method, it can be applied as well to non-scientific matters. The data on correlation is longstanding in scientific literature. The research results for Correlational Studies published

in *Psychology of the Science of Behaviour* states that “[in] correlational studies, the investigator measures the degree to which two variables are related.”¹⁴² These variables result in a “correlation coefficient” that is measured on a “scatterplot” or graph that show a positive or negative correlation with 1.0 being the “perfect relation.”¹⁴³ Outside mathematics and pure science, I conclude from the foregoing that the method of correlation may be judiciously used in the arts and humanities to establish a positive or negative correlation without pretence to the same degree of accuracy.

- 5) It is clear from the letters written on Shoghi Effendi’s behalf that his vision of the truth is comprehensive, i.e., both inclusive and allusive, since the search for truth is not to be restricted to the Bahá’í sacred writings alone. Correlation consequently acts as a safeguard against any possible invasion of the fundamentalist mindset that would confine truth strictly to the Bahá’í Revelation.
- 6) The method of correlation assumes that any truth statements found outside the Bahá’í corpus illuminate or augment truth statements found in the Bahá’í teachings, just as the Bahá’í sacred writings illuminate or augment the findings of other thinkers or systems of truth.
- 7) Two commonsensical principles follow from (5) above: A truth is a truth; and any one truth is not mutually exclusive of any other.
- 8) Correlation is a search for common ground that allows for a reconciliation of truth statements, without their necessarily being total identification in all respects—in other words, correlation respects both particularity (distinction) and commonality (oneness).
- 9) Correlation may lead to a new synthesis of truth, but in some cases the attempt to correlate fails if the propositions or truth statements are judged to be mutually exclusive. In this case, negative correlation results.
- 10) Correlation clarifies truth statements and as a function of dialectic leads to the emergence of new truths.
- 11) Correlation logically connects a sequence of interrelated events or statements and ascribes meaning to them.
- 12) Correlation may be found within the events of history and within and among the teachings of the world’s great religions.
- 13) Correlation is apt to promote dialogical scholarship.
- 14) Sandra Hutchison has argued plausibly that inherent to Shoghi Effendi’s method of correlation is a certain pragmatism that invites

us “to contemplate the relationship between the academic disciplines we are pursuing and the social [or spiritual] principles enunciated in the Bahá’í writings.”¹⁴⁴ Hutchison sees, moreover, in the method of correlation a “bridge” that might link the Bahá’í perspective with other contemporary issues or projects.¹⁴⁵

- 15) With Shoghi Effendi’s advocacy of the practice of a “more profound and coordinated Bahá’í scholarship,”¹⁴⁶ Sandra Hutchison rightly envisions the possibility, not only for “solutions to specific modern problems” but also for providing “the basis upon which a new theoretical framework for understanding our chosen subjects can be established” and “their implications with respect to interdisciplinary studies as well as to the development of holistic methodologies within each discipline. . . .”¹⁴⁷
- 16) Shoghi Effendi’s statement that the Bahá’í teachings are to be taken as “a great balanced whole”¹⁴⁸ is not only a validation of holism but also invites us to consider that correlation can serve to provide linkages between seemingly contradictory poles in the intellectual sphere.
- 17) Without correlative linkages, thinkers in diverse disciplines and activists who seek to apply experimentally social and spiritual principles remain separated and/or lacking the vital collaboration that is necessary for a more complete understanding and resolution of the complex problems facing humanity today.

The Divine Economy

Orienting Observations

Four closely connected references to “*the Divine Economy*” occur in the second World Order letter of 21 March 1930, “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh Further Considerations.” While this topic would have normally been considered in chapter 2 on the World Order letters, its importance calls for separate treatment. The Divine Economy is one of the central features of this letter and requires closer attention because this topic is generally misunderstood. Four orienting observations are in order at the outset: First, the Divine Economy is not primarily about economics, i.e., financial questions, but neither does it exclude it. Second, the Divine Economy is used as a shorthand expression for the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh with which it is closely identified. Third, the Divine Economy, in its pre-Bahá’í antecedents, has its origins in both the secular and religious spheres. Fourth, the Divine Economy has specific antecedents in Christian

theology as well as in the “economical,” i.e., efficient management of human affairs, but its usage in the writings of Shoghi Effendi is Bahá’í specific. One of its Judeo-Christian meanings refers to the operation of the divine plan for the salvation of humanity. This meaning is basically consistent with the Guardian’s usage. As such, it is appropriate and suited to Western Bahá’ís, who stem largely from a Judeo-Christian background.

Shoghi Effendi makes four mentions of the Divine Economy in this letter. Three of those mentions are cited here; the fourth is found below. He asserts that the features of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh are unique and are to be distinguished from other forms of government, whether secular or religious:

For Bahá’u’lláh, we should readily recognize, has not only imbued mankind with a new and regenerating Spirit. He has not merely enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy, however potent, sound and universal these may be. In addition to these He, as well as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy.¹⁴⁹

Should we look back upon the past, were we to search out the Gospel and the Qur’án, we will readily recognize that neither the Christian nor the Islamic Dispensations can offer a parallel either to the system of Divine Economy so thoroughly established by Bahá’u’lláh, or to the safeguards which He has provided for its preservation and advancement. Therein, I am profoundly convinced, lies the answer to those questions to which I have already referred.¹⁵⁰

Dear friends! Feeble though our Faith may now appear in the eyes of men, who either denounce it as an offshoot of Islam, or contemptuously ignore it as one more of those obscure sects that abound in the West, this priceless gem of Divine Revelation, now still in its embryonic state, shall evolve within the shell of His law, and shall forge ahead, undivided and unimpaired, till it embraces the whole of mankind. Only those who have already recognized the supreme station of Bahá’u’lláh, only those whose hearts have been touched by His love, and have become familiar with the potency of His spirit, can adequately appreciate the value of this Divine Economy—His inestimable gift to mankind.¹⁵¹

Etymological and Theological Roots

It may further understanding to consider a few etymological and theological roots. Early Christian theology identified the divine economy with the work of God's salvation operating from the dawn of history. In a historical interpretation of theology, Saint Irenaeus, the first Father and Bishop of Lyons (d. after 190 CE), taught that the "divine economy" was synonymous with the "divine plan," God's plan of salvation that was transacted periodically by covenants made with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Christ, a bond that linked the Hebrew Bible and the Gospel and which culminated in the incarnation of Jesus.¹⁵² The bare, key idea of a plan of salvation for humanity, purposed by God, can be positively correlated to the meaning intended by the Guardian. However, Shoghi Effendi's teaching of the Divine Economy provides the means in a modern, international context: the laws and institutions that constitute the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Two Greek root words are further relevant: (1) *oikonomikos* (Lat. *oeconomicus*), (*oikos*=house, *nomos*=law), meaning pertaining to the management of a family, household, or estate. This meaning originally indicated the laws or principles of production, distribution, and consumption of wealth, ideally, within an ethic of justice. It was used in treatises written by Xenophon, Aristotle, and Cicero to describe the proper management of the household and referred to the administration or management of the family, the basic social and economic unit of society.¹⁵³ (2) *Oikonomia*, (Lat. *Dispensatio*), meaning "the economy of salvation," i.e., the "plan," "arrangement," "disposition"¹⁵⁴ of "God's activity for our salvation"¹⁵⁵ and the dispensations of His providence for the human race. Regarding the first meaning, in a "world-embracing"¹⁵⁶ context, the management of the Divine Economy would have to embrace the whole human family according to the principles of a theocracy which Bahá'u'lláh has firmly established: "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed."¹⁵⁷

Determining Meaning by Context

An essential understanding of the Divine Economy can be gained simply by an examination of the term in context. Hillel's seventh norm or rule of interpretation in Jewish Midrash, "the meaning of a statement may be determined from its context,"¹⁵⁸ applies here. It has become a norm of scriptural exegesis that has been passed down to the Abrahamic religions

and which is known in Christianity as *scriptura ipsius interpret*, “scripture interprets itself.” In Sunni Islam, an identical guidelines exists in the *Tafsir al-Qur’an bi ‘l-Qur’an* “Commentary on the Koran by the Koran” and a Hadith, “The Koran interprets itself.”¹⁵⁹ While the Guardian’s writings are not sacred scripture, this norm applies. In the first of the three passages quoted above, the meaning of the Divine Economy becomes clearer when read in context: “*Bahá’u’lláh. . . has. . . clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy.*” It may be inferred that the “Divine Economy” stands in apposition to “laws” and “definite institutions.” In the same passage Shoghi Effendi wrote:

*These [laws, institutions] are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth. Not only have they revealed all the directions required for the practical realization of those ideals which the Prophets of God have visualized, and which from time immemorial have inflamed the imagination of seers and poets in every age. They have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.*¹⁶⁰

Reexamination of the following passage gives us another clue as to the meaning of the Divine Economy. It is a “system”:

*Should we look back upon the past, were we to search out the Gospel and the Qur’án, we will readily recognize that neither the Christian nor the Islamic Dispensations can offer a parallel either to the system of Divine Economy so thoroughly established by Bahá’u’lláh, or to the safeguards which He has provided for its preservation and advancement. Therein, I am profoundly convinced, lies the answer to those questions to which I have already referred.*¹⁶¹

The following passage contains all the components that constitute the Divine Economy:

Unlike the Dispensation of Christ, unlike the Dispensation of Muhammad, unlike all the Dispensations of the past, the apostles of Bahá'u'lláh in every land, wherever they labor and toil, have before them in clear, in unequivocal and emphatic language, all the laws, the regulations, the principles, the institutions, the guidance, they require for the prosecution and consummation of their task. Both in the administrative provisions of the Bahá'í Dispensation, and in the matter of succession, as embodied in the twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh can summon to their aid such irrefutable evidences of Divine Guidance that none can resist, that none can belittle or ignore. Therein lies the distinguishing feature of the Bahá'í Revelation. Therein lies the strength of the unity of the Faith, of the validity of a Revelation that claims not to destroy or belittle previous Revelations, but to connect, unify, and fulfill them. This is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have both revealed and even insisted upon certain details in connection with the Divine Economy which they have bequeathed to us, their followers. This is why such an emphasis has been placed in their Will and Testament upon the powers and prerogatives of the ministers of their Faith.¹⁶²

The passage implies that the Divine Economy does not mean anything other than what it set out: “. . . *the laws, the regulations, the principles, the institutions, the guidance. . . the administrative provisions. . . the matter of succession. . . the twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship. . .*” In sum, the Divine Economy refers to *all* the provisions that have brought into being and are sustaining the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Maximum Efficiency: The Elegant Solution

In what other sense is the Divine Economy economic? “Economic” is synonymous with a streamlined, orderly, and efficient operation. The following factors are also relevant:

- It is a divinely ordained, living, growing organism that serves as a channel for the Holy Spirit to ensure the welfare of society. Following 'Abdu'l-Bahá's precept, by its agency, warfare will be replaced by welfare.¹⁶³ In this view, monetary considerations do

enter into the equation in the sane production, equitable distribution, moderate consumption, and wise management of material wealth.

- It is dynamic and expansive. It allows for the creation of auxiliary institutions to respond to the needs of an ever-changing, progressive society. Shoghi Effendi wrote, “*It should also be borne in mind that the machinery of the Cause has been so fashioned, that whatever is deemed necessary to incorporate into it in order to keep it in the forefront of all progressive movements, can, according to the provisions made by Bahá’u’lláh, be safely embodied therein.*”¹⁶⁴
- This System is integral, whole, and complete in itself. However, the Divine Economy does not conform to those systems that are called autopoietic (self-creating) by some thinkers, even though it retains some of their basic features, since one of the characteristics of autopoiesis is self-creation: “It [the autopoietic system] produces, and is produced by, nothing other than itself.”¹⁶⁵ This statement could not be applied to the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, which remains entirely dependent on its Divine Source.
- The Divine Economy is characterized by a simplicity of conception and design that is intended to function with maximum efficiency. This characteristic of simplicity is expressed scientifically as “the elegant solution” or “principle of economy.”¹⁶⁶ The principle of economy means that in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, complex phenomena have been reduced to the fewest number of organizational structures and operating principles possible that produce the best results.

The Divine Economy, Dispensational Religion, and Progressive Revelation

In addition to being *the* Divine Plan of Salvation, the Divine Economy alludes to three other interconnected realities which are closely tied to it: (a) dispensational religion, (b) progressive revelation, and (c) God’s Greater Covenant with humanity. All three components form an interrelated whole expressing God’s activity in human history. As was already noted, the Latin translation of the Greek *Oikonomia* is *Dispensatio*, a cognate of *dispendere*, which yields “dispensation” and “to dispense.” The literal meaning of *dispendere* is “to weigh out.” A less frequent, now dated, dictionary definition of “dispensation,” but very pertinent to this analysis, includes “the divine ordering of the affairs of the world.”¹⁶⁷ Synonyms include “administration, direction, economy, plan.”¹⁶⁸ A fundamental concept in Bahá’í theology, as yet little explored, is dispensational religion. The title of Shoghi Effendi’s

weightiest theological treatise, *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (1934), which he repeatedly referred to as his “last will and testament,”¹⁶⁹ bears this key theological term.

A dispensation refers to an era of time, usually 500 to 1,000 years, that is dominated by the authority of a major prophetic figure¹⁷⁰ who reveals a new Holy Book in which essential spiritual truths taught by previous prophets are reaffirmed, new teachings proclaimed, and divine laws and institutions founded while former ones are abrogated. The dispensation, which is loosely a “form” or “structure,” is closely related to progressive revelation, since this latter phenomenon occurs within and throughout a number of divine dispensations, as attested by Shoghi Effendi’s statement “*that Divine Revelation is orderly, continuous and progressive and not spasmodic or final.*”¹⁷¹ This progressive revelation is dispensed proportionate to humanity’s spiritual capacity in a given era: “Know of a certainty that in every Dispensation the light of Divine Revelation has been vouchsafed to men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity.”¹⁷² Bahá'u'lláh, in the same passage, uses the rising sun as a symbol of religion in history, the successive Divine Manifestations/Prophets, or even progressive revelation itself: “Consider the sun. How feeble its rays the moment it appeareth above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approacheth its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light.”¹⁷³ Further, Shoghi Effendi writes of “*different stages in the eternal history and constant evolution of one religion*”¹⁷⁴ and of an “*ever-increasing intensity, the splendor of one common Revelation at the various stages which have marked the advance of mankind towards maturity.*”¹⁷⁵ Most pointedly, he refers to the faith of Bahá'u'lláh “*as the culmination of a cycle, the final stage in a series of successive, of preliminary and progressive revelations.*”¹⁷⁶ It is dispensational religion that provides the framework in which progressive revelation occurs and is made possible.

As was noted, the literal meaning of dispensation, from *dispendere*, is “to weigh out.” This means that successive revelations from God are meted out to humanity according to its degree of spiritual capacity and social evolution. Metaphorically, the act of “weighing out” also brings to mind a balance or scale in which the subtle and diverse contents of religion are carefully sifted, weighed, and apportioned by the Hand of the Divine Assayer, commensurate to the needs of the age. On this theme, Bahá'u'lláh’s language in *The Seven Valleys* closely resembles that of the Qur’án. He writes, “. . . yet to each time and era a portion is allotted and a bounty set apart, this

in a given measure.”¹⁷⁷ The quranic passage reads, “And no one thing is there, but with Us are its storehouses; and We send it not down but in settled measure” (15:21).

The correlation between the purely spiritual component of revelation and the degree of social evolution has been indicated by Shoghi Effendi to an extent that does not minimize the role of social factors in determining the degree of power manifested by Divine Revelation in the world. In other words, the spiritual contents of the great world religions have not only caused societal advancement but have also adapted themselves to societal conditions and to the level of material progress achieved. In expatiating on the greatness of the Bahá’í revelation, the Guardian cautions against ascribing any “*superior merit*” to the Bahá’í Faith. He writes that the eclipsing light, the remarkable “*signs and tokens*” accompanying its advent, and the high spirituality of its “*votaries*,” not only should be explained by the sheer magnitude of its revelatory power but also “*should be viewed and explained as the inevitable outcome of the forces that have made of this present age an age infinitely more advanced, more receptive, and more insistent to receive an ampler measure of Divine Guidance than has hitherto been vouchsafed to mankind.*”¹⁷⁸ Such a statement guards against expressions of overzealousness or triumphalism, and, while recognizing the presence of God in all things, in principle gives due credit to the many benefactors of humanity who have contributed to the welfare and advancement of society. Moreover, the abstract word *forces*, suggests that other factors than strictly religious ones have gone into the making of the character of the present age.

The Greater Covenant and American Dispensationalism

It would be instructive to compare and contrast the Bahá’í understanding of dispensational religion to the movement of evangelical “dispensationalism” begun in the United States in the late 1800s and which has continued to the present day. In so doing, two principles are recalled from the section above, “The Method of Correlation”:

- (8) Correlation is a search for common ground that allows for a reconciliation of truth statements, without their necessarily being total identification in all respects—in other words, correlation respects both particularity (distinction) and commonality (oneness).
- (9) Correlation may lead to a new synthesis of truth, but in some cases the attempt to correlate may result in failure if propositions or truth statements are judged to be mutually exclusive. In this case, negative correlation results.¹⁷⁹

Systematized first in the writings of John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), a former Irish priest who held a radical view of ecclesiology,¹⁸⁰ and one of the founders of the Plymouth Brethren, the principles of dispensationalism were spread initially by the Niagara Bible Conference (1876) and the subsequent Bible Conference movement. It included such figures as C. I. Scofield (1843–1921), whose Scofield Reference Bible (1909) sold more than two million copies and put dispensationalism into the hands of the layperson. It included a vast network of such institutions as the Moody Bible Institute (1886), now independent, and the Dallas Theological Seminary (1924) (independent), and several smaller bible colleges and mission organizations. Using a hermeneutic that combined “Scottish common sense” and a “historical-grammatical,”¹⁸¹ i.e., literal interpretation of the Bible, dispensationalism embodied the primary impetus for a mission-oriented twentieth-century evangelical fundamentalism. It published such works as “The Fundamentals” (which probably gave rise to the word *fundamentalism*), a twelve-volume paperback series (1910–15) that fought back against modern, critical scholarly investigations of the Bible, initiated in earnest with the “lower” (textual) and “higher criticism”¹⁸² in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dispensationalism included in its teachings such features as “vivid apocalyptic expectations” of an imminent and futuristic Second Advent, rapture theology, “a political bias toward the nation of Israel,” God’s chosen people under the “old covenant,” missionary activity, anti-secularism, withdrawal from and “pessimism concerning the world,” although in more recent times, evangelicals, whether of the older dispensational stripe or not, have become highly politicized.

While American dispensationalism is flawed in its narrow dogmatism and much touted “one way” salvationist exclusivism, two features of dispensationalism are worthy of interest: the definition of the concept itself and its view of history as a contest between good and evil.

The Concept Itself. Dispensationalism is particularly useful in its advocacy of a Great Covenant operating within and throughout various dispensations. Bahá’í advocacy of a broader definition of the covenant, or interconnected dispensations as applying to all the Abrahamic religions (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá’í Faith), and to the religions of South Asia, would no doubt be rejected by American dispensationalists and would have to be restricted to Judaism and Christianity alone, “the old and the new covenants.” However, the first and second (of seven) of Scofield’s scheme of “dispensations” were the stages of

pre-Edenic “innocence” and later post-Adamic “conscience,” the latter referring to the Fall until the time of the Flood. Thus, Scofield extended the notion of the religious dispensation as stretching back to prerecorded history and marking its starting point with the cycle beginning with Adam. As far as they go, these bare notions would be consistent with the Bahá’í understanding of the function of the religious dispensation within history.

Dispensationlists, to their credit, even possessed their own limited concept of “progressive revelation.” According to M. James Sawyer, they defined their favorite concept as “[a] distinguishable administration in the fulfillment of the divine purpose of creation, operative within history, during which God administers the world in a particular manner. The dispensations correspond historically to the successive stages of progressive revelation.”¹⁸³ Sawyer writes also that “[t]he unifying principle of history is eschatological, with God revealing his character and glory in successive dispensations.” As bald statements, these sentences are coherent with Bahá’í theology. However, what Christian dispensationalists meant by “progressive revelation,” the germ of whose concept they claim is to be found in the first two verses of the epistle to the Hebrews,¹⁸⁴ and what they mean by the Covenant differ in crucial respects from Bahá’í theology, in which both the divine covenant and the religious dispensation are given to far broader and more-inclusive definitions.

Its View of History as a Contest between Good and Evil. The view of history of dispensationalists resembles particularly one aspect of Shoghi Effendi’s view of history, originating with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,¹⁸⁵ as a dramatic confrontation between “*the forces of darkness and the army of light,*” which is represented as “*the greatest drama in the world’s spiritual history.*”¹⁸⁶ Sawyer defines the dispensationalist view of history as a vivid apocalypse: “Dispensational historiography views the world as a stage upon which the drama of cosmic redemption is fought between the divine forces and those of Satan. Each dispensation functions as an act in that drama.”¹⁸⁷ Although ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has defined Satan, in terms of moral realism rather than metaphysical fact, as “a product of human minds and of instinctive human tendencies toward error,”¹⁸⁸ and although dispensationalists believe in the literal person of Satan as the fountain of all evil, nonetheless, the view of history as a dire contest between the antagonistic forces of truth and error is similar in both religions. The full flavor of Shoghi Effendi’s apocalyptic presentation of the contest between the forces of darkness and light follows:

*The stage is set. The hour is propitious. The signal is sounded. Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual battalions are moving into position. The initial clash between the forces of darkness and the army of light, as unnoticed as the landing, two millenniums ago, of the apostles of Christ on the southern shores of the European continent, is being registered by the denizens of the Abhá Kingdom. The Author of the Plan that has set so titanic an enterprise in motion is Himself mounted at the head of these battalions, and leads them on to capture the cities of men's hearts.*¹⁸⁹

For all their symbolism, “*the forces of darkness*” are far from being mere allegory, for that would impute to them a “non-existent” metaphysical character. Even though the Bahá'í understanding views evil in Dionysian or Thomistic¹⁹⁰ terms as a privation of good, it recognizes evil nonetheless as a devastating moral fact (a metaphysical impossibility but a moral fact). “*The forces of darkness*” are the symbolic representation of those “demons” or idols of our age that are wreaking chaos in the world, all those negative forces that are impeding the integration of the human community into one organic whole. With the dramatic language of a vivid apocalypse, both Shoghi Effendi and the authors of the Bible were drawing upon the spiritual imagery expressing the final great battle of battles—Armageddon. While this language of contrast and confrontation is to be found in the Hebrew Bible and the Gospel of John, it predated the Gospel in Zoroastrian apocalyptic writings and in both Mandaeism and Manicheism.

Endnotes

1. *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind*, vol. 2, p. 769.
2. *Modern Illustrated Library, Growth of Ideas: Knowledge, Thought, Imagination*, p. 162.
3. John Herman Randall, Jr. and Justus Buchler, *Philosophy: An Introduction*, p. 222.
4. William Nicholls, *Systematic Philosophical Theology, The Pelican Guide to Modern Theology*, vol. 1, p. 51.
5. "Faith, Reason, and Society in Bahá'í Perspective," *World Order* 21.3/4 (Spring/Summer 1987): 15. Saeidi's criticism of Hegel and Marx reads: "Hegel and Marx, however differ drastically from the Bahá'í perspective when they refuse to apply the idea of the historicity of reason to their own theories, claim a myth of total reason, pretend an objectivity that transcends history, and declare an end of the dialectic" (p. 15).
6. Ken Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution*, p. 32. Original source not cited by Wilber.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 479.
8. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 180.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
10. See pp. 180–82.
11. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 182–83.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
13. Letter dated 15 February 1947 in *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 445.
14. *Ibid.*
15. In the *Lawh-i-Maqsud* (Tablet of Maqsd) Bahá'u'lláh writes, "Such academic pursuits as begin and end in words alone have never been and will never be of any worth. The majority of Persia's learned doctors devote all their lives to the study of a philosophy the ultimate yield of which is nothing but words" (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 169).
16. Letter dated 15 February 1947 in *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 445.
17. As reported by television journalist Evan Solomon, host of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's "Hot Type," an interview program featuring well-known authors. Source not given. 12 January 2002.
18. Rúhíyyih Rabaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 36.
19. Green has in fact been called an "anti-Hegelian." See John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, p. 57. Green's social and political philosophy was indebted to Hegel for his views on the social origins of rights and the positive role of the state, but unlike Hegel, he rejected any advocacy of violence or revolution as a means of social change. Green's state interventionist views helped to overthrow the older laissez-faire economic liberalism. This promoted a greater interest in reformist, social legislation.
20. Edward Caird's (1835–1908) little volume *Hegel* was widely read as a sympathetic introduction to the philosopher. Caird was a distinguished Kantian scholar who wrote a *Critical Philosophy of Kant*, characterized as "the most thorough, comprehensive, and weighty exposition ever written in English" (Albert E. Avey, *Handbook in the History of Philosophy: 3500 BC to the Present*, pp. 225–26). The source of the foregoing quotation is not identified.

21. McTaggart (Cambridge) gave an atheistic interpretation to Hegel and finally came to the conclusion that the universe is one interrelated whole that is essentially spiritual. He viewed the Absolute as a system of immortal selves whose most important bond is love.
22. Bosanquet adhered most closely to both the form and content of Hegel's philosophy.
23. Jowett is reported to have said, "It is too great and too near for this generation to comprehend. The future alone can reveal its import" (*The Bahá'í World*, vol. 12, p. 625). Comparative religionist J. Estlin Carpenter quoted Edward Caird, Jowett's successor as Master of Balliol, as saying, "He thought Bábísm (as the Bahá'í movement was then called) might prove the most important religious movement since the foundation of Christianity."
24. Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, n. 11, p. 537.
25. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2, *The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath*, p. 79.
26. *An Intellectual History of Modern Europe*, n. 8, p. 248.
27. Cassirer was influenced by Kant's transcendental idealism. For Cassirer, a human being was preeminently an *animal symbolicum* rather than an *animal rationale*. The richness of his symbolic life tied language, religion, science, and art together. The symbol contributes to humanity's cultural diversity, contributes to self-liberation, and allows humankind to build up a world of its own, a world of ideals. See his famous *An Essay on Man*.
28. Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, p. 249.
29. "Hegelianism is the renaissance of tribalism" (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2, p. 30).
30. Ronald N. Stromberg, *An Intellectual History of Modern Europe*, p. 248.
31. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2, p. 64.
32. Cited in Popper, *ibid.*, p. 64. From the *Encyclopedia*, pp. 455–56 and §347 of *The Philosophy of Law*.
33. From the introduction, *Philosophy of History*.
34. From the conclusion, *Philosophy of History*, p. 457.
35. Hegel, *Reason in History*, a compilation of retranslated texts from Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, p. 22.
36. Hegel, *Reason in History*, p. 24.
37. Robert Heiss, *Hegel Kierkegaard Marx: Three Great Philosophers Whose Ideas Changed the Course of Civilization*, p. 144.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
39. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, p. 248.
40. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, pp. 25–40.
41. In responding to his pro-Hegelian critics in the postscript, Popper, while being slightly apologetic, unabashedly repeated that he was "hoping to expose the ridiculous in this philosophy which I can only regard with a mixture of contempt and horror" (p. 394).
42. "Hegel (2)" in Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 7, part 1, p. 256.
43. The expression is from editor Robert S. Hartman's introduction to Hegel's *Reason in History*, p. ix.
44. The quotations of Hegel are taken by Popper from *Selections*, an English translation of Hegel edited by J. Loewenberg, an ardent British admirer of Hegel. In *The Modern Student's Library of Philosophy*, pp. 389, 447, 443, 446. The passages are from *The Philosophy of Law* and *The Philosophy of History*, which Popper also quotes by paragraph

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- number from the original German editions. See Popper p. 304, “Notes to chapter 12,” *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, p. 31.
45. See Shoghi Effendi’s condemnation of the three “false gods” of nationalism, racialism, and communism, p. 113.
 46. Hegel was no populist and had no confidence in the people’s intelligence: “What constitutes the state is a matter of trained intelligence, not a matter of “the people” (*Reason in History*, p. 57). “People being what they are, one has to be content with less freedom; so that the monarchical constitution, under the given circumstances and the moral condition of the people, is regarded the most useful” (p. 59).
 47. From Hegel’s Encyclopedia quoted by Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, p. 45.
 48. Frederick William wrote that he was determined never to give way to “the hotheads, that very active and loud-voiced group of persons who for some years have set themselves up as the nation and have cried for a constitution” (Popper, p. 43, quoting from E. N. Anderson’s *Nationalism and the Cultural Crisis in Prussia, 1806–1815*, p. 294).
 49. He took this position in the *Philosophy of Right (Law)*.
 50. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. “Hegel and Hegelianism.”
 51. When *The Philosophy of Right* was published, Hegel sent it to the Lord Chancellor, Prince von Hardenburg, with a note expressing his good fortune to be counted among the king’s subjects in an “enlightened regime and under the guidance of Your Serene Highness, the Prussian state, to which therefore it must give me special satisfaction to belong” (quoted by Heiss, p. 155).
 52. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th rev. ed., s.v. “Hegel.” This particular charge is not found in the 15th edition.
 53. Heiss, *Hegel Kierkegaard Marx*, p. 167.
 54. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 182.
 55. See the collection of essays *Hegel’s Political Philosophy: Problems and Perspectives*.
 56. In her article “Hegel on War,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 26 (1965). Quoted in D. P. Verene, “Hegel’s Account of War,” in *Hegel’s Political Philosophy: Problems and Perspectives*, p. 171.
 57. D. P. Verene, “Hegel’s Account of War,” p. 172.
 58. Ibid.
 59. Ibid.
 60. Ibid., n. 2, p. 168.
 61. Ibid., p. 168.
 62. In his “Political Theory in the History of Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25(1964): 305.
 63. Copleston, op. cit., p. 179.
 64. Ibid., p. 260.
 65. Ibid.
 66. Ibid.
 67. From the preface to *The Philosophy of Right*, cited in Copleston, p. 259.
 68. “Hegel (2)” in Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, p. 260.
 69. Ibid., p. 261.
 70. Robert Heiss, op. cit., p. 179.
 71. *Philosophy of History*, p. 30. Italics in original.
 72. Ibid., p. 32.

A Celestial Burning

73. J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth*, p. 255.
74. See Popper, op. cit., from *Philosophy of Right (Law)* §327 and 328L, Gans edition of 1833.
75. Stromberg, op. cit., p. 247.
76. In Section 111, “Persia,” chapter 1, “The Zend People,” pp. 176–81. *The Philosophy of History*, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, with a preface by Hegel’s son, Charles, trans. J. Sibree. In *The World’s Greatest Literature*.
77. Ibid., pp. 173–74.
78. W. H. Walsh writes, “But I think it is worth remarking that he regarded history not just as a unity, but as a unity of a special kind. It got its unity from the fact that it consisted of a series of attempts. . . . what Hegel called the realization of freedom” (“Principle and Prejudice in Hegel’s Philosophy of History,” in *Hegel’s Political Philosophy*, p. 183).
79. *The Philosophy of History*, p. 13.
80. Ibid., p. 15.
81. *Growth of Ideas: Knowledge, Thought, Imagination*, p. 169.
82. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 341.
83. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 149–50.
84. Heiss, *Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx*, p. 139.
85. Quoted by Heiss, ibid., pp. 137–38 from Hegel, *Philosophy of History*.
86. From the introduction to Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 18.
87. W. H. Walsh, “Principle and Prejudice in Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*” in *Hegel’s Political Philosophy: Problems and Perspectives*, p. 182.
88. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 341. Brackets in original.
89. Ibid., p. 341.
90. See Kant’s remarkable essay “Perpetual Peace,” progressive and far-sighted for its time in which he writes of “world citizenship” (Third Definitive Article) (Kant, *On History*, pp. 85–135).
91. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 138.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid., p. 144.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid., p. 149.
96. Ibid. *Suttee* is not Hegel’s word.
97. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, pp. 157, 167.
98. Ibid., p. 158.
99. W. H. Walsh, “Principle and Prejudice in Hegel’s Philosophy of History,” p. 192.
100. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 99.
101. Ibid., p. 91.
102. Ibid., p. 93.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid.
105. Walsh, “Principle and Prejudice in Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*,” p. 186.
106. Shoghi Effendi, “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh,” p. 182.
107. James C. Livingstone, *Modern Christian Thought from the Enlightenment to Vatican II*, p. 156.
108. A ritual is a prescribed order for performing a rite. The rite of burial, for example, is performed according to a prescribed ritual.

109. Livingstone, *ibid.*, p. 156.
110. In Britain they were called Neo-Hegelians. The theological reinterpretation of Christianity was done there by the Scots John and Edward Caird. Edward Caird, previously mentioned, developed *some* ideas that were strikingly similar to certain Bahá'í concepts such as the unity of humankind, which was based on Caird's concept of religion being universally rational. (He did not, however, espouse the notion of special revelations or mystical intuitions.) Caird moved logically from the oneness of humankind to the oneness of religion and advocated that the data for the study of religion should be drawn from the entire field of the history of religions, both "primitive" and modern. He also believed in the evolutionary process of the religions, i.e., the so-called primitive religions contained the germ of the higher ones. For Caird the knowledge of God was the start-and-end-point of all thinking, and in religion this knowledge was brought more clearly to consciousness (summarized from John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought: The Frontiers of Philosophy and Theology, 1900–1960*, pp. 25–26).
111. Bauer and Marx had planned to found a society of atheism to supplant religion. See Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the Intellectual Development of Karl Marx*, p. 94.
112. Marx, *On Religion*, pp. 41–42, quoted by Livingstone in *Modern Christian Thought*, p. 181.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
114. See, for example, the sections on Hegel's theism and atheism in Raymond Keith Williamson, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 216–29.
115. Walter Jaeschke writes that Shubarth and Carganico in *Über Philosophie* criticized Hegel for no mention of personal immortality (*Reason in Religion: The Foundation of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, p. 365).
116. Cited in Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 219, from *Philosophy of Mind* §564.
117. Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* (1965), p. 275 quoted by Williamson, p. 219.
118. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 71, quoted by Williamson, p. 218.
119. Kaufmann, quoted by Williamson, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, p. 219.
120. The invocation of a prayer for spiritual qualities reads, "He is the prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God!" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 147).
121. *Reason in Religion*, pp. 367–68. The famous statement that God needs the world is found in Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*, 1:308, n. 97. Hotho was Hegel's pupil.
122. *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, cited in Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, p. 44. Brackets in Hannay.
123. *Postscript*, p. 90, cited by Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, pp. 98–99. For a discussion of the leap of faith, see Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, pp. 98–99.
124. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3:319, quoted in Williamson, p. 232.
125. Quoted in Williamson, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, p. 232. From *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* pp. 1:96–97, 215–16, 2:318–19. Also from *The Philosophy of Mind*, part 3 of Hegel's Encyclopedia, §573.
126. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 320, 325, quoted in Williamson, pp. 232–33.
127. For Spinoza, thought and extension were united in a single Substance.
128. "Essence and the Distinction of Attributes in Spinoza's Metaphysics" in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 169.

129. This is a formula of my own making.
130. In Williamson's introduction to Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*, n. 5, p. 366.
131. Compressed from James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Vatican II*, pp. 173–80.
132. Stromberg, *An Intellectual History of Modern Europe*, p. 247.
133. Cited by the Universal House of Justice in a letter to an individual 19 October 1993. Published in *Bahá'í Studies Review* 3.2 (1994): 76.
134. For a fuller discussion of this teaching, see chapter 1, "The Starting Point: The Search for Truth" in McLean, *Dimensions in Spirituality*, pp. 1–40.
135. From a letter of 5 July 1947 published in "The Importance of Deepening Our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith," p. 47.
136. From a letter of 21 October 1943, published in "The Importance of Deepening Our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith," p. 44.
137. From a letter dated 5 July 1949 published in "The Importance of Deepening Our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith," p. 49.
138. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. xii.
139. Letter of 2 January 1986 to the Bahá'ís of the world. In *Crisis and Victory*, p. 77.
140. This is one of Toynbee's major theories of the growth and decline of civilizations as elaborated in his massive ten-volume *A Study of History*. The challenge-and-response motif appears especially in chapter 2, section 5 of D. C. Somervell's abridgement of Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, pp. 60–79.
141. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 100.
142. Carlson et al., *Psychology of the Science of Behaviour*, p. 45.
143. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
144. "Interchange," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, no date.
145. *Ibid.*
146. "It seems what we need now is a more profound and coordinated Baha'i scholarship in order to attract such thinking men as you are contacting" (from a letter to an individual, 3 July 1949, cited in *The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call*, p. 28).
147. "Interchange," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*.
148. Letter to an individual, 19 March 1946, in the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, *Two Compilations on Scholarship* (1979 and 1983). The complete sentence reads: "We must take the teachings as a great, balanced whole, not seek out and oppose to each other two strong statements that have different meanings; somewhere in between, there are links uniting the two."
149. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 19.
150. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
151. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.
152. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th rev. ed., s.v. "Irenaeus." References to the "divine economy" are lacking in the current 15th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. See also Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, pp. 80–81. Irenaeus elaborated a grandiose view of salvation history stretching back to creation and moving forward through the fall and the salvation of Christ up to and including the final restoration (*recapitulatio*) of all things at end time. Irenaeus wrote in Greek, but his writings survive in a five-book treatise written to combat Gnosticism and other heresies, *Against the Heresies* (c. 180). He established Christian teaching as being governed, not by private or esoteric teaching, but by the "rule of faith," the apostolic tradition. He was the first systematic theologian of Catholic belief.

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153. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, s.v. “Economics.”
154. *Ibid.*, s.v. “Divine Economy.” See also *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Divine Economy.”
155. *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, vol. 14, p. 455, s.v. “Christian theology.”
156. Bahá’u’lláh writes, “Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self” (*Gleanings*, p. 94).
157. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶181.
158. “History of Interpretation” in *The Oxford Companion of the Bible*, p. 308.
159. Ahmad von Denffer, *‘Ulum al-Qur’án*, p. 125. Von Denffer cites Ibn Taymiya as a source for these statements.
160. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 19–20.
161. Underline not in original.
162. *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 22.
163. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said in London during His first public address in the West at the City Temple, “In the days of old an instinct for warfare was developed in the struggle with wild animals; this is no longer necessary; nay, rather, co-operation and mutual understanding are seen to produce the greatest welfare of mankind” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*, p. 20).
164. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 22–23.
165. John Mingers, *Self-Producing Systems: Implications and Applications of Autopoiesis*, p. 11. Autopoiesis is a major branch of systems theory found in such diverse fields as sociology, cognitive science, laws, policy science, and psychotherapy. Autopoiesis was originally a biological and neurophysiological concept in which the “self-producing,” autonomous, and self-maintaining system was a central focus. The concept of autopoiesis has been taken up in many different disciplines, each with its own interpretations, concerns, and applications. According to H. Maturana and H. Varela, “all living systems are autopoietic” (*Autopoietic Systems: A Characterization of the Living Organization*, p. 89).
166. This is the modern name for the logical rule also known as Occam’s Razor. The elegant solution has received wider endorsement in the field of mathematics as the minimum number of steps to achieve the solution exhibiting maximum clarity. In dance or martial arts, elegance refers to minimum motion with maximum effect. Engineers strive to use the least amount of material and minimize the number of moving parts. The main critics of elegant solutions say that they are reductionistic.
167. From *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*.
168. From *Roget’s 21st Century Thesaurus in Dictionary Form*, p. 262.
169. A remark made by Hand of the Cause Z. Khádem to the Persian-speaking Bahá’ís assembled at the 1984 Association for Bahá’í Studies-North America Annual Conference in Ottawa, dedicated to “The Vision of Shoghi Effendi.” He emphasized that the Guardian made this assertion repeatedly to him.
170. For Bahá’ís, these would be Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh.
171. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 115.
172. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 87.
173. *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.
174. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 114.
175. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

176. Ibid., p. 103.
177. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, pp. 37–38.
178. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 60.
179. The following points on Dispensationalism are from M. James Sawyer's "Dispensationalism" in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, pp. 106–12.
180. Darby's radical view was that the church could in no way be construed as an institution but was only a communion or very loose community, a "spiritual fellowship."
181. As used by fundamentalist theologians, this is the current dispensational scholarly term for "literal."
182. "Lower Criticism" referred basically to detecting and eliminating errors that, over the centuries, crept into biblical texts and attempting to recover and restore them to their original "purity," i.e., in line with the author's intentions. "Higher Criticism" referred to the broader task of ascertaining dates and authorship of texts, examining and determining sources, and the literary purposes (scope and character) of such texts.
183. "Dispensationalism," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, p. 107.
184. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Hebs. 1:1–2). Once believed to have been written by St. Paul, scholars now attribute this letter to an author or authors unknown.
185. In speaking of the patterned historical opposition to the Prophets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "In spite of all their efforts the Sun of Truth shone forth from the horizon. In every case the army of light vanquished the powers of darkness on the battlefield of the world, and the radiance of the Divine Teaching illumined the earth. Those who accepted the Teaching and worked for the Cause of God became luminous stars in the sky of humanity" (*Paris Talks*, pp. 102–3).
186. The full quotation reads: "No need to expatiate on the particular episodes which cast a lurid light on the moving annals of those years. No need to dwell on the character and actions of the peoples, rulers and divines who have participated in, and contributed to heighten the poignancy of the scenes of this, the greatest drama in the world's spiritual history" (Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 12).
187. "Dispensationalism," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, p. 110.
188. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 23.
189. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 26.
190. In the *Summa Theologica*, I. Question 48 a, 1, c and in Question 1, article 1 and a.2, St. Thomas defines the nonexistence of evil in terms that are virtually identical to Bahá'í theology. In the second reference, he wrote, "*Malum non est aliquid, sed est privatio alicujus boni particularis.*" "Evil is not something (i.e., a particular thing) but is the privation of any thing necessarily perfect (good)." In the first reference he wrote, "*Malus est defectus boni qui natum est et debit habere. Malum est privatio ordonis ad finem debitum.*" "Evil is the absence of good which comes into existence and has necessity (i.e., an existence and necessary good). Evil is the absence of order toward an established end."

8

STYLE AND PATTERN

No style is good that is not fit to be spoken or read aloud with effect.

—William Hazlitt (1778–1830)

Style

Exploring Shoghi Effendi’s Literary Art

This chapter delineates the more concrete features of Shoghi Effendi’s writings. “Style and Pattern” along with chapter 10, “Rhetoric: The Language of Persuasion,” identify the defining elements of the Guardian’s literary style. Style includes aesthetic considerations of Shoghi Effendi’s writings, that is, their ability to please and impress, and the literary devices or rhetorical figures which shape his language. Rhetoric has a different purpose. It aims to persuade rather than impress and, ultimately, to move the reader into action. For these purposes, the architectonic structure of the Guardian’s language may be studied like that of any other writer, but its Bahá’í-specific aim and content make it distinctive and give it a particular, defining orientation. The tenor of his writings cannot be separated from their vehicle, the Bahá’í Faith. Identifying his rhetorical or figurative language, or the influence of Gibbon on his prose, is an exercise in patterning, i.e., pattern seeking and pattern identification. This tends to be a taxidermic, somewhat mechanical or scholastic exercise; the elements are identified and exhibited. But it is an indispensable exercise, nonetheless, if one hopes to understand how the Guardian’s literary art interrelates to the ordering of his thought. Other aspects of this exercise are more theoretical, but it is hoped they will offer some original insights.

What Style Means in Shoghi Effendi’s Writing

Stylistics is one of the several branches of literary criticism, and it refers to the distinctive way that an author uses language in a conscious way to

impress.¹ For the student of Shoghi Effendi's writings, structural patterning serves to identify and decode the linguistic structures of the Guardian's language and thought. These patterns are not random; they emerge in a conscious, logical order or form and display themselves in a sequence of arrangements that involve a certain predictability, another feature of style.² Although I have not subjected the structures and patterns of his writings to computer analysis, it would be instructive to do so to more accurately identify the structures that would be identified.

Before proceeding to identify some typical patterns in the writings of the Guardian, it would be useful to define more fully what is meant by Shoghi Effendi's style. Three things are intended: (1) Style refers to the particular, inimitable quality of his writings, those elements that distinguish him from any other writer. (2) Style refers to that excellence by which he demonstrates the most effective verbal means for the doctrinal, rhetorical, historical, or other ends that he purposes. (3) Style describes the man himself. To some extent, the literary personality reflects the personality of an author. The French naturalist Comte de Buffon (1707–1788) captured this idea well in his inaugural address *Discours sur le style* (Discourse on Style) (1753), upon induction into the French Academy, when he said simply, "*Le style, c'est l'homme*" ("Style is the man").³ The "personality" of Shoghi Effendi *qua* writer is to be very closely identified with Shoghi Effendi the Guardian. This means that only the narrowest of gaps separates the man and writer from his function as Guardian. This situation is atypical of other writers who do not normally communicate religious matters through the authority of a sacred office.

Rúhíyyih Rabbaní gives us some idea of this connection between the personality of the man and his writing when she refers to the Guardian's cables and telegrams:

The whole of Shoghi Effendi's life activity as Guardian, his mind and his feelings, his reactions and instructions, can be found reflected in miniature in his cables and telegrams; often they were more intimate, more powerful and revealing than the thousands of letters he wrote to individuals because in his letters his secretary usually dealt with details and thus the words are not the Guardian's own words, except for the postscripts which he wrote himself and which most of the time conveyed the assurance of his prayers, his encouragement and his statement of general principles.⁴

Didactic and Eristic Elements of His Style

Shoghi Effendi was not just the authorized interpreter of Bahá'í scripture; he was also *the* informed observer and commentator of the interactions between the Bahá'í Faith and the historical events taking place in the world at large. As such, he was, and remains, the Bahá'í Faith's preeminent teacher of its Formative Age (1921–). Consequently, a strong didactic voice is found in his writings. E. W. F. Tomlin in his instructive essay “The Prose of Thought” has drawn attention to two binary elements of style, both of which can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to the Guardian's works: the dialectical and the eristic. Tomlin writes that “[t]he ideal prose of thought would be that in which the two elements were in equilibrium.”⁵ Taking the two labels in reverse order, the eristic, from the Greek *eris* meaning “strife,” refers to a disputatious or polemical tendency. As such, it is more closely linked to rhetoric, which seeks to persuade, and is useful for apologetics. Citing the *Oxford Dictionary*, Tomlin adds that the aim of eristics “is not truth but victory” and that it “seeks not to persuade but to impose” and makes a “deliberate appeal to sentiment and prejudice.”⁶ Tomlin's statement would have to be inverted when applied to Shoghi Effendi's writings. The Guardian seeks victory but through the power of truth; his views are “imposed,” not only by the authority of sacred office but also by sound reasoning and by the ready powers of persuasion.

The counterpart in Tomlin's definition is the dialectical, the dialogical mode of discourse that seeks to convey truth through a process of reasoning. I have substituted, however, the label “didactic” (Gk. *Didaktikos*=apt to teach) for dialectical. As it is used technically in philosophy, dialectic does not apply to the Guardian's writings. Although the appeal to reason is clearly present, the dialogical aspect is not. In literary criticism, although the point is debated, the word *didactic* is sometimes used as a word of reproach because it tends to blunt the imagination; it is viewed, rather, as being more appropriate for the scholarly essay or book. As head of the Bahá'í Faith, one of Shoghi Effendi's main duties was to clarify the multitude of questions submitted to him that originated in the multifaceted nature of the Bahá'í teachings. Not only were the affairs of the Administrative Order becoming increasingly complex but also was the Bahá'í community in the pre- and post-World War II scenarios facing large challenges in the prosecution of the Divine Plan, in the world at large, and in living the Bahá'í life. The didactic voice is consequently prominent in his religious epistolary.

Tomlin writes that in the dialectical element “[t]here is statement, counter-statement, and conclusion; the primary appeal is to reason.”⁷ While the Guardian makes declarative statements and sometimes addresses or anticipates objections and makes conclusions, and although he does make good use of the rhetorical question, he does not pursue the dialectical method of question and answer (*Dialektiké*) as, for example, is found in Plato’s dialogues, which are based on the method of strict consequent logic. But as has been pointed out in chapter 1, Shoghi Effendi’s writings are broadly dialectical in that they use demonstrative or expository reason. While the rhetorical element is always strong, it would be mistaken to overemphasize it; his arguments are never subsumed to rhetorical flourishes. The overall impression is, rather, that exhortation, precept, definition, and idea are all an ensemble of sound and sense.

Although he was not a technical philosopher, the Guardian was nonetheless a man of refined, clear perceptions and progressive, innovative ideas. His writings present a new order of thought in which Bahá’í history and teachings have been reformulated to assess the dramatic, tragic effect of the rejection of the Bahá’í Revelation on world affairs and the resultant collapse of Western civilization. His epistolary is accompanied by a “dogmatic” voice, used here in the non-pejorative sense of one who makes formal doctrinal enunciations based on legitimate authority. Tomlin’s definition of eristic as an imposition of meaning applies here. While not technically elaborate or academic, the Guardian’s theological interpretations are nonetheless lucidly perceptive, original, soundly argued, and explicit. His chief theological treatise, “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” (1934), is the model text that substantiates these assertions. Any serious Bahá’í theology that considers the station (*maqám*) of the three Central Figures, or their relationships to one another, or the divine origins of the Bahá’í Administrative Order, cannot afford to omit this foundational document.

Naming His Style

It is not speculation that Shoghi Effendi was keenly interested in style, both in his own writings and in the writings of others. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní wrote that when reading his much admired, constant literary companion, Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (whose abridged Everyman’s version was at his bedside table when he died),⁸ Shoghi Effendi would exclaim, “Oh what style; what a command of English; what rolling sentences; listen to this.”⁹ The Guardian’s enthusiastic admiration for Gibbon no doubt helped to produce his original style. It must be said, however, that although

Shoghi Effendi relied on Gibbon for some historical material and while he adopted Gibbon as his prose model, he was no slavish imitator of one who can scarcely be imitated in any case.

Various names have been proposed to describe Shoghi Effendi's style. Some of them include the baroque, the magisterial, the high Victorian, and the heraldic.¹⁰ Glenford E. Mitchell, in an early, instructive study of Shoghi Effendi's writings, referred to the "baroque constructions in which words are arranged in rich designs of meaning and imagery like settings of fine stones."¹¹ Glenford Mitchell's use of the word *baroque* seems to be synonymous with ornate or elaborately symmetrical, an accurate descriptor. This meaning of baroque is a loan word that comes from art or music criticism. One critic of eighteenth-century literature, Donald Greene, applies it to works that are "*dramatic* performances, rejoicing in bright colors, exaggeration, startling contrast, overpowering the spectator or auditor with sheer energy and diversity."¹² All of these descriptors apply to the Guardian's prose.

The literary term *baroque* is ambiguous, being sometimes honorific, sometimes pejorative, although the word is tending to lose its pejorative tone. It refers to literature that is defined by intensity, conflicts, and extremes. Paradoxically, a more ancient meaning of baroque refers to a style that is precisely antithetical to the elaborately decorative or symmetrical.¹³ Contrary to the usual impression, Shoghi Effendi is sometimes plain speaking, even terse, and his writings occasionally contain aphorisms or epigrams in the Attic style that lie in close context to his more familiar periodic sentences. Here, in passing, are three examples of aphorisms. While admonishing his readers not to shrink or recoil before the forces of opposition, the Guardian wrote, "*The voice of criticism is a voice that indirectly reinforces the proclamation of its Cause.*"¹⁴ In "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh," while dilating on the unique features of the Administrative Order, the Guardian stipulated the attitude that is to govern the members of Bahá'í institutions toward their electors. Unlike modern political parties, which are often greatly influenced in the setting of their policies and decisions by lobby groups and/or public opinion, those elected to office, he wrote, "*are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience.*"¹⁵ This sentence from *The Advent of Divine Justice*, also eminently quotable, addressed the question of the favorable prejudice that electors should exercise toward minorities: "*If any discrimination is to be at all tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favor of the minority, be it racial or otherwise.*"¹⁶

“High Victorian” has also been suggested. It refers to the elevated style of the Guardian’s writings associated with the writers of the late Victorian period (to 1901). This phrase situates the Guardian’s use of language within a temporal context and correctly alludes to some of the writers he read and admired, such as Macaulay and the “passionate and prophetic”¹⁷ Carlyle. Since the Guardian would have been exposed to the influences of this literary period—although his beloved Gibbon did not belong here—it is fitting to apply the qualifier “Victorian” in a broad sense. Read and admired by Shoghi Effendi, the historian Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859), the prototypical Victorian writer, has been described as being “the advance herald of the millennium, mid-Victorian style.”¹⁸ However, the phrase “high Victorian” would seem to preclude the oriental elements in the Guardian’s writing, as well as his distinctly modern turns of phrase or strains of thought. The romantic revival was fascinated by Orientalism,¹⁹ but this fascination had begun to wane in the Victorian Period (1837–1901), although elements of it still persisted, as in Carlyle’s sympathetic treatment of Muhammad, “The Hero as Prophet,” in *Heroes and Hero Worship*. While all of these labels may be useful, finding the exact, appropriate term to affix to the Guardian’s style is always a tricky affair, since none, including my own suggestion, seems adequate.

Multilayering

A close reading of the Guardian’s prose reveals a multi-layered technique. This technique is a textual weave that blends heterogeneous elements together in the creation of a distinct, free-flowing style containing at least five layers. They are: specifically Bahá’í content; a passionate or earnestly sincere effect of uncton or religious fervor; a swelling of oriental elements that includes Judeo-Christian, mainly biblical allusions, and biblical and quranic symbolism; various literary and historical references from Gibbon, Macaulay, Carlyle, H. G. Wells, and other writers; and diction, both ancient and modern, which reflects romantic, mystical, classical,²⁰ and contemporary usages.

Biblical and Quranic Symbolism

I would like to focus briefly on the third category listed above—oriental elements and biblical/quranic symbolism. The famous Sura 24:35, which begins “God is the light of the heavens and the earth,” a central text for the Sufis, which Harold Bloom in his lucid chapter on Muhammad called “a perfect poem in itself”²¹ with its mentions of “light,” “niche,” “lamp,” “glass,” “oil,” and “olive tree, neither of the East nor the West,” finds a noteworthy

textual parallel in the Guardian's stirring message written on the centenary of the martyrdom of the Báb (1950) to the American Bahá'ís "gathered beneath the dome of the Most Holy House of Worship in the Bahá'í world."²² That message contains a remarkable one-paragraph extended process-metaphor of the martyrdom of the Báb and its generative effect on the rise of the Administrative Order throughout the world. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine this rich metaphor in detail, suffice it to say it incorporates imagery based on the "Holy Seed," "ground in the mill of martyrdom and oppression," "branches, leaves, buds, blossoms," "oil," "flickering light," "fire," and "Holy Fire,"²³—language that is reminiscent of the universal divine light mentioned in Sura 24:35 and much fire/flame, seed, and oil imagery in both biblical testaments. John Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies* mentions "retribution" (along with "sign," "exile," and "covenant") as one of the four main groups of imagery in the Qur'án. This imagery of retribution "on the fate of nations, cities, peoples who fail the God's test,"²⁴ finds yet another parallel in *The Promised Day Is Come*, which castigates the spiritual and temporal leaders, both Islamic and Christian, with their failed ecclesiastical institutions, fallen royal houses, and dysfunctional governments, and the world's people, for the rejection of its Twin Messengers, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

Unction or Religious Fervor

Whether in his expositions, letters, telegrams, or especially in his exhortations and appeals, unction and religious fervor pervades his writing. Unction refers to "a fervent or sympathetic quality in words or tone caused by or causing deep emotion."²⁵ This stylistic trait is particularly appropriate to Shoghi Effendi's writings since unction has specifically religious antecedents and indicates an effusive prose style. Symbolically, unction or anointing (Lat.=*unguere*, to anoint) signifies the presence of the Holy Spirit. As a religious rite, it had a broad range of applications in the ancient Near East. Anointing was used in ancient Israel rather than coronation for royal investiture and remains to this day part of the English coronation ritual.²⁶ Unction, the act of anointing, signifies that an individual has been singularly blessed or stands in a special relationship to God.

Many examples could be chosen to illustrate this feature, but the Guardian's last collective message sent to the Bahá'ís of North America on 21 September 1957, before his death in London on 4 November, is particularly illustrative. The Guardian viewed the moment as "*this fresh turning point in the fortunes of a Crusade, for which they have so unremittingly*

labored.” He exhorted the Bahá’ís to “*rise to heights never before attained in the course of the six decades of American Bahá’í history.*” The outcome hinged upon the successful completion of the “*God-given mission*” with which the North American Bahá’ís, and their co-workers around the world, had been entrusted with the Ten Year Plan. Typically, this passage contains strong rhetorical features in the insistent pleas and exhortations by which he moved his readers into action. He called upon the Bahá’ís to redouble their efforts and to reconsecrate themselves to the remaining tasks at hand:

Once again—and this time more fervently than ever before—I direct my plea to every single member of this strenuously laboring, clear-visioned, stout-hearted, spiritually endowed community, every man and woman, on whose individual efforts, resolution, self-sacrifice and perseverance the immediate destinies of the Faith of God, now traversing so crucial a stage in its rise and establishment, primarily depends, not to allow, through apathy, timidity or complacency, this one remaining opportunity to be irretrievably lost. I would rather entreat each and every one of them to immortalize this approaching, fateful hour in the evolution of a World Spiritual Crusade, by a fresh consecration to their God-given mission, coupled with an instantaneous plan of action, at once so dynamic and decisive, as to wipe out, on the one hand, with one stroke, the deficiencies which have, to no small extent, bogged down the operations of the Crusade on the home front, and tremendously accelerate, on the other, the progress of the triple task, launched, in three continents, and constituting one of its preeminent objectives.²⁷

“Spiritual Romance”

Chapter 19 of *God Passes By* relates the travels of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Egypt, western Europe, and North America from August 1911 to December 1913.²⁸ This chapter contains a remarkable paragraph featuring several elements of the spiritual romance that is one of the hallmarks of Shoghi Effendi’s style. The exemplified passage is a lengthy retrospective of certain key moments in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s life. Using the departed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as his medium, Shoghi Effendi recalls certain poignant episodes in the life of his Grandfather, the Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh, although the main focus is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The paragraph is reproduced here in full:

Who knows what thoughts flooded the heart of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as He found Himself the central figure of such memorable scenes as these? Who knows what thoughts were uppermost in His mind as He sat at breakfast beside the Lord Mayor of London, or was received with extraordinary deference by the Khedive²⁹ himself in his palace, or as He listened to the cries of “Alláh-u-Abhá” and to the hymns of thanksgiving and praise that would herald His approach to the numerous and brilliant assemblages of His enthusiastic followers and friends organized in so many cities of the American continent? Who knows what memories stirred within Him as He stood before the thundering waters of Niagara, breathing the free air of a far distant land, or gazed, in the course of a brief and much-needed rest, upon the green woods and countryside in Glenwood Springs, or moved with a retinue of Oriental believers along the paths of the Trocadero gardens in Paris, or walked alone in the evening beside the majestic Hudson on Riverside Drive in New York, or as He paced the terrace of the Hotel du Parc at Thonon-les-Bains, overlooking the Lake of Geneva, or as He watched from Serpentine Bridge in London the pearly chain of lights beneath the trees stretching as far as the eye could see? Memories of the sorrows, the poverty, the overhanging doom of His earlier years; memories of His mother who sold her gold buttons to provide Him, His brother and His sister with sustenance, and who was forced, in her darkest hours, to place a handful of dry flour in the palm of His hand to appease His hunger; of His own childhood when pursued and derided by a mob of ruffians in the streets of Tihrán; of the damp and gloomy room, formerly a morgue, which He occupied in the barracks of ‘Akká and of His imprisonment in the dungeon of that city—memories such as these must surely have thronged His mind. Thoughts, too, must have visited Him of the Báb’s captivity in the mountain fastnesses of Ádhirbáyján, when at night time He was refused even a lamp, and of His cruel and tragic execution when hundreds of bullets riddled His youthful breast. Above all His thoughts must have centered on Bahá’u’lláh, Whom He loved so passionately and Whose trials He had witnessed and had shared from His boyhood. The vermin-infested Síyáh Chál of

Tíhrán; the bastinado inflicted upon Him in Ámul; the humble fare which filled His kashkúl while He lived for two years the life of a dervish in the mountains of Kurdistán; the days in Baghdád when He did not even possess a change of linen, and when His followers subsisted on a handful of dates; His confinement behind the prison-walls of ‘Akká, when for nine years even the sight of verdure was denied Him; and the public humiliation to which He was subjected at government headquarters in that city—pictures from the tragic past such as these must have many a time overpowered Him with feelings of mingled gratitude and sorrow, as He witnessed the many marks of respect, of esteem, and honor now shown Him and the Faith which He represented. “O Bahá’u’lláh! What hast Thou done?” He, as reported by the chronicler of His travels, was heard to exclaim one evening as He was being swiftly driven to fulfil His third engagement of the day in Washington, “O Bahá’u’lláh! May my life be sacrificed for Thee! O Bahá’u’lláh! May my soul be offered up for Thy sake! How full were Thy days with trials and tribulations! How severe the ordeals Thou didst endure! How solid the foundation Thou hast finally laid, and how glorious the banner Thou didst hoist!” “One day, as He was strolling,” that same chronicler has testified, “He called to remembrance the days of the Blessed Beauty, referring with sadness to His sojourn in Sulaymaniyyih, to His loneliness and to the wrongs inflicted upon Him. Though He had often recounted that episode, that day He was so overcome with emotion that He sobbed aloud in His grief. . . . All His attendants wept with Him, and were plunged into sorrow as they heard the tale of the woeful trials endured by the Ancient Beauty, and witnessed the tenderness of heart manifested by His Son.”³⁰

One of the several noteworthy points in this passage is its obvious departure from the formal voice of traditional history. For a book that is a foundational history of the first century of the Bahá’í Faith (1844–1944), this passage is not, in point of fact, “history” at all, at least, in the traditional sense of the word: a detached or objective record of the events that seeks to frame a sequence of events or ascribe causes. This passage is, rather, the personal history of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It does, however, like traditional

historiography, bear witness to change—the dramatic changes in the life of the Perfect Exemplar within His own lifetime. It is the record of the moving transformation from early persecution, suffering, and abasement into later ease and conspicuous honor.

Although *God Passes By* is undoubtedly history, more particularly the record of sacred history, Shoghi Effendi's presentation of the life and intimate memories of the departed 'Abdu'l-Bahá, whom he recalls with such vivid and poignant emotion, evokes a quality of pathos (sympathy, pity, tenderness), that is strongly reminiscent of the emotional tone invoked by the poets or prose authors of the Romantic Period. This spiritual romanticism is strengthened by the added credibility of being grounded in real historical events and includes the tragic sense that accompanies the unjustified suffering and loss inflicted on the righteous and the innocents, and the heroism that testifies to the invincible power and unquenchable nobility of the human spirit, which are all inherent to the divine drama.

Through the use of three initial rhetorical questions (“*Who knows what. . . ?*”), which, contrary to convention, are answered in subsequent lines, a sense of mystery and suspense is temporarily created. By the device of prosopopoeia, the representation of a departed or absent person who is still capable of thinking, feeling, speaking, and remembering, Shoghi Effendi enters into the intimate recollections of his beloved Grandfather. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is depicted by Shoghi Effendi as the venerable and long-suffering, but newly liberated prisoner who moves freely through the urban settings of western Europe and the expansive greenery of North America. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's voice becomes that of Shoghi Effendi as he recalls distressing episodes from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life which are extended to include the life of the Báb and especially Bahá'u'lláh.

The retrospective of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life, seen through Shoghi Effendi's eyes, passes in review some of the key episodes of Bahá'í history. It is only too obvious from this passage—and there are many others—that Shoghi Effendi unabashedly makes space for intimate emotion in Bahá'í history, a space that is not usually accommodated in the works of conventional historians. *God Passes By* reminds us that history is not just reification, reconstructed events made into an abstract “thing.” In the perspective of the profound changes wrought by the Bábí-Bahá'í revelation, Bahá'í history concerns the flesh and blood feelings of uncommonly real people and their life experiences. The above passage furnishes, consequently, a pertinent

example of what the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz called “blurred genres”³¹ in an influential 1980 essay that highlights what he recognizes as the text’s “use of emotion for cognitive ends.”³² Shoghi Effendi’s vision of history cannot be abstracted from individual and collective spiritual transformation or from the deeply personal feelings that must necessarily accompany such transformation.

