

# **Did Prophecy Fail? The Lesser Peace and the Year 2000**

**by Jack McLean**

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## **(1) Introduction**

Prior to the turning of the twentieth century, especially in its last three decades, a widespread notion existed in the Bahá'í community that the Lesser Peace would be established by the year 2000 following some catastrophic event. Confusion and questions arose when the anticipated event did not materialize as expected. This question requires further study, not only because it affords an opportunity to examine more closely a case of prophecy misunderstood, but also because the prophecies concerning the Lesser Peace created a potential "live moment" in which members of the present-day Bahá'í community expected to become living witnesses to the fulfilment of their own scriptures.

What is now known will be retrospectively examined here, namely, that popular understandings and expectations of statements in the Bahá'í sacred writings which had anticipated the establishment of the Lesser Peace by the year 2000 did not materialize as expected. This disconnect calls for a re-examination of the scriptures, the authoritative interpretations of Shoghi Effendi and the elucidations of the Universal House of Justice. The dissonance between the understanding and expectations of believers, on the one hand, and the statements made in authoritative Bahá'í sources, and the outcome of events themselves, on the other, illustrates one of the basic principles of prophecy study; namely, that prophecy can only be fully understood in retrospect, that is, after the fact.

This paper has two objectives.: (1) To examine the sources in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and pilgrim's notes on this question, as well as the after-the-fact elucidations of the Universal House of Justice and the Research Department at the World Centre. (2) To explain how the sources were generally misinterpreted. The validity of the various statements that have been made in the Bahá'í sacred writings, the writings of the Guardian, and the elucidations of the House of Justice will be affirmed throughout. But this paper suggests that a cognitive readjustment be made, if it has not been made already, in our understanding of the steps that will lead to the eventual establishment of both the Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace. It reaffirms, as has already been stated by the Universal House of Justice, that the establishment of the Lesser Peace is not a once and for all apocalyptic event that occurs on a specific moment in time but is rather a historical process that becomes defined by any number of significant occurrences that are leading now, and will lead, to the fuller establishment of the Lesser Peace.

## (2) The Lesser Peace, the Great Peace and the Most Great Peace: The Scriptural Sources

In the *Súriy-i-Haykal* or *Súrih* of the Temple, one of His most Bahá'í challenging works<sup>[1]</sup> from the Adrianople period (1863-1868), and one of several tablets to the kings and rulers, Bahá'u'lláh addressed five potentates of His time — Pope Pius IX, Napoleon III, Czar Alexander II, Queen Victoria and Násiri'd-Dín Sháh. In the tablet to Queen Victoria, addressing the kings of the earth collectively, He alludes to two forms of peace, the Most Great Peace (*Sohl-i-Azam*) and the Lesser Peace (*Sohl-i-Ásghár*). He writes in the tablet to Queen Victoria: "Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents."<sup>[2]</sup> In the tablets revealed after the revelation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (post 1873), Bahá'u'lláh wrote in the Tablet of *Bishárát* or Glad Tidings: "The sixth Glad-Tidings is the establishment of the Lesser Peace, details of which have formerly been revealed from Our Most Exalted Pen. Great is the blessedness of him who upholdeth it and observeth whatsoever hath been ordained by God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."<sup>[3]</sup>

The fuller form of the Lesser Peace will result from a political pact made in enlightened self-interest by the governments of the world in which armed aggression and warfare between nation-states, except in the interests of collective security, will be abolished. Disarmament and reconstruction also will be undertaken. The Most Great Peace, the final fulfilment of the ancient prophetic promise of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, has been most clearly alluded to in the writings of Shoghi Effendi, and will result from the world's universal acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh and His teachings and the application of the laws and ordinances which He prescribed.

An alternative expression that is also used by Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá to describe the Lesser Peace, but lesser known to Bahá'ís, is the *Sohl-i-Akbar* (the Great Peace) which is used, for example, in the following context published in the *Gleanings* in which He convokes a World Peace Conference: "The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men."<sup>[4]</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá also used the expression "Great Peace", although rarely. At the Theosophical Centre in London (September 30, 1911), in his brief summary of nine Bahá'í teachings, the Master said:

Eighthly: Bahá'u'lláh declared the coming of the Most Great Peace. All the nations and peoples will come under the shadow of the Tent of the Great Peace and Harmony — that is to say, by general election a Great Board of Arbitration shall be established, to settle all differences and quarrels between the Powers; so that disputes shall not end in war.<sup>[5]</sup>

Here the phrase "Great Peace" is used in the same context as the Most Great Peace which might indicate that the two terms are synonymous. It might also refer to an intermediary stage between the Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace. But this Great Peace would seem to be but another stage in the process of building peace, for peace can only be a singular phenomenon.