An evocative atmosphere of spiritual romanticism infuses the above passage with its air of nostalgia as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá relives “*pictures from the tragic past. . . with feelings of mingled gratitude and sorrow.*” Our author allows for the venting of the deep emotions that accompany these episodes as he recalls the memories of his Grandfather whose love for Bahá’u’lláh had united Son to Father in a common crucible of suffering and sorrow: “*Above all His thoughts must have centered on Bahá’u’lláh, Whom He loved so passionately and Whose trials He had witnessed and had shared from His boyhood.*” The sense of deep pathos that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá could not help but express in tears for the unjustified sufferings of Bahá’u’lláh is freely recounted. His deep emotion is contagious: “*All His attendants wept with Him, and were plunged into sorrow as they heard the tale of the woeful trials endured by the Ancient Beauty, and witnessed the tenderness of heart manifested by His Son.*”

However, despite these sad remembrances, we are nonetheless conscious of the triumphant moment that has occurred with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s providential liberation after having suffered through forty years of political despotism, religious fanaticism, and the virulent opposition of the members of His own family. With the consciousness of this triumphant moment, the reader is, nonetheless, aware that the long-awaited deliverance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and that His freedom of movement throughout Egypt, western Europe, and North America have been won at great cost. The magnificent patience, the privation and long-suffering of the greatest Persian exile have finally given way to a dramatic reversal that has enabled the unchained, magic hand of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to have sown “*seeds of undreamt-of potentialities. . . in some of the fertile fields of the western world.*”³³ Nevertheless, chapter 19 of *God Passes By* concludes with this sobering observation: “*And already, alas! a world which proved deaf to His warnings and refused to heed His summons has plunged itself into two global wars of unprecedented severity, the repercussions of which none as yet can even dimly visualize.*”³⁴

Pattern

A brief reference to patterning has already been given in the context of Shoghi Effendi's style. Erwin R. Steinberg in his article "Stylistics as a Humanistic Discipline" draws attention to the tendency of the human mind to verbal "pattern seeking." Steinberg suggests that pattern seeking belongs not only to the scientific mind but also to the humanistic outlook. The scientist and humanist could find common ground in pattern seeking that cuts across both frames of interpretation. Pattern for Steinberg is "an ordering, organising principle" that is calculated rather than being random. It would have a high degree of intentionality and is deliberately crafted by the author. Steinberg suggests a number of ways of reporting patterns in literature: simple recording, accounting for effect, achieving meaning through patterns, and noting counter-patterns.³⁵

Wolfgang Iser, one of the prominent theorists in the phenomenology of the reading process (Reader Response Theory), makes the following observation that is pertinent to this topic. Iser's remark applies to the ideational or imaginative content of literature, or to the phenomena of patterning itself:

The phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that, in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to the text. . . . As the reader uses the various perspectives offered him by the text in order to relate the patterns and the "schematised views" to one another, he sets the work in motion, and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of responses within himself. . . . The need to decipher gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity—i.e., we bring to the fore an element of our being of which we are not directly conscious. . . . it also entails the possibility that we may formulate for ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness."³⁶

The sections below identify patterns in Shoghi Effendi's prose that include examples of diction, syntax, and literary devices.

Dynamic Word Duos

One characteristic pattern in Shoghi Effendi's diction is the effective use of the binary adjective-noun combination that is used so commonly in everyday speech. The following are some random examples of the fine touch put to this

basic syntactical unit that is so apt to convey an immediate thought, feeling, mood, reaction, or idea. These phrases are simply recorded here without further comment, except to say that the context of these “word duos” has to do generally with the rejection of Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation by the kings and ecclesiastics, the misdeeds of enemies, the prevailing atmosphere in the world, or the expansion of the Bahá’í Faith and its future. We read of “*frigid indifference,*” “*threatening hour,*” “*devastating ferocity,*” “*rapacious enemies,*” “*prevailing gloom,*” “*mischievous misrepresentations,*” “*flagrant secularism,*” “*ominous tones,*” “*gloriously radiant,*” “*puny mortals,*” “*suicidal carnage,*” “*systematic machinations,*” “*tempestuous winds,*” “*unquenchable enthusiasms,*” “*dauntless courage,*” “*battling ideologies,*” “*agitated multitudes,*” “*rhythmic pulsations,*” “*explosive outbursts,*” “*measureless potentialities,*” “*audacious adventures,*” and “*siren voices.*”

The Serial Semi-Colon/Linking Paratactical Clauses

One of the more familiar syntactical patterns in Shoghi Effendi’s writing is the linking of clauses in apposition, punctuated by semi-colons. This linkage produces a connective tissue of thought, with each phrase adding progressively to the meaning of the preceding one. The series of dependent clauses creates a cumulative effect, also typical of Gibbon, which breaks upon the shore of the reader’s mind like a succession of waves. The technical name for this structure is parataxis, the linking or juxtaposition of clauses or sentences without conjunctions (hypotaxis uses subordinate clauses). The simile of successive waves with their rolling motion is apt, but another comparison comes to mind—the telegraph. With this structure, a dramatic telegraphic effect is created, one that taps out the points, clause by clause, creating a connected series of strong lines in words of power. In this example, the Guardian lists the factors in the “*universal commotion*” that has resulted from the world’s turning “*a deaf ear to the Voice of God’s Messenger in this day*”:

The violent derangement of the world’s equilibrium; the trembling that will seize the limbs of mankind; the radical transformation of human society; the rolling up of the present-day Order; the fundamental changes affecting the structure of government; the weakening of the pillars of religion; the rise of dictatorships; the spread of tyranny; the fall of monarchies; the decline of ecclesiastical institutions; the increase of anarchy and chaos; the extension and consolidation of the Movement of the Left;

*the fanning into flame of the smouldering fire of racial strife; the development of infernal engines of war; the burning of cities; the contamination of the atmosphere of the earth—these stand out as the signs and portents that must either herald or accompany the retributive calamity which, as decreed by Him Who is the Judge and Redeemer of mankind, must, sooner or later, afflict a society which, for the most part, and for over a century, has turned a deaf ear to the Voice of God’s Messenger in this day. . . .*³⁷

The Periodic or Ciceronian Sentence

The long, periodic sentence is the usual feature that comes to the mind of the Guardian’s readers. It is sometimes called the Ciceronian sentence, being named after the famous Roman orator, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE), who spoke at great length in the Senate and who wrote very long sentences in his essays. The Ciceronian sentence is assured, dignified in tone, and characterized by balance, parallelism, or antithesis. It is usually but not always periodic, meaning that the main clause or idea is usually withheld to the end (period/full-stop), which creates an effect of suspension. Just as the Báb deliberately ignored the conventions of Arabic grammar, so did the Guardian ignore certain conventions and current styles of English. While for the English teacher, “the run-on sentence” is a fault, it is a permanent element of Shoghi Effendi’s style. Whether for the sentence or the lengthy paragraph, the Guardian did not come to a full stop until he was fully satisfied with both sound and sense. Here is one of the best examples of this structure, a sentence that is fully nineteen lines long, at least as it appears in book format in *Citadel of Faith*. This example is actually a benediction, if not a prayer, that recounts ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s blessings on the North American Bahá’ís. By it, the Guardian elicits a sense of gratitude and expresses his high hopes that they may fulfill their divine mission and birthright. As a benediction, this passage is doubly fitting, since it closes this letter of 8 November 1948:

May He Who called them into being and raised them up, Who fostered them in their infancy, Who extended to them the blessing of His personal support in their years of childhood, Who bequeathed to them the distinguishing heritage of His Plan, Whose Will and Testament initiated them, during the period of their adolescence, in the processes of a divinely appointed

*Administrative Order, Who enabled them to attain maturity through the inauguration of the first stage in the execution of His Plan, Who conferred upon them the privilege of spiritual parenthood at the close of the initial phase in the operation of that same Plan, continue through the further unfoldment of the second stage in its evolution to guide their steps along the path leading to the assumption of functions proclaiming the attainment of full spiritual manhood, and enable them eventually, through the long and slow processes of evolution and in conformity with the future requirements of a continually evolving Plan, to manifest before the eyes of the members of their sister communities, their countrymen and the whole world, and in all their plenitude, the potentialities inherent within them, and which in the fullness of time, must reflect in its perfected form, the glories of the mission constituting their birthright.*³⁸

Here is another more typical example from *The Advent of Divine Justice*, which contains the same marks of suspension, periodicity, and balance. It is the prelude to the approximately seven pages of inspirational scripture that Shoghi Effendi has selected and translated from “*the great mass of Bahá’u’lláh’s unpublished and untranslated writings*”:

*Whether in His revelation of the station and functions of His loved ones, or His eulogies of the greatness of His Cause, or His emphasis on the paramount importance of teaching, or the dangers which He foreshadows, the counsels He imparts, the warnings He utters, the vistas He discloses, and the assurances and promises He gives, these dynamic and typical examples of Bahá’u’lláh’s sublime utterance, each having a direct bearing on the tasks which actually face or lie ahead of the American Bahá’í community, cannot fail to produce on the minds and hearts of any one of its members, who approaches them with befitting humility and detachment, such powerful reactions as to illuminate his entire being and intensify tremendously his daily exertions.*³⁹

Alternating Diction: The Terse Sentence

Alternating diction refers to variety in sentence structure, to the juxtaposition of long and short sentences. While the long sentence predominates in our author’s writings, he adds variety and contrast to the sentence structure by strategically placing a short or terse sentence or sentences within the passage.

This point was made by Rúhíyyih Rabbaní and was first pointed out by the Guardian himself in response to her observations that his sentences and paragraphs ran too long:

On the other hand he liked to use a structure sometimes of very short sentences that followed each other one after the other like the cracks of a whip. He would call my attention to this variation in style, pointing out how each method was effective, how the combination of the two enriched the whole and achieved different ends.⁴⁰

These terse sentences are used either singly or in combination. This first example, which is taken from *The Promised Day Is Come*, is found in the section subtitled, “The Falling Fortunes of Shí’ih Islam.” Shoghi Effendi calls to account the generic mullah responsible for the massacre of thousands of innocent Bábí-Bahá’ís. A one-sentence paragraph, which also contains double and triple alliterations (placed in bold for emphasis), is followed by a terse sentence:

*Might not that same mullá ponder the torrents of blood which, during the long years when he enjoyed impunity of conduct, flowed at his behest, the flamboyant anathemas he pronounced, and the great army of orphans and widows, of the **disinherited**, the **dishonored**, the **destitute**, and the **homeless** which, on the Day of Reckoning, were, with one accord, to cry out for vengeance, and invoke the malediction of God upon him?*

*That infamous crew had indeed merited the degradation in which it had sunk.*⁴¹

More frequently, Shoghi Effendi links a series of terse, declarative sentences in one paragraph, as in this example, which summarizes the disastrous and tragic results of the Bolshevik Revolution. The last sentence is more expansive:

A great trembling seized and rocked the foundations of that country. The light of religion was dimmed. Ecclesiastical institutions of every denomination were swept away. The state religion was disendowed, persecuted, and abolished. A far-flung empire was dismembered. A militant, triumphant proletariat exiled the intellectuals, and plundered and massacred the nobility. Civil war and disease decimated a

*population, already in the throes of agony and despair. And, finally, the Chief Magistrate of a mighty dominion, together with his consort, and his family, and his dynasty, were swept into the vortex of this great convulsion, and perished.*⁴²

The following example, also taken from *The Promised Day Is Come*, is part of the Guardian's treatment of the humiliation to which the intransigent and visionless Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX, the recipient of one of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets, was subjected:

*Every effort to retrieve the situation created in 1870⁴³ proved fruitless. The Archbishop of Posen went to Versailles to solicit Bismarck's intervention in behalf of the Papacy, but was coldly received. Later a Catholic party was organized in Germany to bring political pressure on the German Chancellor. All, however, was in vain. The mighty process already referred to had to pursue inexorably its course.*⁴⁴

The Rhetorical Question

Shoghi Effendi frequently used the device of the rhetorical question, normally used to persuade by eliciting a tacit affirmation or response. Although it does not usually solicit a response, I will show in chapter 10, "Rhetoric: The Language of Persuasion," that the series of thirteen rhetorical questions used to eulogize the North American Bahá'í community in *The Advent of Divine Justice* does indeed inform as well as persuade. In fact, this series of rhetorical questions constitutes a synopsis of American Bahá'í history.

The rhetorical question is generally intended to point to something that the speaker/writer finds self-evident, as in Milton's line, "For what can war but endless war still breed?"⁴⁵ The unavoidable answer effectively wins the listener to the speaker's point of view. The rhetorical questions in Shylock's speech in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, in which he defends his conduct, is used to argue in favor of Shylock's point of view. Shakespeare's rhetorical question is intended to produce sympathy or to justify Shylock's conduct, "Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? . . . If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not avenge?" (Act. 3, Sc. 1). The rhetorical question is a much simplified form of question-begging (*Petitio principii*), i.e., the

conclusion is assumed in the premise and is considered to be logically or philosophically weak, since it does not make a strong argument and substitutes emotion for rationality. However, emotion, no less than reason, is a faculty that contributes to human understanding and has a valid, longstanding place in the art of rhetoric.

In the following example, Shoghi Effendi comments on the historic “open letter” by Queen Marie of Rumania published in the *Toronto Daily Star* (4 May 1926) “to the world at large testifying in a language of exquisite beauty to the power and sublimity of the Message of Bahá’u’lláh.” In his letter of 7 October 1926, Shoghi Effendi paid tribute to “this notable triumph which the unbending energy and indomitable spirit of our beloved Martha [Root] has achieved for our sacred Cause.” Then, while alluding to “those stirring events which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has prophecied, shall in the fulness of time signalize the triumph of God’s holy Faith,” Shoghi Effendi asks, “For who can doubt but that the deeds of those valiant pioneers of the Faith, unexampled though they have been in the abundance of their number and unexcelled in their sublime heroism, are but a faint glimmer of what, according to the divine promise, its steadfast followers are destined to perform?”⁴⁶ The question effectively becomes an affirmation and a prediction. In other contexts, the Guardian answers his own question. In *The Promised Day Is Come*, while expatiating on the world’s deplorable lack of response to the summons of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, Shoghi Effendi both asks and answers the question:

How—we may well ask ourselves—has the world, the object of such Divine solicitude, repaid Him Who sacrificed His all for its sake? What manner of welcome did it accord Him, and what response did His call evoke? A clamor, unparalleled in the history of Shí’ih Islam, greeted, in the land of its birth, the infant light of the Faith, in the midst of a people notorious for its crass ignorance, its fierce fanaticism, its barbaric cruelty, its ingrained prejudices, and the unlimited sway held over the masses by a firmly entrenched ecclesiastical hierarchy. A persecution, kindling a courage which, as attested by no less eminent an authority than the late Lord Curzon of Kedleston, has been unsurpassed by that which the fires of Smithfield⁴⁷ evoked, mowed down, with tragic swiftness, no less than twenty thousand of its heroic adherents, who refused to barter their newly born faith for the fleeting honors and security of a mortal life.⁴⁸

The Jussive: New Counsel on Teaching

Although the jussive (imperative) mood (Lat. *Jubeo*=to bid) expresses a command or a duty, in Shoghi Effendi's writings it tends to be hortatory (expressive of exhortation). The jussive mood frequently begins with such phrases as "Let . . ." or "Let us . . ." and is frequently used in the Bible. In Psalm 58, for example, King David calls out imprecations upon his enemies: "Let them melt away as waters which run continually: when he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be cut as in pieces. As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away: like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun" (vv. 7–8). In *The Advent of Divine Justice*, the Guardian makes extensive use of the jussive.⁴⁹ This example is taken from a letter written early in his ministry (24 November 1924) to the Bahá'ís of North America, during that period when they were still feeling the loss of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing and were adjusting to the newly functioning institution of the Guardianship. After quoting a relevant passage from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi exhorts the Bahá'ís to arise, travel, and settle abroad to teach the Bahá'í Faith. His comments are an early indication of the multifaceted nature of the deceptively simple act of teaching. Among them are "*individual regeneration*" and "*clear understanding*," along with the adoption of the most efficient methods and strategies to best exploit the opportunities at hand.

Shoghi Effendi's own comments are accompanied by this passage that presents a method of teaching practiced by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Bahá'í scripture is, of course, replete with references to teaching the Bahá'í Faith, but it seems unlikely that 'Abdu'l-Bahá would have made such statements during His own lifetime, since they pertain to His own method. Only with His passing did fuller reflection on His teaching methods become possible. Shoghi Effendi wasted no time in bringing these statements to the attention of believers:

Having grasped the significance of these words, having obtained a clear understanding of the true character of our mission, the methods to adopt, the course to pursue, and having attained sufficiently the individual regeneration—the essential requisite of teaching—let us arise to teach His Cause with righteousness, conviction, understanding and vigor. Let this be the paramount and most urgent duty of every Bahá'í. Let us make it the dominating passion of our life. Let us scatter to the uttermost corners of the earth; sacrifice our personal interests,

*comforts, tastes and pleasures; mingle with the divers kindreds and peoples of the world; familiarize ourselves with their manners, traditions, thoughts and customs; arouse, stimulate and maintain universal interest in the Movement, and at the same time endeavor by all the means in our power, by concentrated and persistent attention, to enlist the unreserved allegiance and the active support of the more hopeful and receptive among our hearers. **Let us too bear in mind** the example which our beloved Master has clearly set before us. Wise and tactful in His approach, wakeful and attentive in His early intercourse, broad and liberal in all His public utterances, cautious and gradual in the unfolding of the essential verities of the Cause, passionate in His appeal yet sober in argument, confident in tone, unswerving in conviction, dignified in His manners—such were the distinguishing features of our Beloved’s noble presentation of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh.⁵⁰*

Balance and Parallelism

These stylistic devices are closely associated in the writings of Shoghi Effendi as they are in literature generally. Parallelism was especially prominent in eighteenth-century English prose, and it serves both to emphasize and balance thought, either by correspondence and/or antithesis. An ancient literary device, it was first named and identified as early as 1753 by Bishop Robert Lowth of Oxford as the formal principle of Hebrew poetry in *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum Praelectiones* in this example from Psalm 29: “Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings/ascribe to the Lord glory and strength/Ascribe to the Lord the glory of His name; worship the Lord in holy array” (vv.1–2).⁵¹ Psalm 19 exhibits this perfect example of parallelism: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the soul is sure, making wise the simple./The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (vv. 7–8). Shoghi Effendi’s literary model, Edward Gibbon, was also fond of parallelism, as this concise example from his *Memoirs* illustrates: “I was neither elated by the ambition of fame, nor depressed by the apprehension of contempt.”⁵² This example also contains antithesis, a device that the Guardian habitually used.

In the following example, readers are both exhorted and warned not to be deflected from their course of action in pursuing the goals of the Divine Plan. The common element is any adverse situations the Bahá’ís may

encounter, situations they are expected to overcome. The technical name for the extended use of parallelism is “cumulative” or “stair parallelism”:⁵³

*Dangers, however sinister, must, at no time, dim the radiance of their new-born faith. Strife and confusion, however bewildering, must never befog their vision. Tribulations, however afflictive, must never shatter their resolve. Denunciations, however clamorous, must never sap their loyalty. Upheavals, however cataclysmic, must never deflect their course.*⁵⁴

Northrop Frye’s comment in *The Anatomy of Criticism* that the rhetoric of persuasion includes “the indictment of a social enemy”⁵⁵ becomes pertinent to the above passage. The “*dangers...strife and confusion...tribulations...denunciations*” and “*upheavals*” constitute the external “enemy” of the engaged believer. Shoghi Effendi, unlike the advocates of “non-judgmental justice,” did recognize enemies, both of himself and of the aims and purposes of the Bahá’í Cause, in its hidden and open adversaries and Covenant-breakers. He also had the moral obligation to point out the moral weaknesses of the Bahá’ís themselves. In the exhortations found in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, he challenged the North American believers that “[t]heir 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.”⁵⁶

But to return to the question—the main point of repetition is a didactic and psychological one that seeks to create a deep impression. In the example cited above, the adjective phrase beginning “*however*” is repeated along with the verbal phrase “*must never*.” When configured as follows, each sentence makes for a close parallel to the others in a [1] + [2] + [3] pattern: “[1] *Tribulations*, [2] *however afflictive*, [3] *must never shatter their resolve*,” with the slight variation occurring in the adverbial phrase in the first sentence “*at no time*” contributing a [1] + [2] + [3] + [4] + [5] structure: [1] “*Dangers*, [2] *however sinister*, [3] *must*, [4] *at no time*, [5] *dim the radiance of their new-born faith*.” The metrical pattern in the terse parallel clauses serves as reinforcement to the call to constancy. The warning is reinforced by the syntactical pattern, which creates an incantatory effect.

The following example, emphasized in bold, is noteworthy since it contains balance, parallelism, and repetition in one passage. The six sentences that constitute the passage contain exact parallels in sentence structure, including repetition of the key words “*Though*” and “*yet*,” and balance through

contrast or antithesis in the thought-lines. This extended structure gives a supreme vote of confidence. The passage shows a mix of realism and faith-driven idealism that corresponds to a Toynbeeian “challenge and response” motif (see chapter 10, “Rhetoric: The Language of Persuasion”), which is but covenantal language in another form. This motif is made explicit by the condition that the “*the measure of the goodly reward*” is contingent upon the extent of “*your daily exertions.*” At the same time, the passage imbues the reader with hope:

*Dearly beloved friends! **Though the task** be long and arduous, **yet the prize** which the All-Bountiful Bestower has chosen to confer upon you is of such preciousness that neither tongue nor pen can befittingly appraise it. **Though the goal** towards which you are now so strenuously striving be distant, and as yet undisclosed to men’s eyes, **yet its promise** lies firmly embedded in the authoritative and unalterable utterances of Bahá’u’lláh. **Though the course** He has traced for you seems, at times, lost in the threatening shadows with which a stricken humanity is now enveloped, **yet the unfailing light** He has caused to shine continually upon you is of such brightness that no earthly dusk can ever eclipse its 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. **Though the ultimate blessings** that must crown the consummation of your mission be undoubted, and the Divine promises given you firm and irrevocable, **yet the measure** of the goodly reward which every one of you is to reap must depend on the extent to which your daily exertions will have contributed to the expansion of that mission and the hastening of its triumph.⁵⁷*

Repetition

The repetition of a word or phrase is one of the basic features of rhythm and prosody or metrics. As mentioned above, Shoghi Effendi’s use of

repetition is closely linked to his predilection for balance and parallelism, which are achieved either by correspondence or by antithesis. Aside from the musical associations of repetition, the melodic refrain, or its psychological uses of anticipation and conditioning, repetition serves a didactic or ideological function: to implant an idea in consciousness. By the repetition of words or phrases, a writer hopes to create an idea that will outlast its reading. In the following example from *The Promised Day Is Come*, which also contains an “irony of situation,”⁵⁸ Shoghi Effendi sets out the rationale that necessitated the proclamation by the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh to “*the kings of the earth and the world’s religious leaders.*”

In the second-half of the nineteenth century, monarchy was still absolute, and the crowned heads of Europe and Asia were far from practicing the democratic and egalitarian ideals proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh in His tablets. Even the British constitutional monarch Queen Victoria (1819–1901), for all her sagacity and political acumen, was opposed to democratic monarchy. Both Liberals and Conservatives needed the confidence of the crown in order to govern effectively. Shoghi Effendi also noted the “*complete subservience to ecclesiastical hierarchies*” of the masses. He concludes, “*These, dominated and shackled, were robbed of the necessary freedom that would enable them to either appraise the claims and merits of the Message proffered to them, or to embrace unreservedly its truth.*” The Guardian further explains the rationale that required the kings and ecclesiastics to be the primary recipients of the divine proclamation:

Small wonder, then, that the Author of the Bahá’í Faith, and to a lesser degree its Herald, should have directed at the world’s supreme rulers and religious leaders the full force of Their Messages, and made them the recipients of some of Their most sublime Tablets, and invited them, in a language at once clear and insistent, to heed Their call. Small wonder that They should have taken the pains to unroll before their eyes the truths of Their respective Revelations, and should have expatiated on Their woes and sufferings. Small wonder that They should have stressed the preciousness of the opportunities which it was in the power of these rulers and leaders to seize, and should have warned them in ominous tones of the grave responsibilities which the rejection of God’s Message would entail, and should have predicted, when rebuffed and refused, the dire consequences

*which such a rejection involved. **Small wonder** that He Who is the King of kings and Vicegerent of God Himself should, when abandoned, contemned and persecuted, have uttered this epigrammatic and momentous prophecy: "From two ranks amongst men power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics."*⁵⁹

The irony of situation consists in the following: despite their enlightenment relative to the great mass of their largely illiterate, impoverished subjects, the kings and ecclesiastics nevertheless rejected the message and turned away from an enlightenment that would have empowered them to make a just appraisal of the divine message they had received and to offer its salutary benefits to the subjects who were groaning under their yoke. Indeed, two oriental potentates known to every student of Bahá'í history could not content themselves with mere rejection. Their choice was systematic persecution of the two divine emissaries, causing the martyrdom of the one and the forty-year exile and imprisonment of the other.

Caution, Contrast, and Antithesis

Balance in the writings of Shoghi Effendi, as for other authors, has not only a literary but also a closely related intellectual function. In the correspondence or antithesis of ideas, some spiritual ideal or truth and/or the negation of a false idea is expressed. Such formulations are sometimes expressed by our author in a [statement + caveat/caution] pattern in which a balancing, cautionary, or opposing idea is indicated following an assertion. This use of contrast or antithesis further indicates Shoghi Effendi's predilection for creating meaning by combining positive and negative statements, as examined in "Positive and Negative Theology" in chapter 1 on "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh." In the following example, the Guardian cautions the North American Bahá'ís "*in the great redemptive work of their Faith*" as "*the champion-builders of that New World Order*" not to conclude that such a mission and station have been conferred upon them "*by reason of inherent excellence or special merit.*" Thus, a cautionary, contrasting or antithetical note is typically introduced to balance his main statement. The jussive also figures here:

Let not, therefore, those who are to participate so predominantly in the birth of that world civilization, which is the direct offspring of their Faith, imagine for a moment that for some mysterious purpose or by any reason of inherent excellence or

*special merit Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to confer upon their country and people so great and lasting a distinction. 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.*⁶⁰

Then the Guardian goes on to make explicit the spiritual attributes that must be manifested by the North American Bahá'ís, attributes that will stand out in marked contrast to the moral degeneracy that debilitates a considerable portion of the great majority of their co-citizens:

*It is by such means as this that Bahá'u'lláh can best demonstrate to a heedless generation His almighty power to raise up from the very midst of a people, immersed in a sea of materialism, a prey to one of the most virulent and long-standing forms of racial prejudice, and notorious for its political corruption, lawlessness and laxity in moral standards, men and women who, as time goes by, will increasingly exemplify those essential virtues of self-renunciation, of moral rectitude, of chastity, of indiscriminating fellowship, of holy discipline, and of spiritual insight that will fit them for the preponderating share they will have in calling into being that World Order and that World Civilization of which their country, no less than the entire human race, stands in desperate need.*⁶¹

Alliteration

Among the Guardian's preferred phonetic devices, his use of alliteration (the repetition of initial consonants) and assonance (the repetition of vowels), which are also characteristic features of the *Saj*⁶² (rhyming or poetic prose) of Persian and Arabic, must be noted. Alliteration exists in almost all languages, but in English it was especially prominent in Anglo-Saxon or Old English poetry, which favored initial rhyme or alliteration over end-rhyme. The effectiveness of alliteration and assonance depends, of course, on their musical effects. While the Guardian's penchant for alliteration will be obvious to any close reader, Rúhíyyih Rabbaní makes the point herself in this example of a rare, quintuple alliteration, "He was very fond of the device of alliteration,

much used in oriental languages but now no longer so common in English. An excellent example of his use of this is provided by this sentence reiterating words beginning with ‘p’ from one of his cables: ‘*Time pressing opportunity priceless potent aid providentially promised unailing.*’”⁶³ In this example, he is unaffected by what some might view as overuse. He was also fond of alliterating the letters *f* and *b* by which he achieves artistic effect. The context is the “*recurrent crises*” that, in various lands, exert their “*baleful influence*” on the world community of Bahá’u’lláh. For identification purposes, the triple alliteration with the letters *l*, *d*, and *f* appear in bold.

*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.*⁶⁴

The following example reflects the central theme of *The Promised Day Is Come*—the dire consequences of the tragic rejection by world’s clerics and sovereigns of the Divine Message:

*What, then—might we not consider—has, in the face of so complete and ignominious a rejection, happened, and is still happening. . . . Empires fallen in dust, kingdoms subverted, dynasties extinguished, royalty besmirched, kings assassinated, poisoned, driven into exile, subjugated in their own realms, whilst the few remaining thrones are trembling with the repercussions of the fall of their fellows.*⁶⁵

Rúhíyyih Rabbaní also cites a saying quoted by Shoghi Effendi in the last World Order letter, “The Unfoldment of World Civilization,” that features the alliterated letter *f*:

Or these words concerning the attitude of the true servants of the Cause: “Of such men and women it may be truly said that to them ‘every foreign land is a fatherland, and every fatherland is a foreign land.’”⁶⁶

Assonance

Assonance is the companion of alliteration. The repetition of vowel sounds, which are not as explosive as the consonants, is less impressive but makes a softening effect on the alliterated consonants. This example from *The Promised Day Is Come* describes the sorry condition of the world. The assonance occurs in these lines with the letter *u*: “A world spiritually destitute, morally bankrupt, politically disrupted, socially convulsed, economically paralyzed, writhing, bleeding and breaking **up** beneath the avenging rod of God.”⁶⁷ The above example also contains the alliterated letter *b*. The following example shows assonance with the letter *a*. It contrasts the declining world order to the ascendant Faith of God:

*A Faith, still proscribed, yet bursting through its chrysalis, emerging from the obscurity of a century-old repression, face to face with the awful evidences of God’s wrathful anger, and destined to arise above the ruins of a smitten civilization.*⁶⁸

Evocative Questioning

Shoghi Effendi continually appeals to the court of the emotions, a mainstay of rhetoric. This passage, extracted from a letter of 24 November 1924 “To my dearly-beloved brothers and sisters in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: care of the American National Spiritual Assembly,” was occasioned by the third commemoration of the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It elicits a sober questioning of the direction being taken by the Bahá’í community. The interrogative tone of this passage is much lighter than the weighty appeals that the Guardian later makes to move the community into action and closer to the fulfillment of his specific objectives. While the tone is lighter, his point is nonetheless clear. In the prosecution of the Divine Plan, Bahá’ís should never lose their sense of direction, nor fail to assess their accomplishments:

*The day is drawing near when, for the third time, we shall commemorate the world over the passing of our well-beloved ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. May we not pause for a moment, and gather our thoughts? How has it fared with us, His little band of followers, since that day? Whither are we now marching? What has been our achievement?*⁶⁹

He continues his letter with the same line of evocative questioning: “Are we by our thoughts, our words, our deeds, whether individually or collectively, preparing the way? Are we hastening the advent of the

Day he so often foretold?"⁷⁰ This gentler approach allows the reader to consult her conscience, and through a process of self-evaluation, take the appropriate actions or measures for the days that lie immediately ahead. The following example, taken from the period of the first Seven Year Plan (1937–1944), evokes the thought of future tasks with which the North American Bahá'í community would be entrusted once the prescribed goals of the current plan had been fulfilled: "*And who knows but that when this colossal task has been accomplished a greater, a still more superb mission, incomparable in its splendor, and fore-ordained for them by Bahá'u'lláh, may not be thrust upon them?*" The nature of that "mission" he only partially discloses in his explanatory statement:

*The glories of such a mission are of such dazzling splendor, the circumstances attending it so remote, and the contemporary events with the culmination of which it is so closely knit in such a state of flux, that it would be premature to attempt, at the present time, any accurate delineation of its features. Suffice it to say that out of the turmoil and tribulations of these "latter years" opportunities undreamt of will be born, and circumstances unpredictable created, that will enable, nay impel, the victorious prosecutors of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Plan, to add, through the part they will play in the unrolling of the New World Order, fresh laurels to the crown of their servitude to the threshold of Bahá'u'lláh.*⁷¹

The Arraignment of Adversaries

Some of the Guardian's most brilliant passages snap to life when he arraigns the opponents of the New Revelation. This example from *The Promised Day Is Come* is a severe condemnation of the entire Persian Shiah religious order. The context is the "*falling fortunes*" of the Islamic church-state that had so cruelly persecuted the Twin Founders of the Bahá'í Faith and its Center of the Covenant. The passage is set out in one long paragraph. The object lesson in divine justice is the secularization of Islam, which Shoghi Effendi clearly viewed as a visitation from God. *The Promised Day Is Come* was written at the end of the reign of the reformer Reza Shah. Reza Shah abdicated in September 1941 when the Allied Forces invaded Iran and forced him to leave. He regarded the ulama as the principal opponents to the reforms that he instituted. During his reign, he gradually whittled away their powers and removed them from the judiciary and imposed on Iran a

Civil and Criminal Code along the lines of the French Napoleonic Code in place of the Shariah. He replaced the ulama by judges trained in the Faculty of Law of the University of Tehran or other universities.⁷² This secularization of Islamic law is alluded to in passing by the Guardian.

This passage also provides a stinging critique of what Shoghi Effendi regarded as the excessive, bizarre, and corrupt practices of Shiah Islam, a critique that must be clearly distinguished from the Guardian's profound reverence for the Prophet, the imams, the Qur'án, and its teachings. Moreover, Shoghi Effendi seems to be looking beyond the immediate historical circumstances and the anticlerical measures instituted by Reza Shah in the 1930s, to envisage the eventual demise of Shiah Islam itself. The condemnation is actually several paragraphs longer than the excerpt presented here, which is reproduced without further commentary:

The pomp and pageantry of these princes of the church of Islám has already died out. Their fanatical outcries, their clamorous invocations, their noisy demonstrations, are stilled. Their fatvá's (sentences), pronounced with such shamelessness, and at times embracing the denunciation of kings, are a dead letter. The spectacular sight of congregational prayers, in which thousands of worshipers, lined row upon row, participated, has vanished. The pulpits from whence they discharged the thunder of their anathemas against the powerful and the innocent alike, are deserted and silent. Their waqfs, those priceless and far-flung endowments—the landed property of the expected Imám—which in Isfáhán alone at one time embraced the whole of the city, have been wrested out of their hands, and brought under the control of a lay administration. Their madrasahs (seminaries), with their medieval learning, are deserted and dilapidated. The innumerable tomes of theological commentaries, super-commentaries, glosses, and notes, unreadable, unprofitable, the product of misdirected ingenuity and toil, and pronounced by one of the most enlightened Islamic thinkers in modern times as works obscuring sound knowledge, breeding maggots, and fit for fire, are now buried away, overspread with cobwebs, and forgotten. Their abstruse dissertations, their vehement controversies, their interminable discussions, are outmoded and abandoned. Their masjids (mosques) and imám-zádihs (tombs of saints), which were privileged to extend the bast (right of

sanctuary) to many a criminal, and which had degenerated into a monstrous scandal, whose walls rang with the intonations of a hypocritical and profligate clergy, whose ornaments vied with the treasures of the palaces of kings, are either forsaken or fallen in ruin. Their takyih, the haunts of the lazy, the passive, and contemplative pietists, are either being sold or closed down. Their ta'z'iyih (religious plays), acted with barbaric zeal, and accentuated by sudden spasms of unbridled religious excitement, are forbidden. Even their rawdih-khánis (lamentations), with their long-drawn-out, plaintive howls, which arose from so many houses, have been curtailed and discouraged. The sacred pilgrimages to Najaf and Karbilá, the holiest shrines of the Shí'ih world, are reduced in number and made increasingly difficult, preventing thereby many a greedy mullá from indulging in his time-honored habit of charging double for making those pilgrimages as a substitute for the religious-minded. The disuse of the veil which the mullás fought tooth and nail to prevent; the equality of sexes which their law forbade; the erection of civil tribunals which superseded their ecclesiastical courts; the abolition of the síghih (concubinage) which, when contracted for short periods, is hardly distinguishable from quasi-prostitution, and which made of the turbulent and fanatical Mashhad, the national center of pilgrimage, one of the most immoral cities in Asia; and finally, the efforts which are being made to disparage the Arabic tongue, the sacred language of Islám and of the Qur'án, and to divorce it from Persian—all these have successively lent their share to the acceleration of that impelling process which has subordinated to the civil authority the position and interests of Muslim clericals to a degree undreamt of by any mullá.⁷³

Old Words with New Meanings

As was discussed in chapter 7, “The Critique of Hegel, the Method of Correlation, and the Divine Economy,” Shoghi Effendi’s use of the term “*the divine economy*,” while based in part on Judeo-Christian antecedents, is original and gives this old phrase a new meaning. A few random examples of this technique may be found in such words and phrases as “pioneer,” “knight,” “tablet,” “administration,” “institutions,” “missionary,” “convert,” and “auxiliary board.” While these substantives share something of the letter and spirit of their original meanings, Shoghi Effendi recontextualized these words. This

semantic shift endowed them with fresh meaning and helped to create a specifically Bahá'í parlance. For example, in secular society an "institution" is not normally viewed as being a channel for divine guidance. (The whole notion would be very doubtful.) But the staid and official quality of an institution, its durability over time, as well as its being led by the Spirit of God is preserved in the phrase "*the divine institutions*" of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

The archaic word "*knight*," as in "Knight of Bahá'u'lláh," was revived to designate those "*spiritual conquerors*" who arose, as had their Christian forebears, to open up "*virgin*" territories previously uninhabited by Bahá'ís during the Ten Year World Spiritual "*Crusade*" (1953–1963). The word "*knight*," with its ancient religious and military associations, was used to express a high order of spiritual service exemplified by those pioneers who arose and moved to "*far-flung*," and in some cases, inhospitable "*outposts*" across the globe, to expose these deprived and "*difficult territories*" to the light of the New Day. By their spirit of sacrifice, these Knights of Bahá'u'lláh divested the old word of its negative, militaristic associations. Anyone who has known any of these Knights of Bahá'u'lláh realizes that such a title was not a piece of bombastic nomenclature but corresponds to a true spiritual station that has been won by dint of effort and service under very trying conditions.

Shoghi Effendi's choice of the word *tablet* to translate the Arabic word *Lawh* (pl.= *Alwáh*) (Per.= *Alváh*) to designate a scripture of indeterminate length is also instructive of the same principle. The translation of "tablet" for *Lawh* does not correspond exactly to any of the established meanings of the word in English. Tablet usually refers to any of the following: engraved writing on a flat, hard, usually stone surface; surface for writing upon; or baked clay forms that preserved ancient writing. Bahá'í scripture was, of course, originally preserved in manuscript form, but this does not qualify in any strict, literal sense as a tablet. The choice of "tablet" points to the Guardian's originality in the choice of this word, since it suggests the permanence of committing writing to clay or stone.

The same originality is apparent with Shoghi Effendi's choice of the word *pioneer* to describe those who engage in missionary-type activity. While the Guardian retained in some contexts the religious flavor of the mission in such phrases as "*missionary zeal*," "*missionary fields*," and "*missionary journey*," he chose instead the word *pioneer* to designate those who would settle in remote places as yet untouched by the Bahá'í Faith. The word *pioneer* blunts the sometimes negative connotations of the word *missionary* and points

rather to the ground-breaking work done by those who perform community-building services. The word *pioneer* makes the reader more cognizant of the importance of the critical first stages of community development in what becomes eventually a long-term venture in founding a spiritually oriented society.

The Music of Rhythmic Prose

Reading Aloud for Rhetorical Effect

In rhythmic prose, and more so in poetry, the musicality of language is most clearly discerned, since meter is a type of musical measure (Gk.=*metron*). One form of the metrical configuration of language was achieved formerly as musical notation.⁷⁴ Although the study of rhythmic prose has largely disappeared from postmodern critical theory and from literary criticism generally, it is still very pertinent to the writings of Shoghi Effendi. Prosody study,⁷⁵ as well practically obsolete, also has certain applications to this chapter. At the outset, the following observation is in order. Any one who reads the Guardian's writings aloud will hear and feel that our author has consciously used rhythm and meter to reinforce his meaning. Admittedly, the poetic flavor of rhythmic prose does not follow current literary taste, which prefers a clear divide between poetry and prose. However, Wellek and Warren in their *Theory of Literature* point out that this divide is "a critical prejudice of our time."⁷⁶ With his use of rhythmic prose, Shoghi Effendi followed a classical heritage. If the texts are not enough to substantiate the Guardian's sensitivity to sound-figures, Rúhíyyih Rabbání's biography indicates, as was mentioned above, Shoghi Effendi's sensitivity to the music of language. He sometimes read his beloved Gibbon aloud to her as he made such comments as, "Oh what style; what a command of English; what rolling sentences; listen to this."⁷⁷ Shoghi Effendi's admiration of the grand style of Gibbon was a style that the historian shared with other late eighteenth-century writers such as Johnson and Burke.⁷⁸

Although he was Iranian by birth and nationality, and travelled using an Iranian passport,⁷⁹ Shoghi Effendi grew up mainly in Haifa, so he was exposed to the Arab culture of Palestine from childhood. He became a master of Arabic prose and wrote beautiful prayers in that language. As is well known, Persian and Arabic prose—and this practice applies to other languages of the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent—are chanted aloud. In these languages, chanting is reserved not only for poetry or prayer but also for prose pieces of high quality. Like Gibbon, Shoghi Effendi always gave his prose a trial by ear, both in Persian and English, reciting aloud as he composed,

repeating his sentences until he was satisfied with both cogency and sonority. Rúhíyyih Rabbání observed that Shoghi Effendi's sensitivity to the musical qualities of English came from the influences of his mother tongue and that his habit of speaking aloud in English as he composed was carried over from Persian. Her eyewitness account gives us a living picture of Shoghi Effendi the writer at work:

His method of composition was new and fascinating to me. He wrote out loud, speaking the words as he put them down. I think this habit in English was carried over from Persian; good Persian and Arabic composition not only can be but should be chanted. . . . This was the Guardian's custom in English as well as in Persian and I believe it is because of this that even his long and involved sentences sound even more flowing and intelligible when read aloud.⁸⁰

The Guardian's prose model, Gibbon, was also sensitive to the sonorities of language. Gibbon wrote that his usual method of composition was to "cast a long paragraph in a single mould, to try it by ear, to deposit it in my memory, but to suspend the action of the pen 'til I had given the last polish to my work."⁸¹ To feel the full rhetorical effect of Shoghi Effendi's writings, they should be read aloud. While reading aloud has largely disappeared in modern culture, except for book clubs, writers' groups, and book launches, in the ancient world the practice was common. Writer-philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), in his *Beyond Good and Evil*, contrasts the silent reading of our time with that of the ancient world. The point of contrast is with his fellow citizens, and it is made with only a light touch of the irony that heavily pervades Nietzsche's writings:

The German does not read aloud, he does not read for the ear, but only with his eyes; he has put his ears away in the drawer for the time. In antiquity when a man read—which was seldom enough—he read something to himself, and in a loud voice; they were surprised when any one read silently, and sought secretly the reason of it. In a loud voice: that is to say, with all the swellings, inflections, and variations of key and changes of *tempo*, in which the ancient *public* world took delight.⁸²

In rhetorical language, sound and sense exist in a synergistic relationship. Since it is so commonplace, it often escapes notice that in spoken language, as in reading, meaning is created through sound. Sound is more often taken for granted in language than in music, but it is no less essential to language

than it is to music. Solitary thinking is merely muted discourse. In conceptual terms, there can be no meaning apart from “syllables and sounds,” whose utterance ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asks us to transcend in prayer to create a mystical form of non-verbal meaning “a prayer that shall rise above words and letters and transcend the murmur of syllables and sounds,”⁸³ a phrase that invokes a higher spiritual order where the conceptual meaning of words ceases and adoration and supplication begins.

The Incantatory Effect

Northrop Frye wrote of the incantatory effects of rhetorical prose, “Here the repetitions are hypnotic and incantatory, aimed at breaking down customary associations of ideas and habitual responses, and at excluding any alternative line of action.”⁸⁴ In other words, the conceptual content and the incantatory effects of rhetorical language are intended first to break down, then to imprint, to evoke a transformative psychological response. For Shoghi Effendi’s writings, this psychological response would be a decisive course of action or the assent to Bahá’í principle as he defined it. In a similar vein, Frye wrote in a fascinating essay on “Charms and Riddles” about the religious language of the Qur’án: “The rhetoric of God, then, according to the Koran, is essentially the kind of rhetoric we have associated with charm.”⁸⁵ Frye refers to charm (Lat. *carmen*=song) in the magical sense of that which fascinates and delights and has a certain spell-like quality associated with rhythm: “the primary associations [of charm] are with music, sound and rhythm.”⁸⁶

In Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*, alternately titled *Literary Life and Opinions*, he explained the origin of meter as “the balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion.”⁸⁷ Coleridge writes in the same chapter, arguing “from the EFFECTS of metre” that it operates “[a]s a medicated atmosphere, or as wine during animated conversation, they act powerfully, through themselves, unnoticed.”⁸⁸ William Butler Yeats also writes of the function of meter as being able to “lull the mind into a waking trance.”⁸⁹ But I have no sense of Yeats’s or Coleridge’s trance-like notion with Shoghi Effendi. The Guardian’s use of meter was actually meant to awaken, to heighten awareness, to provoke thoughtfulness, and, especially, to arouse his readers to action. It was intended to inspire and motivate rather than to lull.

Cadence

One feature of rhythmic prose that has direct applications to Shoghi Effendi’s writings is cadence, the modulation or rise and fall of language. Cadence is

felt most pointedly during audible reading. The natural correlative to the recurring pattern of meter or cadence is the constant motion of waves breaking successively upon the shore. In one sense, the cadence of language corresponds to the rhythm of life, to the rise and fall, the ebb and flow of human events themselves. In the examples of the Periodic or Ciceronian sentence given above, a wave-like succession of phrases was identified. Two examples of cadence are given below. In the first, the cadence is moved with anger and contempt, if not scorn, for the rude rejection of Bahá'u'lláh's message and the severe persecution to which the Persian Prisoner was Himself subjected. The structure that was previously noted for the rhetorical question applies here. Shoghi Effendi raises the question himself, answers it, and then provides a short summary statement or conclusion. This gives a Question+Answer+Conclusion (Summary Statement) pattern:

How—we may ask ourselves—has the world, the object of such Divine solicitude, repaid Him Who sacrificed His all for its sake? . . . Unmitigated indifference on the part of men of eminence and rank; unrelenting hatred shown by the ecclesiastical dignitaries of the Faith from which it had sprung; the scornful derision of the people among whom it was born; the utter contempt which most of those kings and rulers who had been addressed by its Author manifested towards it; the condemnations pronounced, the threats hurled, and the banishments decreed by those under whose sway it arose and first spread; the distortion to which its principles and laws were subjected by the envious and the malicious, in lands and among peoples far beyond the country of its origin—all these are but the evidences of the treatment meted out by a generation sunk in self-content, careless of its God, and oblivious of the omens, prophecies, warnings and admonitions revealed by His Messengers.⁹⁰

In the second example, the Guardian writes in a message of April 1956 of the events that led to a “*remarkable victory over the combined forces of its traditional adversaries in the land of its birth,*” an allusion to the severe, clergy-instigated, state-approved persecution of the Iranian Bahá'ís, begun in August 1955, that resulted in unprecedented publicity for the Bahá'í Faith and the direct intervention of the United Nations.⁹¹ While the most important feature of this message is clearly the historical significance of these events and the proven ability of the Bahá'í Faith to

resist and overcome such attacks, for the purposes of this analysis, the Ciceronian sentence contains an example of the suspension and inversion created by Latinism, the final positioning of the verb form “*unenforced*,” which completes the preceding phrase “*boastful and reiterated threats*”:

*A long-abused, down-trodden, sorely tried community, constituting the overwhelming majority of Bahá'u'lláh's followers, subjected recently to the strain and stress of a violent recrudescence of persecution, which was marked throughout by intense vilification, intimidation, spoliation, expulsion, arson, rape, and murder, has emerged triumphant from yet another gruelling experience—a testing period of exceptional severity—its unity unbroken, its confidence reinforced, its prestige considerably enhanced, its fame noised abroad to an unprecedented degree, its administrative agencies unshaken, its endowments unimpaired, and the grim, boastful and reiterated threats of its sworn enemies to outlaw it through formal legislative action, confiscate its property, demolish its edifices, imprison and deport its members, and extirpate it, root and branch, in the native land of its Founder **unenforced**.*⁹²

Latinisms⁹³ also appear in Gibbon, as in this sentence from his memoirs, “It was at Rome, on the 15th of October, 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind.”⁹⁴

The Sublime

Religious and Aesthetic Category

The ancient concept of the sublime (Gk.=*hypsos*, lit. elevation) is an apt descriptor of Shoghi Effendi’s writing style. This rich concept interpenetrates the categories of mysticism, spirituality, aesthetics, and stylistics alike. Religiously, it refers to the incarnation of the sacred, the holy, or the mystical. Aesthetically, it denotes an impressive elevation of style and a power that is able to produce such effects as⁹⁵ “transcendent vastness or greatness, as of power, heroism, extent in space or time.” The sublime outstrips “normal standards of measurement or achievement” and results in a feeling that is “akin to awe and veneration” that overpowers the reader/observer and inspires the self to meet “in sympathy with its object.”

But the sublime may also find concrete expression in the life of an individual, a life that is characterized by nobility, long-suffering, and a rare beauty of character. It is this type of the sublime that the Guardian used to describe the life of the Greatest Holy Leaf in the glowing tribute paid to her written shortly after her death: “*How can my lonely pen, so utterly inadequate to glorify so exalted a station, so impotent to portray the experiences of so sublime a life, so disqualified to recount the blessings she showered upon me since my earliest childhood—how can such a pen repay the great debt of gratitude and love that I owe her.*”⁹⁶

The classical expression of the sublime was masterfully stated by the Greek rhetorician and philosophical critic Longinus (c.213–273)⁹⁷ in his famous treatise, “On the Sublime” (*Peri Hupsos*). An eloquent work that identifies some essential elements of great literature, this treatise speaks in exalted fashion of the sublime as being the most dynamic property of the text or speech, especially when it embodies “intense utterance,” “vehement passion,” “speed, power, and intensity,” is “overpowering,” or gives “transport.”⁹⁸ While Longinus’s immediate concern was to distinguish the great from the truly great writers of Greek classical antiquity, his treatise has important implications for all scriptural, rhetorical, poetical, or dramatic texts. His five-fold division of the sources of the sublime is especially pertinent to this study:⁹⁹

1. The power of forming great conceptions (*noesis*), which I refer to simply as high-mindedness;
2. Inspired and vehement passion;
3. Formation of figures (*schemata*);
4. Noble diction;
5. Dignified and elevated composition.

To reformulate these five points more concisely: the author with sublime style must have the ability to form great thoughts, express them passionately, and demonstrate the ability to use metaphorical language in a dignified, noble manner.

Pre-Text: The Sublime in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

As a pre-text to Shoghi Effendi’s use of the sublime, it would be helpful to refer to Soheil Bushrui’s literary analysis, *The Style of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: Aspects of the Sublime*, a study that was reviewed by Sen McGlinn.¹⁰⁰ Soheil Bushrui’s study would have benefited from a more in-depth explanation of the key concept to which he refers in the title. However, some explanation

of the sublime is given in the opening paragraphs of part 1. There, sublimity is identified as one of the chief traits of Arabic and is related to the functions of “sacred language”:

That which we call ‘sublime’ in religious literature can be conveyed only in a very special kind of language which may be characterized as ‘sacred language’, and which is virtually indefinable in nature. It is distinguished, however, by the fact that, unlike any other kind of language, it encompasses all three modes of cognition: analysis, intuition, and revelation.¹⁰¹

In light of Longinus’s treatise, one might argue that Professor Bushrui has perhaps overemphasized the inscrutable nature of the sublime, but he is right to have indicated its embodiment in sacred language and its transcendent capabilities. He argues that the sublimity of the *Aqdas* is due in large part to the sublimity of Arabic itself, to which Bahá’u’lláh Himself has given undisputed preeminence.¹⁰² The linguistic effect of Arabic is, according to the saying, “*al-sihr al-halál*” (‘lawful magic’) or more exactly “enchantment” according to Suheil Bushrui’s rendering, “When one speaks Arabic, one is not merely engaging in communication. Rather, it is a spiritual experience.”¹⁰³ Such are the powers of this extraordinary tongue, powers that are due, in part, to its “richness of expression,” “wealth of synonyms, and an extraordinary breadth of vocabulary expressive of multitudinous and subtle differentiations of sense in the realms of both feeling and action.”¹⁰⁴

Bahá’u’lláh’s Global Army

While the following text of Shoghi Effendi is in English rather than Arabic, some of Professor Bushrui’s descriptors apply. In *Messages to the Bahá’í World, 1950–1957*, the letter of 30 June 1952 clearly meets the five qualifications of Longinus. While the rhetorical properties of this text are as usual strong, there is no pervasive use of metaphor that mitigates the application of “the formation of figures.” But metaphorical language is present nonetheless in the root metaphor of Bahá’u’lláh’s spiritual army and its “*onward marching legions*.” This is the counterpart of the military figure of the Lord of Hosts that is widely used throughout the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ps. 24:10, Is. 6:3, Jer. 46:18). Metaphorical language is found in other phrases of the Guardian’s letter. He refers, for example, to those who “*have fallen a prey to the forces of a blind and militant nationalism*,” or those who “*find themselves bound by the chains and fetters of a haughty intellectualism*,” phrases that use a hunter/prisoner language of domination

and captivity. The Oxford scholar Donald A. Russell, closely echoing Longinus, makes the point that the sublime “may be found in a single phrase, for it does not need a whole context for its display.”¹⁰⁵ Sen McGlinn, also referring to Longinus, makes the same point, “. . . this [sublimity] is achieved most striking [*sic*] when an exalted thought is expressed in language of utmost simplicity, devoid of literary devices.”¹⁰⁶ Longinus’s example, cited by McGlinn, is Genesis 1:3 “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” While it is true that Longinus argues for a simplicity of the sublime, it is also true that in chapter 8 of his treatise he considers “the formation of figures” (*schemata*) as one of the five main identifiers of the sublime.

The following long passage is written without a paragraph break. The text is global in scope. Its imaginative vision depicts pioneers and travel-teachers moving across the five continents, strategically covering the whole world in response to the Guardian’s summons to execute the Ten Year World Plan (1953–63). It employs ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s familiar metaphor of the army of Bahá’u’lláh, with its militant tone and self-confident assurance of final victory. This example is remarkable not only for the world-encompassing breadth of its vision but also for the finely detailed and realistic identification of the many challenges and obstacles to be met and overcome by the spiritual warriors in each theatre of operation. Shoghi Effendi is throwing down the gauntlet to those stalwart soldiers who will arise “*to obey, as befits His warriors, the summons of the Lord of Hosts.*” However, he does so by making the potential pioneer keenly aware of the difficulties and challenges to be encountered:

Under whatever conditions, the dearly loved, the divinely sustained, the onward marching legions of the army of Bahá’u’lláh may be laboring, in whatever theatre they may operate, in whatever climes they may struggle, whether in the cold and inhospitable territories beyond the Arctic Circle, or in the torrid zones of both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres; on the borders of the jungles of Burma, Malaya and India; on the fringes of the deserts of Africa and of the Arabian Peninsula; in the lonely, far-away, backward and sparsely populated islands dotting the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Indian Oceans and the North Sea; amidst the diversified tribes of the Negroes of Africa, the Eskimos and the Lapps of the Arctic regions, the Mongolians of East and South East Asia, the Polynesians of the South Pacific Islands, the reservations of the Red Indians in both American continents, the Maoris of New Zealand, and the aborigines of

Australia; within the time-honored strongholds of both Christianity and Islam, whether it be in Mecca, Rome, Cairo, Najaf or Karbilá; or in towns and cities whose inhabitants are either immersed in crass materialism, or breathe the fetid air of an aggressive racialism, or find themselves bound by the chains and fetters of a haughty intellectualism, or have fallen a prey to the forces of a blind and militant nationalism, or are steeped in the atmosphere of a narrow and intolerant ecclesiasticism—to them all, as well as to those who, as the fortunes of this fate-laden Crusade prosper, will be called upon to unfurl the standard of an all-conquering Faith in the strongholds of Hinduism, and assist in the breaking up of a rigid age-long caste system, who will replace the seminaries and monasteries acting as the nurseries of the Buddhist Faith with the divinely-ordained institutions of Bahá'u'lláh victorious Order, who will penetrate the jungles of the Amazon, scale the mountain-fastnesses of Tibet, establish direct contact with the teeming and hapless multitudes in the interior of China, Mongolia and Japan, sit with the leprous, consort with the outcasts in their penal colonies, traverse the steppes of Russia or scatter throughout the wastes of Siberia, I direct my impassioned appeal to obey, as befits His warriors, the summons of the Lord of Hosts, and prepare for that Day of Days when His victorious battalions will, to the accompaniment of hozannas from the invisible angels in the Abhá Kingdom, celebrate the hour of final victory.¹⁰⁷

As he had done earlier in *The Advent of Divine Justice* for the North American believers, the Guardian was also engaging in identity creation. Here it is the identity of a world community singularly united, laboring under the aegis of one supreme Divine Will that is embodied in the Teaching Plan itself. The world-embracing vision takes in all the geophysical regions of the earth, as well as the variegated races of “the children of men.”¹⁰⁸ The reader is struck by the immensity of the challenge that faces the Bahá'í world. Through their efforts, the Bahá'ís are being summoned to defeat the various “-isms” that afflict the world community, those pernicious ideologies and narrow beliefs—racialism, nationalism, ecclesiasticism—that have inflicted incalculable suffering on humanity. Also stigmatized along with these ideologies are the rigid boundaries of the caste system, with its attendant religious and class prejudices. The citizens of the New Age of planetary

unity are being summoned to infuse the breath of life into the crass materialism that permeates urban life and even to release those who worship the false god of their own intellect, the proud ones who are bound by an arid and “*haughty intellectualism*.” For Shoghi Effendi, overweening pride of intellect has become just another, if unsuspected, “-ism.”

The Interaction of Art and Soul: “Sublimity is the Echo of a Great Soul”¹⁰⁹

A question that once preoccupied literary theorists remains relevant to this discussion. Longinus maintained that any literary work that meets the qualification of sublimity is due both to a combination of nobility of soul and skill or art. According to his five-fold schema of the sources of the sublime, two attributes (highmindedness and passion) derive from the soul of the writer/rhetor, while three attributes (figures, diction, and composition) derive from art or skill.¹¹⁰ This distinction is necessary in order to qualify a writer’s merit. If sublimity is achieved through natural endowment alone and not by dint of art or skill, then the work has less merit. If, however, natural endowment is augmented by art or skill, then the work can be said to have benefited from both natural ability and applied technique. Donald Russell observed, “Next, the possibility of a *tekhne* of this excellence [in writing] has to be demonstrated against those who say that such a thing comes solely by nature (*phusis*) and not by a combination of nature and art.”¹¹¹ In other words, writers can be born, but they must also be made. And skill is art or acquired technique, all that *tekhne* implies. But Longinus also relates the writer’s sublimity to his or her individual perception of the divine: “The secret of the great writers is their vision of the universe and its divine control. Their *hupsos* ‘lifts them up near the great mind of god’. It will endure forever, and it testifies to the co-operation of art and nature.”¹¹²

To speak of sublimity of soul is to speak also of the writer’s discipline. It would be exaggerated and unfair to ascribe Shoghi Effendi’s literary skill to divine inspiration alone. The concept of art or skill cannot be disassociated from discipline or method, of working steadily to hone one’s craft. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní has indicated that the Guardian worked methodically over the years to perfect the literary skill, which he received by natural endowment. While this passage has already been quoted elsewhere, it bears repeating here:

From his Beirut days until practically the end of his life Shoghi Effendi had the habit of writing vocabularies and typical English phrases in notebooks. Hundreds of words and sentences have been

recorded and these clearly indicate the years of careful study he put into mastering a language he loved and revelled in. For him there was no second to English.¹¹³

In the third of three talks on Shoghi Effendi at a National Bahá'í Youth Conference (19–21 June 1970), held at Wilmette and Evanston, Illinois, during which she stressed the importance of maintaining high standards of literacy in English, Rúhíyyih Rabbaní spoke of Shoghi Effendi's serious but playful work ethic while composing. She related that the Guardian worked long hours at one sitting, as he struggled relentlessly, but playfully, with a phrase or a sentence, working to fit it into one of his typically long passages. His tenacity was such that he never gave up until the phrase or sentence had been successfully integrated.¹¹⁴ Rúhíyyih Rabbaní has written that Shoghi Effendi maintained not only the several hours of day and night-time reading required to keep up with the supervision of the complex administrative affairs of the various national Bahá'í communities but also the necessary reading to keep him informed of world trends and current events. This reading was accompanied by a selective method of elimination:

He assiduously kept abreast of the political news and trends of the world, through his *Times*, *The Jerusalem Post* and sometimes the well-known European dailies *Journal de Genève* and the Paris edition of the *New York Herald Tribune*. Before the war he subscribed to an English magazine, *The Nineteenth Century*, which had many articles on current affairs, and was the only one I ever knew him to read, but found its standard had declined after the war and gave it up. . . . He knew exactly which pages of *The Times* had the news he wanted to look at—the leaders, the world news, and above all, the editorials—and he would scan these quickly and then proceed to rip out with his fingers the articles he wanted to look at or read carefully and throw the rest away. . . .¹¹⁵

Gibbon and the Guardian

The Question of Influence

This section exemplifies certain phrases and passages from *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that have probably been used by Shoghi Effendi. As reported by Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, the Guardian frequently read and openly admired the renowned British historian Edward Gibbon

(1737–1794). Rúhíyyih Rabbání’s instructive commentary mentions Gibbon’s stylistic influence on Shoghi Effendi’s writings:

From his Beirut days until practically the end of his life Shoghi Effendi had the habit of writing vocabularies and typical English phrases in notebooks. Hundreds of words and sentences have been recorded and these clearly indicate the years of careful study he put into mastering a language he loved and revelled in. For him there was no second to English. He was a great reader of the King James version of the Bible, and of the historians Carlyle and Gibbon, whose style he greatly admired, particularly that of Gibbon whose *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* Shoghi Effendi was so fond of that I never remember his not having a volume of it near him in his small room and usually with him when he travelled. There was a small Everyman’s copy of part of it next to his bed when he died. It was his own pet bible of the English language and often he would read to me excerpts from it, interrupting himself with exclamations such as “Oh what style; what a command of English; what rolling sentences; listen to this.” With his beautiful voice and pronunciation—in the direction of what we call an “Oxford accent”, but not exaggeratedly so—the words fairly glowed with colour and their value and meaning came out like shining jewels. I particularly remember one peaceful hour (so rare, alas) when we sat on a bench facing the lake on a summer afternoon in St James’ Park in London and he read me Gibbon out loud. He revelled in him and *throughout Shoghi Effendi’s writings the influence of his style may clearly be seen*, just as the biblical English is reflected in his translations of Bahá’u’lláh’s Prayers, *The Hidden Words* and Tablets.”¹¹⁶

Her affirmation of Gibbon’s stylistic influence is not really surprising, given Gibbon’s unrivaled position as historian and writer, and given also that our author was both a careful stylist and a keen student of history. Shoghi Effendi absorbed Gibbon’s abridged *A History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* continuously for about thirty-seven years. (Here I am assuming that Shoghi Effendi first made his acquaintance with Gibbon’s work at Balliol College, Oxford in October 1920, shortly after he was admitted to Oxford via an organization known then as the Non-Collegiate Delegacy.)¹¹⁷ While Shoghi Effendi consciously chose Gibbon as his prose model, he was no slavish imitator of the English historian, even though the influence of Gibbon’s style can be detected in the Guardian’s prose.

The Dependence Theory: How Valid is it?

Where applicable, scholars will attribute “dependence” of one writer on another. To establish dependence as a principle is valid because it recognizes the moral or intellectual debt of one author to another. However, concerning Shoghi Effendi’s writings, such a theory would have to be carefully qualified and must take into account the following: to speak of “dependence” rather than “influence,” as Rúhíyyih Rabbaní did, frames the discussion in something of a misleading light. A dependence theory would require closer definition, more in-depth research, and wider textual analysis. In attributing stylistic influences of Gibbon on the Guardian, two things need to be distinguished: first, simple textual borrowings of words and phrases; and second, borrowing of historical information. In other words, form must be distinguished from content. Regarding textual loan words, I have made a simple juxtaposition of words and phrases. But without further studies, it would be hazardous to theorize beyond the observation of some obvious textual parallels.

Regarding the borrowing of historical information, Shoghi Effendi clearly relied on Gibbon, mainly about early Christianity. This point is considered below. It is important to stress that the research presented here is preliminary and does not pretend to be exhaustive. Further research of Gibbon and the Guardian may yield other findings.

The borrowing of words and phrases made by our author helped mainly to determine the form of the Guardian’s discourse, i.e., his wording and phraseology. Put simply, any loan words from Gibbon were put to use in another context, i.e., the Bahá’í Faith and its history. Although some direct borrowings and textual parallels from the Bible,¹¹⁸ Gibbon, and H. G. Wells can certainly be found, their overall influence vis-à-vis the global significance of the Guardian’s writings is, in my view, relatively minor. Any theory of dependence would have to be seen within and against the total context of the Guardian’s writings, with their wealth of theological ideas, authoritative interpretations, historical material, and moral/spiritual values, prescriptions, and insights. The better question would be: What is the relative value and influence of such borrowings in light of the Guardian’s entire corpus?

Here I must anticipate the accusation of plagiarism. Specific instances of loan words and phrases, and even of historical information, do not constitute plagiarism in the Guardian’s writings. It was common practice for writers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and beyond, not to identify their sources or quotations. Traditional oriental historiography almost never does so. Shoghi Effendi was not an academic scholar but the

over-burdened head of a growing world religion. He was not writing for a narrow audience of erudite readers but for a community of informed believers and was not consequently bound by the strictures of academic writing. As suggested above, my first tentative observations have led to the conclusion that any loans have been instrumental in creating a vocabulary, illustrating a point, or making a comparison. However, the World Order letters do show that in the case of early Christianity, the Guardian relied upon Gibbon for content as well as form.

Edward Gibbon: A Judicious Choice

Gibbon was ideally suited to model the type and style of prose that Shoghi Effendi used to develop his own. While his faults have been corrected by the intervening two centuries of historical research and methodology, Gibbon remains the greatest historian to have thus far written in English. To this virtually unanimous judgment must be added his other widely recognized contribution as having penned “perhaps the greatest piece of literary architecture in any language.”¹¹⁹ Shoghi Effendi thus accomplished a double-stroke in choosing Gibbon’s *chef-d’oeuvre*. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in six volumes (1776–1788) is at once a masterpiece of historical narrative expressed in the most eloquent English. This judgment of literary historian, George Sampson, written in 1940, remains a succinct description of Gibbon’s great contribution to history and literature. The passing years have only confirmed Sampson’s assessment:

The Decline and Fall is not only the greatest historical work in the English language, it is perhaps the greatest piece of literary architecture in any language. It is faultless in design and in detail, and its symphonic narrative power is superb. . . . Some of his chapters have never been excelled as historical essays. He followed truth, as he understood it, wherever truth was to be found, and his honour as a historian cannot be impugned. Further, he is one of the great masters of English prose. His power of narrative is equalled by his gift of argumentative statement, and, in all parts of his work, his style is one which holds the reader spellbound by its stately dignity, relieved by a subtle personal character. The faults of that style are obvious; but a writer cannot have every style.¹²⁰

Sampson is referring to a certain lack of passion, which is by no means lacking in Shoghi Effendi. To corroborate Sampson’s view, Terry Eagleton, in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, makes the same point. Gibbon’s

magnum opus belongs as much to literature as it does to history.¹²¹ In his admiration of Gibbon, Shoghi Effendi was joining a distinguished society. Charles Alexander Robinson, former professor of classics at Brown University, wrote in the preface to Saunders's 1952 abridged version of *The Decline and Fall* that "Winston Churchill's majestic phrases, as we all know, have been inspired, at least in part, by close familiarity with Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*."¹²² Robinson went on to remark that it was not quite so well known that Clement Attlee, another British prime minister, read *The Decline and Fall* "during the critical summer of 1949."¹²³ Robinson refers to the British elections of 1950 by which Attlee's Labour Party was returned to power by a slim majority over the Conservatives and Liberals.¹²⁴ Saunders is suggesting that Attlee's electoral campaign speeches were influenced by his reading of Gibbon.

Rúhíyyih Rabbaní mentions that another writer whom Shoghi Effendi admired was the Scottish historian, social critic, and essayist Thomas Carlyle, who also highly regarded Gibbon.¹²⁵ Carlyle could not have been the lone British writer to have taken note of Gibbon's sonorous phrases. Gibbon was read across the generations by women and men in British public life. But the admiration enjoyed by Gibbon, while general, was not universal. The genial Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) excoriated Gibbon in his writings.¹²⁶

Shoghi Effendi's interest in the British historian doubtless goes beyond sheer admiration for Gibbon's narrative ability and highly polished literary style. Beyond learning the causes of the dissolution of a once great empire, *The Decline and Fall* must have proved instructive reading for the Guardian for at least two other reasons:

1. It provided him with material on the growth of Christianity as it was transformed from a persecuted Jewish sect into the state religion of the Roman Empire. From this account, he was able to make comparisons with the early period of growth of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith.
2. Like the period that Gibbon portrayed, Shoghi Effendi lived in a period, as we do, when Western civilization, like the eternal city, had "enmeshed itself and civilization in catastrophe."¹²⁷ Fascination with catastrophe partly explains Gibbon's popularity after more than 200 years have passed. It intrigues the modern mind to discover why a mighty empire crumbles. But in Gibbon, the Guardian found reasons to make parallels between the history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire and the collapse of modern civilization.

*... the signs of an impending catastrophe, strangely reminiscent of the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West, which threatens to engulf the whole structure of present-day civilization—all witness to the tumult which the birth of this mighty Organ of the Religion of Bahá'u'lláh has cast into the world—a tumult which will grow in scope and in intensity as the implications of this constantly evolving Scheme are more fully understood and its ramifications more widely extended over the surface of the globe.*¹²⁸

Jewish Christianity Compared to the Bahá'í Faith's Emancipation from Islam

During the 1980s, Christopher Buck drew to my attention a passage in the World Order letters that relies on Gibbon. While Shoghi Effendi's phraseology loosely follows that of the British historian, he has used Gibbon's passage for two reasons: to provide information on the development of early Christianity and to contrast the relatively rapid growth and emancipation of the Bahá'í Faith from its parent religion of Islam, compared to Christianity's slower growth and longer severance from Judaism. This passage can also be viewed as being illustrative of a phenomenon in comparative religion, i.e., the emancipation of a growing world faith from its parent religion, but it is put to apologetic purposes. The tenacious influence of the Judaizers, the members of the Jerusalem church led by James, is used to cast a favorable light on the early emancipation of the Bahá'í Faith from Islam. Whereas the Jerusalem church clung to its Jewish laws and rituals for at least a century, from their religion's inception Bahá'ís—except when forcibly prevented—adhered to their own laws and teachings even as they struggled against and suffered from the fanatical forces of Islamic orthodoxy. Here is Shoghi Effendi's reference to the early branch of Jewish Christianity:

How great was the obstinacy with which the Jewish converts among the early Christians adhered to the ceremonies of their ancestors, and how fervent their eagerness to impose them on the Gentiles! Were not the first fifteen bishops of Jerusalem all circumcised Jews, and had not the congregation over which they presided united the laws of Moses with the doctrine of Christ? Is it not a fact that no more than a twentieth part of the subjects of the Roman Empire had enlisted themselves under the standard of Christ before the conversion of Constantine?

*Was not the ruin of the Temple, in the city of Jerusalem, and of the public religion of the Jews, severely felt by the so-called Nazarenes, who persevered, above a century, in the practice of the Mosaic Law?*¹²⁹

The passage from Gibbon, upon which the above passage is partially based, reads:

The enfranchisement of the church from the bonds of the synagogue was, however, a work of some time and some difficulty. The Jewish converts, who acknowledged Jesus in the character of the Messiah foretold by their ancient oracles, respected him as a prophetic teacher of virtue and religion, but they obstinately adhered to the ceremonies of their ancestors and were desirous of imposing them on the Gentiles, who continually augmented the number of believers.¹³⁰

Here is the Guardian's contrasting passage, which puts the early Bahá'í Faith in a more favorable, comparative light:

*How striking the contrast when we remember, in the light of the afore-mentioned facts, the number of those followers of Bahá'u'lláh who, in Persia and the adjoining countries, had enlisted at the time of His Ascension as the convinced supporters of His Faith! How encouraging to observe the undeviating loyalty with which His valiant followers are guarding the purity and integrity of His clear and unequivocal teachings! How edifying the spectacle of those who are battling with the forces of a firmly entrenched orthodoxy in their struggle to emancipate themselves from the fetters of an outworn creed!*¹³¹

It is clear from this one textual comparison that, while Shoghi Effendi relied on Gibbon for the historical information pertaining to the history of early Christianity, he used the passage for other, apologetic purposes. Further study of certain passages in "The Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh," "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Further Considerations," "America and the Most Great Peace," and "The Unfoldment of World Civilization" may yield other results. To recapitulate from the foregoing:

- Shoghi Effendi used Gibbon as his main prose model;
- Although Gibbon's prose clearly influenced Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian was no slavish imitator of the English historian;

- Our author developed his own distinct magisterial, multi-layered style;
- He depended upon Gibbon for information about early Christianity and the fall of the Roman Empire;
- This information was put to other purposes in the making of favorable comparisons to the Bahá'í Faith and to set the decline of modern civilization against the parallel decline of the Roman Empire.

Juxtaposing Phraseology from Gibbon and the Guardian

Based on the observations of Rúhíyyih Rabbaní that Shoghi Effendi made English vocabulary and phraseology lists, it is only obvious that one of the primary purposes of these lists gleaned from non-Bahá'í authors was to provide a vocabulary that could be used in the context of his own writing. In this section, textual parallels are presented that can be found in Edward Gibbon (EG) and the Guardian (SE). These examples, which are not exhaustive, will be presented in the context of the sentences in which they appear. In some cases, Gibbon's phraseology has been put to another purpose. But in other cases, the Guardian follows Gibbon's meaning fairly closely.¹³²

- (EG) "Marius, the most contemptible of all the candidates for the purple, was distinguished, however, by intrepid courage, **matchless** strength, and blunt honesty" (p. 173).
- (SE) "Headed by their illustrious representative, who ever since the call of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was raised has been twice round the world and is still, with marvellous courage and fortitude, enriching the **matchless** record of her [Martha Root's] services, these men and women have been instrumental in extending, to a degree as yet unsurpassed in Bahá'í history, the sway of Bahá'u'lláh's universal dominion" (WOB, p. 88).
- (EG) "But this mode of persuasion loses much of its weight and influence when it is addressed to those who neither understand nor respect the **Mosaic dispensation** and the prophetic style" (p. 322).
- (SE) "Have not the Asiatic churches of Jerusalem, of Antioch and of Alexandria, consisting chiefly of those Jewish converts, whose character and temperament inclined them to sympathize with the traditional ceremonies of the **Mosaic Dispensation**, been forced as they steadily declined to recognize the growing ascendancy of their Greek and Roman brethren?" (WOB, p. 74).

- (EG) “The progress of Christianity was not confined to the Roman empire; and, according to the primitive fathers, who interpret facts by prophecy, the new religion, within a century after the death of its **Divine Author**, had already visited every part of the globe” (p. 316).
- (SE) “The flame of devotion ignited and the enthusiasm generated, during the celebrations which commemorated the centenary of the birth of the Mission of the **Divine Author** of our Faith, and which, in the course of the years immediately following it have carried the members of the American Bahá’í Community, so far and so high, along the road leading to their ultimate destiny, must, in whatever way possible, be fanned and continually fed throughout the entire area of the Union, in every state from the Atlantic to the Pacific seaboard, in every locality where Bahá’ís reside, in every heart throbbing with the love of Bahá’u’lláh” (COF, p. 154).
- (EG) “These Judaizing Christians seem to have argued with some degree of plausibility from the **divine origin** of the Mosaic law and from the immutable perfections of its great Author (p. 266).
- (SE) “Let none, however, mistake my purpose, or misrepresent this cardinal truth which is of the essence of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. The **divine origin** of all the Prophets of God—including Jesus Christ and the Apostle of God, the two greatest Manifestations preceding the Revelation of the Báb—is unreservedly and unshakably upheld by each and every follower of the Bahá’í religion” (PDC, p. 107). (See other references to “divine origin.”)
- (EG) “The Jewish religion was admirably fitted for defence, but it was never designed for conquest; and it seems probable that the number of proselytes was never much superior to that of **apostates**. The **divine promises** were originally made, and the distinguishing rite of circumcision was enjoined, to a single family” (p. 264).
- (SE) “The volumes which a **shameless apostate** [Avarih] composed and disseminated, during that same period in Persia, in his brazen efforts not only to disrupt that Order but to undermine the very Faith which had conceived it, proved similarly abortive” (GPB, p. 327). “Though the ultimate blessings that must crown the consummation of your mission be undoubted, and the **Divine promises** given you firm and irrevocable, yet the measure of the goodly reward which every one of you is to reap must depend on the extent to which your daily exertions will have

contributed to the expansion of that mission and the hastening of its triumph” (ADJ, p. 16).

- (EG) “In proportion to **the smallness of its numbers**, the character of the society may be affected by the virtue and vices of the persons who compose it; and every member is engaged to watch with the most vigilant attention over his own behaviour and over that of his brethren, since, as he must expect to incur a part of the common disgrace, he may hope to enjoy a share of the common reputation” (p. 285).
- (SE) “And. . .the Bahá’ís of Chicago, having petitioned ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for permission to erect a House of Worship, and secured, in a Tablet revealed in June 1903, His ready and enthusiastic approval, arose, despite the **smallness of their numbers** and their limited resources, to initiate an enterprise which must rank as the greatest single contribution which the Bahá’ís of America, and indeed of the West, have as yet made to the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh” (GPB, pp. 261–62).
- (EG) “The ties of blood and friendship were frequently **torn asunder** by the difference of religious faith; and the Christians, who in this world found themselves oppressed by the power of the pagans, were sometimes seduced by resentment and spiritual pride to delight in the prospect of their future triumph” (p. 278).
- (SE) “And lastly, we call to remembrance, the final scene of that sombre tragedy, when, as a result of the Prince’s violation of his sacred engagement, a number of the betrayed companions of Quddús were assembled in the camp of the enemy, were stripped of their possessions, and sold as slaves, the rest being either killed by the spears and swords of the officers, or **torn asunder**, or bound to trees and riddled with bullets, or blown from the mouths of cannon and consigned to the flames, or else being disemboweled and having their heads impaled on spears and lances” (GPB, pp. 41–42).
- (EG) “The practice of second nuptials was branded with the name of legal adultery; and the persons who were guilty of so **scandalous** an offence against Christian purity were soon excluded from the honours, and even from the arms, of the church” (p. 289).
- (SE) “It would be sufficient for my purpose to call attention to the great number of those who, in the first two centuries of the Christian era, “purchased an ignominious life by betraying the holy Scriptures into the hands of the infidels,” the **scandalous** conduct of those bishops who were thereby branded as traitors. . .” (WOB, p. 56).

Gibbon: Great Historian and Unbeliever

If Shoghi Effendi admired Gibbon, it was not because the historian was religious. While the known biographical steps in Gibbon's loss of faith are beyond the scope of this study, suffice it to say that Gibbon's was a gradual and tortuous journey from belief to unbelief. Gibbon wrote in a famous phrase in the concluding chapter of his history—"I have described the triumph of barbarism and religion." But it was a triumph that Gibbon regretted. One of his biographers has, in fact, described him as "the noblest Roman."¹³³ Gibbon wrote and thought as a republican. It is clear that his sympathies lay with Rome and were inimical to all those who contributed to her decline and fall, and that included Christianity. But he remained, ironically, one of the most well-informed theologians and church historians that England has ever produced. While he eventually lost faith in Christianity, his profound erudition put Christian historians to shame. This was true to such an extent that John Cardinal Newman, as quoted by Joseph W. Swain in *Edward Gibbon the Historian*, wrote, "It is melancholy to say it, but the chief, perhaps the only English writer who has any claim to be considered an ecclesiastical historian, is the unbeliever Gibbon."¹³⁴

Shoghi Effendi's Literary Achievement

His Cultural and Linguistic Background

In achieving such mastery over a language that was not his native tongue, Shoghi Effendi has joined a select company of modern authors. This accomplishment is even more remarkable because his mastery was achieved equally well in two other languages, Persian and Arabic. While he was formally educated in both English and French, his preference for English was no doubt providential since English, a western Germanic language, was destined to become not only an international lingua franca but also the tongue of the North American Bahá'ís who were charged with executing 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan around the world. From an early age, Shoghi Effendi's education and training were overseen by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This included instruction in English, as this reported conversation with Dr. Josephina Fallscheer-Zürcher, the Swiss physician who "attended the ladies of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's household" indicates, "There followed another long pause, then the Master turned again to me and said, 'At the present time the British Empire is the greatest and is still expanding

and its language is a world language. My future Vazir shall receive the preparation for his weighty office in England itself, after he has obtained here in Palestine a fundamental knowledge of the oriental languages and the wisdom of the East.”¹³⁵

Culturally and linguistically, Shoghi Effendi was Persian, but he grew up in Haifa, then Arab Palestine, and mastered classical Arabic, thus being exposed from birth to both cultures. He knew the Qu’rán and Islam intimately. He was educated first in French at the Collège des Frères in Haifa. Although he learned English from an early age and probably became fluent over the years through meetings with visiting pilgrims from England and North America, studies in English did not actually begin until the post-secondary level. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní writes that the Guardian entered the English-language Syrian Protestant College, later the American University of Beirut “when he finished what was then equivalent to the high school.”¹³⁶

English was a medium that the Guardian revelled in and loved. By choosing English as the “language of interpretation” of the Bahá’í Faith to convey his thoughts, interpretations, translations, decisions, instructions, and plans, and in which to write his great chronicle of the first century of Bahá’í history, the Guardian showed himself to be a world citizen of the era of internationalism. In addition to Persian, Arabic, English, and French, he also spoke, but did not write, some Turkish.¹³⁷ According to Professor Moshe Sharon of the University of Jerusalem, who as a youth met Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian spoke some Hebrew.¹³⁸ The same divine afflatus that inspires his Persian and Arabic writings is also felt in his English, although arguably in a manner less direct and perceptible. Whatever stylistic distinctions may exist between his English and Persian/Arabic writings, the same driving, inspirational force is clearly felt in all three, through the pure prism of Shoghi Effendi’s mind.

Originality and Predictability of Style

The stock of literary devices and syntactical patterns that have been examined in this chapter constitute a repertoire that Shoghi Effendi drew upon and to which he returned again and again. These recurring patterns and rhetorical structures make for a certain predictability of style. But, then, every author is both defined and limited by his or her own style. No writer can have the merits of every style. Even though I regard the influence of other writers on Shoghi Effendi’s original, magisterial style as minimal, with the outstanding exception of Gibbon, he was, no less than

any other writer, dependent upon preexistent sources, especially in his historical studies, and on literary models, particularly since English was not his mother tongue.

It should be no offense to his readers to say that the Guardian was limited, as well as liberated, by the medium of words. With words alone he faced the formidable challenge of presenting to the Bahá'í community the recurring list of pressing tasks by which the various stages and goals of the Divine Plan were to be attained. By words alone, he argued, extolled, exhorted, chastised, and pleaded with the Bahá'ís and with the world, to awaken them to the sure realization that, without full recognition of the station of Bahá'u'lláh, obedience to His teachings, and the immediate, concerted execution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, humanity's fate was destined to be that of on-going crisis and catastrophe.

In his expository writings, the rolling cadence of the periodic sentence, the complex chain of paratactical clauses, with each distinct phrase marshalled in quasi-military style to add weight to the argument, the building to climax, and the climax itself—all become familiar stylistic markers to Shoghi Effendi's close readers. In the more functionally rhetorical passages, in which he sets before the Bahá'ís the urgent needs of the Plan, standard phraseologies and formulaic writing are used: greetings, warnings, pleas, praises, admonitions, and exhortations fall into this category. While the wording may vary, these formulae are more or less precast in verbal structures that cannot assume the rich variety of form and expression found in longer expositions. His constant exhortations to the Bahá'ís to arise and to fulfill the goals that he had set before them have the same familiar ring, and indeed, the message remains fundamentally the same.

However, a certain predictability of style does not seriously detract from the originality and vigor of the Guardian's religious epistolary, which has set a new, exemplary standard for material of this genre. While the epistle is an ancient literary form, it has been vastly expanded and individualized by Shoghi Effendi. While any writer uses preexistent materials, the original design that is woven into the fabric of the Guardian's corpus, has produced a handiwork that cannot go by any other name than sublime artistry.

In closing, I should say that we should not expect Shoghi Effendi to be something that he is not: a writer of imaginative prose, a novelist, or a poet. Yet his religious epistolary and historical works bespeak a subtle

awareness of poetic imagination and narrative skill. His epistolary clearly accomplishes what it purposes—to convince, to instruct, to inspire, to move to action. *God Passes By* not only chronicles the tragic events of the Bábí Dispensation and the subsequent internal/external expansion of the Bahá'í Faith but also traces its metamorphosis into a major world religion. In a larger sense, this multidimensional, cross-genred work can be viewed as a prototype of providential history that turns tragedy into triumph.

Endnotes

1. Further to this discussion, see “Stylistics” in *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, pp. 276–85.
2. See Erwin R. Steinberg’s instructive paper, “Stylistics as a Humanistic Discipline,” *Style* 10 (1976): 67–69.
3. From *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th rev. ed., s.v. “Buffon.” This saying does not appear in the 15th edition.
4. Rúhíyyíh Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 128.
5. E. W. F. Tomlin, “The Prose of Thought,” in *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*, vol. 7, *The Modern Age*, p. 231.
6. Tomlin, *ibid.*, p. 231. My *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* gives this definition for eristic: “Aimed or aiming at winning the argument, rather than at reaching truth, disputatious.”
7. Tomlin, “The Prose of Thought,” p. 231.
8. Rúhíyyíh Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 38.
9. *Ibid.*
10. The consultant who suggested magisterial and high Victorian prefers anonymity. This last expression is an invention of my own and comes from the word *herald*, which derives from two Old High German words *hari* (army) and *waltan* (to rule), and refers to an official bearer of tidings of great consequence. Of these suggestions, baroque, magisterial, and high Victorian would be most readily recognizable.
11. “The Literature of Interpretation—Notes on the English Writings of Shoghi Effendi,” *World Order* 7.2 (Winter 1972–73): 36.
12. Donald Greene, *The Age of Exuberance: Backgrounds to Eighteenth-Century English Literature*, p. 129. Italics in original.
13. In Cicero’s *Brutus* or *De Claris Oratoribus*, the baroque sentence describes two distinct styles: (1) the Attic or plain sentence that tends not to balance clauses against one another and (2) the Senecan, which is more pointed or aphoristic and balanced than the Attic sentence but not as ornate as the Ciceronian (*The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, s.v. “Cicero,” p. 236).
14. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 42.
15. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 153.
16. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 35.
17. George Sampson, *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, p. 547. The phrase is actually found in Sampson’s treatment of Gibbon, pp. 544–47.
18. *The College Survey of English Literature*, p. 855.
19. The fascination with the Middle East and India resulted from British colonial expansion and the fresh acquaintance with Oriental (i.e., Middle Eastern) poetry.
20. By classical, I refer to diction that is used in any number of literary works that demonstrate perennial appeal over the centuries and which are distinguished by such criteria as balance, unity, and proportion. For example, Shoghi Effendi’s use of the word *hallmark* in the following phrase, “*the heroic self-sacrifice that constitute the*

- hallmark of these faithful stewards” (*The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 79). A hallmark refers originally to the mark stamped on gold and silver articles to ensure their purity.
21. Harold Bloom, *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds*, p. 154.
 22. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America* (1947–1957), p. 80.
 23. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 82.
 24. Cited by Bloom, *Genius*, p. 149.
 25. *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, s.v. “Uunction.”
 26. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, s.v. “Anoint.”
 27. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 157.
 28. Shoghi Effendi writes that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá actually set out in September of 1910 but that poor health obliged him to stay in Ramleh, a suburb of Alexandria, until the summer of the following year (*God Passes By*, p. 280).
 29. The title of the viceroy of Egypt under Turkish rule 1867–1914. From the Persian *Khadiv*, prince.
 30. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 292–94.
 31. The context of Geertz’s phrase has to do with the “refiguration” of social thought that is currently underway. Geertz remarks on the increasing disappearance of genre in writing and the difficulty of classifying many postmodern authors and their works. See “Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought,” *American Scholar* 49 (1980). While the phrase “blurred genre” does not apply to Shoghi Effendi as Geertz uses it to describe the cross-genred work of social scientists and others, as a general concept it does apply to his writings with their mixture of sacred text, historical account, moral judgment, poetic feeling, and doctrinal interpretation.
 32. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, p. 449.
 33. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 294.
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. *Style* 10 (1976): 67–69, quoted in *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, p. 281.
 36. Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,” in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, pp. 50, 51, 68. Published originally in *The Implied Reader: Patterns in Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, pp. 274–94.
 37. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, p. 103.
 38. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 63.
 39. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 75.
 40. Rúhfyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 197.
 41. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 95.
 42. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
 43. The year of the Vatican Council (convened 8 December 1869) during which the Pope declared, with strong Jesuit support, the dogma of Papal Infallibility by a vote of 451 in favor, 88 against, and 62 in favor of some amendment. While the dogma states that the Pope is infallible only when speaking *ex cathedra*, i.e., on matters of faith and morals, what was provocatively doctrinaire was the declaration that the Pope derives such infallibility directly from God and not from any wider consent of the church whose divine authority is not mentioned anywhere in the newly proclaimed dogma. This dogma momentarily assured the triumph of the ultramontanists who were led

- directly by the Pope. The long reign of Pius IX ended with the severe curtailment of the Supreme Pontiff's temporal power and the separation of church from state. Count Mastai-Ferretti, the former Bishop of Imola, soon witnessed a general outbreak of anti-clericalism in western Europe. The final separation of church and state was decided when King Victor Emmanuel II declared war on the Papal States, seized the church's vast holdings, invaded Rome, and took the Pope prisoner in the Vatican. Shoghi Effendi notes that the Pope's former vast temporal power shrank to be "practically confined to the miniscule [sic] City of the Vatican" (*The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 55).
44. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 54.
 45. The example given in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s.v. "Rhetorical Question," p. 218. Baldick does not give the source in Milton.
 46. *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 111.
 47. Smithfield, once a market in central London, was the place where heretics or martyrs (depending on one's point of view) were burned at the stake during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.
 48. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, pp. 6–7.
 49. See, for example, pp. 5, 29, 33, 35, 42–46 (especially), 49, 51, 61. These examples from the 1963 revised edition.
 50. *Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 69–70.
 51. Dorothea Ward Harvey, "The Literary Forms of the Old Testament," in *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, p. 1077.
 52. Quoted in Baldick, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p. 183.
 53. Harvey, op. cit., p. 1077.
 54. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 72. The spiritual attributes underlying this passage are courage and steadfastness.
 55. Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, p. 327.
 56. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 41.
 57. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.
 58. One of the types of irony, which includes verbal or rhetorical irony, dramatic or tragic irony, and romantic irony.
 59. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, pp. 19–20.
 60. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 19.
 61. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.
 62. The characteristic features of *Saj'* are parallelism and internal rhyme. However, since it is not poetry, *Saj'* does not observe traditional verse metrics, and considerable latitude is left to the author to determine any rhyme patterns or length of phrases used.
 63. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, pp. 197–98.
 64. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 5.
 65. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, pp. 48–49.
 66. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 199. Quoted from Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 197–98.
 67. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 16.
 68. *Ibid.*
 69. *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 67.
 70. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
 71. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 13–14.

72. Thanks to Moojan Momen for these details.
73. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, pp. 93–94.
74. Such exercises today are largely forgotten or are confined to the work of theorists. An early exposition of musical metrics was Stanley Lanier’s *Science of English Verse*. See also M. W. Croll, “Music and Metrics,” *Studies in Philology* 20 (1923): 388–94.
75. Prosody or metrics is the theory of versification that deals with questions of rhythmic pattern and form as found in rhyme, syllables, meter, stanzaic patterns, etc.
76. René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, p. 165.
77. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 38.
78. Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, p. 165.
79. The family of Bahá’u’lláh had been granted Ottoman citizenship in Baghdad.
80. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 197.
81. From the introduction, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, p. 15.
82. “Peoples and Fatherlands,” in *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, no. 247, p. 204. Italics in original.
83. *Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 71.
84. Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 327.
85. Frye, *Spiritus Mundi, Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society*, p. 135.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
87. Coleridge, *Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge*, p. 299. From chapter 18 of *Biographia Literaria*.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 300. Capital letters in original.
89. Quoted by I. A. Richards, source unnamed, in *Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 143.
90. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 7.
91. For details, see Shoghi Effendi’s letter of 20 August 1955, “A Mysterious Dispensation of Providence,” in *Citadel of Faith*, pp. 133–42 and his letter of April 1956, “So Significant a Victory,” in *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, pp. 97–98.
92. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92.
93. A Latinism is a particular instance of Latinate usage, which indicates not only the suspension or delay of the main verb but also diction that prefers words of Latin rather than English origin, e.g., *suspend* rather than *hang*.
94. Cited in *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s.v. “Latinate.”
95. For a brief overview of the sublime in Longinus, Burke, Kant, and Wordsworth, see “The Sublime” at <http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/patten/sublime.html>.
96. *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 187.
97. The authorship of Longinus is in question. He is consequently sometimes referred to as Pseudo-Longinus.
98. “On the Sublime” 1:4, cited by Tompkins in *Reader-Response Criticism from Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, n. 5, p. 227.
99. The following five points are taken from the excellent study, “Roman Classicism: Longinus,” in *Literary Criticism. A Short History*, vol. 1, *Classical Criticism* by William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, p. 99. These five points are taken from chapter 8 of Longinus’s “On the Sublime.”
100. *Bahá’í Studies Review* 6 (1996): 93–96. McGlinn’s mainly negative review reflects a pervasive sense of critique, including his reference to several of Bushrui’s “presumably deliberate omissions” (p. 93), which he proceeds to explain.
101. Suheil Bushrui, *The Style of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: Aspects of the Sublime*, p. 26.

102. Bushrui “paraphrases” this passage of Bahá’u’lláh quoted in Persian by Ali Akbar Furutan, “However Persian is not as rich as Arabic; in fact all the languages of the earth seem limited when compared to the Arabic language” (*Lughat-i-Fushá va Lughat-i-Nawrá*, pp. 22–23).
103. Bushrui, *Style*, p. 29.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
105. Donald A. Russell, “Greek Criticism of the Empire,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 1, *Classical Criticism*, p. 307.
106. Sen McGlinn, review of *The Style of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, op cit., p. 95.
107. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, pp. 37–38.
108. A phrase used by both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to refer to the members of the human race.
109. The quotation is from Longinus “On the Sublime,” chapter 44, quoted in Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History*, p. 99.
110. Summarized by Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History*, p. 99.
111. Donald A. Russell, “Greek Criticism of the Empire,” p. 307.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 308.
113. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith*, p. 12.
114. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, “Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith.”
115. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 201.
116. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, pp. 37–38 (emphasis mine).
117. An organization of Oxford administrators that granted to students who were not members of a College or Hall the same rights and privileges as other students. In 1932 it became the St. Catherine’s Society and received college status as St. Catherine’s College in 1962. See Riaz Khadem, *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford and Earlier*, pp. 79–82.
118. See, for example, the discussion on a textual parallel with a passage from St. Paul in chapter 7, “The Critique of Hegel, the Method of Correlation, and the Divine Economy.”
119. George Sampson, *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, p. 547.
120. *Ibid.*
121. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, p. 8.
122. P. ix.
123. *Ibid.*
124. See J. Henry Landman and Herbert Wender, *World Since 1914*, p. 371.
125. Carlyle’s great friend Edward Irving had been his school master at Kirkcaldy and “had a library, in which Carlyle devoured Gibbon and much French literature. . .” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 14th edition, s.v. “Thomas Carlyle”). This point does not appear in the 15th edition.
126. Editor Donald A. Stauffer writes in his introduction to *Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge*, “He did not read without discriminations, as anyone knows who has read his excoriating opinions on Edward Gibbon” (p. xii).
127. From the preface by Charles Alexander Robinson, Jr., *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, p. ix.
128. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 156.
129. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
130. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, p. 266.
131. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 57.

132. All references from Gibbon are taken from *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. References from Shoghi Effendi's writings are abbreviated titles.
133. E. J. Oliver, *Gibbon and Rome*, chapter 15, n.p.
134. Joseph W. Swain, *Edward Gibbon the Historian*, p. 70.
135. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 12.
136. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
137. 'Alí Nakhjavání, member of the Universal House of Justice from 1963–2003, in an e-mail of 21 June 2002 to this author wrote that “[w]e do not know of any letter written in Turkish by the beloved Guardian.” However, in the same communication, he related that he was told by Rúhíyyih Rabbaní that she recalled a Turkish woman who was “the only person on pilgrimage” to whom the Guardian spoke Turkish. But he spoke it only when absolutely necessary.
138. At the 'Irfán Colloquium, held in London in July 2004, Professor Sharon told me that he met Shoghi Effendi with a group of Israeli students and that the Guardian had spoken Hebrew with them.

9

THE MILITARY METAPHOR

O ye loved ones of God! In this, the Bahá'í dispensation, God's Cause is spirit unalloyed. His Cause belongeth not to the material world. It cometh neither for strife nor war, nor for acts of mischief or of shame; it is neither for quarrelling with other Faiths, nor for conflicts with the nations. Its only army is the love of God, its only joy the clear wine of His knowledge, its only battle the expounding of the Truth; its one crusade is against the insistent self, the evil promptings of the human heart. Its victory is to submit and yield, and to be selfless is its everlasting glory. In brief, it is spirit upon spirit. . . .

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Militaristic Language and the Temper of the Times

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, the world community has been subjected to the ominous sounds of “wars and rumours of wars” (Mat. 24:6) and has grown understandably averse to militaristic language. The old saying is still true: “War begins in words.” The former Soviet Union’s reconciliation with the West in the 1980s, the smashing of the Berlin Wall, and the calming of the nuclear arms race gave momentary respite from this oppression and a renewed hope for peace following decades of Cold War. But the opening decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed a resurgence of Islamic extremism that has necessitated the adoption of increased security measures in those countries viewed by Jihadists as targets. Humanity has been plunged into a new, unpredictable, highly dangerous, non-conventional type of global civil war.

Passages in the Bahá'í writings and the epistolary of Shoghi Effendi based on the military metaphor would ostensibly appear to be at odds with the pacific aspirations of the world’s people. More pointedly, this rhetoric—rhetoric being used here in a nonpejorative sense—may strike some readers as being contrary to the aims and purposes of the Bahá'í Faith itself. It seems reasonable to

observe that it appears inappropriate to employ militaristic language of any sort for a religion with the promotion of the unity of humanity and world peace as its fundamental teachings and with sacred writings that have repeatedly deplored and emphatically condemned the horrors of war. This line of thinking resembles another that takes the metaphorical nature of religious language too literally. Bahá'u'lláh's reference to His newly proclaimed laws as having unsealed "the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power"¹ could easily be misconstrued as a strange metaphor for a religion that has forbidden the consumption of alcohol.

Peace-loving people especially may be offended by bellicose language, not only because language sounding like a call to arms—however figurative its use—is repugnant but also because this rhetoric clashes with the more feminine diction employed in the Bahá'í writings that speaks of birth, nurturing, gentility, mothering, and care—diction that feels more appropriate to the purposes of religion. Others reject it because it reflects a mentality associated with religious fundamentalism or is felt as a strident call to engage in a vigorous campaign of evangelization. Even for some sophisticated readers who are capable of making creative interpretations of the metaphorical uses of language, the military metaphor remains problematic. Despite the antimilitaristic stance that is clearly stated in Bahá'í scripture, the military metaphor is being met with some unfavorable reactions that range from passive neutrality, to discomfort and/or open rejection. Whatever the analytical niceties, militaristic language *sounds like* a glorification of war.

Dealing with Dissonance

Militaristic language may consequently produce a crisis of feeling in some readers. However, the tenor of this chapter contends that this crisis (should it exist) be remedied by a more detached effort to understand the deeper purposes of such discourse. Scripture, or its associated expressions in the official language of Bahá'í institutions, sometimes occasions a mental or moral test in which the believer's understanding, subjective taste, or moral criteria collide with the letter and/or spirit of such language. This observation does not deny anyone the right to his or her subjective emotional reaction or personal taste. But, as Bahá'u'lláh indicates in the *Book of Certitude*, His preeminent doctrinal work, such crises are tests of understanding, one of the several functions of the Word of God in every religious dispensation. This quotation is perhaps relevant to apply to the present topic:

Know verily that the purpose underlying all these symbolic terms and abstruse allusions, which emanate from the Revealers of God's

holy Cause, hath been to test and prove the peoples of the world; that thereby the earth of the pure and illuminated hearts may be known from the perishable and barren soil. From time immemorial such hath been the way of God amidst His creatures, and to this testify the records of the sacred books.²

Scriptural language that disturbs the reader calls for a state of openness that invites deeper reflection, during which the text is allowed to speak to the heart and mind without prejudice. This conscious attempt to set aside one's preconditioned, personal response and to "see" or "hear," i.e., understand these texts in a fresh way, allows the reader to gain new insights based on a more reflective, empathetic mode of understanding. A reader cannot be faithful to the spirit of the Bahá'í writings if he or she accepts only those passages that inspire the spirit, refine the mind, or elicit assent, while rejecting those verses that disturb or produce "cognitive dissonance." Since scripture is revealed as a unified, integral whole, it must be taken as such.

Close reading calls for fuller reflection on such texts to better understand their nature and purposes. Dissonance-producing passages require a particular and demanding sort of reader response: that of seeing with the eyes of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, or Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'u'lláh has written, "If it be your wish, O people, to know God and to discover the greatness of His might, look, then, upon Me with Mine own eyes, and not with the eyes of any one besides Me."³ Such an effort requires the adoption of a psychological attitude and intellectual understanding that empathizes with the point of view of the Authors of the Bahá'í Revelation. A deeper appreciation of the dynamics of language, any virtues associated with the military life, and a conscientious attempt to apprehend the Authors' intent helps to dispel the literalist interpretation and the undifferentiated, negative emotional response.

Some Spiritual and Rhetorical Purposes of Militaristic Diction

Negative reactions to the military metaphor are largely subjective, i.e., based on personal taste. Now, questions of personal taste are notoriously difficult to arbitrate. The respected scholar and literary critic Harold Bloom has correctly pointed out that personal taste—actually, he refers to "literary taste" and "spiritual discernment"—is "notoriously disputable."⁴ Wisdom is justified by the Latin expression *De Gustibus non est disputandum*, which has been taken over in a direct translation by the Germans as *Über Geschmackssachen streiten wir nicht* ("Let us not argue over questions of taste"). Nevertheless, reasons are being offered here that intend to justify a closer reading of the military metaphor.

At the outset, the following observations are intended to validate the wisdom contained in such discourse. In the Bahá'í sacred writings, militaristic language generally serves a six-fold purpose:

1. To remember and honor the hero-martyrs of the Heroic Age of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith;
2. To promote the spirit of courage and sacrifice in Bahá'í service;
3. To counter the warlike mentality—a case of fighting fire with fire. As a technique of catharsis, bellicose diction is turned on its head and is used paradoxically. The Bahá'í writings paradoxically employ militaristic diction and identify with certain of its psychological features to pacify the warlike spirit;
4. To signify the presence of divine confirmations, militaristic language is employed symbolically. This presence is based on a belief in the biblical “hosts of heaven” which are, at origin, military figures. The Bahá'í counterpart to the heavenly host is the celestial assembly of the “concourse on high”;
5. To infer—despite the abuses, extremes, and horrors of actual warfare—that a nexus of “military virtues” exists that is worth preserving and emulating; and
6. To call readers to service in action.

Further to the third purpose above, the psychological effect of catharsis (*Gk.* purification) occurs by the homeopathic “law of similars” when the military turn of phrase is heard or read scripturally. In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the notion of catharsis consisted of a purging action that calmed and cleansed, especially the emotions of pity and fear, as evoked by Greek drama.⁵ Interpreting Aristotle’s *Poetics*, S. H. Butcher wrote that catharsis could “exorcise” certain emotions.⁶ In Lessing’s interpretation of Aristotle’s notion of catharsis, he concluded that “the sensations evoked by pity and fear should afterward exert a moral influence on the audience by being transformed into virtuous action.”⁷⁷

This notion can also be applied *mutatis mutandis* to the militaristic turn of phrase in scripture. It is clearly at work in the epigraph quoted at the head of this chapter. When the militant spirit is invoked, ideally, it pacifies, transforms, energizes, and anticipates the spirit of service in action. Consequently, without some deeper understanding of the metaphorical functions of language and, just as importantly, an evaluation of the positive value of certain “military virtues,” the reader risks rejecting this type of discourse as just another outdated version of Sabine Baring-Gould and Arthur J. Sullivan’s famous hymn, “Onward Christian Soldiers.”

Background in the Writings of the Three Central Figures

Military rhetoric is one of the characteristic discourse styles in the Bahá'í sacred writings. It should be noted that this language is only *one of* several types of performative discourse used in Bahá'í scripture and the writings of Shoghi Effendi. In *Dimensions in Spirituality*, I have identified militaristic language as being just one of ten symbolic modes of writing found in the Bahá'í writings. The other nine symbolic modes are: pastoral; hierarchies of the natural kingdoms; elemental; celestial; courtly; transpersonal language; kinship and association; hearth and home; and town or country life.⁸ In modern writers, the military metaphor is rare, but it still survives. For example, Marianne Williamson, a currently popular writer on spirituality, uses phraseology virtually identical to the Bahá'í writings in her book *Illuminata*: “Prayer is our way of signing up with the army of light and receiving its reinforcements on a regular basis.”⁹

Since Shoghi Effendi was the preeminent translator, editor, and authorized interpreter of Bahá'í scripture, as well as the outstanding author of the Formative Age, it is not surprising that the military metaphor should reappear in his epistolary since he would have received these figures of speech in his official capacity as custodian of the Bahá'í sacred writings. The following convenient list has been drawn up at random to indicate the presence of military diction in the Bahá'í writings. Ideally, these words and phrases need to be seen in a context that suggests their wider spiritual meaning, but here it is a question of simple sampling to indicate their presence:¹⁰ “army of light, sword, mission, crusade, legions, castles, warriors, recruits, knights, battalions, armies, strongholds, victory, triumph, watchword, hosts, vanguard, troops, standard bearers, enemies, rank upon rank, banners, stalwart warriors, legions, steeds, commander, hosts, battlefield, reinforcements, crusader, armor, shield, lance, post, fortifications.” Corresponding action words are also found: “conquer, attack, defeat, razed, vanquish, break through, rapidly marching, onward marching, win the victory.” In addition to individual substantives and verbs, other examples of metaphors and extended metaphors of this sort can be found throughout the Bahá'í writings. Some of them will be examined below.

The Inheritance of Jihad and Martyrdom in the Dispensation of the Báb
Military language in the dispensation of the Báb (1844–1863) was not a matter of mere rhetoric. It derived from His theological vision of the Godhead and was in fact part of a larger defensive strategy employed to ensure the very survival of the Bábí Faith. For the Báb, Almighty God is the supreme triumphant One,

“Say, God hath undisputed triumph over every victorious one. There is no one in heaven or earth or in whatever lieth between them who can frustrate the transcendent supremacy of His triumph.”¹¹ Jihad (lit. struggle or fight), which is known in most Western languages as holy war, was one of the salient practices of Islam that appears to have been sanctioned by the Báb but later outlawed by Bahá’u’lláh. However, Nader Saeidi has conclusively demonstrated in *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Báb* that a careful analysis of the Báb’s texts on jihad shows that the conditions that He imposed for the conduct of holy war rendered it in fact virtually impossible to execute. During His lifetime the Báb personally never sanctioned offensive war.¹²

The Shiah clerics condemned the Báb as an imposter and heretic, a crime punishable by death in Islam. With their sanction, the eager complicity of the State, and the willing participation of an unrestrained, fanatical populace, the three estates determined to eradicate the vulnerable Bábí community. In an orgy of violence, the proscribed sect was set upon. In “*an avalanche of calamities*,”¹³ more than 20,000 Bábís were martyred, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reckoning,¹⁴ a number that Shoghi Effendi has repeated.¹⁵ Thus, Mullah Husayn’s command to the faithful, uttered in the thick of battle at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí, “Mount your steeds, O heroes of God,”¹⁶ originally had a literal meaning that originated in a historical context in which these first believers fought a defensive war in order to vindicate the truth of the Báb’s claim. Any military rhetoric in the Bahá’í writings is an inheritance from Islam and echoes the early struggles of the Bábí religion. The seed of military language was consequently planted in the Báb’s writings within the earliest stage of the Heroic Age and has become embedded in Bahá’í scripture. In the Formative Age (1921–), Shoghi Effendi was to put the power of this language to more contemporary use in the pressing needs of the Divine Plan.

It would appear, however, that in using militant language the Báb had other purposes in mind than the defense of His Faith and the survival of the community. The Bábí martyrs and subsequent martyrs adhering to the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh offered themselves up as a proof that the Revelation of both Prophets was true. Bahá’u’lláh’s following commentaries take this view:

No land remained which did not drink the blood of these embodiments of detachment, and no sword that did not bruise their necks. Their deeds, alone, testify to the truth of their words. Doth not the testimony of these holy souls, who have so gloriously risen to offer up their lives for their Beloved that the whole world marvelled at the manner of their sacrifice, suffice the people of this day?¹⁷

If these companions, with all their marvelous testimonies and wondrous works, be false, who then is worthy to claim for himself the truth? I swear by God! Their very deeds are a sufficient testimony, and an irrefutable proof unto all the peoples of the earth, were men to ponder in their hearts the mysteries of Divine Revelation.¹⁸

These passages should invoke a more detached reflection on the remarkable phenomenon of martyrdom itself, which is so emotionally fraught, particularly for Westerners who generally consider it to be a rebarbative and incomprehensible phenomenon. Bahá'u'lláh challenges His readers to transcend the horrors associated with the scenes of carnage in nineteenth-century Persia and to reflect instead upon the detachment and steadfastness of these remarkable souls who displayed such a rare combination of meekness, purity, and gentility, along with a redoubtable courage and fierce heroism that stood in stark contrast to the barbaric treatment, cowardly behavior and treacherous conduct meted out by their persecutors.

The rule of the sword was abolished by Bahá'u'lláh at the Ridván event in 1863. In a number of later tablets, He explicitly forbade engaging in militaristic jihad, so-called holy war.¹⁹ Among them is the *Tablet of Bishárát* following the revelation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* in 1873. In the first Glad-Tiding (*Bishárát*) Bahá'u'lláh declares that “the law of holy war hath been blotted out from the Book.”²⁰ However, when it is a question of denying one’s faith to save one’s life, the law of God prescribes that “[i]t is better for you to be killed than to kill.”²¹ It can be understood from this discussion that military language, while it is much older than the Bábí-Bahá'í dispensations, inherits directly from the heroic struggles and spirit of martyrdom, the remarkable courage and tenacity shown by those who willingly chose to make the sacrifice of their own lives. Militancy of faith, in this sense, has a legitimate meaning that is never outmoded.

Bahá'u'lláh as the Lord of Hosts

One of Bahá'u'lláh's messianic titles is “Lord of Hosts”²² (Ar. *Rabbu'l-Junúd*) (Heb. *Yahweh Seba'ot*, lit. “Jehovah of armies”). This title is used frequently in the Hebrew Bible to designate God and His chosen people who have been consecrated to fight against the heathen. A cursory review of Bahá'u'lláh's writings indicates that His preferred loan word from military parlance is the ancient word *hosts* (KJV), which appears frequently in His tablets. The word *hosts* is a frequent occurrence in the Torah, designating both the battle-ready Israelite soldier and the guardian angel.²³ In the Fourth *Ishráq* it is written, “In

this Revelation the hosts that can render it [His Faith] victorious are the hosts of praiseworthy deeds and upright character. The leader and commander of these hosts hath ever been the fear of God, a fear that encompasseth all things and reigneth over all things.”²⁴ Here, military strength and power have been converted into the “hosts” of moral authority.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s “Army of Light”: The Teacher as Valiant Warrior

‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the source of the familiar phrase “the army of light,” which is also employed by both Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, “In every case the army of light vanquished the powers of darkness on the battlefield of the world, and the radiance of the Divine Teaching illumined the earth.”²⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also used the ancient image of the believer as a conquering soldier when in *The Tablets of the Divine Plan*, He summoned the Western Bahá’ís to accomplish a “world mission”²⁶ in a global expansion of the Bahá’í religion. In the third of four general tablets to the Bahá’ís of North America (19, 20, 22 April 1916), while being exposed to the extreme duress of Jamál Páshá’s tyrannical regime, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote:

These souls are the armies of God and the conquerors of the East and the West. Should one of them turn his face toward some direction and summon the people to the Kingdom of God, all the ideal forces and lordly confirmations will rush to his support and reinforcement. He will behold all the doors open and all the strong fortifications and impregnable castles razed to the ground. Singly and alone he will attack the armies of the world, defeat the right and left wings of the hosts of all the countries, break through the lines of the legions of all nations and carry his attack to the very center of the powers of the earth. This is the meaning of the Hosts of God.²⁷

This is a prototypical example of the triumphant military rhetoric that was later used by Shoghi Effendi. In ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s rousing call to action, teaching the Bahá’í Faith is viewed as a battle or a contest to be waged by the believers who are charged with a divine mission. As is typical of any militaristic discourse, the menacing presence of the enemy is necessary, the adversary that is hostile to the divine purpose. This enemy is “the armies of the world,” which can be understood as the masses of unbelieving peoples and/or the materialistic, secular forces that drive entire societies or the obsolete political systems that govern them. Above all, this text affirms one of the fundamental purposes of military rhetoric: to convey the unconditional promise that any believer who works for the execution of the Divine Plan will receive unflinching divine assistance.

The editors of *Star of the West*, in an article entitled, “Join the Army of Peace,” quoted these words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

O ye My soldiers of the Kingdom! Be ye valiant and fearless! Day by day add to your spiritual victories. Be ye not disturbed by the constant assaults of the enemies. Attack ye like unto roaring lions. Have no thought for yourselves, for the invisible armies of the Kingdom are fighting on your side. Enter ye the battlefield with the Confirmations of the Holy Spirit. Know ye of a certainty that the powers of the Kingdom of Abhá are with you. The hosts of the heaven of Truth are with you. The cool breezes of the Paradise of Abhá are wafting over your heated brows. Not for a moment are ye alone. Not for a second are ye left to yourselves. The beauty of Abhá is with you. The Glorious God is with you. The King of Kings is with you.²⁸

It is not the fearless teacher being addressed here, but the one who is disheartened by the daunting proportions of the divine mission. The soldier being addressed in this passage is not the conquering hero, for the battle has just begun and the victory has not yet been won. A textual parallel from the Hebrew Bible that conveys the same spirit of solicitude are the words of Jahaziel, son of Zechariah, to the assembled inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem and their king Jehoshaphat, as they prepared to battle the Moabites and Ammonites, “Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God’s” (II Chron. 20:15). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words are both exhortation and promise. They promise uninterrupted divine assistance. But the triumphant language is softened by the affirmation that “[t]he cool breezes of the Paradise of Abhá are wafting over your heated brows.” The closing lines evince a solicitous concern for the loneliness of the solitary soldier. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recognizes that the divine combatant sometimes feels comfortless in his struggles, and He offers this consolation—“Not for a moment are ye alone.”

The Military Virtues

The Knight of Faith in Shoghi Effendi’s Writings

With this background in mind, let us now turn to the writings of Shoghi Effendi. The penultimate 1956 *Ridván Message*²⁹ to the Bahá’í world contains an extended metaphor that is key to understanding the Guardian’s view of spirituality as active service to the Bahá’í Faith. The metaphor of the “knight

of faith” has a textual parallel in the writings of St. Paul. It was also employed by the founder of modern existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), to refer to the Prophet Abraham as he faced the great test of being required by God to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac (Gen. 22:1–19).³⁰ In 1957, four years into the great World Crusade (1953–1963), Shoghi Effendi wrote the following passage that combines all at once military and noble/heroic motifs:

*Putting on the armour of His love, firmly buckling on the shield of His mighty Covenant, mounted on the steed of steadfastness, holding aloft the lance of the Word of the Lord of Hosts, and with unquestioning reliance on His promises as the best provision for their journey, let them set their faces towards those fields that still remain unexplored and direct their steps toward those goals that are as yet unattained, assured that He who has led them to achieve such triumphs, and to store up such prizes in His Kingdom, will continue to assist them in enriching their spiritual birthright to such a degree that no finite mind can imagine or human heart perceive.*³¹

The Guardian has based his stirring exhortation on the image of the medieval knight who is setting out on a holy crusade. However, the knight’s battle garb has been entirely transformed into the dress of the pilgrim or spiritual crusader. His armor becomes God’s love. His shield is the covenant of God’s Word and the crusader’s promise of protection. His steed is steadfastness. His lance is the cutting edge of Truth. His hope for a safe journey is faith in the promises of God. However, the knight of faith is more than just the pilgrim or the militant crusader in this rendering. He is also the adventurous *voyageur* or daring pioneer, setting off for unexplored lands to lay the foundations of the new spiritual civilization of tomorrow. The scene seems to come alive as the knight performs a sequence of actions in preparation for his departure: he puts on his armor; buckles his shield; mounts his horse; raises the lance and sets out. All these actions, each of which has symbolic import, are done in preparation for the journey. The mood is one of consecration, dedication, and singular purpose.

The textual parallel is St. Paul’s passage in Ephesians 6 about putting on “the whole armour of God” (v. 13). As previously noted, the Guardian was “a great reader of the King James version of the Bible,” which he used as a model for the English translations of the Bahá’í sacred writings.³² In his period study, *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford*, Riaz Khadem cites the testimony of J. C. Hill, a fellow Oxonian “who knew him well” and who spent Michaelmas of 1921 with Shoghi Effendi at Balliol College. Hill said that “[h]e read the whole of

the Bible from cover to cover in about a week.”³³ Another fellow student, Adrian Franklin, corrected an “anecdote” that circulated at Balliol about the Guardian when he first arrived in Oxford that “he had never heard of the Jewish/Christian bible, but when told of it, read it Genesis to the end of the New Testament in about a week.” Franklin further related to Riaz Khadem, “I believed this at the time—I was only just 18—but on reflection now I see the story must have been rubbish.”³⁴ As a student in Haifa at the Collège des Frères, a place where he was not happy,³⁵ Shoghi Effendi “was exposed to the Bible at the Jesuit school” and “had taken four formal courses on the Bible during his freshman and sophomore years at the American University of Beirut.”³⁶ The biblical flavor of the allusion to the knight of faith in the 1956 Ridván Message becomes sharper when we read it in light of St. Paul’s text:

Therefore, take the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:13–17).

Elsewhere in *Messages to the Bahá’í World, 1950-1957*, our author echoes the language of the three Central Figures when he writes this strong exhortation: “*The Lord of Hosts, the King of Kings, has pledged unfailing support to every crusader battling for His Cause. Invisible battalions are mustered, rank upon rank, ready to pour forth reinforcements from on High.*”³⁷ This one example, although brief, contains a series of military metaphors in a compact space. The sentence begins with the prototypical biblical phrase “*The Lord of Hosts,*” uses covenantal language in the word “*pledged,*” contains a historical allusion to soldiers of the cross “*every crusader,*” and promises the assistance of the company of angels, the “*invisible battalions.*” Should he become weak or weary, the embattled soldier will be vouchsafed “*reinforcements*” from on high, symbolizing a renewal of strength.

“The Knight of Bahá’u’lláh”: An Order of Spiritual Aristocracy

Shoghi Effendi’s allusion to the knight of faith brings to mind a title that he did make explicit—the Knight of Bahá’u’lláh. Granting of spiritual titles to distinguished believers was common during the ministries of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Shoghi Effendi, with few exceptions, was not inclined to

bestow titles. One title that he did grant was “*Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*” as a reward for those women or men who first opened up “*virgin territories*” during the Ten Year World Crusade/Plan (1953–1963). The title was awarded to those who rendered exemplary service in the pioneering field. What does it suggest? The person of the knight is, of course, historically based. But while the title may seem to come in the guise of spiritual romance, a stylistic feature of Shoghi Effendi’s writing that was examined in chapter 8, “Style and Pattern,” the title is far from being quixotic. For anyone familiar with their stories, the Knights of Bahá’u’lláh did, in fact, have to face some harsh “battles” in their far-flung pioneering posts. So while the title may sound romantic, there was nothing romantic in *being* a Knight of Bahá’u’lláh. Moreover, the comparison to the real knight of the Middle Ages will bring us quickly down to earth. Historians have suggested, for example, that the average well-educated citizen of today has far better manners than the knight of old, who might have sold his own daughter for financial gain, a common practice of the day, or knocked his wife senseless for speaking disrespectfully to him.³⁸ Needless to say, such a brute is not the sort of knight that Shoghi Effendi had in mind.

A knight is an aristocrat. Aristocracy is one of the defining, permanent features of the Bahá’í Administrative Order.³⁹ But the title Knight of Bahá’u’lláh refers to the creation of an ad hoc order of spiritual aristocracy. With the death of the last Knight of Bahá’u’lláh, the order will die, although it will live on in the annals of Bahá’í history and in the memories of present and future generations. What else does the title suggest? The knight’s code of honor, which was observed during “the golden age of knighthood” in the early thirteenth century, reduced to its fundamental virtues, exacted fearlessness, courtesy, truthfulness, loyalty, defense of the Holy Faith, and defense of the weak, the innocent, and the oppressed. (The reality was often something quite different as we have seen above.) By virtue of the spiritual code by which she or he lived, Knights of Bahá’u’lláh proved themselves to be adventurous and courageous, to be willing to endure loneliness and hardship, and to be steadfast in spreading the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh in the remotest regions of the globe.

The language of spiritual aristocracy suggested by the title also implies a covenant. To expand the aristocratic analogy based on medieval society, knights were bound to their lords in a suzerain–vassal relationship by a process called manumission (handing down) or dubbing ceremonies in which the soldier was named a knight. Bahá’u’lláh has revealed that through belief in Him, His believer (vassal) enters into a covenant with his Lord. This covenant cannot be valid unless obedience to His laws is also

observed. The first paragraph of the *Aqdas* prescribes:

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth everyone who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration.⁴⁰

This prescription, while it puts the main burden of responsibility on the believer, implies a two-way covenant. Bahá'u'lláh has granted salvation; He expects obedience. The theological counterpart to the Suzerain–vassal relationship also suggests that the agreement between Bahá'u'lláh and the believers, the Suzerain and His vassals, is based, not only on the concept of obedience and loyalty but also on the bestowing of privilege or bounty, granted to the believer by Bahá'u'lláh. In medieval tenure or landholding, the vassal owed his earthly existence to his suzerain and was therefore beholden to him. The vassal was also obligated to the suzerain for the protection that the lord offered, and, in return, the vassal was expected to perform military duty. This covenantal relationship can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh and their Lord, and to every Bahá'í. Bahá'u'lláh has granted salvation and security to every loyal follower—“all good.” The service formerly owed to the medieval suzerain has been transformed into service to Him, willingly offered by His “soldiers.”

Militaristic Language as Commitment

If one looks beyond the symbolic functions of military rhetoric, the more philosophical question arises as to the meaning of such language as the expression of a mode of being. The respected Canadian literary critic, Northrop Frye (1912–1991), has identified in his influential work, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1981), “existential writing” as having descended from metonymy, the third great phase in literature.⁴¹ Frye has aptly described the existential mode of literature, both atheistic (naturalistic) and theistic (transcendental), as “an interest in the transcendental in the seabed of human concern.”⁴² Although Shoghi Effendi’s writings clearly do not fall within the genre of existentialist writing, still one can retain from Frye’s definition the word *concern* as an accurate

descriptor of the spirit motivating the Guardian's writings. As a literature of profound spiritual concern, a literature that is *engagé* (engaged/committed), another existential characteristic, the Guardian's writings aspire to transform not just to describe the world. He *is* concerned with being, not as a philosophical speculator, a role to which he was personally averse, but rather as an inspired and engaged spiritual author and guide, whose writings served to direct the world community of which he was the head, one who anchored his perspective in resolving the social, historical, and spiritual crises of modern civilization in light of the remedies offered by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

In a wider perspective, the military metaphor belongs to the nature and function of the religious symbol. Historian and phenomenologist of religion Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) outlined six functions of religious symbolism,⁴³ as “the existential value of religious symbolism.”⁴⁴ Eliade referred to “the fact that a symbol always aims at *a reality or a situation in which human existence is engaged*.”⁴⁵ Here Eliade has expressed what other great thinkers, such as Carl Jung or Paul Tillich, have said in other words, something that the ordinary individual knows through everyday experience. Symbols are not just passive concepts that motivate us psychologically; they participate in and actively transform spiritual life. Eliade wrote:

It is above all this existential dimension that marks off and distinguishes symbols from concepts. Symbols still keep their contact with the profound sources of life; they express, one might say, the “spiritual [realm] as lived” (*le spirituel vécu*). This is why symbols, have, as it were, a “numinous aura”; they reveal that the modalities of the spirit are at the same time manifestations of life, and, consequently, they directly engage human existence.⁴⁶

Other Military Virtues

It can be said, consequently, that the committed, disciplined, or engaged outlook that is expressed by the military metaphor corresponds to one of the “modalities of the spirit” to which Eliade refers. This point has been made in moral-psychological terms by William James (1842–1910), the eminent American psychologist and philosopher of religion. In his essay, “The Moral Equivalent of War,” the author of the famous classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience* put himself “squarely into the anti-militarist party.”⁴⁷ James wrote that he looked forward “to a future when acts of war shall be formally outlawed as between civilized peoples.”⁴⁸ However, in a subsequent section of the same paper, “The Value of the Military Virtues,” James made the following

points that are closely allied with the thrust of this chapter. He argued that what he called “the martial virtues” have much to do, not only with the benefits of a disciplined lifestyle but also with the governance of human society itself:

But I do not believe that peace either ought to be or will be permanent on this globe, unless the states pacifically organized preserve some of the old elements of army discipline. A permanently successful peace-economy cannot be a simple pleasure-economy. In the more or less socialistic future towards which mankind seems drifting, we must still subject ourselves collectively to those severities which answer to our real position upon this only partly hospitable globe. We must make new energies and hardihoods continue the manliness to which the military mind so faithfully clings. Martial virtues must be the enduring cement; intrepidity, contempt of softness, surrender of private interest, obedience to command, must still remain the rock upon which states are built. . . .⁴⁹

James went on to argue that “on the ruins of the old morals of military honor, a stable system of morals of civic honor builds itself up.”⁵⁰ Martial values must lead to constructive civic enterprises and to the formation of a hardy character that can be produced without the catastrophe of war. James decries the fearmongering and enemy-making upon which the military mindset must be based in order to produce the desired result. But “Fear,” he rightly maintains, “is not the only stimulus known for awakening the higher ranges of men’s spiritual energy.”⁵¹ Building on the thoughts of H. G. Wells (another writer whom Shoghi Effendi had read), James wrote:

H. G. Wells adds that he thinks that the conceptions of order and discipline, the tradition of service and devotion, of physical fitness, unstinted exertion, and universal responsibility, which universal military duty is now teaching European nations, will remain a permanent acquisition, when the last ammunition has been used in the fireworks that celebrate the final peace.⁵²

War, for all its cruelty, horror, and tragedy, calls forth heroic qualities. The renowned twentieth-century historian, Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975), who predicted that the Bahá’í Faith may become a meaningful “portent of the future,”⁵³ drew attention to the “heroic virtues” displayed in warfare in his ten-volume *A Study of History*:

War calls forth heroic virtues akin to those which the followers of an unpopular religion are called on to display, and many preachers

of such religions has drawn upon the vocabulary furnished by the arts and implements of warfare, none more conspicuously than St. Paul. In the Jewish tradition which the Christian Church had retained as a treasured part of its own heritage, war was consecrated both in a literal and in a metaphorical sense.⁵⁴

In passing, I retain Toynbee's reference to St. Paul by way of comparison to Shoghi Effendi—I stress that the comparison is being made only in the following respect—in that both figures wrote epistles to religious communities in the early stages of development, epistles that contained strong exhortations analogous to the life of the soldier. To win the victory, the soldier was expected to demonstrate discipline, courage, valor, loyalty, sense of duty, pride, obedience, strength, and resistance. Above all, victory depended upon soldierly unity or “*esprit de corps*” (lit. spirit of body), but which is perhaps best rendered by the “spirit of solidarity” or “sense of cohesion.” The key to victory was for troops to move and to fight as one soldier. This image of soldierly solidarity is reflected in this sentence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “How good it is if the friends be as close as sheaves of light, if they stand together side by side in a firm unbroken line.”⁵⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s military analogy of Bahá’í unity as soldiers fighting in a solid line hearkens back to the most ancient traditions of discipline in warfare. The well-known sociologist of religion Max Weber (1864–1920), writing in a section called, “The Origins of Discipline in War,” refers to “an oft-quoted passage” of Homer that tells us that for Greek soldiers discipline was broken when they began to fight out of line.⁵⁶ Fighting out of line was consequently prohibited, since it was the prelude to defeat.