## (3) Expectations Regarding the Establishment of the Lesser Peace by the Year 2000: Re-Examining the Sources

The official Bahá'í response to this question was made in a Memorandum of the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice (19 April 2001) with a covering letter from the Secretariat of the House to an individual. This document is instructive since it gives a good

overview of the question as well as giving the institutional Bahá'í response. In addition to my own research, and the Memorandum from the Research Department, I have also used Mr. William Collins's instructive paper "Apocalypse and Millennium: Catastrophe, Progress and the Lesser Peace" published recently in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*.<sup>[6]</sup> Some of the sources upon which this misconception was based include: (1) a newspaper interview given by `Abdu'l-Bahá to the Montreal Star on September 11, 1912 (2) a passage from a tablet of `Abdu'l-Bahá written in 1906 (3) pilgrims' notes (4) passages from the writings of Shoghi Effendi.

The short answer to the disappointment surrounding the Lesser Peace and the year 2000 can be attributed to misinterpretation, i.e. the making of wrong inferences. In the interests of brevity, the following three simple formulae will serve to illustrate. Based on a 1906 tablet of `Abdu'l-Bahá, which will be examined more closely below, believers concluded that: (1) the "unity of nations" predicted by `Abdu'l-Bahá and the Lesser Peace were the same thing. (2) Since `Abdu'l-Bahá had written that the "unity of nations" would be "securely established in this century," and since this unity of nations was equated with the narrow definition of the establishment of the Lesser Peace, many concluded that the Lesser Peace would be established by the year 2000.

The third formula would be that the Lesser Peace would be established following some great catastrophe. I hasten to add that this perspective is certainly true if one considers that World Wars I and II were catastrophes, as are all the wars or unrest that have taken place and are taking place within nations (civil/tribal wars), or between nations in many countries of the globe, and which have taken, based on estimates made by the United Nations, over five million lives in the decade of the 1990's alone.<sup>[7]</sup> However this catastrophe is ultimately defined, and whether some great universal apocalypse lies still lies ahead of us, as "the" catastrophe, or not, this expectation is not wrong.

The most troubling statement to reconcile with the outcome of events, which admittedly is not scriptural, is `Abdu'l-Bahá's interview with a reporter for the Montreal Star on September 11, 1912. When asked "Are there any signs that the permanent peace of the world will be established in anything like a reasonable period?", `Abdu'l-Bahá answered: "It will be established in this century. It will be universal in the twentieth century. All nations will be forced into it."<sup>[8]</sup> It is important not to twist `Abdu'l-Bahá's reported statement to refer to some form of world unity. Whatever the connections may be between world unity and world peace, this is clearly a statement about world peace. If one considers that World War II was the last global conflict, in which, as following the methods of classical warfare, alliances between nations were made and battles fought, then we might say that this prophecy of `Abdu'l-Bahá has been fulfilled, although serious objections might well be raised to this statement.

#### **(4) "The Fifth Candle of Unity"**

Let us return to the scriptural source. The scriptural source that was most subject to misinterpretation was a sentence from `Abdu'l-Bahá's letter to an "honored lady" who called herself a Christian, a letter commonly referred to as the Seven Candles of Unity. (Per. *Sham*. candle). That lady was Jane Elizabeth Whyte and she was the wife of the former Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland. The author of *Century of Light* (2001) writes that Mrs. Whyte "...was an ardent sympathizer of the Bahá'í teachings..." and "...had visited the Master in `Akká and would later make arrangements for the particularly warm reception that met Him in Edinburgh."<sup>[9]</sup> The "fifth candle" is referred to as follows: "The fifth candle is the unity of nations (*vahdat-i-vatan*) — a unity which in this century will be securely established, causing all peoples of the world to regard themselves as

citizens of one common fatherland."<sup>[10]</sup> ("*Sham-i panjom vahdat-i-vatanist dar in qarn in ettehad va yeganegi niz be naháyat-i qovvat záher shavad. Jami'e melal-i álam áqebat khodra ahl-i vatan-i váhed shomarand.*")<sup>[11]</sup> The key phrase "...is the unity of nations (*vahdat-i-vatanist*) — a unity which in this century will be securely established..." Whether this phrase is translated as "unity of nations" or "unity of countries," an alternative translation, makes little difference. Readers equated "unity of nations" with the establishment of the Lesser Peace. Since `Abdu'l-Bahá indicated that this event would take place "in this century" readers concluded that ergo the Lesser Peace would be established by the year 2000.

But in its covering letter of 19 April 2001, the Universal House of Justice, following closely the wording of `Abdu'l-Bahá's prophecy, has taken this phrase in the sense of "...that unity which arises from a recognition among the peoples of various nations, that they are members of one common human family." It thus sees no direct connection of this prophecy to the establishment of the Lesser Peace, that is, by the year 2000. However, several other significant world developments coincide with `Abdu'l-Bahá's prophecy. Among them we may include: (1) the establishment of the League of Nations at the Versailles Peace Conference in January of 1919. The League embodied the vision of the "immortal Woodrow Wilson,"<sup>[12]</sup> as Shoghi Effendi called him, and was point fourteen of his famous "Fourteen Points" (Jan. 8, 1918), although the phrase League of Nations did not appear until Wilson's speech of "The Five Particulars" on September 27, 1918 and was point four of the five. (The phrase "League of Nations" probably originated with Field Marshall J.C. Smuts in his 1918 *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion*).<sup>[13]</sup> Shoghi Effendi viewed the League as a direct fulfilment of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>[14]</sup> (2) The founding of the United Nations in San Francisco in April, 1945. (3) The final paragraph (32) of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (18 September 2000) which is a clear statement supporting the view that the prophecy of `Abdu'l-Bahá has been fulfilled: "We solemnly reaffirm, on this historic occasion, that the United Nations is the indispensable common house of the entire human family, through which we will seek to realize our universal aspirations for peace, cooperation and development." (4) The world-wide millennium celebrations, during which the peoples of the world, linked by satellite and joining the festivities in their respective native dress, celebrated this event as members of one family.

## **(5) Cautions About Fixing a Date for the Lesser Peace**

Upon closer reading of this same tablet, it seems probable that the Lesser Peace is more accurately described by the first candle "unity in the political realm." Since the definitive form of the Lesser Peace will be legally embodied by a political pact, possibly resulting from a World Peace Conference, it is more logical to assume that the first candle describes it more closely. The Guardian clarified in response to a number of believers that unity in the political realm ".... is a unity which politically independent and sovereign states achieve among themselves."<sup>[15]</sup>

And while it is logical to assume that the seven candles would appear in chronological order, Shoghi Effendi clarified in a letter written on his behalf (19 November 1945) that "The Seven Lights of Unity will not necessarily appear in the order given."<sup>[16]</sup> Pilgrims' notes have added to the confusion surrounding this question since they are not mutually consistent. Mr. William Collins in his paper refers to May Maxwell's 1939 pilgrim's notes as having the Lesser Peace beginning in 1963, the hundredth anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration.<sup>[17]</sup> Sarah Kenny's "Haifa Notes" say simply that the Lesser Peace will be established before the end of the century.<sup>[18]</sup>

However, Mr. Collins observes that in 1946 the Guardian instructed the editors of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* to revise Dr. Esslemont's earlier editions which had indicated that by 1957, and later by 1963, based on "authenticated manuscripts of `Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings,"<sup>[19]</sup> that some degree of world peace would be established. Shoghi Effendi wrote: "...in the Bahá'í teachings themselves there is nothing to indicate that any definite degree of world peace would be established by 1957, nor by 1963, the one hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh. The Bahá'ís understand that the process of spiritual regeneration and social order is evolutionary, and that no human powers can prevent the final consummation of the divine promise."<sup>[20]</sup>

The Research Department in its Memorandum "Attainment of the Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace" (19 April, 2001) indicated: "In reviewing this material it becomes apparent that there is nothing in the authoritative Bahá'í writings to indicate that the Lesser Peace would be established before the end of the twentieth century." With this assertion, the Research Department would appear to be following closely a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi (1946) which it cites: "All we know is that the Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace will come — their exact dates we do not know."<sup>[21]</sup>