Media reports of World Wars I and II, and military engagements generally, often report veterans as saying that battle situations create a depth of camaraderie or brotherly solidarity that was unknown to them in civilian life. C. S. Lewis in *The Four Loves*, his remarkable *précis* on the anatomy of friendship, affection, eros, and charity (divine love), makes a passing reference to the Roman historian Tacitus who recorded that the old centurions as their legions were being disbanded were “clinging to one another and begging for last kisses.”⁵⁷ In context, Lewis is making the point that deep friendship expressed through gestures of affection is no sure indication of homosexuality.⁵⁸ However, the passage is also noteworthy for our purposes, since it indicates the deep bonds of affection created among soldiers. Thus, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reference to soldiers fighting in line is not only suggestive of unity, discipline, and single-mindedness but also points to the close ties that are created during battles or in their aftermath, here symbolizing active service to the Bahá’í

Faith. In the same essay referred to above, William James pointed out that “war has been the only force that can discipline a whole community.”⁵⁹ Order and discipline may be required for war, but they are no less indispensable for the prosecution of any stage of the Divine Plan.

The sacrifice of life is the cost of winning the battle. Since ancient times, the duty of the soldier was not just to slay but also to be slain. The soldier’s first duty was self-sacrifice. Thus warfare converges with religion and spirituality on one central theme: the sacrifice of self. Further, the soldier must be steadfast, that spiritual attribute so highly praised in Bahá’í scripture. A wounded soldier, if able, must return to the field of battle when recovered. This return of the veteran to the field speaks of the heroism of the valorous heart, the heart that will put life and limb on the line again and again.

The Divine Mission: Seizing the Hearts

Bahá’u’lláh’s mission centers in the divine right to possess hearts: “By the righteousness of God! It is not Our wish to lay hands on your kingdoms. Our mission is to seize and possess the hearts of men.”⁶⁰ Now the Bahá’í Faith, as the great religions gone before it, is a religion with a mission. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *The Tablets of the Divine Plan* (1916–1917), as quoted by Shoghi Effendi in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, wrote, “Be not concerned with the smallness of your numbers, neither be oppressed by the multitude of an unbelieving world . . . Exert yourselves; your mission is unspeakably glorious.”⁶¹ But it must also be observed that this word *mission* has been disassociated from its pejorative connotations of religious fundamentalism and aggressive proselytization. Shoghi Effendi repeatedly urged the pioneer, once landed, not to “leave his post.”⁶² This military expression appeals most strongly to the sense of duty or loyalty. He also used the term “*watchword*,”⁶³ a password for soldiers that functioned as a sign of mutual recognition. The watchword becomes a code word for unity, for by it soldiers recognize themselves as being in solidarity. The Guardian freely used such words and expressions as *missionaries*, *converts*, and *foreign mission fields*⁶⁴ in order to emphasize the goal-oriented nature of the Bahá’í teaching enterprise and to spur his readers into action. While these words and phrases are not the literal equivalents of their Christian counterparts, they still suggest a zeal or fervor in the execution of the task at hand.

Summary and Conclusion

Shoghi Effendi incorporated the military metaphor into his epistolary that he adopted and adapted from the Bahá’í sacred writings. The military metaphor

was intended to strengthen faith and to move believers to action, and served a vision of heroism or nobility, which he equated with rising to perform exemplary service. With the Báb, militaristic language was an intrinsic part of His theological vision of the Godhead, but it also served the functional purpose of ensuring the very survival of His followers and His religion. In Abrahamic religions, militaristic language had its origins in the Hebrew Bible. Bahá'u'lláh identified Himself with the biblical “Lord of Hosts” but moralized the meaning of “hosts” to refer to moral integrity and authority on the part of His followers. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in a spiritualized turn of phrase that has become reflected in institutional rhetoric, coined the phrase “the army of light,” which demilitarizes the older rhetoric and, in a new equation of power, substitutes for military might the luminosity of love, knowledge, and spirit in action.

The existential meaning of the military metaphor has a practical counterpart in spiritual life. The believer willingly “fights” or struggles to change the inward condition of the spiritual self and the outward conditions of society. This willingness to fight or struggle expresses spiritual commitment, a quality of striving, of accepting conflict and attempting to resolve it, of wrestling with a “spirituality of imperfection,”⁶⁵ and of battling with self, which according to the Bhagavad Gita and the Qur’án, is the only battle worth winning and according to a hadith of Muhammad makes the “greater *jihád*.”⁶⁶

The reflections in this chapter draw attention to one of those seeming paradoxes encountered in spiritual life. Bahá’í scripture counsels an abiding sense of contentment and gratitude for one’s lot in life and also calls upon the believer to be resigned and grateful in the midst of tests. Yet these same writings nowhere ask believers to be apathetic or complacent about the cultivation of one’s own spirituality or moral development, nor to reconcile oneself through “*apathy, timidity or complacency*” to the inhumane conditions and human savagery that have devastated the peace and security of the individual and the world. On the contrary, these conditions must be willingly fought by all means sane and spiritual:

*Once again—and this time more fervently than ever before—I direct my plea to every single member of this strenuously laboring, clear-visioned, stout-hearted, spiritually endowed community, every man and woman, on whose individual efforts, resolution, self-sacrifice and perseverance the immediate destinies of the Faith of God, now traversing so crucial a stage in its rise and establishment, primarily depends, not to allow, through apathy, timidity or complacency, this one remaining opportunity to be irretrievably lost.*⁶⁷

Endnotes

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶5.
2. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 49.
3. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 272.
4. Bloom makes this comment in his essay, “St. Paul,” in *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds*, p. 133.
5. Aristotle’s reference to catharsis or purgation occurs in Book 6, “The Definition of Tragedy”: “. . . it relies in its various elements not on narrative but on acting; through pity and fear it achieves the purgation (catharsis) of such emotions” [1449b] (*Aristotle: On Poetry and Style*, p. 12).
6. Quoted by Clifford Leech in *Tragedy: The Critical Idiom*, p. 47. From Butcher’s *Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Arts*, pp. 248–49. No other publication data are given by Leech.
7. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. “Lessing.”
8. McLean, *Dimensions in Spirituality*, pp. 207–8.
9. Marianne Williamson, *Illuminata: Thoughts, Prayers, Rites of Passage*, p. 188.
10. For brevity’s sake, these examples are listed without reference to source.
11. The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 164.
12. For the full discussion, see Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, pp. 357–68.
13. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 36.
14. In *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “In order to ensure the progress of mankind and to establish these principles Bahá’u’lláh suffered every ordeal and difficulty. The Báb became a martyr, and over twenty thousand men and women sacrificed their lives for their faith” (p. 125).
15. In his “Retrospect and Prospect” in *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi, referring to the remarkable transformation of the Bahá’í Faith from an obscure Muhammadan sect into a world religion, wrote that it was “consecrated by the sacrifice of no less than twenty thousand martyrs. . .” (p. 402).
16. Shoghi Effendi tells us that on this particular charge, Mullah Hussayn, led by Quddús and 202 Bábís and shouting “Yá Sáhibu’z-Zamán,” penetrated as far as the private apartments of the prince, who escaped from a back window into the moat and ran away barefooted (*God Passes By*, p. 40).
17. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 224.
18. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 182.
19. Several tablets of Ridván are known to exist, although their exact number and details of their various dates remain to be determined. The most well-known tablet is reproduced in *Gleanings XIV*, “The Divine Springtime is come. . .” (pp. 27–35).
20. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 21.
21. In the *Súriy-i-Haykal* (Súrih of the Temple), in the tablet to Násiri’ d-Dín Sháh, Bahá’u’lláh wrote, “Sedition hath never been pleasing unto God, nor were the acts committed in the past by certain foolish ones acceptable in His sight. Know ye that to be killed in the

- path of His good pleasure is better for you than to kill.” This injunction is sometimes shortened to “It is better to be killed than to kill” (*The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 110).
22. Shoghi Effendi has interpreted this title as belonging to Bahá’u’lláh: “To Israel He was neither more nor less than the incarnation of the “Everlasting Father,” the “Lord of Hosts” come down “with ten thousands of saints. . .”” (*God Passes By*, p. 94).
 23. Angels appear in the writings of both pre-exilic and post-exilic Judaism as divine messengers of Yahweh, but they spring into much greater numbers in post-exilic Judaism in the writings of Ezekiel and Zachariah, culminating in the hierarchy of angels depicted in the Book of Daniel and the apocryphal Books of Enoch, which form part of the Pseudepigrapha. In addition to the Books of Enoch, these books are the Books of Baruch, the Assumption of Moses, and the Psalms of Solomon. Their designation as Pseudepigrapha indicates that the books were written under pseudonyms to give them enhanced authority and credibility. It is likely that Jewish angelology was strongly influenced by contact with the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism during the Exile.
 24. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 126.
 25. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911–1912*, pp. 102–3.
 26. The expression “world mission” is Shoghi Effendi’s in *God Passes By*, pp. 305, 406.
 27. *Tablets of the Divine Plan, Revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the North American Bahá’ís during 1916 and 1917*, p. 17.
 28. Words attributed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *Star of the West* 13.5 (August 1922): 113.
 29. Rúhíyyih Khánúm states in *The Priceless Pearl* that this passage was contained in the “last Ridván Message to the Bahá’í World” (p. 200), but Shoghi Effendi penned his last Ridván Message (April 1957) in the final year of his life. See *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, pp. 102–20.
 30. The expression “the knight of faith” is used throughout Kierkegaard’s Problem 2 of “Fear and Trembling” in *Fear and Trembling and the Sickness unto Death*. The “distress and dread in the paradox of faith” faced by Abraham is discussed on pp. 81–91.
 31. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, p. 102.
 32. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 37.
 33. Riaz Khadem, *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford*, p. 129.
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. Dr. Habíb Mo’ayyid, “assigned by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to look after Shoghi Effendi,” stated in an interview with Khadem in 1970 that the Guardian was not happy in this school (p. 2).
 36. Khadem, *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford*, p. 129.
 37. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, p. 44.
 38. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed., s.v. “Knighthood and Chivalry.” This negative view of the knight has been eliminated in the 15th edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.
 39. In his comparison of the Bahá’í Administrative Order with other forms of administration, Shoghi Effendi mentions four types of government, three of them secular (democracy, autocracy, and aristocracy) and one divine (theocracy): “*It incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, is devoid of the defects which each of them inherently possesses, and blends the salutary truths which each undoubtedly contains without vitiating in any*

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way the integrity of the Divine verities on which it is essentially founded” (*God Passes By*, p. 326). The aristocratic element includes the Afnán, the descendants of the Báb, and the Aghsans, the descendants of Bahá’u’lláh, who are named specifically in the *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*; the Hands of the Cause; and the line of Guardians. The aristocratic element would have come through bloodline in the case of the Guardians, the Afnán, and the Aghsans, but the spiritual aristocracy of the Hands of the Cause was by appointment, which departs from bloodline. The line of Guardians, an inherited office, can be viewed as a type of monarchy that is the fountainhead of the aristocratic element.

40. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶1, p. 19.
41. The other two are revelation (which produced kerygma) and metaphor (which produced poetic or literary writing).
42. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 25.
43. Mircea Eliade, “Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism” in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
45. *Ibid.* Italics in original.
46. *Ibid.*
47. From *Memories and Studies*, chapter 11, pp. 286–95.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Quoted in Ross Earle Hoople, preface, *Philosophy: A Book of Readings*, p. 291.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 292.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 294.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Toynbee wrote, “At the same time, when I find myself in Chicago and when, travelling northwards out of the city, I pass the Bahá’í temple there, I feel that in some sense this beautiful building may be a portent of the future” (*Christianity Among the Religions of the World*, p. 104).
54. From D. C. Somervell’s two-volume abridgement. The quotation above is from volume 2 (which abridges Toynbee’s volumes 7–10), p. 66.
55. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 76.
56. Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*, p. 31.
57. Lewis paraphrasing Tacitus in *The Four Loves*, p. 60.
58. “Kisses, tears and embraces are not in themselves evidence of homosexuality” (p. 59).
59. “The Moral Equivalent of War,” quoted in *Preface to Philosophy*, p. 293.
60. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶83, p. 49.
61. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 62.
62. “No pioneer should leave his post unless there is some very urgent reason and then only after consultation with the appropriate committee or National Assembly. If it is found someone must leave their post because of very urgent matters, then the National Assembly should arrange to replace the pioneer before the pioneer leaves. The Guardian urges that you pay the very closest attention possible to this important matter, so that the development of the Faith in these virgin areas may move along in an orderly manner, and produce great results” (Shoghi Effendi through his secretary, *Messages to Canada*, p. 43). This letter is dated 6 May 1954 in the 1965 edition, but in the 1999 edition, an entirely different letter dated 6 May 1954 is found on p. 197. The May 6th letter in the 1965 edition does not appear in the revised 1999 edition.

A Celestial Burning

63. See Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 42, 157; *Messages to America*, p. 28; *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 36.
64. Quoted in Rúhíyyih Rabanní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 198.
65. From the title of the book of the same name. *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Modern Wisdom from Classic Stories*, in realistic fashion, seeks to relate “the continuing story of a spirituality that speaks to both the inevitability of pain and the possibility of healing *within* the pain. . . . The spirituality of imperfection speaks to those who seek meaning in the absurd, peace within the chaos, light within the darkness, joy within the suffering—without denying the reality and even the necessity of absurdity, chaos, darkness and suffering” (Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, pp. 2–3).
66. Seyyed Hossein Nasr in his chapter, “The Spiritual Significance of *Jihád*,” quotes this hadith of the Prophet following one of the battles, “You have returned from the lesser *jihád* to the greater *jihád*.” Nasr writes, “Inner *jihád* or warfare, seen spiritually and esoterically, can be considered therefore as at once the key to the understanding of the whole spiritual process and the path to the realization of the One that lies at the heart of the total Islamic message” (*Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, pp. 27, 33).
67. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 157.

10

RHETORIC: THE LANGUAGE OF PERSUASION

The Rhetorical Use of Language

Rhetoric is an inescapable, pervasive feature of Shoghi Effendi's use of language. The Guardian's use of rhetoric reflects certain classical elements of the ancient art, but it also manifests several particular features that are uniquely his own. Both aspects are considered below. Following the correlative method used throughout this book, references to Aristotle's principles on rhetoric and other authors are meant to provide the reader with a larger framework that will elucidate Shoghi Effendi's skill as a rhetorician. Although rhetoric is not philosophy, for Aristotle, whose *On Rhetoric* (322–320 BCE) laid the foundation for all subsequent discussion, it was the counterpart of *Dialektiké*,¹ a conversational form of Plato's conclusive argument by question and answer, and thus could be treated systematically. Aristotle's understanding of rhetoric also had an ethical component that related it to "politics."² As we shall see below, the ethical component of the Guardian's rhetoric was also strong.

Rhetoric has two functions intended to operate as one. The first is to persuade, a goal that is attained by eristic (disputation/polemic) rather than deductive logic. Aristotle was wary of eristics because disputation was based on the semi-logical rhetorical syllogisms of emotional oratory. In his view, these syllogisms could mislead, since they were weaker than the formal logical demonstration of first premises and conclusions [*On Rhetoric*, 1354a3–5].³ While persuasion is clearly the main goal of rhetoric, Aristotle made the following fine distinction between rhetoric and dialectic. Rhetoric, he wrote, is a faculty or power [*dynamis*] whose goal "is not to persuade but to see the available means of persuasion in each case" [1355a14].⁴ The great philosopher is really saying that the purpose of rhetoric is to support the logical argument.

The second function of rhetoric is to persuade the listener to adopt a viewpoint and to move him/her to action. Thus, rhetoric may be defined simply as speech that is intended to persuade and to move the listener to action. This definition perfectly suits Shoghi Effendi's use of rhetoric.

The Need for Conformity of Word to Deed

Outside the academy, a pejorative meaning is now associated with rhetoric, just as it had been for Plato in the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus Dialogues*.⁵ This modern meaning departs from one of the ideal, foundational principles of *On Rhetoric* (1:2), an ethical consistency between speaker and speech, between word and deed. To be truly convincing, Aristotle taught, the great orator must be of reputable character (*éthos*).⁶ Present-day references to “rhetoric” have the connotations, at best, of ineffectual good will on the part of the rhetor, or at worst, insincerity, dishonesty, or hypocrisy. Rhetoric today is often viewed as being deceptive and self-serving. Today’s most visible orators, the politicians, with their ever-ready team of “spin doctors,” are perceived, according to one commentator, as making nothing more than “purple patches,” the “verbal smoke-screen,” and “sound and fury signifying nothing.”⁷ This is a clear indication of the wide gap that now exists between credibility of character and the spoken word. It seems likely, however, that during the Bahá’í dispensation the study and practice of the art of rhetoric will be revived along spiritual and ethical lines in the promotion of truth.

Shoghi Effendi’s Formal Study of Rhetoric

Aristotle points out in *On Rhetoric* that no special training is required to become an effective rhetor. Individuals can learn to use rhetoric effectively by intuitive means. In addition to his natural ability, Shoghi Effendi did in fact study rhetoric over three semesters during a two-year period (1915-17) at the Syrian Protestant College, later the American University of Beirut. During the first and second semesters of his junior year, 1915-16, rhetoric was included on Shoghi Effendi’s syllabus and again during the first semester of his senior year, 1916–17.⁸ His native ability coupled with three semesters of courses help to explain the Guardian’s cognizance and effective use of some of the classical elements of this ancient art.

The written recollections of the Guardian’s school friend, ‘Alí Yazdí, who visited Shoghi Effendi at Oxford, 4–5 November 1920, and who “stayed in Shoghi Effendi’s room for a couple of nights,”⁹ indicate the Guardian’s keen interest in college debates. Yazdí recalls the young Shoghi Effendi’s lively interest in the debating societies at Balliol College during the Michaelmas term¹⁰ of that same year:

He was intensely interested in the outstanding speakers at Oxford and especially those in Oxford Union,¹¹ where the great statesmen had received their training. He wanted me to attend the debates with him

and to hear the address by [James] Bryce. He hoped we could discuss the talks together. After my visit I received a card from him dated 6 November 1920, which bore the crest of the Oxford Union Society.¹²

Shoghi Effendi's card to his childhood friend 'Alí Yazdí reflects not only his disappointment at his missing the debate—Yazdí had to return to London en route to the United States—but also Shoghi Effendi's keen interest in the Oxford Union proceedings: "*Dear 'Alí: I have received your card, and I knew well that it would be difficult for you to come here again. I did miss you profoundly last night and the night before, particularly as I firmly anticipated that we would both enjoy and comment upon the procedures of the debate and lecture.*"¹³ This passage also conveys something of the Guardian's tender affection for his old friend and his spirit of enthusiasm and love of learning, which have been mentioned by Rúhíyyih Rabbání in her biography, qualities that began when he was still a schoolboy living in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's home in Haifa.¹⁴ Riaz Khadem also reports from a letter by William Elliot, a fellow Oxonian, that the Guardian presented a paper to The Lotus Club, which, Elliot wrote, "was the outstanding club, I think, for intellectual discussions and dialogue. . . . The Lotus Club appreciated the qualities of Rabbani."¹⁵ Shoghi Effendi's use of rhetoric was grounded, consequently, not only in his own writing ability but also in his formal studies and life experience at the Syrian Protestant College and later at Oxford.

Rhetorical Criticism and Shoghi Effendi's Epistolary

Bret Breneman's 1991 article "Socrates'/Plato's Use of Rhetoric: A Bahá'í Perspective"¹⁶ offers a revised understanding of rhetoric that would make it more consonant with the aims and purposes promoted by the Bahá'í teachings. Breneman critiques the eristical and logocentric aspects of classical rhetoric to suggest more congenial, less confrontational or argumentative forms of rhetoric that would resemble consultation, create unity, and carry the weight of *éthos* (character). By these means, the speaker would persuade, not by words alone but also by force of moral integrity. However, Breneman's argument, while it speaks well to a much needed humanizing rhetoric of courtesy, veracity, and ethical credibility in our own time, would have a certain limiting effect if applied pervasively to the writings of Shoghi Effendi. The Guardian makes very good use of classical rhetoric's eristics, *logos*, and *éthos*. His rhetoric aims to be highly persuasive and is, at times, unabashedly disputatious, especially when dealing with the Bahá'í Faith's royal historical adversaries or enemies (Covenant-breakers), or when

he attacks pernicious ideologies such as nationalism, racialism, communism, moral perversity, baneful prejudices, or false doctrines. His convictions go well beyond polite debate. They manifest a certain uncompromising apocalyptic certitude.

In this connection, another question arises. How is the rhetorical effect achieved in Shoghi Effendi's writings different from, say, that of imaginative prose? Edward P. J. Corbett wrote that rhetorical criticism "is interested in the *product*, the *process*, and the *effect* of linguistic activity, whether the imaginative kind or the utilitarian kind."¹⁷ Rhetorical criticism looks to the immediate effect of a work rather than other literary considerations.¹⁸ Jane Tompkins, editor of an instructive work on Reader-Response Theory, of which rhetorical criticism is a major component, writes that the rhetorical mode looks upon literature as "existing primarily in order to produce results and not as an end in itself."¹⁹ In this sense, rhetorical prose creates a close bond between the author and the reader/audience, compared with the larger spaces created by more imaginative texts. The rational-affective-persuasive functions of the Guardian's rhetoric aim not only to deepen the intellectual-spiritual understanding of his readers/believers but also ultimately to move them to action. His rhetorical skills are fully deployed and in command when he persuades the Bahá'í community to arise to fulfill the goals of the Divine Plan.

Aristotle viewed the rhetoric of persuasion (*pistis*) as one of the practical arts, more concerned with acting and doing than are the rational and speculative arts and sciences, such as metaphysics and mathematics.²⁰ While the Guardian's writings have their own literary, historical, spiritual, and theological characteristics and qualities, they remain, nonetheless, an exercise in the practical and the functional. Shoghi Effendi's writings are always designed *to do* something: to deepen understanding, to define doctrine, to interpret history, to report, to comment on the significance of current events in light of the Bahá'í Faith's ascending world order, and especially to move the believer to action. When his pen moved, it was never for the sake of art alone.

Except for his great chronicle of the first hundred years of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith, *God Passes By* (1944), Shoghi Effendi's writings are largely epistolary. Ann Boyles, in her instructive article, "The Epistolary Style of Shoghi Effendi," points out that the differences between the letter and the epistle have to do with both content and style. While an epistle is theoretically any letter, the epistle is "a conscious literary form," which concerns itself with "public matters and with philosophy as well as with religious problems."²¹

The Guardian's letters have become a matter of doctrinal, administrative, historical, and literary interest because of the uniqueness of their style and the vast range and import of their subject matter.

Several reasons validate the letter as the Guardian's preferred medium of communication. The epistle creates a bond of intimacy and sense of collaboration between reader and author that is not inherent to other genres. His letters, despite their elevated, formal contents, have the desired effect of creating a personal bond between Shoghi Effendi and his readers, a rapport which, despite the Guardian's preeminence as the head of a growing world religion, creates a shared sense of fraternal collaboration, of belonging to the same faith community. William Decker has pointed out in his *Epistolary Practices* that letter writing "assumes the existence of a certain confidentiality as its enabling condition."²² "Letters," he writes, "have long been read as primary sources of biography and history, as texts brimming with informational content. Yet the performative, fictive, and textual dimensions of letter writing, and the artifacticity of the personally inscribed holograph,²³ have only recently attracted serious notice."²⁴ Regarding this sense of epistolary intimacy or confidentiality, it should be kept in mind that through his estimated 26,000 letters and cables,²⁵ Shoghi Effendi was writing, not only to individuals but also to a faith community that, as the Bahá'í sacred writings themselves attest, constitutes a "people," a collective named by Bahá'u'lláh "the people of Bahá'" (Ar. *Ahl-i-Bahá'*). Any faith community is a live audience. Decker's "performative" reference to the epistle underscores the direct, transformational potential of the letter on the audience.

"The Perfect Orator is the Perfect Man"²⁶

Unlike in contemporary society, in classical antiquity, rhetoric's efficacy depended on the *éthos* (nature/disposition/moral character) of the speaker. The rhetor (*rhétor*²⁷) had to be "worthy of credence," which is "almost, so to speak, the controlling factor in persuasion" (*On Rhetoric*, 1356a4). Only to the degree that the orator embodied moral integrity was his discourse judged to be effective. Compared to modernity, classical rhetoric was a more holistic, as well as a practical art, since it attempted to convince by the triadic norms of *pathos* (emotion), *éthos* (character), and *logos* (rational argument) [1356a3,5]. Shoghi Effendi's moral integrity gives his writing weight and credibility, thus reinforcing an "interlocking relationship"²⁸ between author, text, and reader. While Shoghi Effendi's authority as Guardian was based on divine appointment, it depended also upon his *author-ity*, i.e., credibility *qua* writer; and this credibility was based on his moral integrity.

“The perfect orator is the perfect man.” With this saying, the Roman rhetoricians Cicero and Quintilian made the closest possible connection between speech and character. How can the phrase “the perfect man” be applied to our author? By using this phrase, I do not imply, of course, that the Guardian was a perfect man in the same sense that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Mystery of God, was a perfect human being. Shoghi Effendi’s own self-understanding of the nature of the Guardian as being “*essentially human*” rules out any misconceived comparisons to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In clarifying the station of the Guardian, as distinct from that of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi wrote, “*Though overshadowed by the unfailing, the unerring protection of Bahá’u’lláh and of the Báb, and however much he may share with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the right and obligation to interpret the Bahá’í teachings, he remains essentially human and cannot, if he wishes to remain faithful to his trust, arrogate to himself, under any pretense whatsoever, the rights, the privileges and prerogatives which Bahá’u’lláh has chosen to confer upon His Son.*”²⁹

But it must be granted that degrees of perfection exist and are relative to the station that each human being occupies. The phrase “perfect man,” as applied to Shoghi Effendi, takes into account ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own statements referring to the divine endowment with which the Guardian was graced from birth and that he clearly demonstrated as he exercised his various functions over a 36-year ministry. More specifically, I suggest that the word *perfect*, as applied to the Guardian, refers to an interaction of three distinct features:

1. Natural endowment or capacity, i.e., exceptional, God-given attributes;
2. Striving, i.e., the surplus of effort required for the full realization of all abilities necessary for the successful execution of the duties of sacred office; and
3. The lack of any deficiency or defect in the exercise of his powers and abilities.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s mention of Shoghi Effendi in part one of the *Will and Testament* draws the reader’s attention to three important distinctions that become apparent throughout the text: Shoghi Effendi’s divine endowment as a direct descendant of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh; his youthfulness; and the handing down of the mantle of divine authority:

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 most wondrous, unique and priceless pearl that doth gleam from out the Twin surging seas. . . . Well is it with him that seeketh the shelter of his shade that shadoweth all mankind.³⁰

The poetic quality of this text is retained, even in translation, not only in its rich natural imagery but also because of the internal rhyme of “Trees” and “seas.” With the birth of Shoghi Effendi, a remarkable dynamic was created in the coupling of his kinship to the Twin Manifestations with the divine endowments mentioned in the text. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, moreover, expresses a special solicitude for Shoghi Effendi’s well-being by making the community of believers aware of the youthfulness that will be in constant need of support and protection: “tender, verdant and flourishing” is this twig that has grown from “the two hallowed and Divine Lote-Trees.” In part three of the *Will and Testament*, the charge to watch over and to protect becomes explicit:

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 and sorrow 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.³¹

As we have seen above, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares Shoghi Effendi to be a “priceless pearl.” But we note that not just any pearl is intended, but “a most wondrous, unique and priceless pearl.” The entire passage constitutes a revelation of the Guardian’s true nature and station. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s metaphorical comparison to the semi-precious gemstone is indeed apt since it applies to the entire ministry of Shoghi Effendi. The pearl develops its fine luster by being exposed to an invading irritant and by secreting the pearly substance to protect itself from the invader. The Guardian’s “radiant nature” was to shine forth during his onerous 36-year administration, despite the relentless hostility and opposition from members of his own family and their determined associates. Years before writing His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had already adumbrated something of Shoghi Effendi’s greatness. When the Guardian was born in 1897, an unnamed Western believer wrote to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, citing a verse from Isaiah 11:6 “. . . a little child shall lead them,” and inquired whether or not this verse referred to a “real living child who exists?”³² He replied, “Thou shalt behold him endowed with the most perfect appearance, supreme capacity, absolute perfection,

consummate power and unsurpassed might. His face will shine with a radiance that illuminates all the horizons of the world. . . .”³³

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements are supplemented by others of a more personal nature in *The Priceless Pearl*. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní calls one of her chapters, “Facets of Shoghi Effendi’s Personality,” but in one of the indexes, “Personal Attributes,” she has further summarized his character by delineating the Guardian’s attributes under three headings:³⁴ Spiritual and Mental Qualities; Artistic and Cultural Tastes and Interests; and Relations with Others.

We read under Spiritual and Mental Qualities: “catholicity of spirit,” “humility,” “mastery of detail,” “orderliness,” “nobility,” “radiance,” “shrewdness, sense of economy, honesty,” “realism,” “ingeniousness,” “practicality but lack of mechanical sense,” and “will-power, object of his existence.” This last reference refers to his complete consecration to the Bahá’í Faith.

We read under Artistic and Cultural Tastes and Interests: “interest in gardens, maps, photography, zoology, love of beauty in nature, zeal for knowledge.”

We read under Relations with Others: “love for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Greatest Holy Leaf, Milly Collins, Sutherland Maxwell,” “tribute to the support and comfort given by Martha Root.” Details and anecdotes of the headings are provided through page references by the author.

For the vast majority of the Bahá’ís who had never met the Guardian or for future generations, an effort of the imagination is required to create a mental picture of such an impressive figure. However, Rúhíyyih Rabbaní’s pen portrait creates the impression of a highly sensitive and gifted man, whose multifaceted nature entitled him to the label of genius; a man who labored much and suffered much, whose life manifested a rare combination of exceptional ability, complete love and devotion to the religion he directed, zeal for knowledge, an unusual capacity for work, an attitude of humility and self-effacement, and a complete consecration to the many tasks that the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had laid upon his shoulders. While he remained essentially human, Shoghi Effendi’s humanity was such that he was able to execute the duties of sacred office with superhuman energy³⁵ and skill in a manner that qualifies as being nothing less than perfect.

The Call to Action

The respected Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye (1912–1991) observed that “the rhetoric of non-literary prose,”—non-literary meaning not deriving primarily from the imagination—connects rhetoric to the world of “social action” and to “the appeal to action through the ear.”³⁶ Frye wrote:

The most concentrated examples of this [“social or oratorical persuasion”] are to be found in the pamphlet or speech that catches the rhythm of history, that seizes on a crucial event or phase of action, interprets it, articulates the emotions concerned with it, or in some means employs a verbal structure to insulate and conduct the current of history.³⁷

Frye cites, among others, Churchill’s 1940 war speeches, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, and Milton’s *Areopagitica* as examples of this genre.³⁸ Shoghi Effendi’s World Order letters (1929–36) and his apocalypse of contemporary history *The Promised Day Is Come* (1941) also belong within Frye’s description. But since our author’s writings deal with issues of great magnitude, i.e., the collapse of a failed old world order and the establishment of the New World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, an order that transcends national interests and boundaries, they become extremely consequential and give an exemplary and urgent meaning to Frye’s definition.

The call to action is linked to the stirring appeals that accompanied the launching of every stage of the teaching plan. That Shoghi Effendi hoped to rouse the Bahá’ís to action was his stated purpose, emphatically and repeatedly expressed. The word *action* continually punctuated his messages, as in this one:³⁹ “*My heart yearns to learn of any speedy and effective action which the valiant members of that community may determine, whether collectively or severally, to undertake.*”⁴⁰ His secretary wrote these words that effectively described his state of mind regarding the execution of the teaching plans he had devised: “He is convinced, that the friends will arise and translate their enthusiasm into Action, because the keynote of the Crusade, must be Action, Action, Action!”⁴¹ In April 1957, approaching midpoint in the “*world-embracing Spiritual Crusade*” (Ten Year Plan 1953–63) that he conceived to establish Bahá’u’lláh’s “*spiritual dominion*” throughout the world, and only seven months before his death on 4 November 1957 in Knightsbridge, London, Shoghi Effendi wrote the following appeal:

I appeal, as I close this review of the superb feats already accomplished, in the course of so many campaigns, by the heroic band of the warriors of Bahá’u’lláh, battling in His Name and by His aid for the purification, the unification and the spiritualization of a morally and spiritually bankrupt society, now hovering on the brink of self-destruction, for a renewed dedication, at this critical hour in the fortunes of mankind, on the part of the entire

*company of my spiritual brethren in every continent of the globe, to the high ideals of the Cause they have espoused, as well as to the immediate accomplishment of the goals of the Crusade on which they have embarked, be they in active service or not, of either sex, young as well as old, rich or poor; whether veteran or newly enrolled—a dedication reminiscent of the pledges which the Dawn-breakers of an earlier Apostolic Age, assembled in conference at Badasht, and faced with issues of a different but equally challenging nature, willingly and solemnly made for the prosecution of the collective task with which they were confronted.*⁴²

His message concludes with the following sentence, which is all at once a vote of supreme confidence, a cherished hope, and a fervent prayer:

*May this Crusade, on which the privileged heirs and present successors of the heroes of the Primitive Age of our Faith have so auspiciously embarked, yield, as it speeds on to its mid-way point, such a harvest as will amaze its prosecutors, astonish the world at large, and draw forth from the Source on high a measure of celestial strength adequate to insure its triumphant consummation.*⁴³

With these repeated exhortations to action, one of the major differences between the ancient and modern usages of language presents itself, viz., the distinction between the function of language as power and the function of language as meaning. In the ancient world, language functioned as a vehicle of power. For Greek and Roman orators and statesmen such as Demosthenes (383/384 BCE) and Cicero (106–43 BCE), language was a vehicle of power, a “great prince,”⁴⁴ that was capable of moving listeners to transport of soul and to action. For Demosthenes, whom both Cicero and Longinus (c. 213–73 CE) viewed as the perfect orator and whose reputation has scarcely diminished in modern times, skillful rhetoric was capable of the most remarkable feats. The Athenian orator in his three Philippics⁴⁵ singlehandedly roused the civic pride and loyalty of Athenians to resist subjugation by Philip of Macedon who had seized one Athenian possession after another.⁴⁶ In addition to this “rhetoric of persuasion to action itself,”⁴⁷ Northrop Frye indicates that “it must have either a rallying point or a point of attack, or both.”⁴⁸ The familiar rallying point in Shoghi Effendi’s writings arises most often from the pressing needs to fulfill the goals of the current teaching plan, as the community is exhorted to arise as “pioneers” and “traveling teachers.” Here is one example among many of a rallying cry,

one that is at the same time a “plea” that contains its own word of warning:

Once again—and this time more fervently than ever before—I direct my plea to every single member of this strenuously laboring, clear-visioned, stout-hearted, spiritually endowed community, every man and woman, on whose individual efforts, resolution, self-sacrifice and perseverance the immediate destinies of the Faith of God, now traversing so crucial a stage in its rise and establishment, primarily depends, not to allow, through apathy, timidity or complacency, this one remaining opportunity to be irretrievably lost. I would rather entreat each and every one of them to immortalize this approaching, fateful hour in the evolution of a World Spiritual Crusade, by a fresh consecration to their God-given mission, coupled with an instantaneous plan of action, at once so dynamic and decisive, as to wipe out, on the one hand, with one stroke, the deficiencies which have, to no small extent, bogged down the operations of the Crusade on the home front, and tremendously accelerate, on the other, the progress of the triple task, launched, in three continents, and constituting one of its preeminent objectives.⁴⁹

As for Frye’s “point of attack,” Shoghi Effendi was often at his literary best when thundering against the evils of the age. These bold denunciations are couched in the voice of the ancient prophetic protest. This passage indicts the decadence of contemporary civilization:

The signs of moral downfall, consequent to the dethronement of religion and the enthronement of these usurping idols, are too numerous and too patent for even a superficial observer of the state of present-day society to fail to notice. The spread of lawlessness, of drunkenness, of gambling, and of crime; the inordinate love of pleasure, of riches, and other earthly vanities; the laxity in morals, revealing itself in the irresponsible attitude towards marriage, in the weakening of parental control, in the rising tide of divorce, in the deterioration in the standard of literature and of the press, and in the advocacy of theories that are the very negation of purity, of morality and chastity—these evidences of moral decadence, invading both the East and the West, permeating every stratum of society, and instilling their poison in its members of both sexes, young and old alike,

*blacken still further the scroll upon which are inscribed the manifold transgressions of an unrepentant humanity.*⁵⁰

The following passage denounces the senseless idol worship of the three “false gods,” “the triple gods,” “the chief idols” of the age, gods that have exacted the cruel and tragic sacrifice and suffering of countless millions of souls in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While this passage is noteworthy for its stigmatization of three pernicious ideologies, it is no less remarkable for its rhetorical properties:

*This vital force [religion] is dying out, this mighty agency has been scorned, this radiant light obscured, this impregnable stronghold abandoned, this beauteous robe discarded. God Himself has indeed been dethroned from the hearts of men, and an idolatrous world passionately and clamorously hails and worships the false gods which its own idle fancies have fatuously created, and its misguided hands so impiously exalted. The chief idols in the desecrated temple of mankind are none other than the triple gods of Nationalism, Racialism and Communism, at whose altars governments and peoples, whether democratic or totalitarian, at peace or at war, of the East or of the West, Christian or Islamic, are, in various forms and in different degrees, now worshipping. Their high priests are the politicians and the worldly-wise, the so-called sages of the age; their sacrifice, the flesh and blood of the slaughtered multitudes; their incantations outworn shibboleths and insidious and irreverent formulas; their incense, the smoke of anguish that ascends from the lacerated hearts of the bereaved, the maimed, and the homeless.*⁵¹

Seven Rhetorical Modes in Shoghi Effendi’s Writings

Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric* is widely accepted as being “the fountainhead of all later rhetorical theory.”⁵² Chapter 3 of book 1 gives three categories of suasive discourse: the political (deliberative); the forensic (legal); and the epideictic (praise or blame).⁵³ While certain selected features of Aristotle’s types are echoed in Shoghi Effendi’s rhetoric, the philosopher’s types cannot be applied holus-bolus to his writings. This is so for two reasons. First, the Guardian’s genres are usually “blurred,” that is, mixed; they defy any easy categorization; their specifically religious content and context have created a distinctive style

of discourse that merits the assigning of further categories. Second, while Shoghi Effendi's rhetoric clearly reflects ancient rhetorical conventions, his discourse is Bahá'í-specific and must be considered within this framework. The following seven modes are therefore suggested. They apply especially to his epistolary: the proclamatory/kerygmatic; the imperative; the deliberative; the defensive; the rhetoric of praise and gratitude; the rhetoric of blame; and the rhetoric of anxious concern. Except for the rhetoric of praise/gratitude and the rhetoric of blame, there is no iron-clad division among these categories. Proclamatory/kerygmatic rhetoric is followed by the imperative mode of the divine command; the imperative shows deliberation; defense may mingle with praise. As we have seen in chapter 8, "Style and Pattern," even expressions of praise can be modulated by cautions and caveats.

I. The Proclamatory/Kerygmatic Mode

A specifically religious type of rhetoric, proclamation is associated with the *kerygma*, derived from the Greek verb *kerussein* meaning "to proclaim." In twentieth-century Protestant theology, it became a technical term having to do with the preaching of the early church on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as the fulfillment of the age promised by the prophets.⁵⁴ Shoghi Effendi's rhetoric, while it is naturally devoid of these Judeo-Christian associations, retains nonetheless a kerygmatic flavor in the dramatic delivery of his urgent messages, in the divine summons that calls the Bahá'í community to arise to fulfill the goals of a newly unveiled teaching plan, in the making of historic announcements, or in the proclamation of a "victory." Here, for example, is the Guardian's cablegram of 9 January 1951 that announced the formation of the First International Bahá'í Council, forerunner of the Universal House of Justice (1963–), a body that was to "*forge links with the newly emerged State*" (Israel), to assist the Guardian with the erection of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb, and "*to conduct negotiations related to matters of personal status with civil authorities*":

PROCLAIM NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES OF EAST AND WEST WEIGHTY EPOCH-MAKING DECISION OF FORMATION OF FIRST INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ'Í COUNCIL, FORERUNNER OF SUPREME ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTION DESTINED TO EMERGE IN FULLNESS OF TIME WITHIN PRECINCTS BENEATH SHADOW OF WORLD SPIRITUAL CENTER OF FAITH ALREADY ESTABLISHED IN TWIN CITIES OF AKKÁ AND HAIFA. FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECIES UTTERED BY FOUNDER OF FAITH AND CENTER OF HIS COVENANT CULMINATING IN ESTABLISHMENT OF JEWISH STATE, SIGNALIZING BIRTH AFTER LAPSE OF TWO THOUSAND YEARS OF AN INDEPENDENT NATION IN THE HOLY

LAND, THE SWIFT UNFOLDMENT OF HISTORIC UNDERTAKING ASSOCIATED WITH CONSTRUCTION OF SUPERSTRUCTURE OF THE BĀB'S SEPULCHER ON MOUNT CARMEL, THE PRESENT ADEQUATE MATURITY OF NINE VIGOROUSLY FUNCTIONING NATIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS THROUGHOUT BAHÁ'Í WORLD, COMBINE TO INDUCE ME TO ARRIVE AT THIS HISTORIC DECISION MARKING MOST SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN EVOLUTION OF ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER OF THE FAITH OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH IN COURSE OF LAST THIRTY YEARS.⁵⁵

II. The Imperative Mode

Closely allied to proclamation is execution. The imperative mode follows the divine command. The plans, strategies, and goals devised by Shoghi Effendi were subject to consultation and deliberation, but once they were decided upon, it was imperative that they be executed. In this example, Shoghi Effendi urges Bahá'ís to consolidate the considerable achievements of the first three years of the Ten Year Plan (1953–63). It was vital that “*the prizes so arduously won*” not be forfeited:

The glorious and stupendous work already accomplished, singly and collectively, in the course of three brief years, in five continents of the globe and the islands of the seas, both at home and abroad, in the teaching as well as the administrative spheres of Bahá'í activity must, as the army of Bahá'u'lláh's crusaders marches forward into new and vaster fields to capture still greater heights, never be jeopardized or allowed to lag or suffer a setback. The prizes so arduously won should not only be jealously preserved but should be constantly enriched. Far from suffering the long and distinguished record of feats which have been achieved to be tarnished, assiduous efforts must be exerted to ennoble it with every passing day.

The newly opened territories of the globe must, under no circumstances, be allowed to relapse into the state of spiritual deprivation from which they have so recently and laboriously been rescued. Nay, the highly edifying evidences proclaiming the expansion and the consolidation of the superb historic work achieved in so many of these territories must be rapidly multiplied. The local assemblies that have been so diligently and patiently established must under no circumstances be allowed to dissolve, or their foundations be in any way endangered. The mighty and steady process involving the increase in the number of the avowed

*supporters of the Faith, and the multiplication of isolated centers, groups and local assemblies must, throughout this newly opened phase of the Plan, be markedly accelerated.*⁵⁶

III. The Deliberative Mode

Shoghi Effendi's discourse is strongly performative. His letters are filled with exhortations, appeals, warnings, condemnations, caveats, directives, objectives, plans, and strategies for winning goals. All these discourse acts are profoundly heartfelt, expressed with eager solicitude and sincere, strong emotion. Yet, the reader finds another tone in our author's rhetoric, one that is more sober, calm, and reasoned. (It is not to be confused with Aristotle's deliberative, i.e., political rhetoric.) It is akin to its more formal expression as "demonstrative reason" explained in chapter 1, "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh." When the deliberative mode dominates, the fires of the spirit that drive the Guardian momentarily abate, and the voice of the wise teacher or counsellor emerges. The following lines, while they still close with the call to action, were written during the last phase of the First Seven Year Plan (1937–1944), and draw attention to the origins of that "world mission" conferred upon the North American Bahá'ís by 'Abdu'l-Bahá with the unveiling of the Divine Plan and whose "initial stage" was enacted by the First Seven Year Plan:

*Viewed in the perspective of Bahá'í history, the Seven Year Plan, associated with the closing years of the First Baha'i Century, will come to be regarded as the mightiest instrument yet forged, designed to enable the trustees of a firmly established, steadily evolving Administrative Order to complete the initial stage in the prosecution of the world mission confidently entrusted by the Center of the Covenant to His chosen disciples. The Divine Plan, thus set in operation, may be said to have derived its inspiration from, and been dimly foreshadowed in, the injunction so significantly addressed by Bahá'u'lláh to the Chief Magistrates of the American continent. It was prompted by the contact established by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself, in the course of His historic journey, with the entire body of His followers throughout the United States and Canada. . . . The hopes and aspirations of a multitude of believers, in both the East and the West, young and old, whether free or suppressed, hang on its triumphant consummation. . . . The time in which to respond to it is relentlessly shortening. Let men of action seize their chance ere the swiftly passing days place it irretrievably beyond their reach.*⁵⁷

IV. The Defensive Mode

This mode of rhetoric has its origin in the courtrooms and political assemblies of fifth-century Greece (BCE). Defense coupled with explanation became for centuries the twin functions of *apologia*. Although apologetics became one of the recognized disciplines for centuries in theological colleges, and more recently in departments of Religious Studies, with the secularization of contemporary society, this engaged approach, while still active, has receded into the background. Clinicians practicing the academic study of religion today suspect it as being too faith-driven, value-laden, non-critical, and dogmatic. Apologetics has been replaced with more “objective,” value-neutral, historical/socioscientific treatments of religion. But the apologetic voice is still clearly heard in Bahá’í sacred texts, even though this voice runs counter to the tenor of our times. Regardless of the current fashion dominating the academy, it is unlikely that responsible Bahá’í apologetics will soon disappear. The defensive mode is found in this passage from “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” that admonishes Bahá’ís not to regard the Báb merely as “*an inspired Precursor of the Bahá’í Revelation,*” a sort of John the Baptist:

*We would assuredly be failing in our duty to the Faith we profess and would be violating one of its basic and sacred principles if in our words or by our conduct we hesitate to recognize the implications of this root principle of Bahá’í belief, or refuse to uphold unreservedly its integrity and demonstrate its truth.*⁵⁸

Then, shifting to a more explanatory note, Shoghi Effendi explains, “*Indeed the chief motive actuating me to undertake the task of editing and translating Nabil’s immortal Narrative has been to enable every follower of the Faith in the West to better understand and more readily grasp the tremendous implications of His exalted station and to more ardently admire and love Him.*”⁵⁹ The defense of the Báb’s station is undertaken, then, for the purposes of theological veracity and devotion. Elsewhere, the defensive mode could be short and perfunctory. Here is the Guardian’s verdict on non-participation in voluntary military “duty”: “*No change whatsoever in status of Bahá’ís in relation to active military duty. No compromise of spiritual principles of Faith possible, however tense the situation, however aroused public opinion.*”⁶⁰ This last example also serves the imperative mode, indicating the interpenetration of some modes.

However, the defensive mode has a wider application than the interpretation of religious doctrine. As the chief “defender of the faith,” the Guardian was called upon to exercise this role whenever the Bahá’ís were subjected to attack. During the 1955 “*premeditated campaign*” of persecution of the Bahá’ís of Iran, Shoghi Effendi fearlessly exposed the crimes inflicted upon the believers and also directed the measures whereby the Bahá’í International Community could come to the defense of its persecuted brethren. His announcement of the persecution and its historical significance were fully developed in a detailed letter of 20 August 1955. In announcing the crisis he wrote:

*With dramatic suddenness, a situation, which had been slowly and secretly developing, came to a head, as the result of the ceaseless intrigue of the fanatical and determined ecclesiastical opponents of the Faith, ever ready to seize their chance, in times of confusion, and to strike mercilessly, at an opportune hour, at the very root of that Faith and of its swiftly developing, steadily consolidating administrative institutions.*⁶¹

He immediately devised a series of countermeasures to alleviate the suffering of the Iranian Bahá’ís, and he called upon the American Bahá’í Community to compensate for the losses suffered by their Middle Eastern co-religionists by widening their teaching efforts and rededicating themselves to the goals of the Ten Year Plan:

*Faced with this organized and vicious onslaught on the followers, the fundamental verities, the shrines and administrative institutions of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh in the land of His birth, the American Bahá’í Community cannot at this hour relax for a moment in the discharge of the multiple and sacred responsibilities it has pledged itself to fulfill under the Ten-Year Plan and must indeed display a still greater degree of consecration and a nobler spirit of self-sacrifice in the pursuit of the goals it has set itself to achieve.*⁶²

V. Praise and Gratitude

The rhetoric of praise and gratitude takes three basic forms in our author’s writings: prayer-like expressions of gratitude; praise of individuals, either living or dead, for their services; and lauding the station or the historic achievements of national communities. Here are two examples of type.

As prayer-like expressions of gratitude:

Acclaim with grateful heart, on twenty-first Anniversary of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Ascension, the glorious emergence of the firmly-welded, incorruptible American Bahá’í community from severest crisis since His passing which the blindness of the breakers of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Covenants has, amidst His kindred, and in the City of the Covenant, recently tragically precipitated.” “Heart aglow with pride, love, gratitude for superb achievement of completion of exterior of the House of Worship, Mother Temple of the West. Bahá’u’lláh’s high behest, enshrined in His Most Holy Book, has been brilliantly executed.”⁶³

One outstanding example of third type of the rhetoric of praise—lauding national communities—is Shoghi Effendi’s glowing tribute to the North American Bahá’í community in *The Advent of Divine Justice*. Almost the entire five-page section headed “Chief Remaining Citadel” exemplifies this mode. Before examining the eulogy, I give the context. In the opening five paragraphs of this section, the Guardian makes a major new statement on the mission and station of the Bahá’í community of North America. These are the main points:

- North America “*bids fair*” to become the “*cradle*” and the “*stronghold*” of the “*New World Order*”;
- To reach his conclusions, Shoghi Effendi has relied, not only on the internal evidence of Bahá’í history but also on the principle of divine election based on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prophecy that foretold “[t]he 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.”
- Shoghi Effendi establishes that this prophecy has been already partially fulfilled but will be fully disclosed only in “*the light of the glory of the Golden Age of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh*.”
- He writes that the North American Bahá’ís are “*the spiritual descendants of the dawn-breakers of an heroic Age*.” but that unlike the martyrs of old they must become a “*living sacrifice*” whose fruit shall be “*that promised World Order, the shell ordained to enshrine that priceless jewel, the world civilization,*

of which the Faith itself is the sole begetter.” Referring to the Administrative Order, he writes, “Its seed is the blood of no less than twenty thousand martyrs who have offered up their lives that it may be born and flourish.”⁶⁴ North America is the land of a chosen people, singled out and “preserved by the immutable decrees of the omnipotent Ordainer and deriving continual sustenance from the mandate which the Tablets of the Divine Plan have invested it. . . .” These believers are laying the groundwork for the future World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.

- In ¶5, in a series of subordinate clauses, the Guardian makes the preamble to his eulogy. Along the lines of Arnold Toynbee’s “challenge and response” causal factor in the making of civilizations,⁶⁵ the preamble establishes the record of the achievements of the North American Bahá’ís, despite the considerable obstacles that confronted them. Each clause addresses a particular obstacle that has been faced and successfully overcome:

A community, relatively negligible in its numerical strength; separated by vast distances from both the focal-center of its Faith and the land wherein the preponderating mass of its fellow-believers reside; bereft in the main of material resources and lacking in experience and in prominence; ignorant of the beliefs, concepts and habits of those peoples and races from which its spiritual Founders have sprung; wholly unfamiliar with the languages in which its sacred Books were originally revealed; constrained to place its sole reliance upon an inadequate rendering of only a fragmentary portion of the literature embodying its laws, its tenets, and its history; subjected from its infancy to tests of extreme severity, involving, at times, the defection of some of its most prominent members; having to contend, ever since its inception, and in an ever-increasing measure, with the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and ingrained prejudice—such a community, in less than half a century, and unaided by any of its sister communities, whether in the East or in the West, has, by virtue of the celestial potency with which an all-loving Master has abundantly endowed it, lent an impetus to the onward march of the Cause it has espoused which the combined achievements of its coreligionists in the West have failed to rival.⁶⁶

Then Shoghi Effendi enters into the heart of his eulogy, a text that is framed by no less than thirteen rhetorical questions without a single paragraph break:

What other community, it can confidently be asked, has been instrumental in fixing the pattern, and in imparting the original impulse, to those administrative institutions that constitute the vanguard of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh? What other community has been capable of demonstrating, with such consistency, the resourcefulness, the discipline, the iron determination, the zeal and perseverance, the devotion and fidelity, so indispensable to the erection and the continued extension of the framework within which those nascent institutions can alone multiply and mature? What other community has proved itself to be fired by so noble a vision, or willing to rise to such heights of self-sacrifice, or ready to achieve so great a measure of solidarity, as to be able to raise, in so short a time and in the course of such crucial years, an edifice that can well deserve to be regarded as the greatest contribution ever made by the West to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh? What other community can justifiably lay claim to have succeeded, through the unsupported efforts of one of its humble members, in securing the spontaneous allegiance of Royalty to its Cause, and in winning such marvelous and written testimonies to its truth? What other community has shown the foresight, the organizing ability, the enthusiastic eagerness, that have been responsible for the establishment and multiplication, throughout its territory, of those initial schools which, as time goes by, will, on the one hand, evolve into powerful centers of Bahá'í learning, and, on the other, provide a fertile recruiting ground for the enrichment and consolidation of its teaching force? What other community has produced pioneers combining to such a degree the essential qualities of audacity, of consecration, of tenacity, of self-renunciation, and unstinted devotion, that have prompted them to abandon their homes, and forsake their all, and scatter over the surface of the globe, and hoist in its uttermost corners the triumphant banner of Bahá'u'lláh? Who else but the members of this community have won the eternal distinction of being the first to raise the call of Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá in such highly important and widely scattered

centers and territories as the hearts of both the British and French empires, Germany, the Far East, the Balkan States, the Scandinavian countries, Latin America, the Islands of the Pacific, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, and now more recently the Baltic States? Who else but those same pioneers have shown themselves ready to undertake the labor, to exercise the patience, and to provide the funds, required for the translation and publication, in no less than forty languages, of their sacred literature, the dissemination of which is an essential prerequisite to any effectively organized campaign of teaching? What other community can lay claim to have had a decisive share in the worldwide efforts that have been exerted for the safeguarding and the extension of the immediate surroundings of its holy shrines, as well as for the preliminary acquisition of the future sites of its international institutions at its world center? What other community can to its eternal credit claim to have been the first 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? What other community can boast of having simultaneously acquired and legally secured the basis of its national endowments, thus paving the way for a similar action on the part of its local communities? What other community has achieved the supreme distinction of having obtained, long before any of its sister communities had envisaged such a possibility, the necessary documents assuring the recognition, by both the federal and state authorities, of its Spiritual Assemblies and national endowments? 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?⁶⁷

As can be readily seen from this long encomium, in Shoghi Effendi's view, praise of the North American Bahá'ís is fully justified. The eulogy is grounded in his understanding of the then recent events of Bahá'í history in the West. But another significant process is at work here. With these passages,

the Guardian is actually engaged in the creation of a *world-historical identity* that acts as a mirror in which the North American Bahá'ís find reflected their role in the global diffusion of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. (In other contexts, this same mirror will reveal their blemishes.) This world-historical identity, which was in large part based upon the historical accomplishments of the North American Bahá'ís, no doubt provided them with a fuller appreciation of the singular global mission that they had been called upon to accomplish.

Each rhetorical question above is in point of fact a statement that alludes to a particular facet of their record of service. Each and every question invites competent historians to make further investigation of the situations in question: “*To appraise correctly their value [“these manifold services”], and dilate on their merits and immediate consequences, is a task which only a future Bahá'í historian can properly discharge.*”⁶⁸ He has made this point elsewhere. Only with the passage of time can adequate historical appraisals and judgments be made. Referring to an understanding of the unfoldment of New World Order, he wrote, “*We must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications.*”⁶⁹ I mention in passing that the Guardian's use of the rhetorical question above is atypical, since the rhetorical question does not normally provide information, but rather elicits a tacit assent.

VI. The Rhetoric of Blame

For all his lavish praise, Shoghi Effendi sometimes found it necessary to blame. As we have already seen, some of his strongest denunciations were reserved for the world and its ways, for “*the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age.*”⁷⁰ But sometimes the condemnations were personal. These personal condemnations were reserved for the unusual but nonetheless grave circumstance of those who had broken the Covenant, an action committed by individuals who called themselves Bahá'ís, but because of material gain, pathological jealousy, vaulting pride or love of leadership, they rebelled against the legitimate Head of the Faith. These “Covenant-beakers”⁷¹ had both secretly and openly defied Bahá'u'lláh's, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's, or Shoghi Effendi's authority and had attempted to discredit them, to divide the community, and to create a following for themselves. This is a mild description of their activities. Using a medical analogy, the Guardian referred to Covenant-breaking as a “*virus of violation,*”⁷² a phrase that indicates both its dangerous and contagious qualities. In the following passages, Shoghi Effendi denounces the Iranians Avarih, Fareed, and Falah.

His stern message reminds us that even though belief in divine punishment discomfits some modern readers, the Guardian regarded divine punishment as one manifestation, among others, of divine justice. As such, divine chastisement was a basic element of his moral theology, deriving from his understanding of the actions and effects of the Bahá'í Covenant. Making Covenant-breaking an object lesson for the community, the Guardian recorded its devastating effects on those who had made concerted attempts to undermine or destroy the unity of the Bahá'í Faith.

Following the successive blows which fell with dramatic swiftness two years ago upon the ring-leaders of the fast dwindling band of old Covenant-breakers at the World Center of the Faith, God's avenging hand struck down in the last two months, Avarih, Fareed and Falah, within the cradle of the Faith, North America and Turkey, who demonstrated varying degrees, in the course of over thirty years, of faithlessness to 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The first of the above named will be condemned by posterity as being the most shameless, vicious, relentless apostate in the annals of the Faith, who, through ceaseless vitriolic attacks in recorded voluminous writings and close alliance with its traditional enemies, assiduously schemed to blacken its name and subvert the foundations of its institutions.

The second, history will recognize as one of the most perfidious among the kinsmen of the interpreters of the Center of the Covenant, who, driven by ungovernable cupidity, committed acts causing agonies of grief and distress to the beloved Master and culminating in open association with breakers of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant in the Holy Land.

The third will be chiefly remembered by the pride, obstinacy and insatiable ambition impelling him to violate the spiritual and administrative precepts of the Faith.

ALL THREE, HOWEVER BLINDED BY PERVERSITY, COULD NOT HAVE FAILED TO PERCEIVE, AS THEIR INFAMOUS CAREERS APPROACHED THEIR END, THE FUTILITY OF THEIR OPPOSITION AND MEASURE THEIR OWN LOSS BY THE DEGREE OF PROGRESS AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE TRIUMPHANT ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER SO MAGNIFICENTLY CELEBRATED IN THE COURSE OF THE FESTIVITIES OF THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED HOLY YEAR.⁷³

The respected comparative religionist Ninian Smart (1925–2000), in a book that investigates the language of moral discourse in religion, makes the point that praise and/or blame is not just to condemn someone as being “good” or “bad.” Smart writes, “One main function of praise or blame is to get people to do the right things and to refrain from the wrong things: it is then a form (usually but not always the mildest form) of reward and punishment. As such its purposes are controlled by the rules and valuations held to be correct.”⁷⁴ According to this logic, those who read the condemnations of Shoghi Effendi will have their identity as faithful believers reinforced. Smart also makes the point that religious value-judgments are embedded in doctrinal schemata or cosmologies, “in developed doctrinal schemes, moral assertions are already incorporated into the pattern of belief—as when God is said not merely to be all-powerful and all-holy but supremely good.”⁷⁵ In religion, then, moral assertions have latent cognitive or belief components.

Shoghi Effendi’s condemnation of Covenant-breakers is not for the sole purpose of stigmatizing them as ambitious, greedy, perverse, or rebellious individuals. These individuals do not just rebel against the *persons* of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and the Guardian. In so doing, they are also attacking the principles, teachings, and institutions that the founders of the Bahá’í Faith have so laboriously established. These *things* have an objective, “living” existence. Therefore, the attacks of Covenant-breakers, while they were directed primarily against the leaders of the Bahá’í Faith, aimed also to undermine the belief and value-system on which the very edifice of the religion rests. The rhetoric of blame, consequently, is tantamount to a condemnation of evil, the harm that works to divide and to destroy; the evil that attempts to usurp what is not rightfully one’s own, but belongs by divine right to another. While the rhetoric of praise exalts noble and virtuous conduct, the rhetoric of blame seeks to indict vice. Such condemnations, harsh and dramatic though they may be, are meant to point to issues of greater magnitude.

VII. The Rhetoric of Anxious Concern

The title of this mode is taken directly from Bahá’u’lláh’s admonition, “Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.”⁷⁶ One of the great tasks that faced the Guardian was to motivate the Bahá’ís to arise to fulfill the pressing, ongoing objectives of the teaching plans that he devised. Apart from instructing and inspiring those pilgrims who were privileged to have visited Akka and Haifa, and who met him in person, the power of prayer and the golden words that flowed from his pen were the only tools he

possessed to mobilize his troops. Accordingly, his letters contain sober admonitions, earnest appeals, and solemn entreaties. As its subtext, this language clearly has the covenant in mind, with its sacred duties and obligations. The following example speaks of a renewed pledge and of “*the dual responsibility solemnly undertaken under the Seven Year Plan.*” These phrases bespeak covenantal language:

*I ENTREAT THE AMERICAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY, WHATEVER THE IMMEDIATE OR DISTANT REPERCUSSIONS OF THE PRESENT TURMOIL ON THEIR OWN CONTINENT, HOWEVER VIOLENT ITS IMPACT UPON THE WORLD CENTER OF THEIR FAITH, TO PLEDGE THEMSELVES ANEW, BEFORE THE THRONE OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, TO DISCHARGE, WITH UNSWERVING AIM, UNFAILING COURAGE, INVINCIBLE VIGOR, EXEMPLARY FIDELITY AND EVER-DEEPENING CONSECRATION, THE DUAL RESPONSIBILITY SOLEMNLY UNDERTAKEN UNDER THE SEVEN YEAR PLAN. I IMPLORE THEM TO ACCELERATE THEIR EFFORTS, INCREASE THEIR VIGILANCE, DEEPEN THEIR UNITY, MULTIPLY THEIR HEROIC FEATS, MAINTAIN THEIR DISTANT OUTPOSTS IN THE TEACHING FIELD OF LATIN AMERICA AND EXPEDITE THE TERMINATION OF THE LAST STAGE IN THE ORNAMENTATION OF THE TEMPLE. I AM PRAYING CONTINUALLY WITH REDOUBLED FERVOR.*⁷⁷

He wrote the following words during the Ten Year Plan (1953–1963), fewer than six weeks before his death in London:

*Once again—and this time more fervently than ever before—I direct my plea to every single member of this strenuously laboring, clear-visioned, stout-hearted, spiritually endowed community, every man and woman, on whose individual efforts, resolution, self-sacrifice and perseverance the immediate destinies of the Faith of God, now traversing so crucial a stage in its rise and establishment, primarily depends, not to allow, through apathy, timidity or complacency, this one remaining opportunity to be irretrievably lost.*⁷⁸

Particular Rhetorical Devices

Loving Greetings

Shoghi Effendi's warm and loving greetings established an immediate, direct, and personal contact with the Bahá'ís. They expressed, in solicitous terms, his sincere affection and open admiration. He wrote such terms of endearment as “*Dearly-beloved friends!*” “*Fellow-believers in the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh,*” “*To the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the*

Merciful,” “My dearest brethren and sisters in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” “My dearly-beloved brethren and sisters in the love of God!” Dearest brethren and sisters in Bahá’u’lláh!” “My dearest friends” and “Dearly-beloved co-workers.” The lone salutation in *The Promised Day Is Come*, found in its concluding passages, read simply “*Dear friends!*” These salutations indicated that Shoghi Effendi saw himself as a close collaborator with his associate believers (“*Dearly-beloved co-workers*”) in the execution of the teaching plan of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. His closing signature indicated, not only his profound humility but also his strong sense of fraternal collaboration. While the weighty title “Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Cause of God” would have been fully justified, he signed simply, “*Your true brother, Shoghi.*” In Persian he usually signed *Bandey-i-Ástánesh, Shoghi*, “Servant of His Threshold, Shoghi.”