While this may be the case, and whatever the other explanations of this prophecy may be, the following written statement of Shoghi Effendi on world unity would seem to suggest that some form of world peace would occur before the end of the twentieth century. In *The Promised Day Is Come*, written in England during the early phases of the Second World War, and published in 1941 — the Guardian had left Haifa were reasons of personal safety — Shoghi Effendi wrote: "This is the stage which the world is now approaching, the stage of world unity, which, as `Abdu'l-Bahá assures us, will, in this century, be securely established."<sup>[22]</sup> One can perhaps conceive that world peace is something different from world unity, such as unity of conscience, but the surface meaning of this passage would seem to suggest that the establishment of some form of world peace before the turn of the century since the two conditions are largely synonymous. But the more than five million deaths that have resulted from various conflicts in the world during the decade of the 1990's would not, to the questioning mind, strongly support any immediate notion of world unity, except in its broadest sense of the ideal that the human family is one.

## **(6) The Establishment of "World Unity" Within the Twentieth Century**

One could make a finer interpretation of the Guardian's and `Abdu'l-Bahá's words "securely established in this century" if one considers that `established' is a foundational process rather than a consolidation, a beginning rather than a steady state or a finished product. Admittedly, such an interpretation would not be the usual one for this phrase. However, other more positive indicators may be found that indicate the establishment of world unity in its broadest sense. Among them we find this passage written during the Second World War which points to "interdependence" and "the spirit of world solidarity." And here we have an illustration of the hermeneutical principle that "scripture [here the text]interprets itself."

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. Its unity in the economic sphere is now understood and recognized. The welfare of the part means the welfare of the whole, and the distress of the part brings distress to the whole."<sup>[23]</sup>

And elsewhere we read of "...the gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society."<sup>[24]</sup>

Other indicators can be found in the October 1985 statement of the Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, i.e. the establishment of the League of Nations, succeeded by the United Nations Organization. In the same context, the Universal House of Justice has also pointed to a number of indicators that may be interpreted in support of the establishment of world unity before the turn of the century.<sup>[25]</sup> The author of the *Century of Light* refers to a number of summits and conferences as "highlights of this process of global discourse on the problems afflicting the world's peoples."<sup>[26]</sup>

## (7) "Synchronization" in Shoghi Effendi's Usage

In addition to the quotations just cited, another passage from the writings of the Guardian needs to be considered. This passage is perhaps the one authoritative source that suggests a direct connection between the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the year 2000. I emphasize the word "suggests." Shoghi Effendi indicated that the "evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions" would "synchronize" with the establishment of the Lesser Peace. The Guardian indicated that the completion of a "far-flung arc" on Mount Carmel would "...mark the culmination of the development of a world-wide divinely-appointed Administrative Order whose beginnings may be traced as far back as the concluding years of the Heroic Age of the Faith."<sup>[27]</sup> Shoghi Effendi elaborated further:

This vast and irresistible process, unexampled in the spiritual history of mankind, and which will *synchronize* with two no less significant developments — the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions — the one outside and the other within the Bahá'í world — will attain its final consummation, in the Golden Age of the Faith, through the raising of the standard of the Most Great Peace, and the emergence, in the plenitude of its power and glory, of the focal Center of the agencies constituting the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>[28]</sup>

Some readers of this passage concluded that: (1) since the Arc on Mount Carmel would be completed by the year 2000, and was in fact dedicated in globally televised ceremony.<sup>[29]</sup> .... (2) since the completion of the foundations of the Administrative Order also had taken place... (3) consequently, the Lesser Peace should have been ushered in by the same year. However, the Research Department noted in its April 2001 Memorandum: "The Universal House of Justice...has instructed us to say that it knows nothing in the writings of the Faith to indicate that the establishment of the Lesser Peace depends upon the completion of the Arc on Mount Carmel." It said further:

You will note that in this passage the Guardian describes three things which will synchronize. [the completion of the Arc, the completion of the Administrative Order and the Lesser Peace]. It is important to note that he is describing, not events, but processes or developments and, although he says they will synchronize — a statement which in itself provides important guidance for the institutions of the Cause — he does not say that they are dependent one upon the other.

This response is puzzling, at least to this writer. Normally the word synchronize means occurring at the same time. The famous lexicographer H.W. Fowler says of this word: "It might



well be reserved for planned concurrences, and not applied to those that are accidental."<sup>[30]</sup> While Fowler's clarification cannot be determinative in this discussion, any serious student of the Guardian's writings knows just how carefully Shoghi Effendi selected individual words to convey his meaning. One has to wonder why he would not have used instead the more general word "coincide." Fowler's explanation comes closest to the Guardian's usage. "Synchronize" connotes a planned and executed activity or event. So while the three occurrences may not be dependent upon one another, significant timing would seem to be the critical factor in Shoghi Effendi's mention.

In retrospect, the Bahá'í community generally interpreted Shoghi Effendi's key word "*synchronize*" with a specific time frame in mind. (In retrospect, we would have to say that this has been done in an overly precise time frame). But once again, his usage may be correctly understood only if we approach our understanding of the Lesser Peace, not as a once-and-for-all event occurring on one moment in time, but rather as an ongoing process that contains any number of significant developments that occur sequentially within it. Certainly his statement may be understood to correspond, at least, to the inauguration of the Lesser Peace, however dimly perceived at first.

### **(8) The Nine Sentences of the Most Great Peace (*Sohl-i-Azam*)**

In the climactic last pages 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: (context)

"[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."<sup>[31]</sup>

The above passage is an encapsulated, visionary overview of a long period in humanity's 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 arrow or chain of events in which each link, once secured, creates the possibility for the next linkage to occur. The Guardian's words need to be read with a cause-effect, dependent or conditional relationship in mind. The above passage has it that two momentous steps will occur as a result of the establishment of the Lesser Peace. These steps, once attained, will produce quantum leaps in both human consciousness and world conditions: first, "the universal recognition" of "the oneness and wholeness" of humanity; second, and consequent to the first development, "the reconstruction of mankind."

This last phrase suggests the gradual restoration of the infrastructure of the nation states of the world to functional efficiency and the unconscious application of Bahá'u'lláh's modern, progressive, world policy teachings which, as outlined by Dr. Christopher Buck, "overleapt Islamic boundaries" and are associated mainly with a western worldview. In Dr. 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."<sup>[32]</sup> These points are implied by sentences one and two.

In sentence two, 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 (my underline). In other words, the spiritualization of the masses has a specifically religious and faith-driven character since it results from the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh and His teachings. Inversely, it is not the result of any secular effect deriving from a humanistic belief in the unity of humanity merely as "human solidarity."

Shoghi Effendi's concept of a spirituality for the masses translates as an intrinsically religious state of consciousness, resulting from a state of faith in Bahá'u'lláh, a faith-state which is associated with a spiritual rebirth in both the individual and society. Still in sentence two, the Guardian gives us a fuller understanding as to the 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 at the onset of its apotheosis, the final flowering generated from the seed of God's Holy Word. It alludes to the full maturation of the human race that found its genesis in the creative powers of the Divine Mind of Bahá'u'lláh. It includes, of course, the full maturation and functioning of the Divine Institutions comprising this Order.

In sentences three to nine, Shoghi Effendi unveils the final stages in the odyssey leading to a new world civilization, the prototypical<sup>[33]</sup> "coming of age..." This long-awaited Golden Age, sung as a hymn of praise, pulsates with the fullness of life of a divinely-ordained, inviolable Sublime System, operating in the plenitude of its many and diverse powers and of which Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure."<sup>[34]</sup>

What is less clear in sentences three to nine is the Guardian's repeated use of the word "*Then*" to depict the awe-inspiring states of the world made new. "*Then*" may be read two ways: (1) as an adverb of time signifying simply "at that time"(2) meaning "as a consequence." If it means "as



a consequence," each of these futuristic states would have to be read sequentially in a cause-effect relationship. If so, they would occur progressively over time. If, however, Shoghi Effendi means to say simply "at that time," this passage may be read holistically, unaffected by temporality, as a timeless description of the various spiritual modalities that will characterise this "...coming of age of the entire human race...."

But whatever the niceties of the semantics 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 with praise, proclamation, celebration and fulfilment. Once all the prophecies that have inspired this passage have been fulfilled, the teleological arrow of directional history will have found its target and come to rest. The ancient vision of a heaven on earth will have been attained. We may hear in Shoghi Effendi's words, the proclamation of a divine drama that has a comedic or happy ending. Professor Otto Reinert's remarks on the "progress of clashing forces" in dramatic conflict are directly pertinent to the final resolution of "...the features of this moving drama."<sup>[35]</sup> as Shoghi Effendi called it. Reinert wrote: "For the essence of the dramatic experience is the fascination with the progress of clashing forces toward resolution."<sup>[36]</sup> This resolution of clashing forces is the overcoming of centuries of manslaughter, conflict and strife. Shoghi Effendi describes the consummation of the *telos* that is driving us toward the end-point of history.