Persuasion by Moral Reasoning

In *The Promised Day Is Come* and *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Shoghi Effendi set forth his argument through a multilayered exposition and several rhetorical devices that are explained in this chapter—encomiums, rhetorical questions, kinetic emotion, epideictic (praise or blame), caveats, cautions, and warnings. At its origins in ancient Greece, rhetoric used both logic and emotion. As was seen above, Aristotle emphasized that rhetoric had to convince by logic, and although he critiqued, with some ambivalence, rhetoric’s tendency to degenerate into an irrational emotionalism, the philosopher accepted the use of psychodynamics in suasive speech. While the Guardian’s writings are clearly not “logical” in the Greek philosophical sense of a dialectical conversation that employs arguments and counterarguments in the search for truth, they employ nonetheless a type of moral reasoning, i.e., sound, definitive, categorical assertions. The following passage directs his readers to focus on the rectification of their personal character. Only individuals thus regenerated, he asserts, will be empowered to transform the moral and spiritual life of the nation:

... let them focus their attention, for the present, on their own selves, their own individual needs, their own personal deficiencies and weaknesses, ever mindful that every intensification of effort on their part will better equip them for the time when they will be called upon to eradicate in their turn such evil tendencies from the lives and the hearts of the entire body of their fellow-citizens. Nor must they overlook the fact that the World Order, whose basis they, as the advance-guard of the future Bahá’í generations of their countrymen, are now laboring to establish, can never be

*reared unless and until the generality of the people to which they belong has been already purged from the divers ills, whether social or political, that now so severely afflict it.*⁷⁹

Based on the principle of necessity, this last sentence alludes to a future time when Bahá'ís will be at last sufficiently transformed to purge the nation from its moral laxities and vices. But this transformation will not be accomplished unless Bahá'ís take a searching moral inventory and remedy any deficiencies found on the balance sheet. The moral reasoning of the above passage, based on the principle of spiritual imperative/principle of necessity, includes a cause-effect relationship that can be paraphrased simply as follows: moral and spiritual regeneration in the nation cannot be achieved unless Bahá'ís become spiritually transformed; the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh cannot be established without the moral and spiritual regeneration of the American people.

This passage calls to mind Christ's maxim following the Beatitudes given in the Sermon on the Mount: "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" (Mat. 5:13). Shoghi Effendi's more explicit textual parallel to the above passage is the following: "*So complete a transformation, so startling a reversal of attitude, can only be effected if that chosen vehicle which is designed to carry the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the hungry, the restless, and unshepherded multitudes is itself thoroughly cleansed from the defilements which it seeks to remove.*"⁸⁰ The words of Christ echo again in the foregoing lines: "How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand" (Mark 3:23-24).

Further to the Rhetorical Question

The Rhetoric of Praise regarding the destiny and world-historical mission of the American nation quoted above invites further comment. I have previously argued that the series of rhetorical questions used by Shoghi Effendi aimed at something larger than mere praise, however justified. It created nothing less than a "defining moment," i.e., the historical identity-formation of the entire North American Bahá'í community. Now the rhetorical question does not normally seek to provide information, but rather to elicit an emotional response. However, in this case, the Guardian's use of the long series of 13 rhetorical questions is atypical, not only for its sustained effect but also because each question contains vital historical information. As the Guardian multiplied the questions, heaping up praise with each one, we realize that each question represented a historical challenge that the community had faced and overcome, in a Toynbeean "challenge and response" process.

The North American Bahá'í community could not have formed, within so short a historical span, any definitive historical identity. With his Rhetoric of Praise, the Guardian was dispensing vital historical information and offering a positive assessment of the early history of the North American Bahá'í community. In so doing, Shoghi Effendi was creating a historically conscious community identity for this “*little band of followers*.”⁸¹ The believers, who formerly saw themselves primarily as individual disciples of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, acting under His personal direction as teachers, pioneers, and heralds of the New Day, were transformed by Shoghi Effendi’s vision into a fledgling but self-standing, vibrant religious *community* that recognized itself as such. His generous eulogy would instill the necessary confidence for the execution of the future weighty tasks with which he would continue to entrust them.

Caveats, Constructive Criticism, and Warnings

As I am using it here, a caveat is a proviso or stipulates a condition. When Shoghi Effendi uses the phrases “*unless and until*” or “*Then and only then*,” he is stipulating that certain conditions must be fulfilled to produce the desired goal. The italicized phrases are conditional, and conditional language is covenantal language. Addressing the North American Bahá'ís on 11 April 1949 during the Second Seven Year Plan, Shoghi Effendi laid down three consequential conditions for the full realization of the Plan, whose chief goal was “*the completion of the Mother Temple of the West*.” This project was “*of such a weighty character as to overshadow every enterprise embarked upon through the organized efforts of its members, in either the concluding years of the Heroic Age of the Faith or the first epoch of the Age which succeeded it*.”⁸² “The successful outcome of this great enterprise depended on the realization of three interdependent conditions: universal participation; sacrifice; and systematization.

*Nor can this campaign yield its richest fruit unless and until the community, in its entirety, participates in this nation-wide sacrificial effort. Nor can this collective effort be blessed, to the fullest extent possible, unless the contributions made by its members involve acts of self-abnegation, not only on the part of those of modest means, but also by those endowed with substantial resources. Nor, indeed, can these self-denying acts, by both the rich and the poor, be productive of the fullest possible benefit unless this sacrificial effort is neither momentary nor haphazard, but rather systematic and continuous throughout the period of the present emergency.*⁸³

He indicated that should these three conditions be realized, the dispensing of unsuspected spiritual powers would bless the erection of that “*holy edifice*”:

*Then and only then will this holy edifice, symbol and harbinger of a world civilization as yet unborn, and the embodiment of the sacrifice of a multitude of the upholders of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, release the full measure of the regenerative power with which it has been endowed, shed in all its plenitude the glory of the Most Holy Spirit dwelling within it, and vindicate, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the truth of every single promise recorded by the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá pertaining to its destiny.*⁸⁴

While Shoghi Effendi's Rhetoric of Praise extolled the “*virtues and qualities*”⁸⁵ of the North American Bahá'í community, he also drew attention to its “*faults, habits, and tendencies.*”⁸⁶ Here is one such observation: “*The American Bahá'í Community, the leaven destined to leaven the whole, cannot hope, at this critical juncture in the fortunes of a struggling, perilously situated, spiritually moribund nation, to either escape the trials with which this nation is confronted, nor claim to be wholly immune from the evils that stain its character.*”⁸⁷ The weeding out of vices, which North American believers had culturally inherited, was imperative if they were to fulfill their high destiny. Although our author's criticism was always constructive, it was delivered nonetheless in plain language. Regarding racial prejudice, “*the most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá'í community at the present stage of its evolution,*” he wrote, “*The ceaseless exertions which this issue of paramount importance calls for, the sacrifices it must impose, the care and vigilance it demands, the moral courage and fortitude it requires, the tact and sympathy it necessitates, invest this problem, which the American believers are still far from having satisfactorily resolved, with an urgency and importance that cannot be overestimated.*”⁸⁸

However egalitarian were (are) the teachings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on racial equality and unity, promoted as early as the second decade of the twentieth century, the above passage makes it clear that the Bahá'ís were still far from the ideal standard. The Guardian presented the racial unity of whites and blacks as a social and spiritual challenge that demanded the immediate and urgent attention of every believer. In his eulogy of the North American Bahá'ís, examined above, the Guardian felt impelled to utter “*a word of warning*”: “*Dearly beloved friends! Great as is my love and admiration for you, convinced as I am of the paramount share which you can, and*

will, undoubtedly have in both the continental and international spheres of future Bahá'í activity and service, I feel it nevertheless incumbent upon me to utter, at this juncture, a word of warning.”⁸⁹ The Guardian’s word of warning draws a “*sharp distinction*” between the North American Bahá'ís and the larger non-Bahá'í society in which they live. The observance of this sharp distinction is necessary, not for any motive of self-congratulation, but rather to befittingly recognize “*the transmuting power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.*” Thus, while they have been the object of Shoghi Effendi’s love and admiration, he reminds the Bahá'ís of the True Source of their signal achievements. While the distinction between the Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í communities would seem to be clear enough, the point is nonetheless a subtle one. The Guardian indicated that this same transformed community could not escape the pernicious influence of the corrupt mores of the host nation; the Bahá'ís could not “*claim to be wholly immune from the evils that stain its character.*” Drawing a parallel between the sublime transformation of the apostolic heroes and martyrs of the Heroic Age in Persia, and “[t]o a lesser degree” with “*the country which has vindicated its right to be regarded as the cradle of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh,*” Shoghi Effendi wrote this sobering reminder:

*Let not, therefore, those who are to participate so predominantly in the birth of that world civilization, which is the direct offspring of their Faith, imagine for a moment that for some mysterious purpose or by any reason of inherent excellence or special merit Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to confer upon their country and people so great and lasting a distinction. 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.*⁹⁰

Then our author proceeds to spell out the faults that must be rooted out. As usual, he mentions the virtues and qualities that must replace them:

It is by such means as this that Bahá'u'lláh can best demonstrate to a heedless generation His almighty power to raise up from the very midst of a people, immersed in a sea of materialism, a prey to one of the most virulent and long-standing forms of

*racial prejudice, and notorious for its political corruption, lawlessness and laxity in moral standards, men and women who, as time goes by, will increasingly exemplify those essential virtues of self-renunciation, of moral rectitude, of chastity, of indiscriminating fellowship, of holy discipline, and of spiritual insight that will fit them for the preponderating share they will have in calling into being that World Order and that World Civilization of which their country, no less than the entire human race, stands in desperate need.*⁹¹

His observations are qualified by this positive note:

*Observations such as these, however distasteful and depressing they may be, should not, in the least, blind us to those virtues and qualities of high intelligence, of youthfulness, of unbounded initiative, and enterprise which the nation as a whole so conspicuously displays, and which are being increasingly reflected by the community of the believers within it. Upon these virtues and qualities, no less than upon the elimination of the evils referred to, must depend, to a very great extent, the ability of that community to lay a firm foundation for the country's future role in ushering in the Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.*⁹²

The Rhetoric of Emotion

The Place of Emotion

Shoghi Effendi's rhetoric features a distinct range of emotions that is examined in this section. Northrop Frye points out that with rhetorical prose "we are moving rapidly away from literature toward the direct verbal expression of kinetic emotion"⁹³ (Gk. *kinéo*=to move). As we have already seen, in Aristotle's distinction between philosophy and rhetoric, the great philosopher disapproved of mixing emotion with reason because he considered emotional appeals to weaken the philosopher's argument. The distrust of emotion dates back to Plato's dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, in which he depicted the soul as a charioteer who is drawn up to heaven by the white winged horse (Pegasus) of reason ("good") and back down to earth again by the black horse of the emotions/passion ("bad").⁹⁴ Plato's literary figure succeeded in dichotomizing reason and emotion (passion). However, rhetorical theory has since legitimized what writers of rhetorical prose have long known: emotions have a legitimate and

necessary place in human discourse. Even within science, sociologists G. Nigel Gilbert and Michael Mulkay argue that emotion has taken its own proper place. In their *Opening Pandora's Box: A Sociological Analysis of Scientists' Discourse*, Gilbert and Mulkay find that emotions are part and parcel of the process of the scientific method and are latently present in scientific statements, even if the emotional experience of the scientist is not explicitly acknowledged in scientific formulations.⁹⁵ The conceptual-affective integrative view of cognitive theory and emotion has been simply and beautifully stated by Wayne C. Booth in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*: "Every desire, every feeling, can become a good reason when called into the court of symbolic exchange."⁹⁶

Predominant Emotions in Shoghi Effendi

The modern philosophy of emotion recognizes six basic emotions: fear, surprise, anger, disgust, sadness, and joy.⁹⁷ In book 2 of *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle discussed a variety of emotions appropriate to the effective use of rhetoric. As one observer has written, ". . . without some knowledge of these, the rhetorician would be incapable of constructing a speech proportionate to his audience, and of arousing their passions."⁹⁸ The five emotions mentioned by Aristotle are pity, indignation, shame, shamelessness, and anger.⁹⁹ If we carefully examine the Guardian's rhetoric and correlate it to the psychology of basic emotion and Aristotle's rhetoric, we find that the following eight emotions predominant: (1) joy, (2) exultation, (3) justified pride, (4) anger, (5) righteous indignation, (6) pathos (grief/pity/sadness),¹⁰⁰ (7) shame (used specifically), and (8) shamelessness (used specifically). These emotions are Bahá'í-specific because they originate in historical contexts relating either to the world's rejection of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, or to the religion's establishment around the world, or to Covenant-breaking. These emotions have an "objective correlative"¹⁰¹ in the history of the Bahá'í Faith.

The emotions named above have their parallel corresponding attitudes: (1) joy=praise/ gratitude; (2) exultation=empowerment and/or humility; (3) justified pride=gratitude/sense of worth; (4) justified anger=justice, defense, integrity; (5) righteous indignation=justice, defense, integrity; (6) pathos (grief/pity/sadness)=compassion, solidarity; and (7)/(8) shame and shamelessness=guilt, waste, foolishness. These parallels reveal the difficulty of separating the cognitive from the non-cognitive. Emotions or attitudes center, not just in persons but in "things," i.e., values, ideas and beliefs. The violation of justice, for example, produced a sense of righteous indignation or anger in Shoghi Effendi.

- 1) *Joy*. Shoghi Effendi's sole and greatest source of joy flowed from the confident realization that the Bahá'ís were fully and actively supporting the teaching work in every land:

*And now as I look into the future, I hope to see the friends at all times, in every land, and of every shade of thought and character, voluntarily and joyously rallying round their local and in particular their national centres of activity, upholding and promoting their interests with complete unanimity and contentment, with perfect understanding, genuine enthusiasm, and sustained vigour. This indeed is the one joy and yearning of my life, for it is the fountainhead from which all future blessings will flow, the broad foundation upon which the security of the Divine Edifice must ultimately rest. May we not hope that now at last the dawn of a brighter day is breaking upon our beloved Cause?*¹⁰²

The following postscript to a letter of 22 November 1946 to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria expressed the Guardian's joy and thankfulness to be able to resume correspondence with these two communities after the interruption of the harrowing war years. The postscript indicates the link between joy and gratitude mentioned above in parallel corresponding attitudes :

*Dearly-beloved co-workers: It is such a joy, mingled with feelings of deep thankfulness to Bahá'u'lláh, to be able to resume direct correspondence with the elected national representatives of a community that has achieved so much in the past for our Faith, that has been so dearly loved by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and is destined to spread, as He foretold, the light of God's sacred Revelation not only in the heart of Europe but throughout that dark, war-devastated spiritually famished continent.*¹⁰³

- 2) *Exultation*. Our author sometimes passes beyond joy to enter into exultation, a certain magnitude of soul, jubilation, and celebration. This passage celebrates a widening of the "area of jurisdiction" of the Administrative Order that was making gains in northeast Asia: "With feelings of exultation, joy, and pride I hail the convocation of this history-making Convention of the Bahá'ís of North-East Asia, paving the way for the emergence of a Regional Spiritual Assembly with an area of jurisdiction embracing Japan, Korea, Formosa, Macao, Hong Kong, Hainan Island and Sakhalin Island."¹⁰⁴ The

following passage written early in his ministry (1923), prior to the establishment of any specific teaching plan that he devised, celebrates and glorifies the fidelity that finds expression in lifelong service: “*All-hail to that undying spirit of fidelity which burns and shall burn unceasingly, in the breasts of His loved ones! Great shall be their reward, and blissful the hour, when after a toilsome life of service, they are gathered to the glory of Bahá, and partake in their Beloved’s Presence, of the joy of eternal Reunion.*”¹⁰⁵

- 3) *Justified Pride.* The word *pride* is ambiguous and troublesome in English. Church theologians placed it at the head of the list of the Seven Deadly Sins, so-called because they were judged to be mortal to the soul without repentance. All seven vices are also mentioned in various passages of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰⁶ Bahá’u’lláh counseled the true seeker, “He must never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory.”¹⁰⁷ However, there is a sense of legitimate pride that differs from its dangerous, spiritually threatening connotations. The ancient Greeks and Romans called this sense *megalopsuchia* and *magnanimitas* respectively. This is the justified pride of the artist, athlete, musician, scientist, scholar, or honor student, who has achieved excellence by dint of effort and skill. The Guardian experienced this same sense of pride in the periodic “*victory*” or achievements won by the Bahá’í community. His letter of April 1956, which assesses the “*second phase*” of the “*global Spiritual Crusade*,” opens with just such a heart-warming expression: “*The triumphant termination of the second phase of the decade-long global Spiritual Crusade on which the followers of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh have so auspiciously embarked impels me to share with the delegates assembled at the Annual Bahá’í Conventions convened in all the continents of the globe the feelings of joy, of pride and of thankfulness which so significant a victory has evoked in my heart.*”¹⁰⁸
- 4) *Justified Anger.* The same principle of justification applies to anger. Justified anger is related to its more religious expression of righteous indignation. Shoghi Effendi’s personality and messages expressed both. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní wrote her personal observations of the contrasting expression of the Guardian’s “clear hazel” eyes “which sometimes changed to a warm and luminous grey.” She noted that “Indignation, anger and sorrow could be equally clearly reflected in them, and alas, he had cause to show these too in his life, so beset with problems and

sorrows.”¹⁰⁹ She writes when the Iranian government closed in 1934 the Tarbiyat School for Boys/School for Girls, founded respectively in 1898 and 1911, that in his cable to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada “the anger of the Guardian is reflected in every word as he pours out the list of indignities to which the Bahá’ís of Persia are being subjected.”¹¹⁰

*Information just received indicates deliberate efforts undermine all Bahá’í institutions in Persia. Schools in Kashan, Qazvin, Sultanabad closed. In several leading centres including Qazvin Kirmanshah orders issued suspend teaching activities, prohibit gatherings, close Bahá’í Hall, deny right burial in Bahá’í cemeteries. Bahá’ís of Teheran compelled under penalty imprisonment register themselves Moslems in identity papers. Elated clergy inciting population. National Teheran Assembly’s petitions to Shah undelivered rejected. Impress Persian Minister gravity intolerable situation.*¹¹¹

- (5) *Righteous Indignation* (Covenant-breaking). Shoghi Effendi’s entire letter of 17 October 1927 to the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the West is a severe condemnation of the misdeeds of the Iranian Covenant-breaker ‘Abdu’l-Husayn Avarih, referred to above in the “Rhetoric of Blame.” The letter begins:

To the Honored Members of the Bahá’í National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the West. My dear fellow-workers:

With feelings of burning indignation I find myself impelled to acquaint you with various events that have recently transpired in Persia. Though in their immediate effect these happenings may prove gravely disquieting to the followers of the Faith in Persia and elsewhere, yet they cannot but eventually contribute to the strengthening and purification of the Cause we steadfastly love and serve.

*I refer to the treacherous conduct of a professed adherent of the teaching of Bahá’u’lláh, by the name of ‘Abdu’l-Husayn Avarih, hitherto regarded as a respected teacher of the Cause, and not unknown by a few of its followers in Europe.*¹¹²

The Guardian presents Avarih as a greedy opportunist who had achieved a certain reputation as a published historian and itinerant lecturer but who, deluded by his own ambition, had foolishly underestimated both the strength

of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and the discernment of the believers who were able to see through the mask of his “*sordid and treacherous mind.*” Although Avarih conspired with Christian missionaries in Iran and with a hostile Muslim clergy, and sought to discredit the Bahá'ís in the eyes of “*the highest dignitaries of the State*” with the old charge that they were rebellious subjects and enemies of the state, Avarih lived to see the utter collapse of his egomaniacal projects:

*Shunned by the entire body of the believers, abandoned by his life-long and most intimate friends, deserted by his wife, separated from his only child, refused admittance into even his own home, denied of the profit he hoped to derive from the sale and circulation of his book, he found to his utter amazement and remorse his best hopes irretrievably shattered.*¹¹³

Clear patterns exist in this darker side of religious history that is Covenant-breaking. One of these patterns is escalation. The Covenant-breaker, when confronted, escalates to new heights of misguided audacity. Avarih struck at the originality and distinctive nature of the Bahá'í teachings and attacked both the authenticity of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the authority of Bahá'í institutions. Furthermore, he attempted to advance his schemes by stooping to the most contemptible of tactics—the personal attack on the Founders of the Bahá'í Faith and their motives. However, in a tone of historical objectivity, Shoghi Effendi wrote the instructive moral of this story:

*Surely, if we read the history of this Cause aright, we cannot fail to observe that the East has already witnessed not a few of its sons, of wider experience, of a higher standing, of a greater influence, apostatize¹¹⁴ their faith, find themselves to their utter consternation lose whatsoever talent they possessed, recede swiftly into the shadows of oblivion and be heard of no more.*¹¹⁵

Covenant-Breaking and the Sin-Covering Eye

I digress here to consider the spiritual implications involved in the expulsion of Covenant-breakers. Shoghi Effendi's strong condemnation of these individuals raises the question of forgiveness and the practice of the “sin-covering eye.” For had not ‘Abdu’l-Bahá counseled, “The imperfect eye beholds imperfections. The eye that covers faults looks toward the Creator of souls”?¹¹⁶ Some may feel that Shoghi Effendi's language is excessively harsh, that the expulsion of Covenant-breakers violates the spiritual counsel

to forgive and to overlook wrong-doing. After all, the world's great religions recommend the practice of compassion, mercy, and forgiveness regarding the faults of others. Why did the Guardian seemingly ignore this advice regarding Covenant-breakers?

Three points should be kept in mind in response. The *first point*, and the short answer to this question, is that both 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi after Him, did in point of fact observe the sin-covering eye for long periods of time, while the Covenant-breakers, did their utmost to defy their authority, to divide the community and to usurp their rightful leadership. Dr. Yúnis Khán-i-Afrúkhtih, one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's faithful secretaries, wrote in his memoirs *Khátirát-i-Nuh-Sáliy-i-'Akká* (Memories of Nine Years in Akka), that for a period of four years 'Abdu'l-Bahá concealed Muhammad-'Alí's clandestine intrigues. It was only when Muhammad-'Alí's younger half-brother openly announced himself as head of the Bahá'í Faith in letters to the Persian Bahá'ís that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was obliged to denounce him. Speaking to the younger Díyá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá reportedly said, "It is now beyond my power to conceal it any longer. You have announced yourselves to the believers."¹¹⁷ Likewise, Adib Taherzadeh writes of Shoghi Effendi's great patience regarding Covenant-breakers, some of whom were members of his immediate family:

As each one rebelled against the Guardian, he tried his utmost to save them. He even refrained from disclosing their rebellion to the community for a considerable period of time. Instead he ignored their insults and endured in silence their despicable conduct until, at the end, he was left with no choice but to announce them as Covenant-breakers.¹¹⁸

Consequently, a long, patient and tortured history, of which the reader may not be fully aware, lies behind each one of these condemnations. A *second point* to bear in mind is the just treatment that was accorded to Covenant-breakers. These expulsions are purely defensive; they preserve the unity of the religion. Covenant-breakers were not expelled because of personal insult or injury to the Head of the religion, despite their ad hominem attacks and nefarious schemes, but rather because their activities, if tolerated, would have brought ruination to the very existence of the Bahá'í Faith itself.

While to avoid the "*virus of violation*,"¹¹⁹ excommunication is necessarily accompanied by shunning; other than the adoption of protective

measures to counteract their schemes, no policy of direct or indirect interference either with Covenant-breakers or their activities was tolerated. No acts of spite or revenge were countenanced. Following ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s example in the Will and Testament, prayers are offered for the forgiveness and happiness of these misguided souls.¹²⁰ The following anecdote related by Yúnis Khán, in which he was personally involved, reveals the magnanimity that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recommended be observed with Covenant-breakers. Yúnis Khán relates that, after consulting with the Hands of the Cause and two other friends, he took measures to dissuade school authorities, who had opened a new school in Tehran, from hiring a certain Hubbu’lláh, son of Jamál-i-Burújirdí,¹²¹ both of whom were Covenant-breakers, thinking that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would be pleased by their action. Much to Yúnis Khán’s great surprise and consternation, He emphatically interrupted the conversation:

“What! You consulted on how to prevent a Covenant-breaker from earning a living? This is not how the Faith is served. In matters of earning a livelihood there is no difference between a believer and a Covenant-breaker. The friends must be the signs of God’s generosity and charity. They should shine like the sun and be as bounteous as the spring rain. They should not consider the capacity or merit of a person. . . .” In short, He continued in this vein for some time, while I felt deep pangs of shame and remorse. . . .¹²²

The *third point* concerns the seriousness of Covenant-breaking itself. Until authoritative statements on the nature of Covenant-breaking were forthcoming from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, its truly devastating effects were not fully understood. And who better than they to write about this disturbing subject since, as the respective Heads of the Bahá’í Faith, they were the primary targets of the stratagems and incessant attacks and suffered most from their actions? At bottom, exposure to Covenant-breaking is exposure to a toxic spiritual contagion. In His penultimate message, sent to the North American Bahá’ís on 12 November 1921, in care of Roy Wilhelm, “his trusted correspondent,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote this short but graphic command regarding association with Covenant-breakers: “He who sits with a leper catches leprosy. He who is with Christ shuns Pharisees and abhors Judas Iscariot. Certainly shun violators.”¹²³ The injunction was repeated in His Will and Testament and followed, consequently, by Shoghi Effendi. The Guardian, faithful to the letter and spirit of his grandfather’s

writings, referred to Covenant-breaking as a “*virus of violation.*” It would be misconceived to view such language as mere hyperbole. In a few telling sentences, Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, who over a twenty-year period witnessed the moral and physical injury it caused the Guardian and which she undoubtedly felt herself, wrote of its devastating, numbing effects. Such effects were all the more convulsing since the violation involved ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s and Shoghi Effendi’s immediate family—in Shoghi Effendi’s case, two brothers, two sisters, uncles and aunts, cousins, and numerous in-laws:¹²⁴

The storms, separations, reconciliations, final sundering of ties, which are involved when a close, distinguished and often dear relative is dying spiritually of a spiritual disease, are inconceivable to one who has not experienced them. . . . It looks simple on paper. But when year after year a house is torn by heart-breaking emotions, shaken by scenes that leave one’s brain numb, one’s nerves decimated and one’s feelings in a turmoil, it is not simple, it is just plain hell.¹²⁵

The same process of contagion that the pathologist observes, also applies to human emotions, and, in religion, to things of the spirit. The virus of Covenant-breaking, just as any other potentially lethal communicable disease, is a psychospiritual fact. Once the contagion has been diagnosed and the disease is declared, often after a long incubation period, radical steps must be taken to eliminate the infection before it kills the entire healthy body. The appropriate metaphor is amputation. When the diseased limb threatens the life of the entire body, it must be severed. Consequently, any invective used by Shoghi Effendi must be seen both as treatment and prevention.

To return to the letter announcing Avarih’s expulsion, Shoghi Effendi ends it with a strong exhortation to defend the Faith, to

*arise with heart and soul for the defence of the impregnable stronghold of the Cause of God, for the vindication of the sacredness and sublimity of the Bahá’í Teachings, and for the condemnation, in the eyes of those who are in authority, of one who has so basely dared to assail, not only the tenets, but the holy person of the recognized Founder of an established and world-wide Faith.*¹²⁶

(6) *Pathos* (Grief and/or Pity). The most outstanding example of pathos is Shoghi Effendi’s ten-page glowing tribute of 17 July 1932, written to mark the passing of the Greatest Holy Leaf. The Guardian’s letter not

only reveals the intense personal grief he felt on the death of his beloved great-aunt Bahíyyih Khanum but also gives a sensitive appraisal of “the towering grandeur of her spiritual life, to the unique part she played throughout the tumultuous stages of Bahá’í history. . . .”¹²⁷ It begins: *Brethren and fellow-mourners in the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh:*

A sorrow, reminiscent in its poignancy, of the devastating grief caused by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sudden removal from our midst, has stirred the Baha’i world to its foundations. The Greatest Holy Leaf, the well-beloved and treasured Remnant of Bahá’u’lláh entrusted to our frail and unworthy hands by our departed Master, has passed to the Great Beyond, leaving a legacy that time can never dim.

The community of the Most Great Name, in its entirety and to its very core, feels the sting of this cruel loss. Inevitable though this calamitous event appeared to us all, however acute our apprehensions of its steady approach, the consciousness of its final consummation at this terrible hour leaves us, we whose souls have been impregnated by the energizing influence of her love, prostrated and disconsolate.

How can my lonely pen, so utterly inadequate to glorify so exalted a station, so impotent to portray the experiences of so sublime a life, so disqualified to recount the blessings she showered upon me since my earliest childhood—how can such a pen repay the great debt of gratitude and love that I owe her whom I regarded as my chief sustainer, my most affectionate comforter, the joy and inspiration of my life? My grief is too immense, my remorse too profound, to be able to give full vent at this moment to the feelings that surge within me.¹²⁸

His letter concludes with this poignant apostrophe:

Dearly-beloved Greatest Holy Leaf! Through the mist of tears that fill my eyes I can clearly see, as I pen these lines, thy noble figure before me, and can recognize the serenity of thy kindly face. I can still gaze, though the shadow of the grave separate us, into thy blue, love-deep eyes, and can feel, in its calm intensity, the immense love thou didst bear for the Cause of

*thine Almighty Father, the attachment that bound thee to the most lowly and insignificant among its followers, the warm affection thou didst cherish for me in thine heart. The memory of the ineffable beauty of thy smile shall ever continue to cheer and hearten me in the thorny path I am destined to pursue. The remembrance of the touch of thine hand shall spur me on to follow steadfastly in thy way. The sweet magic of thy voice shall remind me, when the hour of adversity is at its darkest, to hold fast to the rope thou didst seize so firmly all the days of thy life.*¹²⁹

(7)/(8) *Shame and Shamelessness* (Covenant-breaking). Both psychiatry and human experience have established that abusive “blaming and shaming” is damaging to the person and to self-esteem. Shame results from the guilty conscience and is a legitimate response to wrong-doing, provided that it acts as a healthy corrective and does not become pathological. The Guardian’s use of shame occurs once again in the context of Covenant-breaking. In addition to his letter of expulsion quoted above, Shoghi Effendi referred to Avarih, although he does not name him, in a review of the futile efforts of those various “enemies” who had opposed the Bahá’í covenant: “*The volumes which a shameless apostate [Avarih] composed and disseminated, during that same period*¹³⁰ *in Persia, in his brazen efforts not only to disrupt that Order but to undermine the very Faith which had conceived it, proved similarly abortive.*”¹³¹

Avarih is branded as “*shameless.*” It is important to note that the Guardian was not attempting to shame Avarih whose conduct amply demonstrated that he was beyond shaming. Shoghi Effendi was stating a fact. Any normal sense of shame results from the workings of a healthy, guilty conscience. Avarih’s conscience was clearly defective. To use Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean as a reference point, the deficiencies of the Covenant-breaker’s conscience were such that he suffered not from too much guilt or shame, but from too little. Aristotle defined virtue (*areté*) as that moderation determined by reason that “comes in the middle or mean between two vices, one on the side of excess, the other on the side of defect.”¹³² Using this criterion, Avarih shows “excess” in the high degree of malevolence he manifested in attempting to undermine the Bahá’í Administrative Order. His “defect” lay in his conspicuous lack of any positive

spiritual qualities. He was “[o]f a nature and character whom those who have learned to know him well have never ceased to despise, even in the brightest days of his public career in the Cause. . . .”¹³³ Harsh words, to be sure. But they are in keeping with the following admonition of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

Strive ye then with all your heart to treat compassionately all humankind—except for those who have some selfish, private motive, or some disease of the soul. Kindness cannot be shown the tyrant, the deceiver, or the thief, because, far from awakening them to the error of their ways, it maketh them to continue in their perversity as before. No matter how much kindness ye may expend upon the liar, he will but lie the more, for he believeth you to be deceived, while ye understand him but too well, and only remain silent out of your extreme compassion.¹³⁴

A Summary of Shoghi Effendi’s Art of Rhetoric

- The primary functions of Shoghi Effendi’s rhetoric are to persuade and to move believers to action;
- His rhetorical style is distinctive and manifests at least seven modes of suasive speech;
- His rhetoric preserves some of the classical modes identified by Aristotle;
- The Guardian is credible and impressive, not only because he is an effective rhetor but also because he is an outstanding historical figure of high moral repute, who executed the wide range of his accomplishments to perfection;
- Persuasion is achieved, both by rhetorical skill and deliberative or moral reasoning;
- His use of the rhetorical question is atypical;
- Kinetic emotion is pervasive;
- His rhetorical language is covenantal, that is, conditional;
- The style is sublime.

Endnotes

1. In Greek philosophy, reaching conclusions that are arrived at by the debate of question and answer. In Plato's philosophy, dialectic was the science of first principles since it dispensed with hypotheses and was viewed as the corner (or coping) stone of logic. Aristotle distinguished between dialectical (syllogistic) reasoning and demonstrative reasoning, which begins with first principles that are assumed to be true. For Aristotle, dialectic was a process of criticism that was the means of refining all principles asserted to be true.
2. Aristotle's notion of politics differed greatly from modern notions of political party systems and partisan adversarial relations that are based on the acquisition of power. As the *Nichomachean Ethics* was concerned with individual happiness, Aristotle's *Politics* "treats of the state as one of the chief means through which the individual attains happiness. The object of [eight books of] the *Politics* is both practical and speculative; to explain the nature of the ideal city in which the end of happiness may be completely realized; to suggest some methods of making existent states more useful to the individual citizen than they were in Aristotle's time, or had been in the past" (introduction by H.W. C. Davis in the Jowett translation, *Aristotle's Politics*, p. 3. An unabridged reprint of the 1885 translation).
3. See chapter 1 of book 1 (of 3) of Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* wherein he identified logic or discursive reason with the rhetorical syllogism known as the *enthymeme*, which was a popular, not a properly logical, demonstration.
4. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*.
5. Plato was a forceful critic of rhetoric because he believed that the rhetor of his time achieved his end by degrading the art into a form of flattery and manipulation based on a bag of verbal tricks. Gorgias was a Sicilian who came to Athens in 427 BCE and who used a poetic style and paradoxical arguments. He delivered and wrote speeches for others (Kennedy, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, appendix 1, p. 283). Bret Breneman points out that Plato, to a lesser extent, critiqued rhetoric in the Protagoras and the Euthydemus ("Socrates'/Plato's Use of Rhetoric: A Bahá'í Perspective," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 4.1 [March–June 1991]: 7).
6. For a fuller discussion of this point, see below "The Perfect Orator is the Perfect Man."
7. The examples in quotation marks are taken from the introduction to Edward P. J. Corbett's *Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works*, p. xxvi.
8. Riaz Khadem, *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford*, p. 13.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
10. In British universities, Michaelmas corresponds to the North American Fall/Autumn semester or term.
11. The Oxford Union Society is a student society that arranges debates, speaker meetings, and social events, but debates were (and are) central to the functions of the Union. In the past, the Oxford Union Society and its counterpart at Cambridge, and their respective presidencies, functioned as a training ground for Britain's aspiring prime ministers,

- politicians, and statesmen. With more recent egalitarian trends in British society, the Unions are not as influential as they once were.
12. 'Alí M. Yazdí, *Blessings Beyond Measure: Recollections of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi*, p. 84.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
 14. The Guardian's wife recounts that Shoghi Effendi's lamp would burn late into the night and that 'Abdu'l-Bahá would go to his door saying, "Enough! Enough! Go to sleep! But this serious-mindedness of Shoghi Effendi pleased Him greatly" (Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 13).
 15. *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford*, p. 110. Letter from William Elliot to Riaz Khadem, dated 15 July 1969.
 16. Breneman, "Socrates'/Plato's Use of Rhetoric: A Bahá'í Perspective," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 4.1 (March–June 1991): 1–18.
 17. Edward P. J. Corbett, *Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works*, xxii. Italics in original.
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. Jane Tompkins "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response" in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, p. 204. It needs to be said, however, that one would have to be selective in applying the principles of reader-response theory to the writings of Shoghi Effendi. Reader-response theory gives a predominant role to the reader in the creation of meaning compared to the "objectivity" of the text. Any reading of the Guardian's writings would have to weigh in on the side of the objectivity of the text. It is not the reader who creates ultimate meaning in the reading process but Shoghi Effendi. But as a book such as this one demonstrates, reactions to that objectivity can be subjective.
 20. From the introduction, Corbett, *Rhetorical Analyses of Rhetorical Works*, p. xi.
 21. Ann Boyles, "The Epistolary Style of Shoghi Effendi" in *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi: Proceedings of the Association for Bahá'í Studies Ninth Annual Conference, November 2–4, 1984*, p. 9. Ann Boyles is quoting C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, p. 199.
 22. William Merrill Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America Before Telecommunications*, p. 5.
 23. A document written entirely in the hand of its author. Note not in original.
 24. Decker, *Epistolary Practices*, p. 4.
 25. Helen, John, and Amelia Danesh, "The Life of Shoghi Effendi" in *Studying the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*, p. 25.
 26. This is one of the key ideas on Roman oratory in both Cicero and Quintilian (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed., s.v. "Rhetoric"). The phrase from Roman oratory that heads the above section is not found in the 15th edition of *Britannica*.
 27. It meant any public speaker.
 28. The phrase is Corbett's, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.
 29. Shoghi Effendi, "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh," p. 151.
 30. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 3.
 31. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
 32. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 2.
 33. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
 34. *Ibid.*, pp. 459–61. See also chapter 6, "Facets of Shoghi Effendi's Personality," pp. 125-43.

35. Hand of the Cause of God Leroy Ioas (1896–1965) who served as the Guardian’s assistant-secretary and representative from March 1952 to Shoghi Effendi’s death on 4 November 1957, said in a tape-recorded talk given in Johannesburg, South Africa on 31 October 1958 that in addition to his other duties, the Guardian received 700 pages of N.S.A. minutes in one day alone that he was required to read. The above dates of service and the date of her father’s talk were indicated to me in a letter from Leroy Ioas’s daughter, Anita Ioas Chapman, dated 31 January, 2000. However, he indicates in the same talk that his period of service was “six years” (tape-recorded personal copy).
36. Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 326–27.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 327.
38. *Ibid.* The other examples cited by Frye are: “Johnson’s letter to Chesterfield, some sermons in the period between Latimer and the Commonwealth, some of Burke’s speeches” and “Vanzetti’s death speech.”
39. The MARS program lists 269 instances of the use of the word *action* in the letters and communications of Shoghi Effendi.
40. *U.S. Bahá’í News* 108 (6 June 1937): 1.
41. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Antipodes: Communications from Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá’í Communities of Australasia*, p. 110.
42. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, p. 120.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Jane P. Tompkins, “An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism,” in *Reader-Response Criticism from Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, p. xxv. Tompkins is referring to Longinus’s remarkable treatise “On the Sublime.”
45. A rhetoric of attack or blame since it was directed against Philip of Macedon who was the great enemy of the Athenians.
46. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. “Demosthenes.”
47. Frye, *Anatomy*, p. 327.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 157.
50. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, pp. 114–15.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
52. Edward P. J. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, p. 543.
53. The following three divisions are found in book 1, chapter 3.
54. *A Handbook of Theological Terms*, s.v. “Kerygma.”
55. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, p. 7.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
57. Shoghi Effendi, letter of 26 May 1942, *Messages to America*, p. 56.
58. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 123.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Shoghi Effendi, message of 17 January 1951, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 90.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
63. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, pp. 58–59.
64. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 156.
65. The challenge-and-response factor in making history belongs to Toynbee’s theory of “the geneses of civilizations” in his monumental ten-volume *A Study of History*. See 2:5,

- “Challenge and Response,” in vol. 1 of D. C. Somervell’s abridgement (of 2 vols.), pp. 60–79.
66. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 7–8.
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–10.
68. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 10.
69. *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 62.
70. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 30.
71. When Bahá’ís refer to Covenant-breaking, they refer to an attempt split the Bahá’í Faith. Such attempts are made by ambitious individuals who defy the legitimate head of the religion and/or by attempting to create a sect based on illegitimate pretexts motivated by a lust for power. Covenant-breaking is regarded with the utmost seriousness because it attempts to sap and destroy the very heart of the Bahá’í Faith’s power and strength—its unity.
72. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, p. 25.
73. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, pp. 53–54, from a cablegram of 16 December 1953.
74. Ninian Smart, *Reasons and Faiths: An Investigation of Religious Discourse, Christian and Non-Christian*, p. 182. See especially chapter 7, “Moral Discourse and Religion,” pp. 179–96.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
76. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 213.
77. Shoghi Effendi, cablegram 13 June 1940. *Messages to America*, p. 42.
78. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 157.
79. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 20–21.
80. *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43.
81. *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 67.
82. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 68.
83. *Ibid.*
84. *Ibid.*
85. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 20.
86. *Ibid.*
87. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 127.
88. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 34.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
91. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
93. Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 328.
94. *The Works of Plato: The Jowett Translation*, p. 295. Jowett does not translate the color of the “bad” horse as being black but rather as “of a dark colour.”
95. See Nigel C. Gilbert and Michael Mulkay, *Opening Pandora’s Box: A Sociological Analysis of Scientists’ Discourse*. Referred to by Doug Brent, *Reading as Rhetorical Invention: Knowledge, Persuasion, and the Teaching of Research-Based Writing*, pp. 61–62.
96. Quoted in Brent, *op.cit.*, p. 73. See Wayne C. Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*.
97. Louis C. Charland, “In Defence of Emotion,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 31 (2001): 135.

98. Theresa M. Crem, "The Definition of Rhetoric According to Aristotle" in Keith V. Erickson, ed., *Aristotle: The Classical Heritage of Rhetoric*, p. 52.
99. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. George A. Kennedy's translation.
100. In Greek, *pathos* means simply emotion or suffering depending on context. It does not carry the English denotation of pity and sadness.
101. In his 1922 essay "Hamlet and His Problems," T. S. Eliot defined an objective correlative as "[t]he only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words a set of objects, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked, e.g., a funeral in the cold rain" (*The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, p. 467).
102. *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 67.
103. Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria*, vol. 1, pp. 113–14.
104. *Japan Will Turn Ablaze! Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, and Historical Notes about Japan*, p. 80.
105. *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 34. This letter of 13 February 1923 is significant for its laying down of the principles by which assemblies are to be elected. It also underscores the importance of the Bahá'í Fund.
106. From the website <http://www.rushman.org/seven/> on the Seven Deadly Sins.
107. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 193.
108. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, p. 91.
109. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 7.
110. *Ibid.*, pp. 308–9.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 309.
112. *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 137. What follows is a paraphrase of Shoghi Effendi's words.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
114. Gk. *apostatés*, deserter. The Guardian's use of the verb *apostatize* is archaic but is literally correct. It indicates someone who in public fashion renounces his or her belief.
115. *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 139.
116. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 93.
117. Pp. 51–52, quoted by Adib Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 178.
118. *Ibid.*, p. 355.
119. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, p. 25.
120. "I beseech Thee with all the ardor of my invocation to pardon whosoever 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. Vouchsafe unto them Thy goodly gifts, give them joy, relieve them from sorrow, grant them peace and prosperity, give them Thy bliss and pour upon them Thy bounty" (p. 19).
121. See Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 208–16 for details.
122. Dr. Youness Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akká*, p. 264.
123. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 49.
124. For the details of these violations, see Adib Taherzadeh, "The Faithless Relatives of Shoghi Effendi" in *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 351–69.
125. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 120.
126. *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 139.
127. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

128. Ibid.
129. Ibid., p. 195.
130. The 1920s. Shoghi Effendi is referring to the deluded and futile efforts of the American Ruth White to have the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declared a forgery. White’s most concentrated efforts to convince the American Bahá’ís of the fraudulence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will took place between 1926 and 1930, but she continued her campaign after this date and ultimately left the Bahá’í Faith when in the late 1940s she became a devotee of Mehr Baba. See Loni Bramson-Lerche, “Some Aspects of the Establishment of the Guardianship” in vol. 5, *Studies in the Bábí and Bahá’í Religions: Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi*, pp. 269–80. The Guardian’s letter of the denunciation of Avarih is dated 17 October 1927 (*Bahá’í Administration*, p. 139).
131. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 327.
132. See the *Nicomachean Ethics* 2: 6–7. The subsequent quotations are taken from that section.
133. *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 137.
134. Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 158.

11

THE LANGUAGE OF INTERPRETATION

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

—Lewis Carroll

Interpretation in Religion and in the Bahá’í Faith

Without interpretation, says Donald Davidson, “there would be no such thing as speech, no such thing as communication.”¹ Understanding depends upon interpretation. Dating back to ancient times, interpretation of sacred scripture has been critical for the study and practice of all the world’s religions. Since c. 250 BCE, when the earliest commentaries on the Tanakh began, interpretation has played a decisive role in the history of the Abrahamic faiths. The need for the interpretation of sacred scripture originates in a variety of factors: to understand obtuse symbolism or “dark” passages; to solve ambiguities or perceived contradictions; to define or to clarify moral positions; to make legal or ritual determinations; and other factors such as the need to correlate scripture to human experience and current social issues; to serve apologetic purposes; and to answer any queries of the thoughtful mind.

But when interpretations have clashed, the consequences have sometimes proven catastrophic. A long, bloody history of sectarianism has resulted in which conflicting interpretations have played a major role. When coupled with political motives, the conflict of interpretations has led to internecine wars of religion in which countless masses have been murdered in the name of God. Within Christianity, the longstanding schism between fundamentalists and liberals derives basically from irreconcilable interpretations. What is the mindset that has determined these differences? Moojan Momen has analyzed the differing “cognitive styles” and psychological tendencies that have produced such divergent interpretations. Among them are Richard Hofstadter’s “one-hundred per cent mentality,” or the notions of “field-dependence versus field-independence” and “convergent and divergent thinking.”²

Orthodox, charismatic, or institutional interpretation carries the weight of official authority. This authority is particularly strong when appeals to infallibility (immunity from error) are made. Fundamentalists Christians take the entire Bible as being inerrant or infallible, as do Roman Catholics ex cathedra statements by the Pope. Orthodox Jews and Muslims respectively hold that every letter of the Tanakh and the Qur'án have been dictated by God. Shia Muslims take as infallible the pronouncements of the holy imams, the lineal successors to the Prophet. Bahá'ís also believe that the interpretations of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, as well as all legislation and general pronouncements of the Universal House of Justice are infallible.

The claim to a definitive interpretation of scripture is driven by the belief that the Divine Logos is able to reveal itself to the human mind in an absolute way, but this claim has been rejected by the pervasive relativism that defines the postmodern mind. Most organized religions require—at least on essential doctrines—a core of common beliefs whose acceptance depends upon uniform interpretation. Generally speaking, the claim to infallible interpretation would seem arbitrary to adherents of the religions of South Asia. But while the preoccupation with infallibility is largely a Western and modern preoccupation, Moojan Momen, referring to the work of W. L. King, has pointed out that Theravada Buddhists hold a similar attitude to fundamentalist Christians regarding the inerrancy of their scriptures.³

Interpretation Under the Bahá'í Covenant: A Vexed Question Solved

The Bahá'í Faith, like its sister religions, recognizes the necessity for an authoritative interpretation of scripture. This necessity has become crucial in a religion that advocates unity as its fundamental teaching, notwithstanding the great emphasis it also places on cultural diversity. The reason lies close at hand. If the Bahá'í Faith were to prove incapable of maintaining its internal unity, it would lose all credibility, momentum, and power. However, Bahá'ís maintain that the potentially divisive problem of interpretation, which has vexed and fractured other religions, has been satisfactorily resolved through the legal appointment of an authorized interpreter of the Bahá'í teachings. Only two figures in Bahá'í history have been invested, or will be invested, with this function: 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Their interpretations are called “authoritative.” “Authoritative interpretation” stands in a category apart from the individual interpretation made by believers.

Both ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have provided the Bahá’í religion with a large corpus of diverse interpretation covering both practical and theoretical matters, the former referring to administrative questions and personal conduct, and the latter pertaining to abstract knowledge and the interpretation of scripture. While the Universal House of Justice has not been specifically endowed with the power of interpretation, a domain that belongs exclusively to the guardianship, its “deductions” and “elucidations” meet the on-going requirement to understand the Bahá’í writings in light of current needs and changing conditions. “Authoritative interpretation” co-exists with the right to “individual interpretation,” which remains subordinate and nonauthoritative. This arrangement creates a healthy dynamic tension that preserves a just balance between the fixed interpretation required to maintain “unity of doctrine,”⁴ and with it the unity of the community and the diversity of thought that is necessary to preserve responsible, intellectual freedom and to guard against fundamentalism. The conditions under which authoritative and individual interpretation function have been defined by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Guardian, and the Universal House of Justice. Both types of interpretation help to ensure that institutional authority is maintained along with intellectual “unity in diversity.”

Shoghi Effendi’s readings of Bahá’í scripture are fully “authoritative,” “binding,” and “inerrant,” a conviction that derives from his appointment in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament (1921). Such a statement may seem, on the surface, hardly distinguishable from similar claims in other religions. But upon closer examination, we discover that whereas in other faiths such a claim, whether institutional or charismatic, does not have clear scriptural warrant and has in fact been seriously contested, the basis for such a claim in the Bahá’í Faith is at once scriptural, unambiguous, and legal. It would seem that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, in interpreting the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, were sufficiently perceptive to have answered Spanish-American poet/philosopher George Santayana’s famous dictum in *The Life of Reason* that “[t]hose who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”⁵ It is precisely because the founders of the Bahá’í Faith have remembered the errors of past dispensations, that they have designed and implemented specific safeguards to prevent the division of the Bahá’í Faith into competing sects based on conflicting interpretations. Other than ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, to none is given the right to make an “inspired” interpretation of scripture and to found a sect based on such an interpretation. Behind these provisions of interpretation of the Bahá’í

Covenant, providential foresight has effectively remedied the potential for schism. As we shall see below, these provisions have provided a bulwark that has maintained, and will continue to maintain, Bahá'í unity.

Shoghi Effendi as Interpreter and Expounder (*Mubáyyín*)⁶

One of the vital functions of the guardianship, as for the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was the interpretation of Bahá'í scripture. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was named in the *Kitáb-i-Ahd* (The Book of the Covenant) of Bahá'u'lláh as both successor to Bahá'u'lláh and interpreter of His writings. Shoghi Effendi was named in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as successor to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Guardian/Interpreter/Expounder of the Bahá'í sacred writings: "He is the expounder (*mubáyyín*) of the Word of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants."⁷ In "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" these same lines are translated by Shoghi Effendi as, "He is the Interpreter of the Word of God."⁸ In the Will, the Guardian's authority is proclaimed, and his functions as head of the Bahá'í Faith are clearly specified. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, moreover, affirms that both the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice are "under the shelter and unerring guidance of the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both)." Since 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not a Manifestation of God (Major Prophet), His writings are not strictly speaking scripture, but in His appointed capacity as Interpreter of His father's words, they have the same authority. The same may be said of the Guardian's interpretations.

The Guardian's large number of interpretations has greatly advanced the doctrinal development of the Bahá'í Faith. The three editions (1983, 1988, 1994) of the code-like compilation *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, with its 2163 collected thematic interpretations, has provided succeeding generations with a vast body of guidance pertaining to the Formative Age that supplements the already existing interpretations of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. While this work bears the handy designation of "Reference File," it is in reality a handbook of Bahá'í belief and administrative practice based on the interpretations of Shoghi Effendi, and to a lesser extent, on the elucidations of the Universal House of Justice. These interpretations and elucidations have been instrumental in forging a greater doctrinal unity and coherence of this developing world religion through the laying down of many supplementary, thematic layers of guidance.

Unlike those scholars who perform textual translation and commentary (formal exegesis) or subjective hermeneutics (eisegesis), 'Abdu'l-Bahá's

and Shoghi Effendi's readings are *tabyín*, that is, authoritative interpretation. *Tabyín*, from the Arabic to the Persian *tabyín kardan*, meaning to discover, to make manifest or to clarify, has become a specialized or technical term having the connotation of "authoritative," "binding," or official. *Tabyín* has become especially authoritative because of the appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the *Aqdas* (§121) as the Interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's words.⁹ That Shoghi Effendi's appointment is in turn grounded in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (*Will and Testament*) creates complete confidence regarding his ability to interpret without error. Referring to Shoghi Effendi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Persian phrase in the *Will and Testament* is "*Mubáyin-i-Ayátu'lláh*," which the Guardian translated as "the Interpreter/Expounder of the words of God" (lit. clarifier of the signs/words (*ayát*) of God).

When Shoghi Effendi became Guardian in 1922¹⁰ and did the first English language translation of the *Will and Testament*, which was received by the American Bahá'ís on 25 February 1922, he translated 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reference to his interpretive function as, "He is the expounder of the words of God." This translation also appears in excerpts of the *Will and Testament* published in *Bahá'í Administration* in 1928. The translation "expounder" is quite apropos here, for it refers especially to a detailed exposition of a theory, doctrine, or religious text. However, as mentioned above, in his theological treatise, "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh," Shoghi Effendi rendered 'Abdu'l-Bahá's word *mubayyín* as "*Interpreter of the Word of God*" rather than "expounder": "*He is the Interpreter of the Word of God.*" Another similar statement reads: "*From these statements it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings.*"¹¹ The use of capitalization in the above examples is significant since it seems to refer to a unique function. However, the word *expounder* is better suited to indicate his more wide-ranging commentaries as they appear in such works as *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, and *The Promised Day Is Come*.

Why Shoghi Effendi's Writings Require a Theory of Interpretation

We may well ask what hermeneutical principles were at work when Shoghi Effendi interpreted the Bahá'í writings? For the purposes of this study, this question is not only valid but also necessary. However, to answer it, a theory is required. This theory will help to complement the actual practice, which is authoritative interpretation itself. To answer this question is not to engage in

the worst kind of speculation, i.e., what mental or psychological processes were at work in the Guardian's mind when he made his interpretations. Rather, this question requires a more functional and pragmatic approach. Here the questions would be rather: what was the effect of Shoghi Effendi's interpretations on the belief and value system of the Bahá'í Faith? How did his interpretations advance the development of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, the Bahá'í Faith's teachings and principles, its moral code, or the ordering of its thought? First, we must make one fundamental assumption that is not at all speculative: Shoghi Effendi knew the objective meaning of Bahá'í texts. He was able to divine the authorial intention of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in deciphering the meaning of Their words. This is not to say that the Guardian was able to read their minds or that he shared in any way their unique divine stations. But it does mean that his interpretations are perfectly consistent with the knowledge, aims, purposes, and intended meanings of the authors of the Bahá'í revelation, as either revealed or concealed in their sacred writings. If we do not accept this fundamental premise, we cannot be guided by his interpretations, nor will we be able to see how they illuminate the Bahá'í sacred writings. In other words, to accept the Guardian's interpretations, one must have faith in his ability to interpret correctly, as proclaimed in the *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Eisegesis

The hermeneutical act, or interpretation, takes three basic forms in the writings of Shoghi Effendi: interpretation proper (divining the meaning of scripture); expounding (elaborating the teachings in wide-ranging or allusive fashion); and translation. It would be helpful at the outset to discuss these three modes of interpretation in light of three key terms in the field: hermeneutics, exegesis, and eisegesis. By making a summary examination of these terms, a basis of comparison can be established to better discern how the Guardian's observed—or did not observe—some basic principles of interpretation.

Hermeneutics: The Principles Behind Interpretation

At its origins, as the etymology of the word reveals, hermeneutics is a divine activity (*hermeneutica sacra*). In post-Schleiermacher hermeneutics, this activity was extended to *hermeneutica profana*, in which secular texts were viewed as being an integral part of the art of understanding. The word *hermeneutic* is sometimes used to distinguish literary or scriptural texts

from the broader art of hermeneutics. Although it is difficult to attribute the precise semantical derivation, the word *hermeios* referred both to the priest at the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi and to the wing-footed messenger-god Hermes. “Significantly, Hermes is associated with the function of transmuting what is beyond human understanding into a form that human intelligence can grasp.”¹² The Greek verb *hermeneuein* means “to interpret,” and the noun *hermeneia* “interpretation.” Thus hermeneutics began as an attempt to understand what were only dimly understood divine mysteries transmitted from the world of the gods. While exegesis explains the concrete meaning of the text itself, hermeneutics is a broader activity that seeks to understand the principles that underlie exegesis and other forms of interpretation. Regarding scripture, Bultmannian theologian Ernst Fuchs put the matter succinctly when he wrote in his *Hermeneutik*, “Hermeneutics in the realm of theology is faith’s doctrine of language [*Sprachlehre*].”¹³ Although hermeneutics was originally a theological and scriptural exercise coupled with philology, since the time its philosophical foundations were established in the nineteenth century by the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and his main successor, the philosopher of history and culture, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), it has broadened and now “refers to the intellectual discipline concerned with the nature and presuppositions of the interpretation of human expressions.”¹⁴ Hermeneutics interprets the meaning of scriptural and philosophical texts for civilizations and societies that are distant in space–time from the source culture of such writings. Hermeneutics has become a discipline of philosophy in its own right, closely related to epistemology.

Dilthey is sometimes called “the father of hermeneutics,” and his goal, elaborated through monumental studies,¹⁵ was to write a “critique of historical reason” inspired by Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, by establishing a common science of interpretation for all the cultural or human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) that would be as valid and objective as the conclusions reached through the scientific method used in the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*).¹⁶ While no such consensus has yet been reached, the merit of Dilthey’s more empirical, historically conscious, positivistic approach was to draw attention to the psychological operations of the human mind itself as the locus of understanding, not as taught in psychological theory,¹⁷ but as consciousness objectifies or manifests itself in languages, literature, historical documents, art, religion, actions, and institutions. In so doing Dilthey formulated his key triad of concepts: *Erlebenis* (lived experience), *Ausdruck* (expression), and *Verstehen* (understanding).

While not appropriate here to elaborate on Dilthey's technical use of these terms,¹⁸ these three components were to be distinguished from the more rational operations of *Erklären* (explanation) as used in science. Dilthey's hermeneutic, moreover, retained romanticism's belief in the soul which is the common property of art, religion, and literature. The soul, in its cultural manifestations, was to be approached through the empathy that formed part of *Verstehen*. Dilthey wrote in a famous phrase, "Nature we explain, the life of the soul we understand."¹⁹

As indicated by the current state of Bahá'í scholarship, subjective hermeneutics is practically nonexistent. Little work is being done that provides some overarching meaning of scripture that correlates its significance to the human condition and to related fields of scientific or scholarly inquiry. This development will likely emerge as the present foundational work of translation and commentary continues, reaches a plateau, and begins to diversify. More subjective, wide-ranging, and allusive approaches will no doubt build on the valuable contribution currently being made by textual translator-commentators.

Individual Interpretation: Pure Intention and Harmonious Effects

The simple but powerful distinction between "authoritative" and "individual" interpretation made by Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice has greatly simplified the complexities and the potential dangers of schism involved in the question of interpretation. The Universal House of Justice has stated that the function of individual interpretation is "the fruit of man's rational power" and may be "conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings."²⁰ In a "freedom with boundaries" approach, the following statement from Shoghi Effendi both judiciously preserves the right of the individual to self-expression but at the same time sets limits on it.

I feel that regarding such interpretations (of verses from the Scriptures) no one has the right to impose his view or opinion and require his listeners to believe in his particular interpretation of the sacred and prophetic writings. I have no objection to your interpretations and inferences so long as they are represented as your own personal observations and reflections. It would be

*unnecessary and confusing to state authoritatively and officially a dogmatic Bahá'í interpretation to be universally accepted and taught by believers. Such matters I feel should be left to the personal judgment and insight of individual teachers. . . .*²¹

While individuals are free to determine for themselves the meaning of sacred scripture based on whatever analytical means may be at their disposal (etymological, historical, religious, intuitive, or textual), any determination of meaning must also include the more subtle but equally important criteria of pure intention and harmonious effects. However, as a bare minimum, any individual interpretation should be text-based and observe some basic hermeneutical guidelines: determining context, correlating letter to spirit, bringing any extra-textual aids to understanding, and so forth. These boundaries allow for both literal and figurative interpretation without heretical intent. “Heretical” here means any claim to divinely inspired or infallible interpretation, or the attempt to gainsay or overturn an authoritative teaching. Even if the judgments of individuals are deemed worthy of great confidence, nonetheless, they have the relative value of informed opinions which may be subject to change.

Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice have both demystified and democratized the question of individual interpretation since it remains the right and privilege of any member of the community and is not confined to scholars or other learned individuals alone. However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has indicated that Bahá’í institutions may endorse the considered views of “individual learned men,” which would apply ostensibly to the legal opinion of jurists or other scholars.²²

Exegesis and Authoritative Interpretation

In theology, exegesis means interpreting or explaining the meaning of a sacred text. It is less frequently used to refer to the explication of a literary text. While the current trend is to replace the word *exegesis* by *hermeneutics*, exegesis remains closer to the function the Guardian performed. Exegesis also refers to the modern application of a sacred text. Shoghi Effendi did precisely this in *The Advent of Divine Justice* when he applied Bahá’u’lláh’s and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teachings on “*moral rectitude*,” chastity, and the abolition of racial prejudice to the North American Bahá’í community.

In saying what the text means, Shoghi Effendi performed two types of exegesis. The first type was based on giving the primary meaning of a text in response to a question. These interpretations were concise and did not

involve elaboration. In giving the primary meaning of a text, the Guardian divined or saw into its Author's intention. The clear exception is "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh," a foundational work that defined the stations of the three Central Figures and the distinctive features of the Administrative Order. While "The Dispensation" is not in any sense formal academic exegesis, it clearly gives interpretations and explications of a number of sacred texts and qualifies as exegesis in the broad sense of the word, although, arguably, "The Dispensation" is closer to *tafsír* (commentary). The other type is global or comprehensive exegesis in which he expounds, at greater length, fundamental teachings, the religion's moral code, its history, or the Bahá'í Faith's interactions with the events of contemporary history and the dying old world order. *The Promised Day Is Come*, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, and *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, which contain copious citations of scripture, fit this description. Although these writings are a modern reformulation of the Bahá'í teachings, they create a new paradigm since they bring the Bahá'í religion fully into the modern age and probe its interactions with contemporary society.