## **(9) The Major Plan, the Minor Plan and the Most Great Peace**

Finally, I would like to make a small digression here but one that is directly pertinent to the theme. This is Shoghi Effendi's use of the terms the Major and Minor Plan of God. The establishment of the Lesser Peace comes under the auspices of the Major Plan of God. The Minor Plan of God is solely under the direction of the Bahá'ís, i.e. the execution the various stages and epochs of the Divine Plan established by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *The Tablets of the Divine Plan* (1916) and executed by Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice according to the various plans. It operates under Bahá'í auspices for "...the execution of the Almighty's design for the redemption of mankind."<sup>[37]</sup> The Major Plan of God, however, is in the hands of God alone. But its workings have become visible to every observer in the daily media on the conflicted stage of world history. According to Shoghi Effendi, in this Major Plan, God uses "...both the mighty and lowly as pawns in His world-shaping game, for the fulfillment of His immediate purpose and the eventual establishment of His Kingdom on earth."<sup>[38]</sup> This unpredictable Major Plan is a plan unknown, a plan that the "omniscient, omnipresent and almighty"<sup>[39]</sup> Creator works according to the will of divine wisdom and judgment.

What is remarkable in the Guardian's selection of these terms is the correlatives of the respective designations "Major" and "Minor." The Major Plan of God does not refer, as one might have expected, to the all-important work of building the New World Order being carried out by the Bahá'ís around the world but to God's work in rearranging the affairs of the planet and in meting out divine justice. There are theological implications to the phrase "the Major Plan of God." The Major Plan of God is in the hands of God alone to do with as God sees fit and is thus an expression of several of the divine names — the Mighty, the Omnipotent, the Judge, the Just, the Avenger and son on. The generality of mankind, and this includes the Bahá'ís, while they can attenuate the fury of this Major Plan, which Shoghi Effendi has compared to a "tempest," the root metaphor used in the exordium of *The Promised Day Is Come* (1941), they cannot prevent it. It corresponds to the all-important phrase given in the tablet of the Tajálliyyát "God doeth whatsoever He willeth."<sup>[40]</sup>

However, while the designation "Major" Plan would seem to indicate a plan of greater importance, we should not forget that ultimately, it is the Minor Plan that will lead to the Most Great Peace since it involves recognition of, and faith in, Bahá'u'lláh as "...the Organizer of the entire planet...."<sup>[41]</sup> It is through the Minor Plan, working behind the scenes and in conjunction with the Major Plan, that a world civilization will eventually "...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"<sup>[42]</sup> a civilization that "...opens up vistas of a justice, a unity, a peace, a culture, such as no age has ever seen."<sup>[43]</sup>

## (10) Summary and Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined some of the sources relating to the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace and we have identified the factors by which certain segments of the Bahá'í community mistakenly concluded that the Lesser Peace would be established by the year 2000. An examination of this question leads us to conclude that the Lesser Peace is neither an absolute term, nor an absolute historical event, but rather an on-going developmental process which leads us closer to its establishment by incremental steps of historical significance.

Our historical proximity to the 20th century should not cause us to overlook the fact that significant steps have already been taken in the century just past that have been instrumental in themselves in leading toward the Lesser Peace. The House of Justice states in its letter of 19 April, 2001 to an individual accompanying the Memorandum of the Research Department of the same date, that: "...there can be no doubt that promise of `Abdu'l-Bahá has now been fulfilled, and the unity of nations securely established in the century now concluded."

Psychological factors have not been considered in this paper but may be mentioned in closing. Dr. David Piff in his book *Bahá'í Lore* (2000) has collected the stories relating to the "catastrophe." These stories indicate, as do the cautions given by the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice after him, that segments of the Bahá'í community have been unduly anxious regarding the onset of the calamity or catastrophe that is clearly mentioned in the Bahá'í sacred writings and the letters of the Guardian. The warnings given in Bahá'í scripture, as well as pilgrims' notes, may have created an apocalyptic expectation of suddenness that anticipated the establishment of the Lesser Peace in a single event before the turn of the 20th century.