The Universal House of Justice, in clarifying the nature of Shoghi Effendi's interpretations, wrote, "The Guardian reveals what the Scripture means; his interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied."²³ The word *reveals* in this statement is noteworthy. Although the Guardian's writings are not Divine Revelation, still they exercise a revelatory function, that of unveiling *the* hidden meaning. Expressed negatively as a standard of proof, our author's interpretations are not plausible ones, that is, more probable than not, nor do they correspond to the possible meanings of texts. They give the exact meaning; and this meaning has a permanent authority and value. Does the statement of the Universal House of Justice mean that the Guardian's interpretation is the only one a text may have? In my view, Shoghi Effendi's interpretations may be joined to other readings, provided that these readings do not ignore or conflict with the authoritative interpretation. The Guardian's interpretations are meant to avoid the bane of all interpretation—misunderstanding. In this they are coherent with Schleiermacher's famous dictum "*Hermeneutik ist die Kunst, missverstand zu vermeiden*" ("Hermeneutics is the art of avoiding misunderstanding").²⁴

Eisegesis and Individual Interpretation

While exegesis aims at making an objective interpretation, of bringing meaning "out of" the text, eisegesis is a subjective "reading in." Eisegesis corresponds to "individual interpretation" and involves reading one's own

biases into texts or reading through the filters that constitute individual understanding. While eisegesis may be original and creative, it also runs certain risks which include: ignoring the literal or plain sense of the text; failing to take into account the religious, literary or historical context or allusions of texts; and ignoring etymology. Eisegesis can also go to the extreme. An extreme example of eisegesis would be to say that the Bahá'í sacred writings permit homosexuality. Extreme eisegesis succumbs to the temptation of imposing the reader's relativized, presumptive values on the text, thus depriving it of its implicit authority. Such an interpreter in effect usurps the authority of the text and passes off either self or personal interpretation as being more important than the text. This flawed process creates an inversion in which the interpreter and the method become the authority, and the sacred text becomes subject to the method, making the interpreter and the method, in effect, more important than the text itself.

Extreme eisegesis is a type of *ta'wíl*. Like all words or concepts, *ta'wíl* has its own history, which is summarized in the endnote.²⁵ But suffice it say that *ta'wíl* is a two-track term. It may be used to refer to legitimate, subjective interpretation of scripture, including “esoteric” or mystical interpretations, but it also refers to deliberate misinterpretation. This last notion of *ta'wíl* occurred during the period that ran from the execution of the Báb (9 July 1850) to the emergence of distinct Bahá'í and Azalí divisions in Edirne by 1866. H. M. Balyuzi wrote that the period immediately following the martyrdom of the Báb was characterized by an “anarchical state of mind and belief. . . .”²⁶ This period has been similarly described by Denis MacEoin as “a time of confusion, anarchy and deep doctrinal division within Babism,”²⁷ a period that gave rise to more than a score of claims to divine revelation and divinely inspired interpretation of scripture put forward by self-appointed pretenders claiming to be *Man Yuzhir'u'lláh*, “Him whom God shall make manifest.” The anti-*ta'wíl* statements of Bahá'u'lláh are particularly meaningful when seen in the light of the false claims that were made at this time. *Ta'wíl* is also forbidden in the *Aqdas*, but here the commandment applies only to a certain type of interpretation. For example, when He reveals that no Manifestation of God shall appear “ere the expiration of a full thousand years,” He adds, “Whosoever interpreteth (*ta'wíl*) this verse otherwise than its obvious meaning is deprived of the Spirit of God and of His mercy which encompasseth all created things” (¶37). This statement is similar to one in ¶105 of the *Aqdas*, “Whoso interpreteth (*ta'wíl*) what hath been sent down from the heaven of Revelation, and altereth its evident meaning, he,

verily, is of them that have perverted the Sublime Word of God, and is of the lost ones in the Lucid Book.” In other words, esoteric or symbolic interpretations of the text are not permitted if they deny its plain (*zāhir*) sense. Consequently, the anti-*ta’wīl* statements in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings and in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s²⁸ should not be generalized to preclude either figurative, allegorical, mystical, or even “esoteric” interpretations of scripture. These approaches are valid and would broaden the scope of the ever-expanding provisional translation-commentaries currently being done by scholars. In an unnamed Persian tablet in the *Itiqarat*²⁹ that treats figurative and literal interpretation, Bahá’u’lláh says, “Some of the words of God can be interpreted figuratively, but such nonliteral interpretations should not give rise to illusions and misconceptions, nor miss the divine intent” (“*ba’ di-yi kalimat-i ilahi ra mitavan ta’vil namud, ya ‘ni ta’vilati kih sabab va ‘illat-i zunun va awham nashavad va az maqsud-i illahi mahrum namanad.*”).³⁰ In this same tablet, Bahá’u’lláh forbids the *ta’wīl* of legal texts or ritual directives. Figurative interpretation of ritual law would gut the positivistic injunctions of scripture and orthopraxy. However, figurative interpretation forms the basis for much of Bahá’u’lláh’s analysis of the apocalyptic verses in both the Gospel and the Qur’án in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*.³¹

Shoghi Effendi’s Three-Fold “Method” of Interpretation

With this background in mind, I would like to make a simple elucidation of the process of Shoghi Effendi’s interpretations from their scriptural texts to their applications in the concrete situations that he defines. This three-fold method of interpretation represents, as its name suggests, what loosely may be called a method, one that correlates the three “*spiritual prerequisites of success*,” from *The Advent of Divine Justice*, examined in chapter 4, with their sources in the Bahá’í sacred writings. The following exercise indicates how closely Shoghi Effendi followed both letter and spirit of the sacred writings as he applied the relevant scriptures to contemporary situations. While the technique of application is basic to the pattern of all exegesis, these examples are Bahá’í-specific and are therefore of interest for this study.

His technique in *The Advent of Divine Justice* is basically consistent with older forms of exegesis such as were found, for example, in Jewish Midrash,³² i.e., rabbinical principles of interpretation which have influenced both Christian and Muslim approaches. The Guardian’s applications of Bahá’í scripture to contemporary situations is illustrative of the following principle: “Scripture is coherent: each part agrees with all the other parts. Scripture

forms a harmonious, interlocking text. Contradictions can be only apparent, not real.”³³ This statement is a close parallel to Shoghi Effendi’s comment, reported through his secretary, that any seeming contradictions in the Bahá’í teachings are only apparent since they are “one great whole with many facets. Truth may, in covering different subjects, appear to be contradictory, and yet it is all one if you carry the thought through to the end.”³⁴ The more scripture is read as a coherent whole, the clearer it becomes. The Guardian’s statement incidentally validates the nature of holism, which is also intrinsic to the Bahá’í Faith. His interpretations show a mutually coherent, interlocking relationship to the scriptures that expounds.

This suggested “method” would be the following:

1. He frames the discussion of morality by grounding his statements in copious citations of the Bahá’í sacred writings. This framing establishes a thematic selection of scripture, which is in itself a valuable pedagogical or deepening tool.
2. He identifies an outstanding spiritual attribute that characterizes the selected passages.
3. He applies the scripture to the contemporary social, moral, or political situation prevailing in North American society. (However, his interpretations are meant for the world and not just North America, which is seen as microcosm of world society).

Three “folds” are indicated in the following representation. The first fold is referred to as the “seed text” or scripture; the second fold is the “*spiritual prerequisite*” or virtue identified by the Guardian; and the third fold is the interpretation as it applies to a contemporary situation. In *The Advent of Divine Justice*, the interpretation usually takes the form of a permission or a prohibition.

Example A: “Moral Rectitude”

First Fold: Seed Text

“The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct.”

“A good character is, verily, the best mantle for men from God. With it He adorneth the temples of His loved ones. By My life! The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof.”

“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.”

Second Fold: Spiritual Prerequisite

“Moral Rectitude”

Third Fold: Interpretation

“A rectitude of conduct, an abiding sense of undeviating justice, unobscured by the demoralizing influences which a corruption-ridden political life so strikingly manifests. . . .”

“This rectitude of conduct with its implications of justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness, must distinguish every phase of the life of the Bahá’í community.”

“The first is specially, though not exclusively, directed to their elected representatives. . . .”

Example B: *“Absolute Chastity”*

First Fold: Seed Text

“Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful, and your heart enlightened.”

“And if he met the fairest and most comely of women, he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty.”

“They that follow their lusts and corrupt inclinations, have erred and dissipated their efforts. They indeed are of the lost.”

Second Fold: Spiritual Prerequisite

“Absolute Chastity”

Third Fold: Interpretation

“A chaste and holy life must be made the controlling principle in the behavior and conduct of all Baha’is, both in their social relations with the members of their own community, and in their contact with the world at large.”

“It must be closely and continually identified with the mission of the Baha’i youth. . . .”

“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.”

Example C: “Freedom from Prejudice”

First Fold: Seed Text

“God is no respecter of persons on account of either color or race. All colors are acceptable unto Him, be they white, black, or yellow.”

“God maketh no distinction between the white and the black. If the hearts are pure both are acceptable unto Him. God is no respecter of persons on account of either color or race. All colors are acceptable unto Him, be they white, black, or yellow.”

“In the estimation of God, there is no distinction of color; all are one in the color and beauty of servitude to Him. Color is not important; the heart is all-important. It mattereth not what the exterior may be if the heart is pure and white within.”

Second Fold: Spiritual Prerequisite

“Freedom from Prejudice”

Third Fold: Interpretation

“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.”

“If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favor of the minority, be it racial or otherwise.”

“Unlike the nations and peoples of the earth, be they of the East or of the West, democratic or authoritarian, communist or capitalist, whether belonging to the Old World or the New, who either ignore, trample upon, or extirpate, the racial, religious, or political minorities within the sphere of their jurisdiction, every organized community enlisted under the banner of Bahá’u’lláh should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it.”

The Maintenance of Objective Meaning and Authorial Intention

It follows that Shoghi Effendi's interpretations—whether they give the primary meaning of a word, phrase, passage or text, or elaborate more comprehensive formulations, as found in his epistolary compositions—provide objective, and in some cases exclusive, meaning to Bahá'í texts. The Guardian clearly had in mind to discern the intended meaning of the Authors of the sacred writings. While his interpretations are inspired, they are nonetheless logocentric, i.e., they rely on the verbal use of signs and symbols to convey permanent, objective meaning. However, such a function clearly runs against the current temper of postmodernism, which has practically destroyed logocentricism and with it the objective meaning of texts.

E. D. Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation* represented a last attempt to maintain objective interpretation as the relativism of the postmodern mind began to take hold. It used a positivist, hypothetical-deductive approach to the interpretation of literature, which today reads as being at the antipodes of postmodernist relativism. Literary criticism today has largely abandoned the search for authorial intention because of the wide consensus on the polysemous (polysemic) nature of texts and the polyvalent and nonprescriptive moral value of human experiences in today's secular age. Reader-response theories (which had the psychological effect of deflecting attention away from text to reader), along with a chaotic plethora of subjectively based theories (which have developed before and since, and are described by literary critics Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle as consisting of "competing jargons and systems, to say nothing of antisystems")³⁵ have buried in textual nescience what was once a central concern of hermeneutics.

Belief in authorial intention and objective meaning has much greater import for maintaining the protective doctrines of organized religion and its scriptural texts than it does for literature, since religions have a vested interest in preserving their doctrinal and hence community unity. Within religion, and especially within Christianity, uniformity of interpretation or interpretation that respects a well-established tradition has long since ceased to be the norm. For those who see themselves as post-modernists and/or deconstructionists, no interpretation is sacred. The Bahá'í Faith, however, maintains a belief in objective textual meaning, especially as it applies to the authorized interpreters of its sacred writings. At the same time, individual interpretation allows for a healthy subjectivity of readings and lets "a thousand

flowers bloom.”³⁶ Hirsch made a plausible argument for “the possibility of objectively valid interpretation.”³⁷ His remarks are valid, not only for literary but also and especially for religious texts. In the 1960s, Hirsch fought to maintain objective interpretation against what was soon to become a veritable sea of literary critical subjectivities: “For if the meaning of a text is not the author’s, then no interpretation can possibly correspond to *the* meaning of the text, since the text can have no determinate or determinable meaning.”³⁸ That there is no determinable meaning to the text was precisely the conclusion reached by Jacques Derrida about a decade later, a position that followed through to an extreme the “logic” of subjective interpretation set loose by New Criticism about three decades earlier.

“The Intentional Fallacy” by W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and M. C. Beardsley, first published in 1946, was highly influential in convincing the informed reading public that any attempt to perceive intention on the author’s part was a fallacy. It helped open the floodgates to postmodernism’s highly subjective hermeneutic. Authorial intention was a very old theory in literary criticism, and Wimsatt and Beardsley did not argue their anti-intentional theory in absolute terms. They were willing to concede that “external,” as distinguished from “internal evidence,” might throw meaning on an author’s intention: “. . .it [external evidence] consists of revelations (in journals, for example, or letters or reported conversations) about how or why the poet wrote the poem. . . .”³⁹ In absolute terms, Wimsatt and Beardsley are obviously right that no path of certitude exists to establish the poet’s intention, since we cannot know with certainty what transpired in the poet’s mind during the creative process. For the intention, they reasoned, the reader must look to the poem: “The poem is not the critic’s own and not the author’s (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public.”⁴⁰ However, both authors engage in absurdities when, at the end of their essay, they divest the poet of any “ownership” of the poem’s meaning and give it to the critic and reader. They write, referring to T. S. Eliot’s line from “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”:

“I have heard the mermaids singing each to each,” whether it be influenced by John Donne’s “Teach me to hear Mermaides singing” in Donne’s poem “Song,” that even if one were to inquire of the meaning from Eliot (then living), and to receive an answer, that “such an answer to such an inquiry would have nothing to do with the poem ‘Prufrock’”; it would not be a critical inquiry.⁴¹

This statement must be seen as a *reductio ad absurdum*,⁴² for it effectively banishes authors from participating in the creation of meaning in their own poems. For while it does suit Wimsatt and Beardsley's purposes in arguing for text-centered interpretations, their ironic statement "Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle,"⁴³ gives the author no voice in the creative process that he or she has initiated. As Socrates has indicated, while poets may not be able to interpret every line of their own verse,⁴⁴ nor should they be asked to do so, they are doubtless in a position to indicate the "meaning" of their own poems. To suggest that an author no longer has any say over her or his own poem because its meaning has become "public" is to invest too much weight in a thesis which otherwise retains a measure of validity.

Objective Meaning and Authorial Intention in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

But how do these considerations relate to the writings of Shoghi Effendi? Regarding authorial intention, Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, who on her own testimony was almost always present when the Guardian translated or wrote his books, has written, "Unlike so many people Shoghi Effendi wrote what he meant and meant exactly what he wrote. It is impossible to eliminate any word from one of his sentences without sacrificing part of the meaning, so concise, so pithy is his style."⁴⁵ She has written in the same context that the writings of the Guardian "should effectively prevent them [readers] from descending to the level of illiterate literates which often so sadly characterizes the present generation as far as the use and appreciation of words are concerned."⁴⁶ Her phrase "illiterate literates" implies that many who know how to read and write do not develop their literacy skills beyond basic levels. And here we recall the occasional complaints of "flowery language," "big words," and "long sentences" made against both the Bahá'í sacred writings and the writings of the Guardian. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní's comment speaks to the "big words" and "long sentences" complaint and says much for the cultural value of literacy:

He never compromised with the ignorance of his readers but expected them, in their thirst for knowledge, to overcome their ignorance. Shoghi Effendi chose, to the best of his great ability, the right vehicle for his thought and it made no difference to him whether the average person was going to know the word he used or not. After all, what one does not know one can find out.⁴⁷

On 25 April 1912 in Washington, DC, in a talk addressed to a group of Esperantists, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made a succinct statement that aptly describes one of the higher functions of language: “. . .the function of language is to portray the mysteries and secrets of human hearts. The heart is like a box, and language is the key. Only by using the key can we open the box and observe the gems it contains.”⁴⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement has a triple implication: it presupposes that the use of language is not mere “play” à la Derrida, but that language is functional and that one of its primary functions is clarity; as He has stated, this clarity has the purpose of revealing things that were previously unclear; His reference to the human heart indicates that any science of linguistics should be imbedded in a spiritual anthropology of the human being.

In distinguishing his own lower station (*maqám*) from that of Bahá’u’lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi made it clear that the power with which he was invested to interpret the words of the three Central Figures in no way implies equality with them; the ability to correctly interpret or discern meaning does not place the interpreter on an equal footing with the Authors whose words he elucidates: “*The fact that the Guardian has been specifically endowed with such power as he may need to reveal the purport and disclose the implications of the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not necessarily confer upon him a station co-equal with those Whose words he is called upon to interpret.*”⁴⁹ His interpretations are not, consequently, an exercise in mindreading, since this would imply that the Guardian’s mind was, in some sense, co-extensive with that of the three Central Figures, a condition that the above quotation clearly repudiates. It was the *meaning* of their holy utterances that the Guardian was empowered, or as he put it, “*endowed*” to reveal.

Language That Creates a New Worldview

The Guardian’s interpretations share at least this much in common with certain features of the “new hermeneutics” established in the 1960s by existentialist New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann’s students, the theologians Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling, who were also proponents of Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s phenomenological approach.⁵⁰ Fuchs and Ebeling argued that one of the primary functions of religious language was not just to communicate ideas but to create a “world.”⁵¹ This world has its own ambiance, its own distinctive style, its own set of terms. In short, this language expresses a worldview. Shoghi Effendi’s interpretations and

translations of the sacred writings, along with his original core works, have helped to provide a coherent and consistent, modern and progressive *Weltanschauung* of this youngest of the world's great religions.

Translation as Interpretation

Along with interpretation proper (giving the primary meaning of a text) and comprehensive expounding, translation was the third type of the Guardian's interpretations. It is axiomatic that any translation is simultaneously an interpretation, especially of literary or sacred texts, which have profound doctrinal and aesthetic implications. The Guardian commented through his secretary on the "literary merit" that translations must show, "Furthermore, it was always the expressed wish and desire of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to have proper and adequate translations that would not only convey the true spirit of the original but also possess some literary merit."⁵² The literary merit envisaged by 'Abdu'l-Bahá would ostensibly have to do with the large poetic element that is intrinsic to sacred scripture.

Nader Saiedi in *Logos and Civilization* has given several instructive examples of how the Guardian's translations have determined a more accurate understanding of the Bahá'í writings. One such example concerns the Báb's prophecy in the Persian Bayán that alludes to the coming Order of Bahá'u'lláh, "Well it is with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. . . ."⁵³ Prior to Shoghi Effendi's selective translation of the *Aqdas*, readers assumed that this passage referred to the order of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, and especially to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, simply because the context of the original referred to "the order of the Bayán,"⁵⁴ i.e., the order of the Báb's writings. Consequently, this prophecy was originally understood to refer to the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. And indeed, Bahá'u'lláh's own statement seemed to indicate such an interpretation.⁵⁵ Following this understanding, readers of these verses in the Most Holy Book, *hádha'n-nazmi'l-a'zam* and *hádha'l-badí'* (lit. this most great order. . .this wondrous order), naturally assumed that they referred to Bahá'u'lláh's writings. But in his translation, Shoghi Effendi rendered them as, "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed" (¶181).

The order first mentioned in the Persian Bayán, just as seed grows into tree, became fully manifest in the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Nader Saeidi's example is instructive for another reason. Regardless of the scholar's ability to more fully appreciate the nuances, sheer power, and beauty or other literary qualities of Persian and Arabic, the fact remains that the Guardian's translations cannot be neglected in any reading or translations of the sacred writings, since they clarify the meaning of the original languages. Saiedi's example dispels the notion that a sound knowledge of Persian and Arabic, while requisite for translation-commentary, does not in itself resolve all hermeneutical complexities. Of course, the problem of interpretation does not apply only to translation; it persists, we sometimes forget, in one's first language, even in everyday, common speech. Consequently, translation-interpretation is a more complex exercise than possessing a mastery of the source languages, as necessary as that ability may be.

Although our author never took a course in translation, his translations are nonetheless expert. As with all the other major tasks that he undertook, he was autodidactic in his translation endeavor. Moreover, his Middle Eastern cultural and religious background, and exposure to European education enabled him to make appropriate cross-cultural translations. The Universal House of Justice has commented:

... the beloved Guardian was not only a translator but the inspired Interpreter of the Holy Writings; thus, where a passage in Persian or Arabic could give rise to two different expressions in English he would know which one to convey. Similarly he would be much better equipped than an average translator to know which metaphor to employ in English to express a Persian metaphor which might be meaningless in literal translation.⁵⁶

In the Bahá'í dispensation, then, a unique precedent has been set regarding the translation of scripture. For the first time in religious history, the functions of authorized interpreter and translator, functions that naturally belong together, have been combined in one person. But apart from this fact, the Guardian's translations are important for at least three reasons: they have established a first canon of scripture in English, the language of interpretation; they are outstanding models of stylized English prose and religious thought; and they are official, inspired interpretations. A religion's belief and value system is, of course, essential to its existence. Translation

of scripture is closely tied to the establishment and maintenance of orthodox values and beliefs. It is for this reason that many religious sects have their own translation of the Bible. Because of his background and education, Shoghi Effendi was best suited for combining the two functions of translation and interpretation in one person.

The Art of Translation is the Art of Transposition

Northrop Frye has observed that unlike Islam, which originated with the Qur'án and was strongly influenced by Arabic in all its missionary journeys, “Christianity as a religion has been from the beginning dependent on translation.”⁵⁷ The same holds true for Western readers of the Bahá'í sacred writings. Yet while translation of scripture is in one sense “settling for the second best,”⁵⁸ it can have the decided advantage of clarifying authorial intention, as we seen above. The remarkable thing about translation is that it is still capable of revealing some of the magic of the original language. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), author of *Truth and Method*, the magnum opus of philosophical hermeneutics, in his essay, “On the contribution of poetry to the search for truth,” has remarked that the lyric poem is best translated by another poet who puts “a new poetic work, as it were, in place of the original by creating an equivalent with the materials of a different language.”⁵⁹ To use a musical analogy, Gadamer's remark indicates that an expert translator has an ability to transpose from one linguistic key to another. This talent includes the knack for translating, not only words but also modes of thought and stylistic expressions. Shoghi Effendi's translations contain the poetic qualities of rhythmic prose that show a fine sensitivity to musical language—cadence, rhythm, alliteration, and assonance are all featured.

The musical qualities of the translation of scripture cannot be sufficiently stressed because of their public character and their connection to worship in song. Following 'Abdu'l-Bahá's counsel, the Bahá'í sacred writings and prayers are increasingly being set to music. The Authorized Version of the Bible was “appointed to be read in churches.”⁶⁰ The Bahá'í writings translated by Shoghi Effendi are also read aloud at Nineteen Day Feasts, Holy Days, and conferences; are quoted in scholarly publications; and are referred to in a variety of other situations. These writings are intended to facilitate that spiritual transformation of which they are so evidently capable in the mind and heart of the reader/listener. St. Paul has rightly said, “So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom.10:17).

Northrop Frye has commented on the desired musical quality in the translation of sacred verse: “If a translator has a ‘tin ear’,” that translator “is continually mistranslating. . . whatever his scholarly knowledge.”⁶¹ It is perhaps the greatest compliment to the Guardian’s skill that the reader or listener is not aware of reading a translation. The same is true for the Authorized or King James version of the Bible, even though the phraseology has grown quaint by modern standards. Here is one passage translated by Shoghi Effendi, from Bahá’u’lláh’s main doctrinal work, *The Book of Certitude*. The passage is a preamble by which Bahá’u’lláh readies His readers for His own exegesis of the symbolic, apocalyptic language used by Jesus to refer to the Second Coming. In it, He appeals to the true seeker not to lose the opportunity of gaining a true understanding of His elucidations. The passage is actually a direct allusion to Bahá’u’lláh’s own declaration of prophethood, which He was soon to make to His followers in Baghdad. The translation has all the hallmarks of scripture: lyrical quality, earnest appeal, soaring inspiration, the use of symbolic language, admonition, and sober argument are all subtly combined.

O the pity! that man should deprive himself of this goodly gift, this imperishable bounty, this everlasting life. It behooveth him to prize this food that cometh from heaven, that perchance, through the wondrous favours of the Sun of Truth, the dead may be brought to life, and withered souls be quickened by the infinite Spirit. Make haste, O my brother, that while there is yet time our lips may taste of the immortal draught, for the breeze of life, now blowing from the city of the Well-Beloved, cannot last, and the streaming river of holy utterance must needs be stilled, and the portals of the Ridván cannot for ever remain open. The day will surely come when the Nightingale of Paradise will have winged its flight away from its earthly abode unto its heavenly nest. Then will its melody be heard no more, and the beauty of the rose cease to shine. Seize the time, therefore, ere the glory of the divine springtime hath spent itself, and the Bird of Eternity ceased to warble its melody, that thy inner hearing may not be deprived of hearkening unto its call. This is My counsel unto thee and unto the beloved of God. Whosoever wisheth, let him turn thereunto; whosoever wisheth, let him turn away. God, verily, is independent of him and of that which he may see and witness.”⁶²

It is well known to Bahá'ís that the Guardian modelled his own translations on the King James translation of 1611 to which his translations may be favorably compared. His knowledge of the Bible was extensive, and the noble phraseology of the King James Version echoes throughout the Guardian's translations. Riaz Khadem writes that our author's familiarity with the Holy Book dated back to his days at the Collège des Frères in Haifa. Later at the Syrian Protestant College, which became the American University of Beirut, the Guardian took "four formal courses on the Bible during his freshman and sophomore years. . . ." ⁶³ Rúhíyyih Rabbaní wrote that Shoghi Effendi "was a great reader of the King James version of the Bible" ⁶⁴ and at Balliol College, J. C. Hill, a friend of Shoghi Effendi, wrote that "[h]e read the whole of the Bible, from cover to cover in about a week. He told us that he was a lover of the midnight oil." ⁶⁵ This background made good preparation for his future task of translation.

The Interpretations of the Guardian and the Elucidations of the Universal House of Justice

Although somewhat peripheral to the scope of this book, this chapter will conclude with a comparison of the differences between the interpretations of Shoghi Effendi and the "elucidations" of the Universal House of Justice. When the Guardian died without issue on 4 November 1957 without having appointed any successor, ⁶⁶ the Bahá'í Faith was forever deprived of a living Guardian. Faced with this deprivation, contemporary interpretations of the Bahá'í writings have ceased. Has the cessation of this critical function adversely affected this growing world religion? The answer to this question is both yes and no. But the first observation to be made is the following. Although there will never again be a living Guardian within the Bahá'í dispensation, with the regrettable result that contemporary interpretation is now "inoperative," ⁶⁷ nevertheless the thousands of interpretations made by the Guardian are still valid and active. The Universal House of Justice has observed, "The Guardianship does not lose its significance nor position in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh merely because there is no living Guardian." ⁶⁸ His "innumerable such definitions, supplementing those made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Bahá'u'lláh Himself" remain. ⁶⁹

In view of the fact that the Universal House of Justice has been empowered both to legislate and to "elucidate" obscure questions or those that have caused differences, what distinction can be drawn between the

interpretations of Shoghi Effendi and the elucidations of the Universal House of Justice? In answering this question, a fundamental distinction must be kept in mind at the outset: the Guardian interpreted scripture; the Universal House of Justice does not. This may seem like an overly drawn semantic distinction, since the word *elucidation* generally implies the function of interpretation, but a Bahá'í-specific understanding of these two terms applies.

Regarding the interpretations of Shoghi Effendi, the Universal House of Justice made this previously quoted observation, “The Guardian reveals what the Scripture means; his interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied.”⁷⁰ This statement defines an exegetical procedure whose outcome determines the objective meaning of a sacred text or a question bearing on the text. The interpretive act exercised by our author would be akin to a flash of insight into the meaning of the holy words. James Hillman’s comment on the nature of intuition in *The Soul’s Code* is relevant: “Intuitions occur; we do not make them. They come to us as a sudden idea, a definite judgment, a grasped meaning. They come with an event as if brought by it or inherent in it.”⁷¹ Hillman also points out that intuitions or insights in ordinary individuals “can be wholly wrong, missing the mark just as quickly and completely as they can get it right.”⁷² However, Shoghi Effendi’s intuition of the meaning of the text was always true.

In “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh,” Shoghi Effendi wrote that authoritative interpretation was the unique province of the Guardianship and that legislation and elucidation belonged to the Universal House of Justice.⁷³ The ability of the Universal House of Justice to elucidate the sacred writings is based on a number of sources, three of which are given here:

- The Guardian quotes from Bahá’u’lláh’s “Eighth Leaf of the Exalted Paradise” that the Universal House of Justice is “to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them.”⁷⁴ (In light of the word *enforced*, this statement would seem to refer to legislation);
- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declared in His *Will and Testament* that the House was to “deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters not expressly recorded in the Book”;⁷⁵

- In one of His stern warnings against differences, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also declared, “Should there be differences of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve the problems. Whatever will be its decision, by majority vote, shall be the real truth, inasmuch as that House is under the protection, unerring guidance and care of the one true Lord.”⁷⁶

The two distinct but complementary powers of interpretation and legislation are determined by the “*sphere of jurisdiction*,” i.e., the proper sphere that both institutions exercise separately.⁷⁷ In this regard, Shoghi Effendi has written, “*Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and proscribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.*”⁷⁸

Regarding the origin of the words *elucidation*, *explanation*, and *deduction*, referring to the process used by the Universal House of Justice, it would seem that they were selected based on a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly in response to a question about the Universal Court of Arbitration:

Touching the point raised in the Secretary’s letter regarding the nature and scope of the Universal Court of Arbitration, this and other similar matters will have to be *explained and elucidated* by the Universal House of Justice, to which, according to the Master’s explicit instructions, all important and fundamental questions must be referred.⁷⁹

In a letter of 27 August 1998 that answered an inquiry about a possible “interpretive function” of the Universal House of Justice, that body wrote, “The divinely inspired legislation of the House of Justice does not attempt to say what the revealed Word means—it states what must be done in cases where the revealed Text or its authoritative interpretation is not explicit; and in this context its offer *explanations*” (italics mine). It wrote further, “While the House of Justice does not interpret, it makes *deductions* on the basis of the revealed Texts and their authorized interpretations” (italics mine).⁸⁰ This statement follows closely the previous comments of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. While it is clear that the Universal House of Justice does “*deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá’u’lláh has not expressly revealed*,”⁸¹ it also offers explanations of scripture, although such questions are sometimes referred to the Research Department at the Centre for the Study of the Texts.⁸² In the absence of

the Guardian, such elucidation derives from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s injunction, quoted in the second point above. The phrase “questions that are obscure” would appear to refer to scriptural obscurities as well as other matters. The late Dr. Peter Khan (d. 2011), retired member of the Universal House of Justice, has provided in his article, “Some Aspects of Bahá’í Scholarship,”⁸³ a pertinent example of this process. While his point is rather to caution scholars not to make “unwarranted inference based on the Writings,”⁸⁴ a point he illustrates with reference to the Big Bang Theory and “the creation of life in the test tube,”⁸⁵ his argument incidentally exemplifies the Universal House of Justice’s elucidations of the sacred text. Peter Khan’s cautionary remark is intended to warn against any tendency to textual literalness by scholars that would put them at odds with the current findings of science. While the details of this argument need not concern us here, his comment is collaterally instructive for present purposes: “I was alerted to that [the possibility of the test-tube creation of life]⁸⁶ by seeing the response of the House of Justice to a question about the possible synthesis of an elementary life form. The House of Justice gave a very cautious response, referring to certain key phrases in the statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and pointing out that their implications will only become clear as biological science advances.”⁸⁷

Now by any normal understanding of the word, the response of the Universal House of Justice would qualify as an “interpretation,” since three basic elements of a standard hermeneutical situation are present: a text; a question about the text; and an answer. And it is interesting that the House of Justice has written elsewhere in this regard, “Although not invested with the function of interpretation, the House of Justice is in a position to do everything to establish the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh on this earth.”⁸⁸ However, owing to the clear and distinct functions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice laid down by Shoghi Effendi, as well as the explanations of the House itself, this statement should not be taken to mean that the Universal House of Justice has trespassed into the realm of interpretation. Rather, its statement, as reported in Peter Khan’s anecdote, must refer to an authoritative understanding of scripture arrived at by a qualitatively different process. On the question of elucidation, Robert H. Stockman has observed:

The Universal House of Justice does possess the power of *elucidation*, a power that to my knowledge it has never defined. At minimum it probably involves logical deduction or induction as to the meaning of a text, or making clear the meaning of a text

through analogy. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi’s power of interpretation, on the other hand, appears to have been a far more dynamic and creative process whose results are less outwardly predictable. . . .⁸⁹

Although it is true that the House of Justice has never formally defined its power of elucidation, it has nonetheless given some indication of this process referred to by Robert Stockman. For example, “As regards the need to have deductions made from the Writings to help in the formulation of the enactments of the House of Justice, there is the following text from the pen of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. . . .”⁹⁰ (The quotation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to the necessity for “subsidiary laws” which correspond to the needs of the changing times.) Within the same series of quotations cited by the Universal House of Justice, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that “conflicting deductions” were made in the realm of Islamic jurisprudence by “individual divines.”⁹¹ Deduction has now reverted to the Universal House of Justice, but the *Will and Testament* has endowed the process with inerrancy. While the interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi could be characterized as inward creative impulses of inspired understanding, or flashes of insight, the process by which the Universal House of Justice reaches its conclusions is a rational, methodical, step-by-step process, a formal activity involving consultation, research, draft proposals, and revisions until the final verdict or explanation is rendered. Consequently, “deduction” or “elucidation” is a lengthier and more deliberative process than interpretation, but it remains nonetheless inspired and inerrant.

When required, the Universal House of Justice gives its understanding of the sacred texts, which supplements ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s and the Guardian’s interpretations, based on the process of consultation. That the Universal House of Justice is also concerned with reconciling conflicting interpretations or viewpoints is also demonstrated by another statement of Peter Khan. He refers to the fundamentalist “back to Bahá’u’lláh” movement initiated by a small group some years ago that ignored the Covenant and the “authoritative clarifications of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian.”⁹² The misunderstandings created by this group was settled by the intervention of the Universal House of Justice. The qualitative distinction between interpretation and elucidation corresponds to an orthodox, authoritative, theological distinction. The word *interpretation* has been restricted to apply to the functions exclusively exercised by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

and the Guardian. Although this distinction has deprived the word *interpretation* of a certain elasticity, this semantic restriction has been made to conform to the different but complementary “*spheres of jurisdiction*” defined by Shoghi Effendi. The language of theological orthodoxy sometimes requires restrictive and, in this case at least, absolute definitions, just as logical and scientific statements tend to absolutize the language of science. In the statements of the Universal House of Justice on its own powers of legislation and elucidation, as distinguished from the interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian, a dogmatic distinction has been made, meant here in the proper theological sense of a distinction that rests on the basis of adequate authority.

Endnotes

1. Donald Davidson, from *The John Locke Lectures* (1980), unpublished, quoted with permission by Hans H. Penner in “Interpretation” in *Guide to the Study of Religions*, p. 67.
2. Moojan Momen, *The Phenomenon of Religion: A Thematic Approach*, pp. 363–85.
3. For a full discussion of this question, see W. L. King, *A Thousand Lives Away*, pp. 53–57, referred to by Momen, *The Phenomenon of Religion*, p. 364.
4. The Universal House of Justice wrote, “Unity of doctrine is maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and the voluminous interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, together with the absolute prohibition against anyone propounding ‘authoritative’ or ‘inspired’ interpretations or usurping the function of the Guardian” (*Wellspring of Guidance: Messages from the Universal House of Justice [1963–1968]*, p. 53).
5. *Oxford Quick Reference Quotations*, p. 274.
6. Thanks to Iráj Ayman and Juan Cole for clarifying the meaning of the original Persian terms used in this section and their associated concepts.
7. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*, p. 11.
8. The fuller text reads: “*He is the Interpreter of the Word of God,*” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, referring to the functions of the Guardian of the Faith, asserts, using in His Will the very term which He Himself had chosen when refuting the argument of the Covenant-breakers who had challenged His right to interpret the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh. “After him,” He adds, “will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants” (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 148).
9. Information taken from an e-mail exchange with Nader Saeidi (22 May 2006) and Juan R. I. Cole’s article “Interpretation in the Bahá’í Faith,” *Bahá’í Studies Review* 5.1 (1995): 6.
10. Most of the information in this paragraph is taken from Diana Malouf’s *Unveiling the Hidden Words: The Norms Used by Shoghi Effendi in His Translation of the Hidden Words*, p. 35. Although the explanation of this date is given in “Introduction and Parameters,” another is given here. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní writes that the *Will and Testament* was read twice: on 3 January 1922 and again on 7 January 1922. This last date is based on a letter written by Shoghi Effendi himself “to an old Bahá’í” and states, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will was read on the 7th of January, 1922, at His house in the presence of Bahá’ís from Persia, India, Egypt, England, Italy, Germany, America and Japan. . . .” The Guardian was not present at either gathering (*The Priceless Pearl*, p. 46).
11. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 149–50.
12. Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer*, p. 13.
13. Quoted in Palmer, *ibid.*, p. 53. See also Ernst Fuchs, *Hermeneutik*.
14. *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, vol. 6, s.v. “Hermeneutics,” p. 279.

15. In addition to six major works of which *Das Wesen der Philosophie* (The Essence of Philosophy) is perhaps the best known, Dilthey's posthumous *Gesammelte Schriften* (Collected Writings) (1913–36) amounted to 12 volumes. They contain some of his most important reflections on hermeneutics.
16. *Encyclopedia of Religions*, s.v. "Hermeneutics," p. 280.
17. However, Dilthey's concept of *Verstehen* as empathy has been criticized precisely for its psychological content.
18. For a fuller explanation, see Palmer, op. cit., pp. 107–15.
19. Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5:143–44, quoted by Roy J. Howard in *Three Faces of Hermeneutics, An Introduction to Current Theories of Understanding*, p. 16.
20. The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 88.
21. Letter of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, 12 December 1929, in *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community: The Messages of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of the British Isles*, p. 423.
22. Referring to the gradual development of a body of legal opinion and judgment during the formative age of the Bahá'í Faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "Today the process of deduction is the right of the body of the House of Justice, and the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice" (from an unidentified source, cited in *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 85).
23. Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 52.
24. From *Hermeneutik und Kritik*, p. 29, quoted in Palmer, op. cit., p. 94. Schleiermacher's *Hermeneutik und Kritik* and *Hermeneutik* are yet to be translated into English.
25. Todd Lawson provided the following commentary: "Ta'wíl comes from the verb 'awwala', to take something to its source or beginning. In early Islam, it meant an interpretation of the Qur'án text. But because of various religio-political developments ta'wíl acquired a certain stigma, viz., it came to designate what the enemies of the Sunni establishment did when they said that the Qur'án supported their claims for power. Further, it also came to designate what certain antinomians said the Qur'án meant: e.g., that the word *Fasting* in the Qur'án referred to, not the actual act of fasting, but the Person of the Imam. This was arrived at through a perhaps tortured reading of the text. In my view, when ta'wíl is forbidden in the Aqdas it refers to this: it is not permissible to explain away the normative laws by saying they only refer to some spiritual reality, etc." (E-mail communication of 24 August 2000 to this author).
26. H. M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*, p. 71.
27. Denis MacEoin, "Hierarchy, Authority, and Eschatology," in *In Iran. Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, p. 96.
28. Some of these are in *Makátíb*, vol. 2, pp. 248–49, quoted by Fazel-i-Mazandarani in *Amr va Khalq*, vol. 3, pp. 45, 450–53. Thanks to Iraj Ayman for supplying these references.
29. Pp. 279–83. Thanks to Juan Cole for supplying this reference.
30. Provisional translation by Juan Cole. Cole calls this untranslated tablet *Lawh-i-Ta'víl*. At the website: <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/trans/vol1/ta-vil2.htm> (accessed 25 September 2011).
31. Further to this discussion, see Christopher Buck's *Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions series, vol. 7.

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32. The *midrashim* were one of several early Rabbinic commentaries on the Hebrew Bible but by far the largest. They contain both narrative/homiletic (*Haggadah*) and legal (*Halakah*) material.
33. "History of Interpretation" in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 306.
34. From "Deepening" in the *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, p. 228. From a letter of 24 February 1947.
35. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, eds., *Critical Theory Since 1965*, from the introduction, p. 1.
36. A variation on the phrase "Let a hundred flowers blossom" by former president of China Mao Tse Tung, referring to China's Cultural Revolution (speech in Peking, 27 February 1957).
37. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 2.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6. Italics in original.
39. In *Essays in Modern Literary Criticism*, p. 182.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
42. By a *reductio* argument, I mean that both Wimsatt and Beardsley's premise and conclusion are false, i.e., that Eliot's answer (a poet explaining the meaning of his or her own poem) would not be a logically valid statement of literary criticism.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
44. In "The Intentional Fallacy" Wimsatt and Beardsley cite Plato's Socrates in this regard: "I went to the poets; tragic, dithyrambic, and all sorts. . . I took them some of the most elaborate passages in their own writings, and asked what was the meaning of them. . . Will you believe me? . . . there is hardly a person present who would not have talked better about their poetry than they did themselves. Then I knew that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration" (quoted in *Essays in Modern Literary Criticism*, p. 179. The source is "The Apology of Socrates").
45. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 196.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 196–97.
48. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 60.
49. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 151.
50. R. E. Palmer in *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer* wrote that Ebeling and Fuchs "advised their students to study Gadamer's book [*Wahrheit und Methode*] with care" (p. 47).
51. "Hermeneutics" in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 280.
52. Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, letter of 16 October 1926, p. 422.
53. Persian Bayán 3:16, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 324–25.
54. Nader Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization: Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 293.
55. Here Saiedi refers the reader to *Ishráq Khávarí, Má'idiy-i-Ásmání*, 1:23–24.
56. Letter to an individual, 16 September 1992.
57. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, p. 3.
58. Frye, *ibid.*, p. 4.
59. "On the contribution of poetry to the search for truth," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 111.

60. From the title page of the KJV.
61. Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
62. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 23–24.
63. Khadem, *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford*, p. 129.
64. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 37.
65. Khadem, *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford*, p. 129.
66. The Universal House of Justice writes, “The fact that Shoghi Effendi did not leave a will cannot be adduced as evidence of his failure to obey Bahá'u'lláh—rather should we acknowledge that in his very silence there is a wisdom and a sign of his infallible guidance” (*Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 82).
67. In a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual (5 May 1977) explaining the “[p]rerogatives and Duties Invested in the Guardian” the House stated that “[t]hirdly, there are those prerogatives and duties which lie exclusively within the sphere of the Guardian himself and, therefore, in the absence of a Guardian, are inoperative except insofar as the monumental work already performed by Shoghi Effendi continues to be of enduring benefit to the Faith. Such a function is that of authoritative interpretation of the Teachings” (*Lights of Guidance*, no. 1049, p. 311).
68. Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 87.
69. In context, the House of Justice is referring to definitions of “the sphere of the legislative action,” which was the prerogative of the Guardian. The Guardian had the authority “to state whether or not a matter was or was not already covered by the Sacred Texts. . .” (*Wellspring of Guidance*, pp. 83–84).
70. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
71. James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*, p. 98.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
73. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 148–50.
74. From the *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* (The Words of Paradise) in *The Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 68.
75. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*, p. 20.
76. “Establishment of the Universal House of Justice,” in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, p. 322.
77. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 148.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
79. Letter of 9 April 1923 in *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922–1932*, p. 47. Italics mine.
80. From a letter to McLean, 27 August 1998.
81. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 150.
82. In former usage this body was referred to as “The Centre for the Study of the Holy Texts.” Of late, however, the word *holy* has been dropped from such communications. The memoranda of the Research Department are not covered by the infallibility extended to the Universal House of Justice in its “enactments” and “elucidations.”
83. Peter Khan, *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 9.4 (December 1999): 47–48.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
85. *Ibid.*
86. In *Some Answered Questions* ‘Abdu'l-Bahá indicated, in Peter Khan’s words, “that attempts at the artificial creation of life will be unsuccessful because it is an unnatural approach” (p. 47). ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s statement reads, “This is why from every natural

composition a being can come into existence, but from an accidental composition no being can come into existence” (chapter 47, p. 181). Peter Khan does not quote from the text of the Universal House of Justice but summarizes the substance of their reply.

87. Khan, op. cit., p. 48.
88. Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 52.
89. “Revelation, Interpretation and Elucidation,” in *Bahá’í Studies*, vol. 3, *Scripture and Revelation*, pp. 65–66. Italics in original.
90. Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 84.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
92. Khan, op. cit., pp. 51–52.

12

THE HISTORY OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE HEROISM, TRAGEDY, DIVINE DRAMA, AND CHARACTER

There is a glory of youth about the tragic mission of the Bab, which, from the human standpoint, is irresistible and compelling.

—Mary Hanford Ford

The Oriental Rose or the Teachings of Abdul-Baha (1910)

Heroism

The Loss of the Heroic in Postmodernity

The adulation of the hero seems to be waning in postmodernity. According to the jaded view of the British historian J. H. Plumb, heroes are created out of an outmoded mythological mindset, popular demand, and the necessity of historical circumstance. In his view, the adulation of the hero corresponds to a waning adolescent mentality in an age dominated by scientific rationalism, one that has lost touch with the magical view of earlier societies in which heroes emerged as lesser divinities.¹ As in former ages, today's hero is usually a political/military leader who is, as Carlyle wrote in his "Great Man" study of prototypical heroes, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, "The Commander over Men; he to whose will our wills are to be subordinated. . . ."² With declining nationalism, the mythology of the former heroes on which nation-building has been staked, has largely been eclipsed. The Universal House of Justice in its message of April 2002 to the world's religious leaders has predicted that "the fetish of absolute national sovereignty is on its way to extinction."³ We might agree, consequently, with J. H. Plumb that the hero who makes a reputation by conquering others is no longer worthy of emulation. In Carlyle's study, the political/military leader, "the hero as king," was only one of six categories. The others included the hero as a god (Odin), the prophet (Muhammad), the poet (Dante,

Shakespeare), the priest (Luther and Knox), and the “man of letters” (Johnson, Rousseau, Burns). Bábí history yields the hero-warrior-martyr or, in the case of Mullah Husayn and Quddús, even the scholar-hero-warrior.

It appears certain, based on Shoghi Effendi’s eulogy of Bábí heroism, that the hero has secured a rightful place in the literature of the Bahá’í dispensation. In light of the remarkable deeds performed by the Bábís, Emerson’s skeptical remark that “[e]very hero becomes a bore at last.”⁴ would have been soundly rejected by Shoghi Effendi, no less than by Carlyle. For Carlyle, heroes were the dynamic movers of society, guides, gifts from heaven, and as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad, revealers of the mystical and the divine. The Bábí heroes were anything but boring.

The Heroism of the Dawn-Breakers

As *God Passes By* and his translation of Nabíl’s Narrative eloquently attest, Shoghi Effendi desired to imbue his readers with the exalted spirit of “*the dawn-breakers of a new Age . . .*”⁵ To memorialize them, he named the new age “*the Heroic Age of the Bahá’í Dispensation.*”⁶ He presents the Báb as the “*Master Hero,*” ruling over that vast company of heroes and heroines. His disciples, the Letters of the Living (*Hurúf-i-Hayy*), constellate “*His satellites, a galaxy of God-intoxicated heroes.*”⁷ Throughout his writings, the Guardian eulogized the dauntless courage and heroism of those Bábís who chose death rather than renounce the Promised One: “*A persecution, kindling a courage which, as attested by no less eminent an authority than the late Lord Curzon of Kedleston, has been unsurpassed by that which the fires of Smithfield evoked, mowed down, with tragic swiftness, no less than twenty thousand of its heroic adherents, who refused to barter their newly born faith for the fleeting honors and security of a mortal life.*”⁸

Although many Bábís were the innocent victims of mob fanaticism, some of the Báb’s followers chose to vindicate their faith by defending their lives. Along with Nayríz and Zanján, Bábí heroism was immortalized at the siege of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí (1848–49),⁹ the shrine of a Muslim saint, located in the eastern province of Mazindaran. There, the two most outstanding of the Letters of the Living, Mullah Husayn and Quddús, commanded 311 other Bábís who, for eleven months, successfully resisted two regiments of infantry and cavalry led by Prince Mihdí-Qulí Mírzá, commander of the army of Mazindaran, and a brother of Muhammad Shah.¹⁰ They were defeated only by treachery.¹¹ With the deaths of the Bábí warriors, the last chapter in the history of legitimate jihad was written. ‘Abd-al-Rahmán

‘Azzám, statesman and former secretary-general of the Arab League (1945-52), refers to jihad as “legitimate war,” which was always in its true sense “the war of self-defense.”¹² While the Guardian has preserved the Báb’s station as Master Hero, just one of His many names and titles, tragedy remains mingled with this heroism. While He fearlessly asserted His prophetic claims in the face of death,¹³ like Jesus, the Báb was led as a “sheep to slaughter” (Acts 8:32). Like Jesus, He offered Himself as a sacrificial “lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter: 19). To the peace-loving, it seems a strange paradox that the apotheosis of heroism, with its sacrifice, courage, endurance, and daring, often occurs in war, otherwise notorious for its cruelty and barbarism. Soldiers fallen in battle are patriots, lovers of country, no less than their comrades-in-arms. The Dawn-Breakers were hero-martyrs, the fallen lovers of God. Here is one example of Shoghi Effendi’s eulogy of Bábí heroism as he remembered the siege of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí:

We remember with thrilling hearts that memorable encounter when, at the cry “Mount your steeds, O heroes of God!” Mullá Husayn, accompanied by two hundred and two of the beleaguered and sorely-distressed companions, and preceded by Quddús, emerged before daybreak from the Fort, and, raising the shout of “Yá Sáhibu’z-Zamán!”, rushed at full charge towards the stronghold of the Prince. . . .” We see relived in poignant memory that last day of Mullá Husayn’s earthly life, when, soon after midnight, having performed his ablutions, clothed himself in new garments, and attired his head with the Báb’s turban, he mounted his charger, ordered the gate of the Fort to be opened, rode out at the head of three hundred and thirteen of his companions, shouting aloud “Yá Sáhibu’z-Zamán!”. . . We acclaim the magnificent courage that, in a subsequent encounter, inspired nineteen of those stout-hearted companions to plunge headlong into the camp of an enemy that consisted of no less than two regiments of infantry and cavalry. . . .¹⁴

It is noteworthy that the historical present is used throughout the above passage. The present tense creates the dramatic impression of immediacy, as if the events are occurring before our eyes. While the events he portrays are firmly grounded in eye-witnessed historical events, his language is

couched in the spiritual romance presented in chapter 8, “Style and Pattern”: “*We are struck with wonder. . . . We are stirred. . . . We are amazed at the serenity and sagacity of that same Quddús. . . . Nor can we fail to note the superb fortitude with which these heroic souls bore the load of their severe trials. . .*”¹⁵ His portrayal of Bábí heroism is clearly intended to continue to inspire present and future generations, and not to be relegated to the textbook reading of a bygone age. Shoghi Effendi did not view the heroic spirit a dead relic of the Apostolic Age. He specified in the following letter, written on his behalf, that heroism should characterize service in the Formative Age (1921–):

These, indeed, are the days when heroism is needed on the part of the believers. Self-sacrifice, courage, indomitable hope and confidence are characteristics they should show forth, because these very attributes cannot but fix the attention of the public and lead them to enquire what, in a world so hopelessly chaotic and bewildered, leads these people to be so assured, so confident, so full of devotion? Increasingly, as time goes by, the characteristics of the Bahá’ís will be that which captures the attention of their fellow-citizens. They must show their aloofness from the hatreds and recriminations which are tearing at the hearts of humanity, and demonstrate by deed and word their profound belief in the future peaceful unification of the entire human race.¹⁶

The Mythological Element: Divine Heroes

Both Shoghi Effendi’s and Nabíl’s presentations of the Bábí struggles contain elements of the hero myth that functions as a myth of redemption¹⁷ in which the Dawn-Breakers engage in a titanic contest, not to save their own lives, but to vindicate the truth of the Báb and His religion. Although the Bábí warriors fit the ancient motif of the warrior-hero, their lives and deeds correspond to other features presented by Carlyle. Figuring among the Dawn-Breakers and the Letters of the Living are priestly reformers who are endowed with the divine strength of mythological¹⁸ figures, that is, divine heroes who are endowed, in the case of Mullah Husayn and Quddús, with quasi-prophetic status. The devotion shown by Shoghi Effendi and Nabíl for the Letters of the Living and their companions echoes some of the Báb’s later writings. Denis MacEoin writes that “in his later works the Báb describes the Letters of the Living explicitly as the return of the Prophet, the twelve Imáms, the four gates (*abwáb*) who succeeded the Twelfth Imám (later

rejected in Bahá'í theory) and Fatimá,” and in the *Kitáb-i-Panj Sh'an* (The Book of the Five Stations) Mullah Husayn is identified as the “throne of the point of the Qur'án,” i.e., Muhammad.¹⁹ Similar remarkable statements are made about Quddús in the Báb's writings.²⁰

Added to the religious elements, classical allusions to the divine hero can be found in both Nabíl's narrative and the condensed account of the same history in *God Passes By*. Since Homeric times, the classical hero was revered above all for displaying great courage in the face of death. He was honored at a shrine (*heróon*) and promoted after death to semi-divine status.²¹ This also applies to the Bábí heroes. Shaykh Tabarsí, already the shrine of a Muslim saint, also became a Bábí shrine. Mullah Husayn's arrival at the fortress, the day after a premonitory dream by the shrine's custodian, which foretold the arrival of Imam Husayn with seventy-two warriors, and eventually the Prophet Muhammad, is presented by Nabíl as the arrival of a venerated hero: “When Mullá Husayn arrived on the following day, the guardian immediately recognised him as the hero he had seen in his vision, threw himself at his feet, and kissed them devoutly.”²² Symbolically, Tabarsí represents, for Bahá'ís, the last legitimate use of arms in defense of a sacred cause. As sacred space, the theater of battle is a shrine-fortress.

The mythological element of the Dawn-Breakers corresponds to two of seven functions of myth identified by Russell T. McCutcheon, i.e., “tales of heroes” and “myths as truths.”²³ McCutcheon's article presents a position now widely held that invalidates Plato's neat but overly simplistic opposition of *logos* and *mythos* in *The Republic* (398a, 568a–c), which he bifurcated into the truth and the lie respectively. The Guardian's portrayal of the Dawn-Breakers is not myth in the obsolete sense of story that is contrary to fact, a “fiction,” but myth in the sense of “a story that is sacred to and shared by a group of people who find their most important meanings in it.”²⁴ In the mythologization of the exploits of the Dawn-Breakers, the function of the Bahá'í Faith's historical and community identity are being actively formed, a function that frames and remembers the words and deeds of the religion's spiritual ancestors.

However, while the Dawn-Breakers are fearsome, awe-inspiring, even magical, they are nonetheless real. Mullah Husayn's cutting in two of the tree, the man, and his musket is not to be taken as hyperbole to supplement the Bábí chronicle with a miraculous story.²⁵ The feat of Mullah Husayn is presented as fact and was witnessed by his enemy, commander Abbás Qulí Khán, who reported the incident himself to Prince Ahmad Mírzá.²⁶ The

deed is all the more remarkable since Mullah Husayn was neither trained in the arts of war nor physically robust. Our author has referred to the Muslim cleric's "*fragile frame and trembling hand.*"²⁷ The Dawn-Breakers are vastly outnumbered and disadvantaged by an oppressive, militarily superior foe, aided and abetted by a tyrannical state and fanatical Shiah clergy. These considerations lend epic proportions to the story. That the Bábís ultimately fell victim to treachery, in no way impugns their status as heroes. On the contrary, their truthfulness stands out in sharp contrast to the cowardice and deceit of their enemies.

The Epilogue: Overcoming "*Colossal Disaster*"

Along with its foregoing narrative, the Guardian's epilogue from *The Dawn-Breakers* is indispensable reading, since it provides a more contemporary perspective on the evolution of the Bahá'í Faith up to circa 1932. Shoghi Effendi's translation and edit of Nabíl's history ends abruptly with Bahá'u'lláh and His family departing for Baghdad "escorted by a member of the imperial body-guard and an official representing the Russian legation" on 12 January 1853 CE.²⁸ The epilogue not only gives Shoghi Effendi's somber reflections on the early period of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith up to the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh (1892) but also provides a more optimistic condensation of the worldwide expansion and successes of the Bahá'í Faith to the time of writing. The first six pages of the epilogue (pp. 651–57) give a synopsis that amounts to nothing but a series of foiled attempts and agonies. Picking up the thread of the narrative at Bahá'u'lláh's point of departure for Baghdad, Shoghi Effendi wrote, "*Never had the fortunes of the Faith proclaimed by the Báb sunk to a lower ebb than when Bahá'u'lláh was banished from His native land to 'Iráq.*"

As usual, our author does not content himself merely to assert. He provides the details to complete the picture of what ostensibly amounts to a "*colossal disaster.*"²⁹ The Guardian observes that superficial or skeptical readers who are "*unwilling to recognise the celestial potency with which that Faith was endowed*" would have written off this early period as "*one of the saddest and most fruitless that had ever been the lot of mortal men.*"³⁰ The subsequent pages reveal a litany of calamitous events:³¹ the foiling of the Báb's plan to proclaim His faith in Mecca; the unfulfilled, mysterious, and unidentified "*programme which He had thought out, the essentials of which He had already communicated to the chosen nineteen of His disciples*"; the excessive if not fanatical behavior of His followers; the untimely death of the Mu'tamid³² that "*wise*

and sagacious ruler,” leaving the Báb vulnerable to the vicious attacks of His enemies; His potentially favorable meeting with Muhammad Shah, dashed by the “cowardly and capricious Hájí Mirzá Áqásí”; the apparent failures to establish the religion in Turkish territory and in India; the Báb’s captivity and isolation in Adhírbajan; the catastrophes of the sieges of Shaykh Tabarsí, Nayríz, and Zanján, which extinguished the lives of Quddús, Mullah Husayn, Vahid, and Hujjat; the murder of Táhirih; and the pitiful disorganization and disarray into which the Báb’s scattered and partially corrupted writings had fallen; and, of course, the martyrdom of the Báb Himself.

Shoghi Effendi’s epilogue—and the same applies to *God Passes By*—would seem to correspond to social anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s “blurred genres,”³³ i.e., “the recognition in one discipline of a cognitive need for or affinity with another discipline. . . .”³⁴ The epilogue is both history and literature: history, since it traces the development of a growing world faith, and literature because it has strong dramatic, epic, and stylistic features. Hayden White, reflecting on the historian’s need for imagination in the writing of metahistory, argued for a much needed realignment of the properly mythical and imaginative elements in the task of the historian. In his capacity as both historian and writer, Shoghi Effendi is engaging in such a process. I should add in passing that myth as sacred story is neither antiscientific nor antihistorical. Myth is beyond science.³⁵ As I have pointed out above, our author has included mythological elements in his treatment of divine heroes, our author has included mythological elements that transcend the temporal and the contingent. Hayden White observes, “Considered as potential elements of a story, historical events are value-neutral. Whether they find their place finally in a story that is tragic, comic, romantic, or ironic—to use Frye’s categories—depends upon the historian’s decision to *configure* them according to the imperatives of one plot structure or mythos rather than another.”³⁶ Shoghi Effendi’s reading of early Bábí history in the epilogue, and also for large portions of *God Passes By*, was to configure it according to heroic, tragic, elegiac, and triumphant perspectives. In so doing, he was engaging in an essentially creative (imaginative) and selective act of discrimination. White adds, “. . . no historical event is *intrinsically tragic*; it can only be conceived as such from a particular point of view or from within the context of a structured set of events of which it is an element enjoying a privileged place. For in history what is tragic from one perspective is comic from another. . . .”³⁷

Quite so. For according to the written account by Captain von Goumoens, the same Bábís so atrociously butchered by their fanatical Muslim persecutors were dispatched in the bazaar with all the celebratory gusto of a *fête*, complete with marching band!³⁸ White, however, makes another point in his instructive essay that is also pertinent to the use of dramatic imagination in Shoghi Effendi's historical writings, "In my view, history as a discipline is in bad shape today because it has lost sight of its origins in the literary imagination. In the interests of *appearing* scientific and objective, it has repressed and denied to itself its own greatest source of strength and renewal."³⁹ At first, it seemed that the dismally low ebb to which the fortunes of the Bábí Faith had sunk would remain irreversible, even to be unmoved by the charisma of such a glorious figure as Bahá'u'lláh, who, as yet, remained largely in the background:

*After He had been despoiled of all His possession in Núr and Tihrán, denounced as the prime mover of a dastardly attempt on the life of His sovereign, abandoned by His kindred and despised by His former friends and admirers, plunged into a dark and pestilential dungeon, and at last, with the members of His family, driven into hopeless exile beyond the confines of His native land, all the hopes that had centred round Him as the possible Redeemer of an afflicted Faith seemed for a moment to have completely vanished.*⁴⁰

This is the hard edge of historical verity. It seems astonishing that Bahá'u'lláh, whose superlative qualities even His enemies admitted, could have been despised by anyone who had known Him. But the statement that the provenance of such hatred comes from feckless "*former friends and admirers*" is only momentarily disarming. Even for One so majestic, the winds of human affection were fickle indeed. Shoghi Effendi knew, of course, as the reader knows, that the opening pages of the epilogue are not the end of the story. His interpretation of the early days of Bábí history does not turn out to be a simple Jeremiad of the failures of its early days. The epilogue will shine a brighter beam on its succeeding pages.

As Shoghi Effendi traces the sequence of events through to a happier outcome, a dynamic tension is created of the cycle of the wheel within the wheel. The blood-stained, dramatic, rapidly turning micro-cycle of early Bábí history plays out within the larger, slower macro-cycle of the worldwide development of the Bahá'í Faith that took place during the ministry of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá and later under the direction of the Guardian himself, during the transition from the Heroic to the Formative Ages. A microhistory, one that began in and was confined originally to Persia, has engendered and perpetuates a metahistory that is destined to embrace the whole world.

The Great Reversal: Looking Through the Eyes of Nabíl

As the events depicted in the epilogue unfold, the wheel of the great reversal or peripety (*Peripeteia*), which Aristotle claimed was essential to tragedy, begins to turn.⁴¹ The dynamic pattern of the reversal is no less essential to Bahá’í history as it was to Greek tragedy and comedy. For according to Aristotle, peripety “is a change by which the action veers around to its opposite.”⁴² In the Greek theater, this veering around, which results from the time restrictions built into the play itself, should be sudden, shocking, and bring about the hero’s demise. But unlike the Greek and Shakespearean plays, the effect of the reversals in Bahá’í history is comedic (having a happy outcome) rather than tragic, since disasters, setbacks, and reversals ensure the advancement of the Bahá’í Faith. In the foreword to *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi points to “disasters,” “seeming reverses,” and “evident victories” as a basic pattern in Bahá’í history:

*Nor will it be my intention to ignore, whilst surveying the panorama which the revolution of a hundred years spreads before our gaze, the swift interweaving of seeming reverses with evident victories, out of which the hand of an inscrutable Providence has chosen to form the pattern of the Faith from its earliest days, or to minimize those disasters that have so often proved themselves to be the prelude to fresh triumphs which have, in turn, stimulated its growth and consolidated its past achievements.*⁴³

Shoghi Effendi conveys the effect of this great reversal through the medium of two characters, the Persian king Násiri’-d-Dín Sháh and the great Nabíl, with the former acting as a foil⁴⁴ for the poet-historian. We see the hazy photograph of this “poet laureate of Bahá’u’lláh,” as an unnamed Englishman has described him,⁴⁵ in his own book put there by Shoghi Effendi. From accounts of his life and character—and indications are conveyed by the photograph itself—a picture emerges of a passionate and sacrificial lover of Bahá’u’lláh, a love that animated his entire being and finally consumed him.⁴⁶ In Shoghi Effendi’s epilogue, Násiri’-d-Dín Sháh serves to highlight the successes of the post-Bábí phase of the Bahá’í

Faith. The Sháh is presented as the disillusioned antagonist who lived to see the unexpected revival of the spiritual forces of the little heresy he had fought so hard to crush: “*Little did he imagine that as his reign was drawing to a close it would witness a revival of the very forces he had sought so strenuously to exterminate—a revival that would manifest a vitality such as he, in the hour of darkest despair, had never believed that Faith to possess.*”⁴⁷

As the Guardian presents the gradually mounting tide of successes that serve to vex and ultimately defeat the king,⁴⁸ there are moments of keen psychological insight and realism: “*The futility of his efforts, however much he might attempt to conceal his feelings, was only too apparent.*” “. . .*these were among the chief factors that convincingly revealed to eyes of the Sháh the invincible character of a Faith he believed himself to have bridled and destroyed.*”⁴⁹ A close reading of the text conveys a sense that the Guardian is attempting, at least, a certain objectivity vis-à-vis the predicament of the king. Although his portrayal of the Qajar monarch amounts to a through-going condemnation, our author attempts at least to see through the eyes of a head of state who was much harassed by a national heresy. About the days following the martyrdom of the Báb, we read:

*Delivered from its curse, which for many nights had robbed him of his sleep, he could now, with undivided attention, set about the task of rescuing his land from the devastating effects of that vast delusion. Henceforth his real mission, as he conceived it, was to enable both Church and State to consolidate their foundations and to reinforce their ranks against the intrusion of similar heresies, which might, in a future day, poison the life of his countrymen.*⁵⁰

While this passage, at least, could arguably be construed as an “objective” description of the state of the monarch’s mind, it is clear where Shoghi Effendi’s sympathies lie. He follows with, “*How vain were his imaginings, how vast his own delusions!*” By contrast, Nabíl is portrayed as the astonished observer who, from beyond the grave, watches with wonder and delight as the Guardian completes the sequel to his own narrative with the impressive advances that were made within the forty years following the completion of *The Dawn-Breakers* in 1889 or 1890: “*Little did Nabíl himself imagine that within two score years of the*

writing of his narrative *the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, the flower and fruit of all the Dispensations of the past, would have been capable of advancing thus far on the road leading to its world-wide recognition and triumph.*"⁵¹ Shoghi Effendi goes on to enumerate the signal events that marked the worldwide expansion of the Bahá'í Faith to the beginning of the third decade of the twentieth century. He highlights this series of noteworthy achievements:⁵² the global spread of the Bahá'í Faith; the illuminated shrine of the Báb as an object of worldwide pilgrimage; the favorable judgment of the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations regarding the illegal seizure of Bahá'u'lláh's house in Baghdad by the Shiites of Iraq; the awakening of the northern states in the United States of America by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's historic visit; the extinction of the sultanate and the caliphate; and "*the unique spectacle*" of the Bahá'í Faith as a worldwide representation of a "*Commonwealth of peoples.*" He puts down these historical accomplishments as we imagine the immortal Nabíl smiling down proudly from a bygone Heroic Age. Nabíl is, of course, the fitting *persona* to enhance the Guardian's account, not only because the epilogue is itself a historical synopsis that updates Nabíl's but also because of the psychological impression of sympathy that is created as the reader imagines his swelling pride at the remarkable growth of the Bahá'í Faith, despite such adversity. What in Nabíl's lifetime had been viewed as a despicable heresy of Shiah Islam, had already become in Shoghi Effendi's day a respectable, growing world religion:

*Little did he imagine that less than forty years after the death of Bahá'u'lláh His Cause, bursting beyond the confines of Persia and the East, would have penetrated the furthestmost regions of the globe and would have encircled the whole earth. Scarcely would he have believed the prediction had he been told that the Cause would, within that period, have implanted its banner in the heart of the American continent, would have made itself felt in the leading capitals of Europe, would have reached out to the southern confines of Africa, and would have established its outposts as far as Australasia.*⁵³

The "*seeming reverses*" which turned into victories had already begun in the prison-city of Akka. In this remote corner of the collapsing Ottoman Empire, the jailer's cell that held the Persian Prisoner, his family and close companions, had become heaven itself: "*Little wonder that, in view of so*

remarkable a reversal in the circumstances attending the twenty-four years of His banishment to Akká, Bahá'u'lláh Himself should have penned these weighty words.” “The Almighty. . . hath transformed this Prison-House into the Most Exalted Paradise, the Heaven of Heavens.”⁵⁴ The epilogue testifies to the resurrection of a proscribed community that had arisen, Phoenix-like, from its ashes. In sum, it vindicates the small band of long-suffering exiles, banished to Iraq in the dead of winter, who became the nucleus of a new world faith.

Tragedy

Divine Tragedy: The Báb as “Master Hero”

Reviewing the momentous beginnings of the Báb’s revelation, Shoghi Effendi directs the reader’s attention to the “*dramatic power*” in the portentous events portrayed by Nabíl:

*Little wonder that the immortal chronicler of the events associated with the birth and rise of the Bahá’í Revelation has seen fit to devote no less than half of his moving narrative to the description of those happenings that have during such a brief space of time so greatly enriched, through their tragedy and heroism, the religious annals of mankind. In sheer dramatic power, in the rapidity with which events of momentous importance succeeded each other, in the holocaust which baptized its birth, in the miraculous circumstances attending the martyrdom of the One Who had ushered it in, in the potentialities with which it had been from the outset so thoroughly impregnated, in the forces to which it eventually gave birth, this nine-year period may well rank as unique in the whole range of man’s religious experience.*⁵⁵

But what are these factors that more closely define the divine tragedy that was the martyrdom of the Báb? What more is implied by the dramatic elements to which Nabíl and Shoghi Effendi referred as they traced those nine fateful years of the Báb’s dispensation? In the same passage, and using the analogy of the theater play, Shoghi Effendi gives us some indication, “*We behold, as we survey the episodes of this first act of a sublime drama, the figure of its Master Hero, the Báb, arise meteor-like above the horizon of Shiráz, traverse the sombre sky of Persia*

from south to north, decline with tragic swiftness, and perish in a blaze of glory.”⁵⁶ “*Sublime drama. . . Master Hero. . . meteor-like. . . tragic swiftness. . . perish in a blaze of glory.*” These phrases are characteristic of spiritual romance. But the “romantic” descriptor is only partially accurate and can mislead. While certain elements of spiritual romance are clearly present in the life of the Báb—purity of heart, nobility, courage, the longing to make the supreme sacrifice, and the supreme sacrifice itself—the Báb cannot be justifiably called a romantic hero. He is, rather, a “*Master Hero.*” To better understand this distinctive phrase, conventional definitions need to be revisited. According to Frederick R. Karl in *The Contemporary English Novel*, the stereotypical nineteenth-century romantic hero had “simple purity, natural goodness of heart and action, and basically Christian morality, a hero who was an aristocratic Christian knight in modern dress.”⁵⁷ While He was no Christian knight, some of these attributes apply. Bahá’u’lláh has said of the Báb that “He was afraid of no one; He was regardless of consequences.”⁵⁸ Bahá’u’lláh’s brief but telling statement underscores the Báb’s indomitable courage and utter disregard for His own safety. This complete abandon and total commitment to a cause—regardless—is *one of the traits of the romantic soul.*

But these traits clash with the mixed *bilan* of romanticism, one that is not at all amenable to our “*mental picture*” of the Siyyid Báb. There are the Byronic excesses and the sickly “sense of corrupt failure.”⁵⁹ These attributes starkly belie the picture of the Báb’s “*youthful glory,*” “*tenderness,*” “*charm,*” and “*heroism,*” which outline a larger portrait of nobility, spiritual beauty, and moral perfection. In his concise descriptions of the spiritual attributes of the three Central Figures, the Guardian wrote, “. . . *there shines upon this mental picture the youthful glory of the Báb, infinite in His tenderness, irresistible in His charm, unsurpassed in His heroism, matchless in the dramatic circumstances of His short yet eventful life.*”⁶⁰ *God Passes By* refers to the episode of the Báb as “*this first act of a sublime drama.*”⁶¹ We might be tempted to interpret this reference as simple metaphor; it points, rather, to the way that Shoghi Effendi conceived of history itself. Following Aristotle’s notion of *mimesis*, of “art imitating life,” in which tragedy *re-presents* a situation in the “real world,”⁶² we would have to say that the life and death of the Báb are defined as *the form of tragedy.* This is a case of life *being* art—the art of tragedy written by a Divine Hand.

Taking Shoghi Effendi's reference to the sublime drama further, certain ambivalent elements of the tragi-comedy come to mind. The combined forces of the Iranian church-state rejected the Báb's messianic claims out-of-hand, loosed an "*avalanche of calamities*"⁶³ on His followers, imprisoned and summoned Him to a humiliating mock-trial, condemned and executed Him, and practically extirpated His nascent community from Iranian soil. At its nadir, the brief mission of the Báb appeared to have collapsed in abject failure. But viewed historically and transcendently, Shoghi Effendi's and Nabíl's accounts tell of the triumph of the Báb over all opposing forces. The Báb's martyrdom sowed the seed for the remarkable metamorphosis of a proscribed heretical sect into a burgeoning world religion, under the guiding hand of Bahá'u'lláh, who rehabilitated the Bábí Faith by reviving the spirit and the sunken morals of its stricken community.

Shoghi Effendi's description of the Báb as a "*Master Hero*" who perished swiftly in "*a blaze of glory*" naturally suggests, by way of contrast, the Greek tragic hero. While the tragic element in the story of the Báb looms large, the expression "*Master Hero*" denies a fully tragic reading to the Guardian's theatrical analogy. The question then is raised: in what sense is the Báb a Master Hero? With His aristocratic bearing, prophetic lineage, purity of heart, and unflinching courage, Bahá'u'lláh's Herald is a larger-than-life charismatic figure, who possesses extraordinary eloquence and supernatural powers, such as the ability to reveal divine verses with amazing rapidity. With such a rare combination of spiritual attributes, the Báb represents *the* perfected prototype of the divine hero, one who, unlike the Olympian gods and heroes, does not stoop to share in their sins and foibles. Unlike the tragic hero whose destiny escapes him, usually for reasons of *hamartia*, the so-called tragic flaw, or *hubris* (pride) that brings about the hero's demise and downfall, the Báb remains fully serene, confident, and self-possessed, the Master of His own fate to the end. In chapter 13 of his *Poetics*, Aristotle observes that if a virtuous person suffers a downfall, this does not constitute tragedy. The tragic hero is an exceptional or outstanding person who combines vice and virtue, and who fails or falls through his or her own fault. Not so with the Báb. But while the Báb's virtue is perfect, His martyrdom remains the epitome of divine tragedy since it denied, or rather delayed, the very means for humanity's salvation.

The Miracle at the Báb's Execution

In a talk on miracles given in Akka circa 1905, 'Abdu'l-Bahá argued, atypically for most religious traditions, that miracles should not be used as

proof for belief in the Divine Manifestation, “Therefore, miracles are not a proof. For if they are proofs for those who are present, they fail as proofs to those who are absent.”⁶⁴ This is contrary to both Protestant and Roman Catholic apologetics, which, as John Hick has pointed out, has used miracles to compel belief in God, Jesus, the prophets or the Bible and its contents.⁶⁵ Today Protestant apologetics tends to reduce the miracle to a sign or symbol, but refusal to believe in miracles as conclusive proof for the divinity of Christ is still grounds for excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church.

But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá nonetheless asserts that “[t]he Holy Manifestations are the sources of miracles and the originators of wonderful signs. For Them, any difficult and impracticable thing is possible and easy.”⁶⁶ The gist of His argument is to redefine the notion of both miracle and proof and to lay down some accessible rational standards by which every Manifestation of God can be recognized. However, *God Passes By* confronts the reader directly with a miracle, although it is perhaps significant that Shoghi Effendi nowhere used the word in his account of the execution of the Báb. He unabashedly presents this remarkable episode as “history,” but its traditional religious significance as a miracle story that has “evoked and mediated a vivid sense of the presence and activity of God”⁶⁷ is inescapable.

It is, as he calls it, the Báb’s “*mysterious*” but momentary escape from His own execution during which He and His devoted disciple, Anís Zunúzí, were left unharmed by the volley fired by a regiment of 750 soldiers. The inclusion of this event in *God Passes By*, the history of the first century of the Bahá’í Faith, raises certain questions. Among them: is the miracle of the Báb’s momentary escape being presented nonetheless as a proof of His prophethood? Does the inclusion of this episode disqualify this work from being an authentic history and instead become a type of hagiography? To answer these questions, a brief review of this remarkable incident would be helpful.

After the upheavals in Mazindaran, Naryiz, and Zanjan, the leading mujtahids of Tabriz, acting on the orders of the Amír Nízám, hastily ordered an ecclesiastical trial, rejected the Báb’s claims to be the Promised One, pronounced Him a heretic and sentenced Him to death. He was subsequently transferred to a barracks square in Tabriz awaiting execution. In the moments before the order was finally carried out at noon on 9 July 1850, the Báb had confidently asserted His own invulnerability, before the full completion of His earthly mission, to the *farrásh-báshí* (head attendant) who had abruptly

interrupted His final conversation with his amanuensis Siyyid Husayn. The Báb declared to the attendant, “Not until I have said to him all those things that I wish to say can any earthly power silence Me. Though all the world be armed against Me, yet shall it be powerless to deter Me from fulfilling, to the last word, My intention.”⁶⁸ After being suspended to a barrack’s wall with His companion, the Báb survived a volley of 750 rifles, and was found unharmed, back in His cell, completing a conversation with Siyyid Husayn, while “*His companion remained, alive and unscathed, standing beside the wall on which they had been suspended.*”⁶⁹ The Armenian Christian, Sám Khán, colonel of the regiment that carried out the order, who had begged the Báb prior to the execution of the sentence to be relieved of his duty lest he incur the wrath of God, ordered his men to leave the barracks immediately and refused to carry out the order on pain of death. A new regiment was brought in and the order executed. Shoghi Effendi writes, “*This time, however, their breasts were riddled with bullets, and their bodies completely dissected, with the exception of their faces which were but little marred.*”⁷⁰

The Guardian’s inclusion of this miraculous event in *God Passes By* is indicative of two things: a respect for historical veracity and a fidelity to theological orthodoxy. Shoghi Effendi shows no reluctance to present the miracle surrounding the execution of the Báb as the fact that it is without compromise or concession to the modern mindset that would be inclined to reject such a story outright. But I must nuance the statement, “a fidelity to theological orthodoxy.” It is a particular kind of theological orthodoxy. As mentioned above, even though ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserted that the Divine Manifestations or Higher Prophets easily perform miracles and have access to the powers of a higher, supernatural order, miracles do not constitute proof of their divinity. That proof is located, rather, in more concrete and positive, this-worldly dimensions of their lives and missions.⁷¹

But the very inclusion of the event in *God Passes By* suggests a respect for traditional theological belief. While the marvelous story is not intended to compel belief in the Báb, it may be interpreted in two ways: in its classical sense of the suspension of the natural order by Divine Omnipotence, which functions according to its own inscrutable laws; and in its more “scientific” sense of an unknown factor for which there is as yet no discernible explanation. However, based on the Báb’s emphatic assertion prior to being taken to the place of execution, before the full

completion of His earthly mission, the momentary delay of the execution points to the existence of a re-ordering of events by the Divine Will. The account is in line with the Báb's doctrine of *Badá*, found in the Persian Bayán, that "God doeth whatsoever He willeth."⁷²

In another sense, it is noteworthy that Shoghi Effendi did not omit this episode. The hermeneutics of suspicion would have it that the miracle is being offered as a proof of the Báb's divinity. But as noted, the Guardian calls it "*mysterious*" rather than "*miraculous*." But, he notes, the Báb was "*providentially preserved*." This suggests that he is pointing to the historicity of the event, an event that was witnessed by a large crowd in Tabriz, as well as by those were directly involved, such as the Báb's amanuensis and cellmate, Siyyid Husayn, who survived the ordeal and recorded the events. That this event "really happened" is what I mean by "a respect for historical veracity." It is partly for this reason that it is not justified to label *God Passes By* a hagiography. However, the place of miracles notwithstanding, the incident carried the power of conviction. The very same *farrásh-báshí* who had interrupted the Báb's final conversation with Siyyid Husayn, and who had quit his post following the Báb's miraculous escape, related that Mirzá Siyyid Mushin, one of the notables of Tabriz, as soon as he heard this story from the headman, was converted.⁷³

The martyrdom of the Báb ends with a tragic *dénouement*. The Promised One's willing submission to His earthly fate, following the final display of divine might, is as an act of selfless submission to Divine Destiny: "'I have finished My conversation with Siyyid Husayn' were the words with which the Prisoner, so providentially preserved, greeted the appearance of the *farrásh-báshí*, 'Now you may proceed to fulfill your intention.'"⁷⁴ With these words, no note of triumph is struck, no gloating over the uncanny event that had just taken place. The same Divine Will that had momentarily stayed the execution with the greatest ease, was now about to reorder the Divine Plan. In the final act of this divine drama, every movement of the human will bends to fulfill the Divine Will. The miraculous but momentary preservation of the Báb's earthly life was the last cup of salvation, generously poured out to a wayward generation by a merciful Providence, the last chance to savor the elixir of Love Itself.

Then came those final, haunting words of the Báb to the multitude, as He too, like Christ, hung suspended:

“O wayward generation!” were the last words of the Báb to the gazing multitude, as the regiment prepared to fire its volley, “Had you believed in Me every one of you would have followed the example of this youth, who stood in rank above most of you, and would have willingly sacrificed himself in My path. The day will come when you will have recognized Me; that day I shall have ceased to be with you.”⁷⁵

Unlike the farewell of Jesus, no expression of unconditional love, no pardoning of a murderous generation is uttered by the Báb. This is not the prayer of mercy, uttered in the throes of agony: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). The parting words are felt as the sting of a rebuke, a decisive sentence of divine punishment and loss. The stainless mirror that reflects the glory of the divine countenance is about to be smashed. We sense in the great pathos of the Báb’s final words that *the* greatest tragedy is about to occur—the extinction of a life that could have saved the world. It seems fitting to remember the voice of Escalus, Prince of Verona, spoken to the feuding Montagues and Capulets: “All are punished!”⁷⁶ As for the faithless multitude, the mob that was so eager to witness the execution of the Báb, to see him forfeit His life as a rebellious heretic, they relish the spectacle. Spanish poet and essayist Miguel de Unamuno wrote in his existentialist work *The Tragic Sense of Life* (1921): “The people abhors comedy. When Pilate—the type of refined gentleman, the superior person, the esthete, the rationalist if you like—proposes to give the people comedy and mockingly presents Christ to them, saying, ‘Behold the man!’ the people mutinies and shouts [*sic*] ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ The people do not want comedy but tragedy.”⁷⁷

The Martyrdom of the Báb: Mourning Joined to Celebration

In sacrificing His life, the Báb had written the most recent chapter in a very ancient drama. The connections between the history of drama and the history of religion are closely tied. The sense of the tragic is intimately connected to the death and mourning of a sacred figure or hero: “Almost every tragedy contains a sacred or heroic tomb.”⁷⁸ In ancient Greece, for example, tragedy was the foundation of worship and originated in the funeral rites of a hero or divinity: “Most tragedies end with the quasi-deification of some hero or heroine, or at least the foundation of some worship.”⁷⁹ While the dramatization of ritual and its connections to ancient fertility cults is not the main focus here, we may well ask ourselves, if the

Báb's martyrdom has any "comedic" element: is there anything that may be celebrated in observing this event?

It seems paradoxical, even inappropriate, to speak of "celebration" in connection with the July 9th martyrdom of the Báb. The first response to such a tragic event would be that of mourning. (To this day, according to their cultural and religious norms, Iranian Bahá'ís wear black to the martyrdom of the Báb commemoration.) But I think it is proper to speak of celebration in observing the martyrdom of the Báb, at least in a qualified way. Celebration is commingled with this Holy Day, despite all the understandable pathos that it summons. The evidence of Bahá'í history itself substantiates this view. *Nabíl's Narrative*, based on the testimony of the Báb's amanuensis, Siyyid Husayn, relates the following of the night before His execution. His testimony tells of the joy that accompanied the Báb in the last evening of His earthly life:

That night the face of the Báb was aglow with joy, a joy such as had never shone from His countenance. Indifferent to the storm that raged about Him, He conversed with us with gaiety and cheerfulness. The sorrows that had weighed so heavily upon Him seemed to have completely vanished. Their weight appeared to have dissolved in the consciousness of approaching victory.⁸⁰

It was said long ago by John of Garland that tragedy "beginning in joy, ends in grief."⁸¹ However, for the Báb, what began in joy (His declaration) and grew into grief (His life of adversity) was about to terminate in joy and deliverance (His final martyrdom). If these observations are true, then the realm of the tragi-comical points to the interconnectedness of all things, as one realm with two poles, indicating the linkages that span the polar opposites of defeat and triumph, death and resurrection, death and rebirth, sorrow and joy, mourning and celebration, old age and rejuvenescence. Nor should we lose sight of the fact, as Bahá'u'lláh has said in His remarkable eulogy of Jesus, that the sacrificial death of such a Precious Being transforms the world in a way that escapes rational analysis, for it causes the cosmic regeneration of the world and all creation with it: "By sacrificing Himself, however, a fresh capacity was infused into all created things."⁸² What is true for Jesus is true for the Báb. Such a unique sacrifice produces an unsuspected and ineffable infusion of life, joy, and creativity.

The ambiguous phenomenology of mind associated with these sacred events can be found, not only in the psychological experience of every

believer but also in the studies on the origins of tragedy and comedy by literary and religious historians. In the minds of mid-nineteenth century theorists, tragedy and comedy had a common origin, just as they share points of convergence in the human psyche. Scholars such as Friedrich Max Müller, one of “the founding fathers of comparative religion,”⁸³ and Sir James Donaldson⁸⁴ found that the origins of both tragedy and comedy lay in the “the cult of Dionysus, the god of wine, ecstasy and the forces of nature, especially the joy of spring.”⁸⁵ While literary critics concurred with the view that the sexual revels of Dionysus led to the Komos Song,⁸⁶ they criticized the view that it led also to tragedy. In the early twentieth century, Sir William Ridgeway “simply denied the Dionysiac origin of drama, and explained tragedy as a funeral performance at the grave of a warrior.”⁸⁷ For his part, Max Müller found a common origin for both genres. As a comparative religionist, he recognized in sacred marriage (*heiros gamos*), a pattern of growth, death, and resurrection as a phenomenon in the worship of many ancient divinities in Europe and the Near East. The revels would, in this view, correspond to the marriage and resurrection phase and the *tragodia*, the Goat or Tragos Song, to the death phase and hence to mourning. What was true for the religions of classical antiquity is also true for the sacrificial death of the Prophet. In His life and death, joy and sorrow meet; tragedy and triumph embrace.

The Martyrdom of the Báb and *Sparagmos*

We come now to some discomfiting considerations on the origins of tragedy and any plausible connections they suggest with the martyrdom of the Báb. This consideration concerns the horrific ritual of *sparagmos* or dismemberment (*Gk.* lit. to tear to pieces). The Dionysian cult practiced the ritualistic sacrifice of a dismembered goat or kid, which was viewed as being the representative or embodiment of the god. The usual psychological explanation points to a desire of identification through participation. The devotee ardently desired to experience what the god has experienced, even death itself. Modern re-enactments of the Passion of Christ along the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem each Easter still fulfill the same function.

The martyrdom of the Báb and His devoted disciple Anís is not, of course, an exact parallel to the ancient Greek rite of dismemberment, a fate that other Bábí martyrs did in fact suffer. But the parallel is close enough to invite comment. Shoghi Effendi, who follows *A Traveller's Narrative* closely in this respect, wrote that in the act of martyrdom “*their breasts were riddled with bullets, and their bodies completely*

dissected, with the exception of their faces which were but little marred.”⁸⁸ Nabíl alluded to the bodily union found in death between beloved Master and cherished disciple, an outward symbol of the joining of their spirits in love and sacrifice: “. . .this time their bodies were shattered and were blended into one mass of mingled flesh and bone.”⁸⁹ This destruction of the earthly temple of the Divine Manifestation corresponds to the complete desecration of the Holy of Holies.

The Lessons of Tragedy

What, then, may be learned from the tragedy of the Báb’s martyrdom and the world’s rejection of Bahá’u’lláh? Tragedies point to great failings in human nature that require self-examination and correction. Arthur Koestler found that all “paradoxes and predicaments arise from conflicts between incompatible frames of experience or scales of values.”⁹⁰ If this statement is true for the substantive issues of life, how much truer it is of the rejection of the Divine Manifestation. The resultant waste of human life and compounded scenarios of conflict spring from “fatal misunderstandings”⁹¹ that should prompt us to consider what has gone wrong with our questionable value systems, spent myths, obsolete worldviews, defective philosophies, and lifestyles.

When we pause to consider what caused the Persian monarchy and Shiah clergy to martyr the Báb and humanity to reject Bahá’u’lláh, or what still impels “civilized” nations to engage in wholesale and indiscriminate massacre, rape, and genocide, we encounter in attempting to understand evil the dark heart of a troublesome mystery. We can, of course, find tentative explanations in theology (sin), philosophy (defective knowledge), morality (lack of education), sociology (failure of socialization process and deviance), and psychology (mental pathology). But Bradley’s notions of Shakespearean tragedy can be profitably applied to the entire human condition:

‘What a piece of work is man’, we cry; ‘so much more beautiful and so much more terrible than we knew! Why should he be so if this beauty and greatness only tortures itself and throws itself away?’ We seem to have before us a type of the mystery of the whole world, the tragic fact that extends far beyond the limits of tragedy. Everywhere, from the crushed rocks beneath our feet to the soul of man, we see power, intelligence, life and glory, which astound us and seem to call for our worship. And everywhere we see them

perishing, devouring one another and destroying themselves, often with dreadful pain, as though they came into being for no other end.⁹²

These thoughts are reminiscent of George Townshend's observations in his introduction to Bahá'u'lláh's *The Hidden Words (Kalímát-i-Maknúnih)* that the human being, in willful rejection of God, has a deep-seated tendency to be self-destructive:

So far has the evil principle in man hitherto prevailed over the Good that looking down the vista of the Prophetic Cycle now gone by, Bahá'u'lláh sees man by his own choice and act, impoverished and abased, busy with his own empty fancies and idle imaginings, distrusting and rebelling against God and thus destroying his hope, choosing boundless shame, binding himself in the fetters of this world and in the prison of self. . . . Throughout the whole of the book, the subtle destructive power of the lower self is exposed and man is warned of the need of ceaseless uncompromising struggle against it in all its forms.⁹³

Divine Drama

The Dramatis Personae: The High-Born

In his modern-day apocalypse, *The Promised Day Is Come*, which details the catastrophic results of the rejection of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh by the kings, ecclesiastics, and humanity, Shoghi Effendi states his purpose as “[t]o enumerate a few of the outstanding features of this moving drama will suffice to evoke in the reader of these pages, already familiar with the history of the Faith, the memory of those vicissitudes which it has experienced, and which the world has until now viewed with such frigid indifference.”⁹⁴ The world's rejection of the Twin Manifestations is earlier in this extended letter judged to be “the greatest drama in the world's spiritual history.”⁹⁵ What else might the phrase “the greatest drama” imply? As was typical of both the Greek and Shakespearean theater, the drama played out in the last century in Europe and the Middle East involved the high-born. The cast of characters included the crowned heads of Europe⁹⁶ and the clerics of Islam and Christendom. While members of the clergy were (are) not generally nobles, they once exercised redoubtable spiritual and judicial authority. This is still the case today for Shariah courts. Shariah

courts, as was formerly true of Christian ecclesiastical courts of the Middle Ages, meted out death sentences and continue to do so, with the issuing of the *fatwáh* (lit. decree). The medieval Christian counterpart was the *auto-da-fé* (Port. “act of the faith”). It is doubly ironic that in His heavenly station of Supreme Spiritual Sovereign, Bahá’u’lláh, in His earthly station, was also an Iranian nobleman, yet He was compelled to endure forty years of imprisonment and exile by Sultan ‘Abdu’l-‘Aziz and Násiri’ d-Dín Sháh.

The Letters from the Prisoner to the Kings

The remarkable missives from the Prisoner to the kings, each tablet bearing its own name,⁹⁷ were no ordinary documents, but messages that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has called a “miracle.”⁹⁸ Although Shoghi Effendi does not expand on the meaning of his grandfather’s designation (“miracle”), perhaps such a rare qualification involves not only the clearly announced prophecies being exactly fulfilled and Bahá’u’lláh’s emphatic voice of fearless authority but also the hidden things the tablets revealed, things that the recipients and their Divine Author alone could have known. While these letters were a very public proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh’s mission and contain a number of salient principles dealing with government and the administration of the affairs of state, they also show proof of visionary insights that see into ulterior motives and the private world of dreams and prayers. To the Russian Czar, Alexander II, ruler of a vast empire, Bahá’u’lláh wrote a note of praise, “We, verily, have heard the thing for which thou didst supplicate thy Lord, whilst secretly communing with Him. Wherefore, the breeze of My loving-kindness wafted forth, and the sea of My mercy surged, and We answered thee in truth. Thy Lord, verily, is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.”⁹⁹ To Napoleon III (1808–1873), Charles Louis, son of Louis and nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte I, whom Bahá’u’lláh upbraided, He wrote:

O King! We heard the words thou didst utter in answer to the Czar of Russia, concerning the decision made regarding the war [Crimean War]. Thy Lord, verily, knoweth, is informed of all. Thou didst say: ‘I lay asleep upon my couch, when the cry of the oppressed, who were drowned in the Black Sea, wakened me.’ This is what we heard thee say, and, verily, thy Lord is witness unto what I say. We testify that which wakened thee was not their cry, but the promptings of thine own passions, for We tested thee, and found thee wanting. Comprehend the meaning of My words, and be thou of the discerning. . . .¹⁰⁰

A “*moving drama*”¹⁰¹ has revealing moments in which the characters speak plainly for themselves; their thoughts, feelings, and motives are revealed; deeds are done. The same Napoleon III, the haughty nephew of Napoleon I was, in Shoghi Effendi’s judgment, along with the Supreme Pontiff Pius IX, “*the most august and influential*” of Bahá’u’lláh’s recipients. In the political and religious spheres, “*they respectively held the foremost rank. . .*”¹⁰² Yet the emperor flung down Bahá’u’lláh’s first tablet and proudly exclaimed, “If this man is God, I am two gods!”¹⁰³ But the unexpected catastrophe of the devastating defeat of the French army by the Prussian forces at the Battle of Sedan (1870) sealed the king’s fate, and his kingdom was lost precisely as Bahá’u’lláh had prophesied in “*sombre and pregnant words*.”¹⁰⁴ In his second missive to the nephew of Bonaparte, Bahá’u’lláh declared:

For what thou hast done, thy kingdom shall be thrown into confusion, and thine empire shall pass from thine hands, as a punishment for that which thou hast wrought. . . . Commotions shall seize all the people in that land, unless thou arisest to help this Cause, and followest Him Who is the Spirit of God [Jesus] in this, the straight Path.¹⁰⁵

Aristotle’s criterion of tragedy moving the spectator to “fear” (awe) should apply here. One has to wonder if the thoughts of the defeated king wandered back to recall the letter that he had so haughtily dismissed. The words of the prisoner of Akka would seem to indicate this possibility, “Then wilt thou know how thou hast plainly erred.”¹⁰⁶ However, seeing was believing for the French official in Akka who translated the Prisoner’s letter destined for the son of Louis Bonaparte:

*The transmitter of the second Tablet had, it is reliably stated, in order to evade the strict surveillance of the guards, concealed it in his hat, and was able to deliver it to the French agent, who resided in Akká, and who, as attested by Nabíl in his Narrative, translated it into French and sent it to the Emperor, he himself becoming a believer when he had later witnessed the fulfillment of so remarkable a prophecy.*¹⁰⁷

Another somber and ironic note is sounded in passing. The descendants of the Qajar kings, like the stereotypical wandering Jew “*roam the face of the earth, scarcely aware of the character of those forces which have*

operated such tragic revolutions in their lives, and so powerfully contributed to their present plight."¹⁰⁸ These plenteous offspring of Persian royalty, a "beehive of princelings," this "race of royal drones,"¹⁰⁹ have suffered a definitive great reversal of their own. The picture emerges of the scattered offspring of Qajar and Ottoman royalty, in some cases destitute,¹¹⁰ suffering from delusions of grandeur but still thickly wrapped in the veils of ignorance: "*Dear friends! The powerful operations of this titanic upheaval are comprehensible to none except such as have recognized the claims of both Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb.*"¹¹¹ Implicit to Shoghi Effendi's statement is a type of Sophoclean irony; the informed spectators understand the movement and the meaning behind the drama better than the leading figures themselves who remain quite uninformed of the forces that have shaped their destinies.

In the final analysis, the spectators of this moving drama do not regret the demise of the crowned heads of Europe, along with the extinction of the sultanate and the caliphate, and the serious curtailment of temporal power experienced by the Pope. With the fall of the royal houses of Europe and the Middle East, following their repudiation of the Prisoner of Akka and His message, Coleridge's phrase "poetic justice"¹¹² takes a new meaning. Although in their day these rulers were the literal embodiment of absolute authority, displaying glittering wealth, and held in awe by their disenfranchised subjects, the Guardian hardly sees these men as heroes. Bahá'u'lláh seems to have a different concept of "royalty" in mind. All this prompts the following remark of our author. Its dramatic tone says much of the willful blindness that led to such great loss, "*Dear friends! Alas, a thousand times alas, that a Revelation so incomparably great, so infinitely precious, so mightily potent, so manifestly innocent, should have received, at the hands of a generation so blind and so perverse, so infamous a treatment!*"¹¹³

Divine Drama and Shakespearean Tragedy

According to Aristotle, the sense of the tragic should inspire the emotions of fear (awe) and pity (compassion): "We feel pity for a man who does not deserve his misfortune; we fear for someone like ourselves."¹¹⁴ The tragic character is "in between the other two; a man who is neither outstanding in virtue and righteousness, nor is it through wickedness and vice that he falls into misfortune, but through some flaw (*harmatia*)."¹¹⁵ Coupled with and related to these primary emotions, would be a sense of loss that A. C. Bradley describes as "the impression of waste."¹¹⁶ In the Greek or

Shakespearean tragedy, this loss, which usually involves the loss of life, is manifested by the inability of the tragic hero to refrain from those actions that bring about the hero's downfall. But we regret the demise of a person who, in other respects, manifested exceptional qualities. It is important to remember in this comparative view that the downfall and ensuing death of the tragic hero is brought about by the weakness of the self. Despite their character flaws, Shakespeare's *dramatis personae* remain free beings who are undone by their own decisions.

An outstanding and inescapable point of comparison between Shakespearean and divine tragedy is this: the rejection of the Divine Manifestation—the tragic event—is not brought about by any character flaw on the Manifestation's part, but rather by the ignorance, perversity, and willful blindness of the reigning spiritual and political leaders who mislead their people. This observation leads to what may be regarded as the essence of divine tragedy: the fact that the Divine Will does not initially prevail over the human will. This remains an awe-inspiring and mysterious occurrence when one considers the multitude of scriptural statements that praise the omnipotence of God, the irresistible sway of the Divine Will, and the supernatural powers of the Divine Manifestations. Theological arguments that the rejection of the Divine Manifestation was predestined are not really helpful here, at least in dramatic terms. To argue that the outcome of events was predetermined by God would destroy the whole notion of tragedy by removing the quality of free will. Free will may be an intellectual curiosity, difficult to resolve, but in dramatic terms it remains the source of tragedy.

To argue that Providence has so ordered this course of events for some hidden wisdom may be true. But this realization in no way diminishes the existential quality and tragic weight of such events. On the contrary, to take Bahá'u'lláh's preferred use of the superlative "most great"¹¹⁷ and apply it here, the rejection of the Divine Manifestation is "the most great tragedy." In our time, the many pathologies engendered by this rejection have raised a dire threat to the very viability of the fabric of civilization itself. The individual fares no better, for he or she suffers from the loss of not having the opportunity to discover the nature of the true self: "True loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self."¹¹⁸ The rejection of the Divine Manifestation does indeed conform to Aristotle's definition that the tragic sense involves the emotions of fear (awe) and pity (compassion). It invokes the sense of pity on a poor humanity that has orchestrated its own downfall

and provokes that sense of fear in the dreaded possibility of those as yet unknown crises and catastrophes, as well as present ones, that continue to plague the world, as its leaders and peoples continue to follow their own dysfunctional agendas.

Character

Characterization as Character Assessment

Characterization has been “the main business of the writer”¹¹⁹ since the inception of the modern English-language novel in the mid-1700s. Although Shoghi Effendi was no novelist and not primarily concerned with full character development, his brief but bold character assessments of historical figures merit further consideration. Characterization—and the word is being used in a restrictive sense regarding Shoghi Effendi’s use of it—is employed not only in *The Promised Day Is Come* but also in *God Passes By*. The Guardian’s characters, when judged negatively, are portrayed with a certain harsh realism. Firuz Kazemzadeh in his 1967 preface to *The Promised Day Is Come* remarked upon Shoghi Effendi’s “brief characterizations” and “bold and precise condensations”¹²⁰ of the crowned heads of Europe and the Middle East, and the Muslim and Christian ecclesiastics who received and rejected Bahá’u’lláh’s letters of proclamation. Kazemzadeh’s comment holds true, not only for *The Promised Day Is Come* and *God Passes By* but also for the cablegrams that Shoghi Effendi composed describing the character of certain Covenant-breakers or when lauding the virtues and exemplary services of Bahá’ís who had just died.

What Otto Reinert has written of the poet and the novelist applies to the Guardian’s character stamps, “He can judge and analyze his characters in authorial comment, by godlike ubiquity and omniscience enter at will into their hearts and souls, and just as easily exit back into straight narrative of external events.”¹²¹ The Guardian’s aim in assessing the characters he presented was to judge the role of a particular historical figure in light of the response or non-response, as the case may be, to the Bahá’í Revelation. However, it should not be overlooked that our author was probably guided in his observations by European historians or observers whom typically he does not identify. His description of Pope Pius IX, for example, reflects the sort of informed opinion that indicates that he relied upon written sources to form his categorical opinions:¹²²

*Authoritarian by nature, a poor statesman, disinclined to conciliation, determined to preserve all his authority, he, while he succeeded through his assumption of an ultramontane attitude in defining further his position and in reinforcing his spiritual authority, failed, in the end, to maintain that temporal rule which, for so many centuries, had been exercised by the heads of the Catholic Church.*¹²³

Shoghi Effendi remained unaffected by any academic concerns for the “objective” and detached historiography of the university textbook. He was both theological historian and historical theologian. For example, the Guardian naturally shared Lord Curzon of Kedleston’s incisive observation that the massacres of the Bábís following the attempt on the life of Násiri’*d*-Dín Sháh (15 August 1852), gave the Bábí Faith “a vitality which no other impulse could have secured.”¹²⁴ In addition to considering whatever sources were available to him, the Guardian naturally made good use of his own insights and perceptions. One of these was “invisualization,” or seeing into his characters, just as the private motives, dreams, and prayers were laid bare before the vision of his Great-Grandfather, as attested in His proclamation letters. I have already referred to our author’s tendency to form categorical opinions or strong judgments. Shoghi Effendi, the writer and Defender of the Faith, is far from the novelist’s tendency of letting the characters speak for themselves. His characters are rather spoken *of*. These comments, for example, are reserved for William II, the second German Emperor and the successor to the recipient of Bahá’u’lláh’s tablet:

*William II, temperamentally dictatorial, politically inexperienced, militarily aggressive, religiously insincere, posed as the apostle of European peace, yet actually insisted on “the mailed fist” and “the shining armor.” Irresponsible, indiscreet, inordinately ambitious, his first act was to dismiss that sagacious statesman [Bismarck], the true founder of his empire, to whose sagacity Bahá’u’lláh had paid tribute, and to the unwisdom of whose imperial and ungrateful master ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had testified.*¹²⁵

While one can readily understand how Shoghi Effendi came to these views through his own reading of European history (“*politically inexperienced, military aggressive*”), the more subjective phrase “*religiously insincere*”¹²⁶ suggests an assessment arrived at by subtler means. We have already met Napoleon III above. Here is Shoghi Effendi’s

characterization of this same Emperor, recipient of two of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets. This acerbic critique is no doubt motivated by the emperor's disdainful rejection of Bahá'u'lláh's first tablet, but it also contains properly historical judgments of the emperor:

*Possessed of a fixed and indestructible ambition, he aspired to emulate the example, and finish the interrupted work, of his imperial uncle. A dreamer, a conspirator, of a shifting nature, hypocritical and reckless, he, the heir to the Napoleonic throne, taking advantage of the policy which sought to foster the reviving interest in the career of his great prototype, had sought to overthrow the monarchy. . . . Though able to initiate far-reaching movements, he possessed neither the sagacity nor the courage required to control them.*¹²⁷

The Guardian also calls Napoleon “*that superficial, tricky and pride-intoxicated monarch. . . this false and boastful monarch. . .*”¹²⁸ Where Shoghi Effendi stands vis-à-vis these “*ill-fated scions*” who rejected Bahá'u'lláh, he makes indubitably clear, with few nuances. Except for the partly qualified cases of Queen Victoria¹²⁹ and Czar Alexander II,¹³⁰ his judgment is categorical: “*All failed completely in their duty to arise and extend their assistance.*”¹³¹ *Hubris*, that mainstay of the Greek tragedy, is brought to life again in the Guardian's writings. The monarchs and ecclesiastics who ignored, disdained, or opposed the Persian prisoner and exile were shaken from their thrones by the “invisible Hand of God”:¹³² “I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit” (Dan. 7:9).

Shoghi Effendi's judgmental characterizations were not something entirely of his own invention. They reflected the strongly moral evaluations made by nineteenth-century historians such as Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859), whom the Guardian had read.¹³³ The fame of the English parliamentarian, historian, and essayist rests almost entirely on his five-volume *History of England* (1848–1861). Shoghi Effendi's wife and personal secretary, Rúhíyyih Rabbání, describes Shoghi Effendi's writings, using words written about Lord Macaulay, “. . . he wrote in language. . . precise and luminous.”¹³⁴ Lord Acton's judgment reflects the great esteem in which Macaulay was held, “Read him therefore to find out how it comes that the most unsympathetic of critics can think of him very nearly the greatest of English writers.”¹³⁵ In this example, Macaulay portrays Sir George Jeffreys

who lived during the reign of King James II (1633–1701). Jeffreys was a tyrannical Chief Justice of the Court of King’s Bench and assisted in the administration of the Great Seal.

He was a man of quick and vigorous parts, but constitutionally prone to insolence and to the angry passions. . . . The profusion of maledictions and vituperative epithets which composed his vocabulary could hardly have been rivalled in the fishmarket or the beergarden. . . . Already might be remarked in him the most odious vice which is incident to human nature, a delight in misery merely as misery.¹³⁶

The Guardian’s characterization of “*Hájí Mírzá Áqásí, the idolized tutor of Muhammad Sháh, a vulgar, false-hearted and fickle-minded schemer,*”¹³⁷ who had been the power behind the throne and Persia’s virtual ruler for some thirteen years, was not based on Áqásí’s opposition to the Bábí Faith alone. Shoghi Effendi relied on this description of the Shah’s tutor taken from Lieutenant-Colonel P. M. Sykes’ *A History of Persia* who was quoting Rawlison from an unidentified source:

The state of Persia, however, was not satisfactory; for Haji Mirza Aqasi, who been its virtual ruler for thirteen years, ‘was utterly ignorant of statesmanship or of military science, yet too vain to receive instruction and too jealous to admit of a coadjutor; brutal in his language; insolent in his demeanour; indolent in his habits; he brought the exchequer to the verge of bankruptcy and the country to the brink of revolution. . . .’ Such—to adopt the weighty words of Rawlinson—was the condition of Persia in the middle of the nineteenth century.¹³⁸

“Character is Destiny”

The old dictum of the Shakespearean theater that “[c]haracter is destiny”¹³⁹ applies to any and all of Shoghi Effendi’s *dramatis personae*. To speak of his villains, the characters who opposed the Bahá’í revelation largely determined the immediate fortunes of the new-born faith. The younger half-brother, Mírzá Yahyá’s “*rebellion*” against Bahá’u’lláh in 1864, for example, “*left its mark on the fortunes of the Faith for no less than half a century.*”¹⁴⁰ William Hazlitt’s appraisal of the moral function of the novel as an acquaintance with “the motives and characters of mankind,” that “imbibe our notions of virtue and vice from practical examples”¹⁴¹ is also relevant to Shoghi Effendi’s mode of characterization. The characters whom

the Guardian briefly portrays, not only make Bahá'í history but also suggest one of the main preoccupations of moral theology. From the behavior of these characters, whether positive or negative, a moral list made be drawn of virtues to cultivate and vices to avoid. For example, in the depiction of the moral and spiritual fiber of the Dawn-Breakers, we read a list of epithets that forms a constellation of zealous, saintly, and noble spiritual virtues. He describes the Bábí spirit as

*a spirit exalted, unquenchable and awe-inspiring, a knowledge surprisingly profound, an eloquence sweeping in its force, a piety unexcelled in fervor, a courage leonine in its fierceness, a self-abnegation saintly in its purity, a resolve granite-like in its firmness, a vision stupendous in its range. . . . a standard of faith and a code of conduct that challenged and revolutionized the lives of their countrymen.*¹⁴²

By contrast, “*people, clergy, monarch and government*” are depicted as being capable of “*intrigue, ignorance, depravity, cruelty, superstition and cowardice.*”¹⁴³ In this hero–villain scenario, considered further below, virtues and vices are juxtaposed in a stark contrast of character traits. Novelist, essayist, and religious philosopher Aldous Huxley (1894–1963)¹⁴⁴ made the following incisive comment that relates to the depiction of positive and negative character traits. Commenting on I. A. Richards’s statement that only Shakespearean theater “can stand the test” of true tragedy, Huxley observed, “Now, the shadow, the photographic negative of a thing, is in no sense irrelevant to it.”¹⁴⁵ He wrote further:

The tragedies of Shakespeare are veined, it is true, with irony and an often terrifying cynicism; but the cynicism is always heroic idealism turned neatly inside out, the irony is a kind of photographic negative of heroic romance. Turn Troilus’s white into black and all his blacks into white and you have Thersites. Reversed Othello and Desdemona become Iago. White Ophelia’s negative is the irony of Hamlet, is the ingenuous bawdry of her own mad songs; just as the cynicism of King Lear is the black-shadow replica of Cordelia.¹⁴⁶

Huxley’s observation applies, not only to the theater but also to history and spirituality alike. Every sinful deed, every cruelty committed by Shoghi Effendi’s antiheroes has its potential counterpart in the realm of virtue. The Guardian presents the heroic deeds of the Bábí-Bahá’ís as the mirror of a

spirituality directly inspired by the living presence of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Moral purpose, then, is intrinsic to the Guardian's vision of history, as he has written in the introduction to his translation of *Nabíl's Narrative*, "*It has its thrilling passages, and the splendour of the central theme gives to the chronicle, not only great historical value but high moral power.*"¹⁴⁷ As Shoghi Effendi's characters either assist or foil the spread of the Bábí-Bahá'í revelations, they become thereby either victors or victims in the creation of their own destiny. For Aristotle, "character" in its ethical sense was fully revealed only in action.¹⁴⁸ Shoghi Effendi's characters are not asleep on the page. Prominent historical figures, no less than stage characters, reveal themselves fully only by their deeds. Implicit to an understanding of the Guardian's vision of history is an underlying moral presence of the reciprocal relationship between character and deeds, i.e., the actions of the individual on the events of history. Deeds determine, not only the fate of the individual soul but also the state of society and the course of world events. This dynamic of the inner spiritual predisposition, manifested in the external deed and outer historical event, characterizes Shoghi Effendi's method of analyzing and portraying history.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's exhortation to practice the "*sin-covering eye*,"¹⁴⁹ the spiritual prescription for interpersonal conduct, was held in abeyance by Shoghi Effendi *qua* Guardian and Defender of the Faith. The acute critical sense of the Guardian, in describing those who opposed the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith, was quite unlike Shoghi Effendi's individual spirituality which was disinclined to dwell on human failings. Hand of the Cause of God Leroy Ioas (1896–1965), the Guardian's assistant secretary from March 1952 to 4 November 1957, commented in a tape-recorded talk given at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Quigley in Johannesburg, South Africa, 31 October 1958, that "[h]e didn't look at their shortcomings. What registered before the Guardian was what a person was offering to God and not his sins and shortcomings." This statement is borne out by certain of Shoghi Effendi's letters of spiritual counsel. He wrote, for example, through his secretary, "But individuals towards each other are governed by love, unity, forgiveness and a sin-covering eye."¹⁵⁰

However, for the purpose of exposing the dire suffering that was inflicted upon the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and to draw attention to the world's plight caused by the rejection of the Twin Messengers, Shoghi Effendi consciously engaged in the exposure of sins committed and omitted. Those readers who may find his moral judgments too categorical and/or forbidding

should bear in mind that the Guardian's stated purpose was in part to draw attention to the unjustified cruelties inflicted upon the Founders of the Bahá'í Faith. In line with divine justice, he laid the blame directly at the feet of those same leaders who so severely afflicted "the true Monarchs of the world, those Gems of divine virtue!"¹⁵¹

Character as the Internal Event of History¹⁵²

In these considerations of the links between character and history, it would be useful to correlate the importance that Shoghi Effendi attached to the effect of character on history to certain ideas of the Oxford metaphysician,¹⁵³ archaeologist, historian, and philosopher of history, R. G. Collingwood. Robin George Collingwood (1889–1943) was a respected archaeologist and historian who specialized in Roman Britain. In his well-known book *The Idea of History*, Collingwood put forth the idea that any historical event has two sides: the external event "which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements" (e.g., Caesar's assassination on the floor of the Roman Senate), and the internal event "which can only be described in terms of thought" (e.g., Caesar's defiance of republican law).¹⁵⁴ In the same context, Collingwood wrote (and this idea can be traced back to Hegel), "an historical process is a process of thoughts."¹⁵⁵

But for the purposes of this study, I should note that the "idea" of "defiance" is as much a property of character or soul as it is of idea. For Collingwood, the historian should take account of both the internal (idea) and external aspect (event) in the interpretation of history. Although Collingwood clearly saw a role for the influence of the idea on history, he was less sympathetic to the purely psychological considerations in the work of the historian that motivated, for example, Wilhelm Dilthey's theory of history, and he criticized Dilthey on that account.¹⁵⁶ The historian's main task, according to Collingwood, is "to think himself into this action, to discern the thought of its agent."¹⁵⁷ For Collingwood, it was sufficient to examine the thought that led to the act. But his notion of the internal event as idea remained at the level of concept.

However, Shoghi Effendi's reading of history involves character assessment for the simple reason that character is expressive of both thought and action. The Guardian ventured to make assessments of the ulterior motives, "hidden agendas," and ambitions of the historical figures that he mentions. His character assessments, however far removed they are from current methods of historiography, acknowledge character as a substantive issue in the outcome of the historical event. If for Shakespeare character is

destiny, for Shoghi Effendi it is also history. Specifically, it is character in its interactions with the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Collingwood, like Dilthey and Macaulay, envisioned a legitimate role for the imagination in the writing of history. Macaulay, who is closest to Shoghi Effendi in his treatment of historical characters, wrote in his *Essay on History*, “A perfect historian must possess an imagination sufficiently powerful to make his narrative effective and picturesque.”¹⁵⁸ This remark indicates that Macaulay was strongly influenced by the early narrative roots of history and by its literary concept of history as story. For Shoghi Effendi, also, history is both drama and story, and has strong literary qualities.

Heroes and Villains

Our author draws a clear line between heroes and villains. His heroes are not the world's heroes. Kings, prime ministers, courtiers, state officials, and clerics are often his villains. The rich and the powerful, regarded with awe, fear, and envy by commoners become in Shoghi Effendi's vision figures worthy of condemnation. The Guardian's negative assessment of the kings and ecclesiastics who were the recipients of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets, it is important to note, is not a blanket condemnation of kingship and clergy. Bahá'u'lláh praised kingship and those clerics whose lives and deeds are a true expression of their spiritual calling.¹⁵⁹ But Shoghi Effendi followed Bahá'u'lláh's generally dim view of the sacerdotal caste, especially the clerics of Persia, whose prelates Bahá'u'lláh castigated as “they that worship no God but their own desire, who bear allegiance to naught but gold, who are wrapt in the densest veils of learning, and who, enmeshed by its obscurities, are lost in the wilds of error.”¹⁶⁰ As for kings, although He praised exemplary rulers,¹⁶¹ Bahá'u'lláh also wrote, “The faults of kings, like their favours, can be great.”¹⁶² This saying applies in pointed fashion to the recipients of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets.

The opening pages of *God Passes By* make clear the divide between those who joined forces with the new revelation and those who aligned themselves in opposition. His villains are not merely villains. They are “*arch villains*.”¹⁶³ Heroes display supernatural powers and abilities; they are virtual gods.¹⁶⁴ The following description of the Bábís stands in marked contrast to the villains whom Shoghi Effendi so graphically portrays:

The arch villains who joined hands with the prime movers of so wicked a conspiracy were the two grand vizirs, Hájí Mírzá Aqásí, the idolized tutor of Muhammad Sháh, a vulgar, false-hearted

and fickle-minded schemer, and the arbitrary, bloodthirsty, reckless Amír-Nizám, Mírzá Taqí Khán, the first of whom exiled the Báb to the mountain fastnesses of Adhírbáyján, and the latter decreed His death in Tabríz. Their accomplice in these and other heinous crimes was a government bolstered up by a flock of idle, parasitical princelings and governors, corrupt, incompetent, tenaciously holding to their ill-gotten privileges, and utterly subservient to a notoriously degraded clerical order. The heroes whose deeds shine upon the record of this fierce spiritual contest, involving at once people, clergy, monarch and government, were the Báb's chosen disciples, the Letters of the Living, and their companions, the trail-breakers of the New Day, who to so much intrigue, ignorance, depravity, cruelty, superstition and cowardice opposed a spirit exalted, unquenchable and awe-inspiring, a knowledge surprisingly profound, an eloquence sweeping in its force, a piety unexcelled in fervor, a courage leonine in its fierceness, a self-abnegation saintly in its purity, a resolve granite-like in its firmness, a vision stupendous in its range, a veneration for the Prophet and His Imáms disconcerting to their adversaries, a power of persuasion alarming to their antagonists, a standard of faith and a code of conduct that challenged and revolutionized the lives of their countrymen.¹⁶⁵

Some readers may find such descriptions overly dramatic or stretching the limits of credibility. The human imagination remains hard pressed to envision the unique events that were unleashed in mid-nineteenth century Persia with the declaration of the Báb. The Bábí revolution created a situation, not only uniquely inspirational but also volatile in the extreme. The Promised One, “standing in the midst,” through whom ‘the splendour of the Face of God is made manifest’,¹⁶⁶ distilled a “divine elixir”¹⁶⁷ that worked a remarkable transformation on converts and antagonized self-declared enemies. The converts, “a galaxy of God-intoxicated heroes”¹⁶⁸ win our admiration, not with rhetoric, but with the full weight of their deeds.

In *God Passes By* and in his translation of *Nabil's Narrative*, we enter a domain in which seeming hyperbole becomes literal and historical truth. Through Shoghi Effendi's pen, we are witnesses to that rarest of events when “God walked among men.” It is the singular power of these events that Shoghi Effendi is striving to convey, beyond an effect that seems to be

sheer dramatization. In his endeavor to capture these rare events, he not only strives to awaken our own somnolent faith but also to inspire a fresh sense of awe and wonder that such deeds could have been done—were done—and to provoke our deepest reflections and sentiments as to their cause. And I strongly suspect that one of our author’s strongest motives in depicting this tumultuous history is to bring us back again to one of the primary motives of rhetoric—to move the reader to action, the ultimate in the act of reading.

The characters that our author finds wanting are not just any old historical figures resistant to change. With the possible exceptions of Queen Victoria, and the Russian Czar Alexander II, they are depicted as negligent sovereigns who have who have failed to observe their most crucial duty: to investigate the weighty claims of the Persian Prisoner. Some of them, Shoghi Effendi judges, following Bahá’u’lláh’s words, are drunk with power, blinded by ignorance and pride, and bereft of even the rudiments of justice. In this divine drama, these sovereigns become the antagonists who thwart the progress and prosperity of humanity by rejecting its Divine Emissary. What, we wonder, might have been the outcome for Persia and the world if “*the bigoted, the sickly, the vacillating Muhammad Sháh*” had not “*at the last moment cancelled the Báb’s imminent visit to the capital. . . ?*”¹⁶⁹ But in place of Muhammad Sháh, on this photographic dark plate of history, another image was soon to develop: Marie of Rumania, the queen who became a believer.¹⁷⁰

Mírzá Yahyá: The Demonic in the Guise of Piety

With the possible exception of Siyyid Muhammad of Isfahan, who was stigmatized by Shoghi Effendi as “*the Antichrist of the Bahá’í revelation*,”¹⁷¹ Mírzá Yahyá, Bahá’u’lláh’s younger half-brother, is the foulest character to have emerged in the Bahá’í dispensation. Bahá’u’lláh has testified that he committed “what hath caused the Holy Spirit, and the dwellers of the Tabernacle of the Grandeur of God, the Lord of this wondrous Day, to lament.”¹⁷² It is a significant measure of the “*devastating*” effects of the rebellion of Yahyá, who intended, by any means possible, to overthrow Bahá’u’lláh and to supplant himself as head of the Bahá’í Faith, that Shoghi Effendi considered that its gravity outweighed even the “*tragic martyrdom of the Báb*.”¹⁷³ This was a “*crisis of the first magnitude*” that shook the twenty-year-old religion “*to its roots*.”¹⁷⁴ The Guardian’s characteristically strong reactions to events that adversely affected the Bahá’í Faith or its three Central Figures are particularly intense in these passages. In a

comparative religious perspective, he describes the acts of Yahyá, his junior by thirteen years, as “*more odious*,” “*more perfidious*,” “*more abhorrent*” than those that have occurred in other religious dispensations. Yahyá’s behavior is judged to be “*monstrous*.”¹⁷⁵ This word indicates not only the extreme violation of moral and spiritual norms but also an ego grown ugly and vicious beyond all proportions. Shoghi Effendi’s indictment of Yahyá’s crimes will suffice. It reads like a list of formal charges in a court of law:

His corruption, in scores of instances, of the text of the Báb’s writings; the blasphemous addition he made to the formula of the adhan by the introduction of a passage in which he identified himself with the Godhead; his insertion of references in those writings to a succession in which he nominated himself and his descendants as heirs of the Báb; the vacillation and apathy he had betrayed when informed of the tragic death which his Master had suffered; his condemnation to death of all the Mirrors of the Bábí Dispensation, though he himself was one of those Mirrors; his dastardly act in causing the murder of Dayyan, whom he feared and envied; his foul deed in bringing about, during the absence of Bahá’u’lláh from Baghdad, the assassination of Mirza Ali-Akbar, the Báb’s cousin; and, most heinous of all, his unspeakably repugnant violation, during that same period, of the honor of the Báb Himself¹⁷⁶—all these, as attested by Aqay-i-Kalim, and reported by Nabil in his Narrative, were to be thrown into a yet more lurid light by further acts the perpetration of which were to seal irretrievably his doom.¹⁷⁷

These last lines refer, of course, to Yahyá’s poisoning of Bahá’u’lláh, one of several “*desperate designs*”¹⁷⁸ to do so. Yahyá, acting as the evil apothecary, smeared the edge of Bahá’u’lláh’s teacup with a toxic herbal substance he had himself concocted. The attempt very nearly succeeded. The effects of the attack poisoned Bahá’u’lláh “*sufficiently to produce a serious illness which lasted no less than a month, and which was accompanied by severe pains and high fever, the aftermath of which left Bahá’u’lláh with a shaking hand till the end of His life.*”¹⁷⁹ The sum total of Yahyá’s deliberate, persistent, and methodical crimes was such that “[i]t brought incalculable sorrow to Bahá’u’lláh, visibly aged Him, and inflicted, through its repercussions, the heaviest blow ever sustained by Him in His lifetime.”¹⁸⁰

No Redeeming Qualities

While he is not psychotic, Yahyá is an extreme character who lives, moves, and breathes, as do some of Dostoevsky's characters, in the subterranean realm. But let us be clear on this point. In Shoghi Effendi's characterization, unlike some of Dostoyevsky's characters,¹⁸¹ Yahyá has no redeeming qualities. His world is demonic because he stands out as one who is bent upon committing heinous acts. He is driven by his insatiable desire to be at the center and command, one who was "*spurred on by this mounting jealousy and impelled by his passionate love of leadership.*"¹⁸² The younger brother stopped at nothing to get what he wanted, not even at the horror of attempting to murder the Manifestation of God, the very Elder Brother who "*had watched over his early youth and manhood*"¹⁸³ and had shown him the utmost kindness and compassion. That it may be an old story provides cold comfort. Yahyá's state of mind shares something with, but goes far beyond, the fraternal jealousy manifested by Cain for his brother Abel, told in the Book of Genesis (4:1–16). Curiously, in the Genesis story, it was also the younger brother who committed the heinous deed.

Yahyá corresponds to E. M. Forster's description of a typically "flat"¹⁸⁴ character, one who does not change. And if Yahyá does change, it is only to sink more deeply. Flat characters usually exhibit some predominant trait. His would be pathological jealousy. Like the "negative space" on the artist's canvas, which helps the viewer to focus on those elements that really make the painting, Yahyá is the symbol of infinite darkness, a darkness that is only illuminated by the merciful light of Bahá'u'lláh's long-suffering. His character, indeed his whole universe, is flat because joyless, a universe that is dominated only by the pathetic but dangerous drives of a starving ego in need of constant feeding. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's descriptive imagery characterizing the relationship between Yahyá and Siyyid Muhammad of Isfahan, described by Shoghi Effendi as "*the black-hearted scoundrel [Siyyid Muhammad] who befooled and manipulated this vain and flaccid man [Yahyá]*" is graphic. Their relationship is like that of "the sucking child" to the "much-prized breast" of its mother.¹⁸⁵ The Freudian implications are not lost on the reader. However, while the litany of Yahyá's crimes is fully exposed, were it not for Siyyid Muhammad's proven ability to manipulate his partner-in-crime, the younger brother might not have been driven to commit such horrendous deeds.

Among Shoghi Effendi's several epithets of Yahyá is the word *vain*. Vanity is, of course, related to pride. These two negative attributes are closely linked by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. In those passages that

stipulate the spiritual attributes of the “true seeker,”¹⁸⁶ Bahá’u’lláh writes, “He must never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence, and refrain from idle talk.”¹⁸⁷ The insight of C. S. Lewis throws light on the nature of pride, which has everything to do with a pathological case of self-love. Lewis remarked that pride or vanity is essentially a competitive sin that at bottom conceals enmity or hatred. In a lust for power, the proud (vain) person props up his or her immature ego by looking down on others. The existence of pride conveys a desperately needed but nonetheless false sense of superiority. But when you encounter God, writes Lewis, “you come up against something that is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself.”¹⁸⁸

This immeasurable superiority is precisely what Yahyá saw in Bahá’u’lláh. But instead of showing gratitude and humbling himself before the Elder Brother who had shown him “tender mercy” and “nurtured” him “by day and by night for service to the Cause of God,”¹⁸⁹ he began to burn with envy. Succumbing to the biblical sin of covetousness, forbidden by the tenth commandment,¹⁹⁰ and reinforced by Jesus,¹⁹¹ which in Bahá’í parlance would be synonymous with “inordinate desire,”¹⁹² i.e., greed for material, moral, or spiritual gain, he began to plot, not only to dethrone the Glory of God but also to destroy Him. The rest makes for an agonizing history. Nevertheless, although He condemns Yahyá, in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* Bahá’u’lláh assures him of God’s forgiveness, were he to truly repent. In a final grand gesture of supreme mercy, despite all that he had done, Bahá’u’lláh wrote, “Turn unto Him, and fear not because of thy deeds. He, in truth, forgiveth whomsoever He desireth as a bounty on His part; no God is there but Him, the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Bounteous.”¹⁹³

Finally, because of their extreme gravity, it would be tempting to categorize Yahyá’s crimes as stemming from the unforgivable sin explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the innate “detestation of the light,” which “has no remedy and cannot be forgiven.”¹⁹⁴ Yahyá *does* appear to be “like a bat which hates the light.”¹⁹⁵ But speculation cannot give us the final answer because it depends on the unknown. However, Shoghi Effendi’s reference to the poisoning of Bahá’u’lláh as one of the “*further acts the perpetration of which were to seal irretrievably his doom*”¹⁹⁶ reads like a final judgment.

Endnotes

1. See J. H. Plumb, "Disappearing Heroes," pp. 49–51.
2. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship: Essays on Goethe*, p. 181.
3. Universal House of Justice, "To the World's Religious Leaders," April 2002.
4. Emerson, "Politics," *Essays, Second Series*, 1844. Quoted by J. H. Plumb in "Disappearing Heroes," p. 51.
5. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 38.
6. There are scores of references to the Heroic Age in the Guardian's writings. Here is one referring to the martyrdom of the Báb: "*The apotheosis in which such a life attained its consummation marks, as already observed, the culmination of the most heroic phase of the Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation*" (ibid., p. 55).
7. Ibid., p. 3.
8. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 7.
9. The shrine of Shaykh Ahmad-ibn-i-Abí-Tálib-i-Tabarsí who "had been one of the transmitters of the traditions ascribed to the imams of the Faith." The shrine was situated about fourteen miles southeast of Bárfurúsh, now Babol (Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 343 and n. 3, p. 343). It was visited by Professor Edward G. Browne of Cambridge on 26 September 1888 and described in detail in his *A Year Among the Persians*, p. 565. The description is reproduced by Shoghi Effendi in n. 3, pp. 343–44 of *The Dawn-Breakers*.
10. Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 360.
11. Quddús finally agreed to the offer of a truce after a sworn promise of safe-passage was signed by the prince in the pages of the Qu'rán. The sacred oath was precipitously violated. Most of the Bábís were massacred, including their leader Quddús, while others were sold as slaves. Mullah Husayn had by this time already died in the fort, having succumbed to bullet wounds.
12. In *The Eternal Message of Muhammad* 'Azzám writes, "If we were to analyze the verses of the Koran which pertain to warfare, and revert to the circumstances of their revelation and follow the events of the Prophet's life, his wars and expeditions, war by war and expedition by expedition, there would be not the slightest doubt that the war sanctioned by Islam is the war of self-defense" (p. 130).
13. As the Báb hung suspended in a military barracks square in Tabriz (9 July 1850) just prior to His execution, His last words to the crowd were: "O wayward generation! Had you believed in Me every one of you would have followed the example of this youth, who stood in rank above most of you, and would have willingly sacrificed himself in My path. The day will come when you will have recognized Me; that day I shall have ceased to be with you" (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 53).
14. Ibid., pp. 40–41.
15. Ibid.
16. *Living the Life*, p. 11. From a letter of 26 October 1941, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi.

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17. The myth of redemption is one of the species of myth identified by Northrop Frye in *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of the "Bible and Literature,"* p. 23. Frye's myth of redemption refers to "some phase of life during or after this one. . . ."
18. The Greek roots of the word *mythology* can be translated as "story of the gods" or "sacred story" (*mythos+logos*).
19. Denis MacEoin, "Hierarchy, Authority and Eschatology in Early Bábí Thought," *In Iran*, vol. 3, p. 105; and n. 65, p. 143.
20. MacEoin, *In Iran*, p. 110.
21. W. F. Jackson Knight, *Elysion Ancient Greek and Roman Beliefs Concerning Life After Death*, pp. 59–60. Jackson's scholarship is marred by its penchant for psychism as it relates to the Hebrew Bible and to Christianity.
22. *The Dawn-Breakers, Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, p. 344.
23. Russell T. McCutcheon, "Myth" in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, pp. 194, 197.
24. Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*, p. 2, quoted by McCutcheon, p. 199.
25. Shoghi Effendi writes that Mullah Husayn slew "a treacherous foe who had taken shelter behind a tree, by cleaving with a single stroke of his sword the tree, the man and his musket in twain" (*God Passes By*, p. 40).
26. The *Tárikh-i-Jadíd* (pp. 106–9) reports that Prince Ahmad Mírzá had questioned Abbás Qulí Khán about the incident who vouched for its veracity while he praised the fortitude of the Bábís (Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 413–14, n. 2).
27. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 40.
28. Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 650 and n. 1.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 651.
30. *Ibid.*
31. The following compressed examples are taken from pp. 651–55.
32. His name means "the trusted one," and he was the governor of Isfahan. The Mu'tamid had a plan to spread the Faith of the Báb throughout Iran by teaching it to influential people in government circles. However, he met with an untimely death.
33. From Geertz's essay "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought" in *Critical Theory Since 1965*. Geertz's essay first appeared in *The American Scholar* (Spring 1980).
34. From the editor's introduction to Hayden White's essay "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, pp. 394–407.
35. William S. Hatcher argues against a now outdated view of myth as being prescientific or antiscientific in his section "Myths and Mythmaking" in *Logic and Logos. Essays on Science, Religion and Philosophy*, pp. 25–29. Hatcher's argument, while historically correct, insofar as science clearly emerged as a corrective to myths as prescientific false beliefs, is reductionistic or exclusionary and ignores current academic analyses of myth as being beyond science, true in some psychological, symbolic, or sense of meaning, and that represent, in part, the cultural memory of various peoples and societies.
36. Hayden White, *Critical Theory Since 1965*, p. 397. Italics in original.
37. *Ibid.*, Italics in original.
38. Captain von Goumoens, an Austrian officer, who worked for the Shah, and as reported by Shoghi Effendi, wrote in *Soldatenfreund* [Soldier's Friend] that he saw some Bábís

- being “dragged in chains through the bazaar, preceded by a military band. . .” (*God Passes By*, p. 65).
39. Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, p. 407. Italics in original.
 40. Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 655.
 41. Aristotle, *Tragedy*, p. 61.
 42. *Poetics* [1452a], quoted by Alan Cooper in “Narrative Theology and the Book of Job,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 11.1 (1982): 38.
 43. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. xiii.
 44. I have used the word *foil* loosely, since Nabíl and Násiri’ d-Dín Sháh are not characters interacting in an actual play. But the word applies insofar as the actions of these characters in the divine drama serve to reveal an evident contrast.
 45. Marzieh Gail, “The Poet Laureate” in *Dawn over Mount Hira*, p. 99.
 46. See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful*, pp. 32–36; Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá’ís in the Time of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 268–70; and Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, vol. 1, pp. 202–6. One detailed circumstantial account of Nabíl can be found in Fadil-i-Mazindarání’s *Tarikh-i-Zuhuru’l-Haqq*.
 47. Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 659.
 48. *Ibid.*, pp. 659–63.
 49. *Ibid.*, p. 663.
 50. *Ibid.*, p. 657.
 51. *Ibid.*, p. 664.
 52. Summarized and condensed from pp. 664–67.
 53. *Ibid.*, pp. 664–65.
 54. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 196.
 55. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
 56. *Ibid.*
 57. Frederick R. Karl, *Contemporary English Novel*, p. 85.
 58. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 230.
 59. Karl, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
 60. From “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 97.
 61. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 3.
 62. Aristotle, *The Poetics* [1447a].
 63. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 36.
 64. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 101.
 65. John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 39.
 66. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 100.
 67. John Hick defines miracles (“breach or suspension of natural law”) as having both a “purely physical and non-religious” meaning or a religious one. The religious meaning is: “Events which have religious significance that evoked and mediated a vivid sense of the presence and activity of God may have occurred, even though their continuity with the general course of nature cannot be traced in our present very limited state of human knowledge” (*op. cit.*, p. 39).
 68. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 52.
 69. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
 70. *Ibid.*
 71. See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, chapters 22 and 42.

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72. It refers to the complete autonomy of the Divine Will. It is also quoted in the *Aqdas*, para. 157. This verse is alluded to by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *Some Answered Questions*, chapter 45, in which He explains the doctrine of the Most Great Infallibility.
73. Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 513–14.
74. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 53.
75. *Ibid.*
76. During the reconciliation of the feuding families after the tragic deaths of Romeo and Juliet (Coleridge, *Romeo and Juliet*, 5.3.305).
77. Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life*, p. 295.
78. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed., s.v. “Drama.” This point is not made in the current 15th edition of *Britannica*.
79. *Ibid.*
80. Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 507–8.
81. From John of Garland (12–13th centuries AD). The complete quotation reads: “[Tragedy] is a poem written in the ‘grand’ style, which treats of shameful and wicked deeds, and, beginning in joy, ends in grief” (Clifford Leech, *Tragedy*, p. 2).
82. For the full eulogy, see Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, section 36, pp. 85–86.
83. Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, p. 252.
84. In his *History of Greek Literature* (1858).
85. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed., s.v. “Drama.”
86. A type of lyric in dialogue form sung by the Chorus to express profound emotion.
87. “Origin of Tragedy” in *Quarterly Review*, 1908, quoted in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed., s.v. “Drama.”
88. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 53. See Browne, *A Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 45.
89. Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 514.
90. Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, p. 359.
91. *Ibid.*
92. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 16.
93. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. vii.
94. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 12.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
96. The recipients of Bahá’u’lláh’s tablets included: Napoleon III, Pope Pius IX, the Russian emperor Alexander II, Queen Victoria, the Prussian king William I, Francis Joseph, the ruler of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the Ottoman emperor Sultan ‘Abdu’l-‘Aziz, and Nasiri’ d-Din Shah, the later assassinated, last monarch of the Qajar Dynasty.
97. “. . . Bahá’u’lláh has written: ‘Each one of them hath been designated by a special name. The first hath been named “The Rumbling,” the second, “The Blow,” the third, “The Inevitable,” the fourth, “The Plain,” the fifth, “The Catastrophe,” and the others, “The Stunning Trumpet Blast,” “The Near Event,” “The Great Terror,” “The Trumpet,” “The Bugle,” and their like, so that all the peoples of the earth may know, of a certainty, and may witness, with outward and inner eyes, that He Who is the Lord of Names hath prevailed, and will continue to prevail, under all conditions, over all men. . . . Never since the beginning of the world hath the Message been so openly proclaimed. . . .’” (Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 46).
98. *Ibid.*, p. 46. The Guardian quotes only “miracle” in quotation marks as being attributed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. There is no indication of the source.

99. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 33.
100. Ibid., pp. 29–30.
101. Ibid., p. 12.
102. Ibid., p. 49.
103. Ibid., p. 51.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid., p. 30.
106. Ibid.
107. Ibid., p. 51.
108. Ibid., p. 69.
109. The phrases “beehive of princelings” and “race of royal drones” are quoted by Shoghi Effendi without citing the source.
110. Shoghi Effendi writes that the grandson of Sultan ‘Abdu’l-‘Aziz sought “*pecuniary assistance*” from “*the World Center of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh*,” which was “*unhesitatingly offered.*” pp. 69–70.
111. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 4.
112. Used by Coleridge, for example, in his seventh lecture on Shakespeare in “The Lectures of 1811–1812,” collected in his two-volume work *Shakespearean Criticism*: “Shakespeare never takes pains to make his characters win your esteem, but leaves it to the general command of the passions and to poetic justice” (*Romeo and Juliet*, p. 175). The concept was first used by Thomas Rymer in *The Tragedies of the Last Age* (1677). Rymer held that the poet had the moral obligation to correct the earlier perception that the “same end happen to the *righteous* and to the *unjust*, *vertue* often opprest, and *wickedness* on the Throne. . . . They concluded, that a *Poet* must of necessity see *justice* exactly administered, if he intended to please” (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 5). Italics in original.
113. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, pp. 15–16.
114. Aristotle, *The Poetics* [1453a].
115. Ibid.
116. Bradley, *Tragedy*, p. 16.
117. The Multiple Author REFER System (MARS) cites 242 instances of the phrase “most great.”
118. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 153–56.
119. Quoted by Walter Allen, *The English Novel*, p. 14. From L. C. Knights, “How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?” in *Explorations*. No page reference cited by Allan or L. C. Knights. The more complete sentence reads: “This assumption that it is the main business of writer—other than the lyric poet—to create characters. . . long ago invaded criticism of the novel. . . .”
120. P. ix.
121. Otto Reinert, ed., *Drama: An Introductory Anthology*, p. xiii.
122. This nonidentification of historical sources should not be viewed as merely an Eastern or oriental method of historiography. It was also typical of English-speaking prose writers at the turn of the century.
123. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 53.
124. Lord Curzon of Kedleston quoted in *God Passes By*, p. 203. The source of the quotation is unidentified by Shoghi Effendi but is probably from Curzon’s *Persia and the Persian Question*, which the Guardian lists among the works he consulted for his translation of

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- The Dawn-Breakers* (Nabíl-i-Azam [Muhammad-i-Zarandí], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*). Shoghi Effendi's mention of Lord Curzon by name is the exception to the Guardian's general tendency.
125. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, pp. 57–58.
126. It could be that this epithet was penned in light of certain historical details that the Guardian encountered in his readings.
127. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 50.
128. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
129. Bahá'ís sometimes remark that Queen Victoria was an exception to the general rejection accorded to Bahá'u'lláh's message, perhaps in light of Shoghi Effendi's statement, "Queen Victoria, it is said, upon reading the Tablet revealed for her remarked: 'If this is of God, it will endure; if not, it can do no harm'" (*The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 65). However, her remark, while not contrary, is at best lukewarm. In his proclamation epistle to the queen, Bahá'u'lláh praised her for abolishing the slave trade and assured her of God's reward for this act. He also praised Victoria for allowing some latitude with representative government, a progressive measure of the day compared to absolute monarchs (*Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 33–34).
130. The following statement of Bahá'u'lláh to Czar Alexander II would indicate a conditional reward: "Whilst I lay chained and fettered in the prison, one of thy ministers extended Me his aid. Wherefore hath God ordained for thee a station which the knowledge of none can comprehend except His knowledge. Beware lest thou barter away this sublime station. . . . Beware lest thy sovereignty withhold thee from Him Who is the Supreme Sovereign" (quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 33).
131. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
132. An Arabic expression that refers to the unseen actions of God.
133. Volumes one and three of Macaulay's *History of England* were in the Guardian's library and have now been transferred to the library at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa. I am also assuming that Rúhíyyih Rabbaní was quoting Macaulay from Shoghi Effendi's own library.
134. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 196.
135. Introduction, Macaulay, *The History of England*, vol. 1, p. x.
136. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 338.
137. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 4.
138. P. M. Sykes, *A History of Persia*, vol. 2, pp. 439–40. This description is found in n. 1, p. 233 of *Nabíl's Narrative*. The above information was first drawn to my attention in a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 25 July 1974.
139. A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 7.
140. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 163.
141. Hazlitt, source uncited, quoted by Walter Allan in *The English Novel*, p. 14.
142. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 5.
143. *Ibid.*
144. Huxley graduated from Balliol College, Oxford in 1915, just five years before Shoghi Effendi arrived there as a "non-collegiate student" in 1920.
145. Aldous Huxley, "Tragedy and the Whole Truth," in W. E. Williams, ed., *A Book of English Essays*, p. 357.
146. *Ibid.*
147. Introduction to *Nabíl's Narrative, The Dawn-Breakers*, p. xxiii.

148. Humphrey House, *Aristotle's Poetics*, p. 71.
149. The expression is from 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 169 and is also used by Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, pp. 41–42 and *God Passes By*, p. 165.
150. Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, pp. 41–42.
151. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 15. In context, Bahá'u'lláh is referring to the persecution of the prophets by the leaders of religion.
152. I have taken some liberty with Collingwood's concept of the internal event of history as idea. I have done so because I think that his concept has some relevance beyond the historian's own argument, namely, that character or states of soul, as well as ideas, have direct influences on historical events.
153. Collingwood, described by Passmore as one of a number of "recalcitrant metaphysicians," wrote *Speculum Mentis* (1924), *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (1933), and his *Autobiography* (1939).
154. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 213. The examples in parentheses are Collingwood's.
155. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
156. Dilthey, as summarized by Collingwood in *The Idea of History* (pp. 172–75), believed that to really know the past the historian had to relive it through the richness of his or her own internal intellectual life, and in a sense appropriate history into her or his own being, ". . . [history] must become part of the historian's personal experience" (p.174). Although Collingwood shared Dilthey's view to a point, Collingwood held that the historian's analysis alone—and the same was true of the philosopher—was either right or wrong, and not due, as Dilthey maintained, to some "psychological structure of disposition" (p. 173), as elaborated in such works as Dilthey's *Introduction to the Sciences of Mind (Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften)* and his *Das Wesen der Philosophie (The Essence of Philosophy)*.
157. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 213.
158. Quoted by R. G. Collingwood in *The Idea of History*, p. 241.
159. See, for example, "Say: O people! Sow not the seeds of discord among men, and refrain from contending with your neighbor, for your Lord hath committed the world and the cities thereof to the care of the kings of the earth, and made them the emblems of His own power, by virtue of the sovereignty He hath chosen to bestow upon them" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 303). And "Those divines. . .who are truly adorned with the ornament of knowledge and of a goodly character are, verily, as a head to the body of the world, and as eyes to the nations. The guidance of men hath, at all times, been and is dependent upon these blessed souls" (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 78).
160. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 214.
161. "A king who is not deterred by the vainglory of power and authority from observing justice, nor is deprived of the splendours of the day-star of equity by luxury, riches, glory or the marshalling of hosts and legions shall occupy a high rank and a sublime station amongst the Concourse on high. It is incumbent upon everyone to extend aid and to manifest kindness to so noble a soul" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 65).
162. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
163. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 4.

164. Examples here are Mullah Husayn's sundering of the man, the musket, and the tree in two with one cut of the sword; his sortie, with 313 men, against the prince's army in which he captured no fewer than seven barricades before being struck down; and the attack by a mere 19 besieged Bábís on two regiments of infantry and cavalry that caused Mullah Husayn's assassin to flee in consternation and to take refuge in the headquarters of the prince (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 40–41).
165. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.
166. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 142.
167. In his preeminent doctrinal work, Bahá'u'lláh pursues an alchemical discourse involving the substances of copper and gold in which he discusses the precursor of the science of metallurgy, not only per se but also as a symbol of spiritual transformation in which the divine elixir, as the Word of God, is the counterpart to the alchemist's magnetic lodestone. "For their agitation was turned into peace, their doubt into certitude, their timidity into courage. Such is the potency of the Divine Elixir, which, swift as the twinkling of an eye, transmutes the souls of men! . . . Likewise, these souls, through the potency of the Divine Elixir, traverse, in the twinkling of an eye, the world of dust and advance into the realm of holiness; and with one step cover the earth of limitations and reach the domain of the Placeless" (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 156–58).
168. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 3.
169. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
170. Having been taught by the foremost Bahá'í teacher of the age, Martha Root, in eight successive visits (1926–1936), Queen Marie bore witness, in several encomiums, not only to the quality of her faith but also to the transforming influence of her distinguished visitor.
171. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
172. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 157.
173. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 163.
174. *Ibid.*
175. *Ibid.*
176. Shoghi Effendi refers to Yahyá's marriage to the Báb's second wife, Fatimih Khanum of Isfahan.
177. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 165.
178. *Ibid.*
179. *Ibid.*
180. *Ibid.*, pp. 163–64.
181. In *Crime and Punishment*, Sonia Semenovna is portrayed as an innocent prostitute, and in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Sonia Andreievna is a saintly adulteress.
182. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 165.
183. *Ibid.*
184. In his *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster describes two basically different types of character. A 'flat' character does not change in the course of a story of play; a "round" character develops and thus alters (J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, pp. 271–72).
185. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 112–13.
186. *Ibid.*, pp. 192–96.
187. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
188. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 108.

189. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶184.
190. Ex. 20:15, Deut. 5:21.
191. "Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). Christ's admonition refers particularly to material goods; whereas, one may also covet goods spiritual.
192. Found in among his superb qualifications of the "true seeker," Bahá'u'lláh counsels that "[h]e should be content with little, and be freed from all inordinate desire" (*The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 193).
193. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶184 and ¶185.
194. "Explanation of Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit" in chapter 31, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 128.
195. *Ibid.*
196. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 165.

13

RETROSPECTIVE AND CONCLUSION

Restoring Shoghi Effendi's Writings to Wholeness

“Our meddling intellect / Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:— / We murder to dissect.” So wrote William Wordsworth in his poem, “The Tables Turned,” an invitation to quit the world of books to contemplate instead “the lore which Nature brings.” At the end of this book, after all this selecting, correlating, comparing, and analyzing, it seems appropriate to attempt to restore Shoghi Effendi’s writings to wholeness. One simple way to do this is to read the Guardian with a pre-analytical mind in the pure act of reading; to read him for inspiration, religious knowledge, and insight, without attempting to delve more deeply; another way would be to offer a summative retrospective and conclusion.

Passive Readers and Active Believers

In modern literary criticism, proponents of the Reader-Response School are fond of speaking of “readers,” and they emphasize the role that readers play in the creation of literary dynamics. Throughout this book, I have referred to both readers and believers. While Shoghi Effendi’s writings, in several passages, do address “*the reader*,” his readers are not just any sort of readers. They are also for the most part believers, putting his readership into a distinctively different category, one that requires a decisive sort of reader-response. Shoghi Effendi would have expected—and did expect his readers—not only to appreciate his writings and to deepen their knowledge of the Bahá’í Faith’s history, sacred scriptures, teachings and Administrative Order but also, and more importantly, to pass into active service in the execution of the Divine Plan. We can be sure that our author did not conceive of the act of reading, at least where the Bahá’í Faith is concerned, as a purely passive act. He was explicit that reading had the functional role of anticipating action.

His Elevated Style

The Guardian's writings have given rise to passing comments about the compound-complex "long sentences," the effusive baroque or "Victorian" style, and the influence of Gibbon. But just as Shoghi Effendi had intimated to Persian-speaking pilgrims, he also expected the English-speaking Bahá'ís to rise to the occasion and to engage him on his own terms. While the Guardian's writings may be challenging for some readers, they amply reward those who will take the time and effort to give them a closer reading. Something of the nature of that reward has been explicated in the foregoing pages. Other writers and scholars will undoubtedly develop, through other filters or lenses, what I have begun here.

The Present Relevance of His Writings

As this book goes to press, it would appear that interest in the writings of Shoghi Effendi is at last awakening. Not a moment too soon. This renewed interest is taking place, in part, because thoughtful minds are beginning to recognize the relevance, the inspirational and historical value, and the thought-provoking quality of these writings. But, in larger part, it is because the Universal House of Justice, whose own messages are inspired and informed by the writings of the Guardian, has been reminding the Bahá'í world that the modern Bahá'í Faith and the grave crises of contemporary world civilization cannot be properly understood without the timely and incisive commentaries provided by Shoghi Effendi. As necessary as a comprehensive grasp of its sacred scriptures and a sound knowledge of Islam, Bábism, and Bahá'í history may be, for a deeper understanding of the Bahá'í Faith only the writings of the Guardian make the transition from the Heroic Age to the modern world's Formative Age, which finds itself yet again in a global catastrophe of overwhelming proportions. As I have written in the dedication, these writings, no less than those of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, have been offered to remedy the dire straits in which humanity finds itself today. Although the Guardian's writings are not Divine Revelation, they cannot be separated from those of the three Central Figures, for they interpret, recast, and revoice the truths of the Bahá'í Revelation in a manner that is directly relevant to the many and great challenges involved in erecting a progressive, peaceful, and stable world society. Students of Bahá'í history are fully conscious that only the writings of Shoghi Effendi provide an authoritative living history of some of the major developments of the Bahá'í Faith in the twentieth century. Indeed, to a large extent they determine

that history. *God Passes By* and the World Order letters reach back to capture the genesis of the Bahá'í Faith and trace the development of its Administrative Order through the first century of its existence.

The Priceless Legacy

One obvious contribution that comes to mind in this review is the priceless legacy handed down and the incalculable debt that past, present, and future generations owe to the Guardian. This man, who lived the greater part of his life on the side of Mount Carmel, directing the continually multiplying and increasingly complex affairs of a growing world religion, rendered the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh intelligible to the modern mind. Drawing on current events, contemporary history, literary allusions, and the Bahá'í sacred writings, he painted a living portrait of the Bahá'í Faith as it emerged from Plan to Plan, while he clarified the unique features of the New World Order and its divine institutions. His was the firm conviction, repeatedly expressed, that without the implementation of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine System, world peace could never be established, nor could the highest aspirations of the world's great religions be realized. To make this point clearer, he graphically described the complete disintegration of an increasingly dysfunctional and moribund world civilization. But within the ashes of this dying order, he pointed to the glowing embers that would soon burst into flame, giving rise to the celestial phoenix of the promised Kingdom of God on earth.

His Fidelity to the Sacred Word

The next point concerns the extent to which his writings depend, not only on the powers of his own creative genius but also on the letter and spirit of the Bahá'í sacred writings. Whatever voice he adopted, whether that of authorized interpreter, commander of the faithful and defender of the Faith, or that of writer, historian, or rhetorician, the Guardian took all his cues from Bahá'í Holy Writ. In all his writings, Shoghi Effendi was interpreting, in either a narrow or broad fashion, the sacred writings of the Faith of which he was the head. This comment in no way minimizes the creative powers or the lifetime of onerous labor that he invested in exercising his functions. On the contrary; it is a mark of the great humility and profound respect that our "*true brother*" showed for the body of the Sacred Writings of which he was the especial trustee. By submitting his manifold creative faculties to the interpretation and execution of the

Holy Word, his own creative genius flourished. And it flourished after the manner that is the hallmark of all true creativity—originality.

His Originality

Whatever comparisons or correlations have been made in this book between Shoghi Effendi's thought and style, and other literary forms, devices, or religious motifs, our author is clearly his own man. It may be trite to say that all creative geniuses strike us in some sense as being original. I emphasize this point because some may have wrongly concluded that our author does not qualify as being original simply because he consciously chose to model his literary style on one of the greatest historians in the English language. But this view is ill conceived. No writer, however original, writes in a vacuum. All have been somehow influenced, in some way formed. It is the mark of any good student to choose a master, or masters, and to learn what may be learned from their model. It is also nonetheless true that, paradoxically, the original creative self emerges in this process of apprenticeship. In this sense, Shoghi Effendi was no different from other writers. However, even after we have grown accustomed to all the familiar patterns of style and rhetoric, the reader is still left with the impression, that despite certain predictability, one is in the presence of a skilful author of great literary, spiritual, and intellectual capacity. After we have read all the rhetorical questions, the Ciceronian sentences, the repetitions and parallelisms, the series of paratactical clauses, the constant recourse to alliteration and assonance, the moral exhortations, the denunciations and warnings, the promises of glory, the encomiums and condemnations, the rhetorical effects and precisely constructed arguments—after all this recourse to his literary stock and trade, we realize that Shoghi Effendi succeeded in capturing that simple, eloquent but lofty vision that the ancient Longinus called the sublime.

“All Comparisons Are Odious”

In making any critical assessment of the Guardian's writings, we should not lose sight of the literary framework within which Shoghi Effendi was confined. Any unfavorable comparisons to other writers or to other standards of literature than his own would be not only unfair but also, as the old expression attributed to Cervantes has it, “odious.” Such comparisons would be odious because our author was not a prose writer of the ordinary sort, nor was he a novelist or short story writer, dramatist,

or poet—although, as I have contended in the foregoing pages, he did display a keen awareness of the requirements of each of these genres. Except for his great chronicle *God Passes By*, the Guardian wrote from within a rather exclusive and restricted genre—the epistolary, a longstanding literary form to which he doubtless added new dimensions in the development of religious literature.

His Multilingual Capacity

By mastering English, a language that was not his mother tongue, one that he did not begin to study in earnest until his early teens, Shoghi Effendi has joined a select company of multilingual authors. Coincidentally, the Guardian’s much-admired prose model, Gibbon, was just as fluent in French as he was in English and wrote with proficiency in that language. Like Gibbon, our author also spoke fluent French, having been first educated at Collège des Frères, a Catholic-run school in Haifa. The same mastery he achieved in English, he arguably exercised with even greater skill in Arabic and Persian, his two native languages. The same divine afflatus that is found in his English-language writings infuses, perhaps to a greater degree, the two languages of revelation. Anybody who speaks a foreign language fluently knows how difficult it is to master the written language, even if one speaks it well. Indeed, it is difficult enough to become a master of any *one* language, let alone three. (In addition to French, Arabic, Persian, and English, Shoghi Effendi spoke a little Turkish, but he did not write in that language; and he also spoke some Hebrew.)

The Cultural Value of His Writings

While the Guardian’s writings will undoubtedly stimulate the values of literacy in the Bahá’í community, they are also valuable because they potentially inform a much wider audience than the immediate religious community for whom they were written. Theological classics, as they have done in past dispensations, enter the public cultural domain. The Guardian’s writings preserve their goodly share of the best heritage of the intellectual, humanitarian, and spiritual values of present-day civilization, even as they propose those progressive social, moral, racial, and religious policies that shall serve as impetus for an “ever-advancing civilization” in the new millennium now just over a decade old. His books and letters not only record the progress of the formative years of the Bahá’í Faith throughout a thirty-six-year period but also serve as a “talking mirror of conscience” for a deeply troubled world, one that keeps trying,

ever so vainly and by all the wrong means, to find its way out of the dark heart of its present crises and traumas.

The Call to Build a Celestial City

Reaching the end of this book, my final thoughts are that Shoghi Effendi's is an urgent and eloquent voice, a voice "crying out in the wilderness." He beckons the distracted citizens of the present age to awaken to the realization that our sorely troubled world still holds the promise of becoming a celestial city. Soon, we will discover that the golden tongue that has been calling us from the heaven of its celestial burning has not raised its cry in vain.

APPENDIX I: STYLE AND PATTERN

A. Generalities

1. General Definition: Style refers to the particular and distinctive speech of an author that distinguishes him or her from any other and refers to the manner in which diction, grammar, and syntax are used in a conscious way to achieve effect.
2. Shoghi Effendi's style refers to: (a) the particular, inimitable quality of his writings; (b) that excellence by which he demonstrates the most effective verbal means for the doctrinal, rhetorical, historical, or other ends that he purposes. In this sense, to say that his writings have a particular style means that they are impressive or effective; and (c) the man himself. The style is a reflection of the personality of the author.
3. Other Descriptors of Style: (i) the eristic (Gk. eris = strife), which refers to a disputatious or polemical tendency, i.e., the arraignment or condemnation of adversaries; (ii) the didactical (Gk. Didaktikos = apt to teach); (iii) the heraldic, baroque, magisterial, or victorian; (iv) the multilayered; and (v) the sublime.

B. Diction

1. Diction refers to the careful choice and arrangement of words to be appropriate to genre and subject matter.
2. One may qualify certain aspects of Shoghi Effendi's diction as reflecting "spiritual romance."
3. In the Guardian's writings, spiritual romance refers to a spiritual essence or substratum in his use of language. It also refers to the sense of the tragic, the heroic; to suffering and loss—all of which are inherent to the divine drama and the invincible power and nobility of the human spirit.
4. This spiritual essence includes some traditional theological beliefs such as faith in God, the power of divine revelation with its concomitant beliefs in the inspirational, the transcendent and the mystical, rather than, for example, musings about or communion with the spiritual essence of nature, one of the grand themes of the English Romantics.

5. There are mythological (sacred story) elements in the treatment of the heroism of the Bábí warrior-martyrs and their sublimity of soul.
6. Blurred Genres: Shoghi Effendi's diction or style is blurred. He combines theological, historical, literary, and dramatic elements in the same text.

C. Pattern and Syntax

1. ***Dynamic Word Pairings.*** For example: “*frigid indifference,*” “*threatening hour,*” “*devastating ferocity,*” “*rapacious enemies,*” “*prevailing gloom,*” “*mischievous misrepresentations,*” “*flagrant secularism,*” “*ominous tones,*” “*gloriously radiant,*” “*puny mortals,*” “*suicidal carnage,*” and “*systematic machinations.*”
2. ***The Linking of Paratactical Clauses (The Serial Semi-Colon)***
The violent derangement of the world's equilibrium; the trembling that will seize the limbs of mankind; the radical transformation of human society; the rolling up of the present-day Order; the fundamental changes affecting the structure of government; the weakening of the pillars of religion; the rise of dictatorships; the spread of tyranny; the fall of monarchies; the decline of ecclesiastical institutions; the increase of anarchy and chaos; the extension and consolidation of the Movement of the Left; the fanning into flame of the smouldering fire of racial strife; the development of infernal engines of war; the burning of cities; the contamination of the atmosphere of the earth—these stand out as the signs and portents that must either herald or accompany the retributive calamity which, as decreed by Him Who is the Judge and Redeemer of mankind, must, sooner or later, afflict a society which, for the most part, and for over a century, has turned a deaf ear to the Voice of God's Messenger in this day. . . .
3. ***The Ciceronian or Periodic Sentence***
May He Who called them into being and raised them up, Who fostered them in their infancy, Who extended to them the blessing of His personal support in their years of childhood, Who bequeathed to them the distinguishing heritage of His Plan, Whose Will and Testament initiated them, during the period of their adolescence, in the processes of a divinely appointed Administrative Order, Who enabled them to attain maturity through the inauguration of the first

stage in the execution of His Plan, Who conferred upon them the privilege of spiritual parenthood at the close of the initial phase in the operation of that same Plan, continue through the further unfoldment of the second stage in its evolution to guide their steps along the path leading to the assumption of functions proclaiming the attainment of full spiritual manhood, and enable them eventually, through the long and slow processes of evolution and in conformity with the future requirements of a continually evolving Plan, to manifest before the eyes of the members of their sister communities, their countrymen and the whole world, and in all their plenitude, the potentialities inherent within them, and which in the fullness of time, must reflect in its perfected form, the glories of the mission constituting their birthright.

4. *The Terse Sentence*

A great trembling seized and rocked the foundations of that country. The light of religion was dimmed. Ecclesiastical institutions of every denomination were swept away. The state religion was disendowed, persecuted, and abolished. A far-flung empire was dismembered. A militant, triumphant proletariat exiled the intellectuals, and plundered and massacred the nobility. Civil war and disease decimated a population, already in the throes of agony and despair. And, finally, the Chief Magistrate of a mighty dominion, together with his consort, and his family, and his dynasty, were swept into the vortex of this great convulsion, and perished.

5. *The Rhetorical Question*

How—we may well ask ourselves—has the world, the object of such Divine solicitude, repaid Him Who sacrificed His all for its sake? What manner of welcome did it accord Him, and what response did His call evoke?

6. *The Jussive Mood*

Having grasped the significance of these words, having obtained a clear understanding of the true character of our mission, the methods to adopt, the course to pursue, and having attained sufficiently the individual regeneration—the essential requisite of teaching—let us arise to teach His Cause with righteousness, conviction, understanding and vigor. Let this be the paramount and most urgent duty of every Bahá'í. Let us

make it the dominating passion of our life. Let us scatter to the uttermost corners of the earth; sacrifice our personal interests, comforts, tastes and pleasures; mingle with the divers kindreds and peoples of the world; familiarize ourselves with their manners, traditions, thoughts and customs; arouse, stimulate and maintain universal interest in the Movement, and at the same time endeavor by all the means in our power, by concentrated and persistent attention, to enlist the unreserved allegiance and the active support of the more hopeful and receptive among our hearers. Let us too bear in mind the example which our beloved Master has clearly set before us. . . .

7. Balance and Parallelism

- a) *Dangers, however sinister, must, at no time, dim the radiance of their new-born faith. Strife and confusion, however bewildering, must never befog their vision. Tribulations, however afflictive, must never shatter their resolve. Denunciations, however clamorous, must never sap their loyalty. Upheavals, however cataclysmic, must never deflect their course.*
- b) *Dearly beloved friends! **Though the task** be long and arduous, **yet the prize** which the All-Bountiful Bestower has chosen to confer upon you is of such preciousness that neither tongue nor pen can befittingly appraise it. **Though the goal** towards which you are now so strenuously striving be distant, and as yet undisclosed to men's eyes, **yet its promise** lies firmly embedded in the authoritative and unalterable utterances of Bahá'u'lláh. **Though the course** He has traced for you seems, at times, lost in the threatening shadows with which a stricken humanity is now enveloped, **yet the unfailing light** He has caused to shine continually upon you is of such brightness that no earthly dusk can ever eclipse its 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. **Though the ultimate blessings** that must crown the consummation of your mission be undoubted, and the Divine promises given you firm and irrevocable, **yet the measure** of the goodly reward which every one of you is to reap must depend on the extent to which your daily exertions will have contributed to the expansion of that mission and the hastening of its triumph.*

8. **Repetition**

Small wonder, then, that the Author of the Bahá'í Faith, and to a lesser degree its Herald, should have directed at the world's supreme rulers and religious leaders the full force of Their Messages, and made them the recipients of some of Their most sublime Tablets, and invited them, in a language at once clear and insistent, to heed Their call. **Small wonder** that They should have taken the pains to unroll before their eyes the truths of Their respective Revelations, and should have expatiated on Their woes and sufferings. **Small wonder** that They should have stressed the preciousness of the opportunities which it was in the power of these rulers and leaders to seize, and should have warned them in ominous tones of the grave responsibilities which the rejection of God's Message would entail, and should have predicted, when rebuffed and refused, the dire consequences which such a rejection involved. **Small wonder** that He Who is the King of kings and Vicegerent of God Himself should, when abandoned, contemned and persecuted, have uttered this epigrammatic and momentous prophecy: "From two ranks amongst men power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics."

9. **Caution, Contrast, Antithesis**

a) *Let not, therefore, those who are to participate so predominantly in the birth of that world civilization, which is the direct offspring of their Faith, imagine for a moment that for some mysterious purpose or by any reason of inherent excellence or special merit Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to confer upon their country and people so great and lasting a distinction. 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.

- b) *It is by such means as this that Bahá'u'lláh can best demonstrate to a heedless generation His almighty power to raise up from the very midst of a people, immersed in a sea of materialism, a prey to one of the most virulent and long-standing forms of racial prejudice, and notorious for its political corruption, lawlessness and laxity in moral standards, men and women who, as time goes by, will increasingly exemplify those essential virtues of self-renunciation, of moral rectitude, of chastity, of indiscriminating fellowship, of holy discipline, and of spiritual insight that will fit them for the preponderating share they will have in calling into being that World Order and that World Civilization of which their country, no less than the entire human race, stands in desperate need.*

10. Evocative Questioning

- a) *The day is drawing near when, for the third time, we shall commemorate the world over the passing of our well-beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá. May we not pause for a moment, and gather our thoughts? How has it fared with us, His little band of followers, since that day? Whither are we now marching? What has been our achievement?*
- b) *Are we by our thoughts, our words, our deeds, whether individually or collectively, preparing the way? Are we hastening the advent of the Day he so often foretold?*
- c) *And who knows but that when this colossal task has been accomplished a greater, a still more superb mission, incomparable in its splendor, and fore-ordained for them by Bahá'u'lláh, may not be thrust upon them?*

D. Model Literary Devices

1. Alliteration

- a) *Time **p**ressing opportunity **p**riceless **p**otent aid **p**rovidentially **p**romised **p**roofing.*

b) *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.*

2. Assonance

- a) *A world spiritually destitute, morally bankrupt, politically disrupted, socially convulsed, economically paralyzed, writhing, bleeding and breaking up beneath the avenging rod of God.*
- b) *A Faith, still proscribed, yet bursting through its chrysalis, emerging from the obscurity of a century-old repression, face to face with the awful evidences of God's wrathful anger, and destined to arise above the ruins of a smitten civilization.*

3. Prosopopoeia. The speaking through or with the voice of someone who is departed, i.e., 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Who knows what thoughts flooded the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as He found Himself the central figure of such memorable scenes as these? . . . Memories of the sorrows, the poverty, the overhanging doom of His earlier years; memories of His mother who sold her gold buttons to provide Him, His brother and His sister with sustenance, and who was forced, in her darkest hours, to place a handful of dry flour in the palm of His hand to appease His hunger; of His own childhood when pursued and derided by a mob of ruffians in the streets of Tihrán; of the damp and gloomy room, formerly a morgue, which He occupied in the barracks of 'Akká and of His imprisonment in the dungeon of that city—memories such as these must surely have thronged His mind.

E. Rhythmic Prose

1. Cadence

How—we may ask ourselves—has the world, the object of such Divine solicitude, repaid Him Who sacrificed His all for its sake? . . . Unmitigated indifference on the part of men of eminence and rank; unrelenting hatred shown by the ecclesiastical dignitaries of the Faith from which it had sprung; the scornful derision of the people among whom it was born; the utter contempt which most of those kings and rulers who had been addressed by its Author manifested towards it; the condemnations pronounced, the threats hurled, and the banishments decreed by those under whose sway it arose and first spread; the distortion to which its principles and laws were subjected by the envious and the malicious, in lands and among peoples far beyond the country of its origin—all these are but the evidences of the treatment meted out by a generation sunk in self-content, careless of its God, and oblivious of the omens, prophecies, warnings and admonitions revealed by His Messengers.

APPENDIX II: RHETORIC, THE LANGUAGE OF PERSUASION

A. Generalities

- Rhetoric is the art of persuading and moving to action;
- The Guardian's rhetoric contains several of the classical elements of the ancient art as well as particular features;
- He studied rhetoric over three semesters during a two-year period (1915–17) at the Syrian Protestant College, later the American University of Beirut;
- At Oxford Shoghi Effendi took a lively interest in the debating societies at Balliol College;
- Epistolary was his preferred means of communication;
- This form of writing creates a bond of intimacy and sense of collaboration between reader and author;
- No discrepancy existed between the Guardian's words and the credibility of his moral character. "The perfect orator is the perfect man."

B. Seven Modes of Rhetoric in Shoghi Effendi

- The proclamatory/kerygmatic;
- The imperative;
- The deliberative;
- The defensive;
- Praise and gratitude;
- The rhetoric of blame;
- The rhetoric of anxious concern.

C. Particular Rhetorical Modes Used by Shoghi Effendi

- His use of the rhetorical question is sometimes atypical since it provides information; whereas, the traditional rhetorical question usually elicits a tacit assent;
- Shoghi Effendi's rhetoric of praise and blame contains strong positive or negative value-judgments that are meant to serve notice to believers as to what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior for Bahá'ís. It also develops and reinforces the Bahá'í identity;

- Loving greetings are used to recognize the existence of his readers and to establish a direct and personal contact with them;
- Greetings are solicitous, and by them the Guardian lavished his affection on the Bahá'í community;
- His greetings indicate that Shoghi Effendi saw himself as a close collaborator with his associate believers in the execution of the Teaching Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá;
- His closing signature, "Your true brother, Shoghi" indicates, not only his profound humility but also his strong sense of fraternal collaboration.

D. Persuasion by Demonstrative or Moral Reasoning

- One function of rhetoric is to persuade by logical and moral means;
- In *The Promised Day Is Come* (1941) and *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1939), Shoghi Effendi sets forth his argument through a multilayered exposition based on demonstrative and/or moral reasoning;
- Our author's rhetoric contains at least three sorts of propositions: (i) propositions of fact, (ii) propositions of value, and (iii) propositions of policy.

E. Kinetic Emotion

- While philosophy tends to be wary of emotion as being liable to error, rhetoric recognizes that humans are emotionally constituted;
- Rhetorical theory recognizes the legitimate place of emotion in discourse;
- At least eight predominant emotions can be found in Shoghi Effendi's use of rhetoric: joy, exultation, justified pride, anger, righteous indignation, pathos (grief and/or pity), shame, and shamelessness.

F. Caveats, Cautions, and Warnings

- Shoghi Effendi's rhetoric contains caveats, cautions, or warnings;
- Caveats or conditions reflect covenantal language;
- When Shoghi Effendi uses such phrases as "unless and until" or "then and only then," he is laying down conditions for the fulfilment of some ideal or plan.

APPENDIX III: NINETY-FIVE QUOTABLE QUOTATIONS

I. Raising the Divine Call

“At so critical an hour in the history of civilization it behooves the leaders of all the nations of the world, great and small, whether in the East or in the West, whether victors or vanquished, to give heed to the clarion call of Bahá’u’lláh and, thoroughly imbued with a sense of world solidarity, the sine qua non of loyalty to His Cause, arise manfully to carry out in its entirety the one remedial scheme He, the Divine Physician, has prescribed for an ailing humanity.”

“Conscious of their high calling, confident in the society-building power which their Faith possesses, they press forward, undeterred and undismayed, in their efforts to fashion and perfect the necessary instruments wherein the embryonic World Order of Bahá’u’lláh can mature and develop.”

II. The Administrative Order

“In the blood of the unnumbered martyrs of Persia lay the seed of the Divinely-appointed Administration which, though transplanted from its native soil, is now budding out, under your loving care, into a new order, destined to overshadow all mankind.”

“To dissociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause, a separation that can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself.”

“They are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience.”

“Let no one, while this System is still in its infancy, misconceive its character, belittle its significance or misrepresent its purpose. The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God’s immutable Purpose for mankind in this day.”

III. Moving Toward the Ultimate Goal

“It is towards this goal—the goal of a new World Order, Divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, equitable in principle, challenging in its features—that a harassed humanity must strive.”

“For the principle of the Oneness of Mankind, the cornerstone of Bahá’u’lláh’s world-embracing dominion, implies nothing more nor less than the enforcement of His scheme for the unification of the world—the scheme to which we have already referred.”

“The ages of its infancy and childhood are past, never again to return, while the Great Age, the consummation of all ages, which must signalize the coming of age of the entire human race, is yet to come.”

“The world is, in truth, moving on towards its destiny. The interdependence of the peoples and nations of the earth, whatever the leaders of the divisive forces of the world may say or do, is already an accomplished fact.”

“The world is moving on. Its events are unfolding ominously and with bewildering rapidity. The whirlwind of its passions is swift and alarmingly violent. The New World is being insensibly drawn into its vortex. The potential storm centers of the earth are already casting their shadows upon its shores.”

“It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced.”

“Both within and outside the Bahá’í world the signs and tokens which, in a mysterious manner, are heralding the birth of that World Order, the establishment of which must signalize the Golden Age of the Cause of God, are growing and multiplying day by day.”

“The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of age of the entire human race.”

“It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a

chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet."

"Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching."

"Not ours, puny mortals that we are, to attempt, at so critical a stage in the long and checkered history of mankind, to arrive at a precise and satisfactory understanding of the steps which must successively lead a bleeding humanity, wretchedly oblivious of its God, and careless of Bahá'u'lláh, from its calvary to its ultimate resurrection."

"Alert to seize every opportunity which the revolutions of the wheel of destiny within their Faith offers them, and undismayed by the prospect of spasmodic convulsions that must sooner or later fatally affect those who have refused to embrace its light, they, and those who will labor after them, must press forward until the processes now set in motion will have each spent its force and contributed its share towards the birth of the Order now stirring in the womb of a travailing age."

"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."

"Ours rather the duty, however confused the scene, however dismal the present outlook, however circumscribed the resources we dispose of, to labor serenely, confidently, and unremittingly to lend our share of assistance, in whichever way circumstances may enable us, to the operation of the forces which, as marshaled and directed by Bahá'u'lláh, are leading humanity out of the valley of misery and shame to the loftiest summits of power and glory."

IV. The Revelation and Its Power

“Dearly beloved friends: Who, contemplating the helplessness, the fears and miseries of humanity in this day, can any longer question the necessity for a fresh revelation of the quickening power of God’s redemptive love and guidance?”

“Small though our present numbers may be, however limited our capacities, or circumscribed our influence, we, into whose hands so pure, so tender, so precious a heritage has been entrusted, should at all times strive, with unrelaxing vigilance, to abstain from any thoughts, words, or deeds, that might tend to dim its brilliance, or injure its growth. How tremendous our responsibility; how delicate and laborious our task!”

“Dear friends! Feeble though our Faith may now appear in the eyes of men, who either denounce it as an offshoot of Islam, or contemptuously ignore it as one more of those obscure sects that abound in the West, this priceless gem of Divine Revelation, now still in its embryonic state, shall evolve within the shell of His law, and shall forge ahead, undivided and unimpaired, till it embraces the whole of mankind.”

“That so fundamental a revolution, involving such far-reaching changes in the structure of society, can be achieved through the ordinary processes of diplomacy and education seems highly improbable.”

“The proclamation of the Oneness of Mankind—the head corner-stone of Bahá’u’lláh’s all-embracing dominion—can under no circumstances be compared with such expressions of pious hope as have been uttered in the past.”

“We stand on the threshold of an age whose convulsions proclaim alike the death-pangs of the old order and the birth-pangs of the new.”

“A titanic, a spiritual struggle, unparalleled in its magnitude yet unspeakably glorious in its ultimate consequences, is being waged as a result of these opposing tendencies, in this age of transition through which the organized community of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh and mankind as a whole are passing.”

“The Faith of Bahá’u’lláh has assimilated, by virtue of its creative, its regulative and ennobling energies, the varied races, nationalities, creeds and classes that have sought its shadow, and have pledged unswerving fealty to its cause.”

“From Iceland to Tasmania, from Vancouver to the China Sea spreads the radiance and extend the ramifications of this world-enfolding System, this many-hued and firmly-knit Fraternity, infusing into every man and woman it has won to its cause a faith, a hope, and a vigor that a wayward generation has long lost, and is powerless to recover.”

“Who can measure the heights to which human intelligence, liberated from its shackles, will soar? Who can visualize the realms which the human spirit, vitalized by the outpouring light of Bahá’u’lláh shining in the plenitude of its glory, will discover?”

“The magnitude and diversity of the theme, the cogency of the argument, the sublimity and audacity of the language, arrest our attention and astound our minds. . . . What memories they evoke! How sublime the principles they inculcate! What hopes they engender! What apprehensions they excite!” [The Guardian’s comments on the tablets to the kings and rulers]

“The recital of Bahá’u’lláh’s sufferings, embodied in those Messages, failed to evoke compassion in their hearts. His appeals, the like of which neither the annals of Christianity nor even those of Islam have recorded, were disdainfully rejected. The dark warnings He uttered were haughtily scorned. The bold challenges He issued were ignored. The chastisements He predicted they derisively brushed aside.”

“Mysteriously, slowly, and resistlessly God accomplishes His design, though the sight that meets our eyes in this day be the spectacle of a world hopelessly entangled in its own meshes, utterly careless of the Voice which, for a century, has been calling it to God, and miserably subservient to the siren voices which are attempting to lure it into the vast abyss.”

“Such simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other, are but aspects of a greater Plan, one and

indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá'u'lláh, the theater of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind."

V. A World Gone Wrong

"Dearly-beloved friends! Humanity, whether viewed in the light of man's individual conduct or in the existing relationships between organized communities and nations, has, alas, strayed too far and suffered too great a decline to be redeemed through the unaided efforts of the best among its recognized rulers and statesmen—however disinterested their motives, however concerted their action, however unsparing in their zeal and devotion to its cause."

"How pathetic indeed are the efforts of those leaders of human institutions who, in utter disregard of the spirit of the age, are striving to adjust national processes, suited to the ancient days of self-contained nations, to an age which must either achieve the unity of the world, as adumbrated by Bahá'u'lláh, or perish."

"If long-cherished ideals and time-honored institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines."

"Dear friends! Alas, a thousand times alas, that a Revelation so incomparably great, so infinitely precious, so mightily potent, so manifestly innocent, should have received, at the hands of a generation so blind and so perverse, so infamous a treatment!"

"Leaders of religion, exponents of political theories, governors of human institutions, who at present are witnessing with perplexity and dismay the bankruptcy of their ideas, and the disintegration of their handiwork, would do well to turn their gaze to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and to meditate upon the World Order which, lying enshrined in His teachings, is slowly and imperceptibly rising amid the welter and chaos of present-day civilization."

“The tumult of this age of transition is characteristic of the impetuosity and irrational instincts of youth, its follies, its prodigality, its pride, its self-assurance, its rebelliousness, and contempt of discipline.”

“A world, torn with conflicting passions, and perilously disintegrating from within, finds itself confronted, at so crucial an epoch in its history, by the rising fortunes of an infant Faith, a Faith that, at times, 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.”

“Dangers, undreamt of and unpredictable, threaten it both from within and from without. Its governments and peoples are being gradually enmeshed in the coils of the world’s recurrent crises and fierce controversies.”

“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.”

“The chief idols in the desecrated temple of mankind are none other than the triple gods of Nationalism, Racialism and Communism, at whose altars governments and peoples, whether democratic or totalitarian, at peace or at war, of the East or of the West, Christian or Islamic, are, in various forms and in different degrees, now worshipping.”

“Their high priests are the politicians and the worldly-wise, the so-called sages of the age; their sacrifice, the flesh and blood of the slaughtered multitudes; their incantations outworn shibboleths and insidious and irreverent formulas; their incense, the smoke of anguish that ascends from the lacerated hearts of the bereaved, the maimed, and the homeless.”

VI. The Judgment of God

“The flames which His Divine justice have kindled cleanse an unregenerate humanity, and fuse its discordant, its warring elements as no other agency can cleanse or fuse them.”

“It is not only a retributory and destructive fire, but a disciplinary and creative process, whose aim is the salvation, through unification, of the entire planet.”

“Much suffering will still be required ere the contending nations, creeds, classes and races of mankind are fused in the crucible of universal affliction, and are forged by the fires of a fierce ordeal into one organic commonwealth, one vast, unified, and harmoniously functioning system.”

“Adversity, prolonged, worldwide, afflictive, allied to chaos and universal destruction, must needs convulse the nations, stir the conscience of the world, disillusion the masses, precipitate a radical change in the very conception of society, and coalesce ultimately the disjointed, the bleeding limbs of mankind into one body, single, organically united, and indivisible.”

“Brimful and bitter indeed is the cup of humanity that has failed to respond to the summons of God as voiced by His Supreme Messenger, that has dimmed the lamp of its faith in its Creator, that has transferred, in so great a measure, the allegiance owed Him to the gods of its own invention, and polluted itself with the evils and vices which such a transference must necessarily engender.”

“This judgment of God, as viewed by those who have recognized Bahá'u'lláh as His Mouthpiece and His greatest Messenger on earth, is both a retributory calamity and an act of holy and supreme discipline. It is at once a visitation from God and a cleansing process for all mankind.”

“God, the Vigilant, the Just, the Loving, the All-Wise Ordainer, can, in this supreme Dispensation, neither allow the sins of an unregenerate humanity, whether of omission or of commission, to go unpunished, nor will He be willing to abandon His children to their fate, and refuse them that culminating and blissful stage in their long, their slow and

painful evolution throughout the ages, which is at once their inalienable right and their true destiny.”

“The fires lit by this great ordeal are the consequences of men’s failure to recognize it. They are, moreover, hastening its consummation.”

“Might not that same mullá ponder the torrents of blood which, during the long years when he enjoyed impunity of conduct, flowed at his behest, the flamboyant anathemas he pronounced, and the great army of orphans and widows, of the disinherited, the dishonored, the destitute, and the homeless which, on the Day of Reckoning, were, with one accord, to cry out for vengeance, and invoke the malediction of God upon him?”

“He chastises because He is just, and He chastens because He loves. Having chastened them, He cannot, in His great mercy, leave them to their fate. Indeed, by the very act of chastening them He prepares them for the mission for which He has created them.”

VII. Challenge and Response

“I adjure them, by the precious blood that flowed in such great profusion, by the lives of the unnumbered saints and heroes who were immolated, by the supreme, the glorious sacrifice of the Prophet-Herald of our Faith, by the tribulations which its Founder, Himself, willingly underwent, so that His Cause might live, His Order might redeem a shattered world and its glory might suffuse the entire planet—I adjure them, as this solemn hour draws nigh, to resolve never to flinch, never to hesitate, never to relax, until each and every objective in the Plans to be proclaimed, at a later date, has been fully consummated.”

“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.”

“How pressing and sacred the responsibility that now weighs upon those who are already acquainted with these teachings! How glorious the task of those who are called upon to vindicate their truth, and demonstrate their practicability to an unbelieving world!”

“The heights its champions must scale are indeed formidable. The pitfalls that bestrew their path are still numerous. The road leading to ultimate and total victory is tortuous, stony and narrow.”

“How vast is the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh! How great the magnitude of His blessings showered upon humanity in this day! And yet, how poor, how inadequate our conception of their significance and glory! This generation stands too close to so colossal a Revelation to appreciate, in their full measure, the infinite possibilities of His Faith, the unprecedented character of His Cause, and the mysterious dispensations of His Providence.”

“Dearly beloved friends! Though the task be long and arduous, yet the prize which the All-Bountiful Bestower has chosen to confer upon you is of such preciousness that neither tongue nor pen can befittingly appraise it. Though the goal towards which you are now so strenuously striving be distant, and as yet undisclosed to men’s eyes, yet its promise lies firmly embedded in the authoritative and unalterable utterances of Bahá’u’lláh.”

“Undismayed by the formidable nature of this task, you will, I am confident, meet as befits you the challenge of these times, so fraught with peril, so full of corruption, and yet so pregnant with the promise of a future so bright that no previous age in the annals of mankind can rival its glory.”

“Ours is the duty to ponder these things in our heart, to strive to widen our vision, and to deepen our comprehension of this Cause, and to arise, resolutely and unreservedly, to play our part, however small, in this greatest drama of the world’s spiritual history.”

“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.”

“Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not

only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family.”

“Every system, short of the unification of the human race, has been tried, repeatedly tried, and been found wanting.”

“The opportunities which the turmoil of the present age presents, with all the sorrows which it evokes, the fears which it excites, the disillusionment which it produces, the perplexities which it creates, the indignation which it arouses, the revolt which it provokes, the grievances it engenders, the spirit of restless search which it awakens, must, in like manner, be exploited for the purpose of spreading far and wide the knowledge of the redemptive power of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, and for enlisting fresh recruits in the ever-swelling army of His followers.”

“And yet while the shadows are continually deepening, might we not claim that gleams of hope, flashing intermittently on the international horizon, appear at times to relieve the darkness that encircles humanity?”

“In the midst of trials it had inspired its loyal followers with a resolution that no obstacle, however formidable, could undermine. It had lighted in their hearts a faith that no misfortune, however black, could quench. It had infused into their hearts a hope that no force, however determined, could shatter.”

“Putting on the armor of His love, firmly buckling on the shield of His mighty Covenant, mounted on the steed of steadfastness, holding aloft the lance of the Word of the Lord of Hosts, and with unquestioning reliance on His promises as the best provision for their journey, let them set their faces towards those fields that still remain unexplored and direct their steps to those goals that are as yet unattained, assured that He Who has led them to achieve such triumphs, and to store up such prizes in His Kingdom, will continue to assist them in enriching their spiritual birthright to a degree that no finite mind can imagine or human heart perceive.”

VIII. The Divine Economy

“For Bahá’u’lláh, we should readily recognize, has not only imbued mankind with a new and regenerating Spirit. He has not merely

enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy, however potent, sound and universal these may be. In addition to these He, as well as 'Abdu'l-Bahá after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth."

IX. The Welfare of the Part and the Welfare of the Whole

"It subordinates, without hesitation or equivocation, every particularistic interest, be it personal, regional, or national, to the paramount interests of humanity, firmly convinced that in a world of inter-dependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no abiding benefit can be conferred upon the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are ignored or neglected."

"The welfare of the part means the welfare of the whole, and the distress of the part brings distress to the whole."

X. Spiritual Transformation

"Where else do we find evidences of a transformation as swift, as complete, and as sudden, as those effected in the lives of the apostles of the Báb?"

"One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh."

"Compare these splendid manifestations of the spirit animating this vibrant body of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh with the cries and agony, the follies and vanities, the bitterness and prejudices, the wickedness and divisions of an ailing and chaotic world."

XI. Opposition

“We should feel truly thankful for such futile attempts to undermine our beloved Faith—attempts that protrude their ugly face from time to time, seem for a while able to create a breach in the ranks of the faithful, recede finally into the obscurity of oblivion, and are thought of no more.”

“We should welcome, therefore, not only the open attacks which its avowed enemies persistently launch against it, but should also view as a blessing in disguise every storm of mischief with which they who apostatize their faith or claim to be its faithful exponents assail it from time to time.”

“These challenging criticisms, whether or not dictated by malice, cannot but serve to galvanize the souls of its ardent supporters, and to consolidate the ranks of its faithful promoters. They will purge the Faith from those pernicious elements whose continued association with the believers tends to discredit the fair name of the Cause, and to tarnish the purity of its spirit.”

“Instead of undermining the Faith, such assaults, both from within and from without, reinforce its foundations, and excite the intensity of its flame. Designed to becloud its radiance, they proclaim to all the world the exalted character of its precepts, the completeness of its unity, the uniqueness of its position, and the pervasiveness of its influence.”

“To such a hopeless victim of confused ideas, I feel I can best reply by a genuine expression of compassion and pity, mingled with my hopes for her deliverance from so profound a delusion.” [The Guardian’s rejoinder to Ruth White’s allegation that the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was a forgery]

“Who knows but that these few remaining, fast-fleeting years, may not be pregnant with events of unimaginable magnitude, with ordeals more severe than any that humanity has as yet experienced, with conflicts more devastating than any which have preceded them.”

“Dangers, however sinister, must, at no time, dim the radiance of their new-born faith. Strife and confusion, however bewildering, must never befog their vision. Tribulations, however afflictive, must never shatter

their resolve. Denunciations, however clamorous, must never sap their loyalty. Upheavals, however cataclysmic, must never deflect their course."

"The voice of criticism is a voice that indirectly reinforces the proclamation of its Cause."

"Unpopularity but serves to throw into greater relief the contrast between it and its adversaries, while ostracism is itself the magnetic power that must eventually win over to its camp the most vociferous and inveterate amongst its foes."

XII. Persecution

"No less than twenty thousand martyrs, however, had to sacrifice their lives ere the Cause for which they had stood and died could register this initial victory over those who were the first to repudiate its claims and mow down its gallant warriors."

"Let him be aware that so soon as the full measure of the stupendous claim of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh comes to be recognized by those time-honored and powerful strongholds of orthodoxy, whose deliberate aim is to maintain their stranglehold over the thoughts and consciences of men, this infant Faith will have to contend with enemies more powerful and more insidious than the cruellest torture-mongers and the most fanatical clerics who have afflicted it in the past. What foes may not in the course of the convulsions that shall seize a dying civilization be brought into existence, who will reinforce the indignities which have already been heaped upon it!"

"Their Faith, they may soon find, has been assaulted, their motives misconstrued, their aims defamed, their aspirations derided, their institutions scorned, their influence belittled, their authority undermined, and their Cause, at times, deserted by a few who will either be incapable of appreciating the nature of their ideals, or unwilling to bear the brunt of the mounting criticisms which such a contest is sure to involve."

XIII. Abstention from Politics

"Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with

the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions. In such controversies they should assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system prejudicial to the best interests of that world-wide Fellowship which it is their aim to guard and foster.”

“Let their words proclaim, and their conduct testify, that they who follow Bahá’u’lláh, in whatever land they reside, are actuated by no selfish ambition, that they neither thirst for power, nor mind any wave of unpopularity, of distrust or criticism, which a strict adherence to their standards might provoke.”

XIV. Racial Unity and Minority Rights

“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. The consciousness of any division or cleavage in its ranks is alien to its very purpose, principles, and ideals.”

“Unlike the nations and peoples of the earth, be they of the East or of the West, democratic or authoritarian, communist or capitalist, whether belonging to the Old World or the New, who either ignore, trample upon, or extirpate, the racial, religious, or political minorities within the sphere of their jurisdiction, every organized community enlisted under the banner of Bahá’u’lláh should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it.”

“If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favor of the minority, be it racial or otherwise.”

“Casting away once and for all the fallacious doctrine of racial superiority, with all its attendant evils, confusion, and miseries, and welcoming and encouraging the intermixture of races, and tearing down the barriers that now divide them, they should each endeavor, day and night, to fulfill their particular responsibilities in the common task which so urgently faces them.”

XV. The One Joy and Yearning of His Life

“And now as I look into the future, I hope to see the friends at all times, in every land, and of every shade of thought and character, voluntarily and joyously rallying round their local and in particular their national centers of activity, upholding and promoting their interests with complete unanimity and contentment, with perfect understanding, genuine enthusiasm, and sustained vigor. This indeed is the one joy and yearning of my life, for it is the fountainhead from which all future blessings will flow, the broad foundation upon which the security of the Divine Edifice must ultimately rest.”

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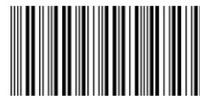
This book is a comprehensive study of selected writings of Shoghi Effendi Rabbání (1897–1957), the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. The author has approached Shoghi Effendi's writings from two main perspectives: the Guardian as the divine interpreter, a man of incisive religious thought; and Shoghi Effendi the eloquent writer, a vocation that was inseparable from his sacred office as Guardian of the Faith. Based on years of careful analysis and research, the author treats such themes as Shoghi Effendi's view of providential history as divine drama, his effective use of rhetoric, his views on morality and spirituality, his understanding of the emerging world order as a modern-day apocalypse, and it analyzes the style and patterns that emerge from his epistolary prose.

This book will serve to inform not only scholars but also all those teachers, administrators, and general readers who seek a deeper understanding of these aspects of the writings of the Guardian, and who may wish to develop them in their talks or publications.

Born in Toronto, Canada, J.A. (Jack) McLean is an independent scholar and poet living in Ottawa. *A Celestial Burning* is his third book.



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