## Notes

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<sup>[1]</sup> The challenge involves the Author's remarkable claims regarding His station in relation to the Godhead.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 93.

<sup>[3]</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 23

<sup>[4]</sup> *Gleanings*, CXVII. Ruh'u'llah Mehrabkhani has studied the various uses of the Sohl-I-Asghar and Sohl-I-Akbar in his article in *Payam-I-Baha'i*.

<sup>[5]</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *`Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>[6]</sup> *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1/4, March-December, 2002, pp. 1-30

- [7] From the United Nations Millennium Declaration, General Assembly, 18 September 2000, fifty-fifth session, II.8.
- [8] *'Abdu'l-Bahá in Canada* (Ontario: Bahai Canada Publications, 1987), p. 35.
- [9] *Century of Light*, p. 127.
- [10] *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 39.
- [11] *Makátib-I 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1, p. 358.
- [12] *Citadel of Faith*, p. 36.
- [13] "League of Nations" in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1959).
- [14] "To her President [of the United States], the immortal Woodrow Wilson, must be ascribed the unique honor, among the statesmen of any nation, whether of the East or of the West, of having voiced sentiments so akin to the principles animating the Cause of Baha'u'llah, 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 Baha'u'llah." (*Citadel of Faith*, p. 36).
- [15] Quoted by the Universal House of Justice in its letter of 19 April, 2001 to an individual.
- [16] Quoted by Kathy Lee, *Prelude to the Lesser Peace*, p. 82. Lee is in turn quoting Ali Nakhjavani.
- [17] "Haifa Talks", vol. 1..
- [18] "Sarah Kenny: Haifa Notes" (1954).
- [19] Collins, p. 16.
- [20] Shoghi Effendi in Esslemont, 1946, ix, cited by Collins, p. 10 (*JBS*).
- [21] Memorandum From the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice, , p. 6.
- [22] *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 121.
- [23] *ibid*, p. 122. This statement may also be taken as a validation of holism.
- [24] *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 44.
- [25] "...the achievement since the Second World War of independence by the majority of all the nations on earth, indicating the completion of the process of nation building, and the involvement of these fledgling nations with older ones in matters of mutual concern; the consequent vast increase in co- operation among hitherto isolated and antagonistic peoples and groups in international undertakings in the scientific, educational, legal, economic and cultural fields; the rise in recent decades of an unprecedented number of international humanitarian organizations; the spread of women's and youth movements calling for an end to war; and the spontaneous spawning of widening networks of ordinary people seeking understanding through personal communication." The Universal House of Justice, *To The Peoples of the World A Bahá'í Statement on Peace* (1982), pp. 1-2.
- [26] World Conference on Education for All in Thailand (1990), the World Summit for Children in New York (1990), the United Nations Conference on the Environment in Rio de Janeiro (1992), World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993), the International Conference on Population in Cairo (1994), the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen (1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). *Century of Light*, p. 124.

- [27] *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, p. 74.
- [28] *ibid*, pp. 74-75.
- [29] The library was not built by the year 2000 but the terraces and the arc were dedicated in a televised inauguration ceremony in the same year.
- [30] "Synchronize" in *Fowler's Modern English Usage*, second edition revised by Sir Ernest Gower (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).
- [31] *The Promised Day Is Come*, pp. 123-24.
- [32] "Bahá'u'lláh as 'World Reformer'". *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4, December, 1990-March, 1991. See pp. 55-64 of Buck's article for more details.
- [33] "Prototypical" means here the ideal or defining standard of the idea of "coming of age."
- [34] This sentence is annexed by Shoghi Effendi in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* to the preceding one given below. The annexed sentence does not appear, however, in *Gleanings* which gives the same quotation ending with "...never witnessed." "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" (WOB, p. 109).
- [35] In *The Promised Day Is Come* Shoghi Effendi wrote: "To 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." (p. 12) The Guardian refers to the world's tragic rejection of Bahá'u'lláh.
- [36] Otto Reinert, Introduction to *Modern Drama*, (xvii).
- [37] *Citadel of Faith*, p. 140.
- [38] *Citadel of Faith*, p. 140.
- [39] *God Passes By*, p. 139.
- [40] "The second Tajalli is to remain steadfast in the Cause of God — exalted be His glory — and to be unswerving in His love. And this can in no wise be attained except through full recognition of Him; and full recognition cannot be obtained save by faith in the blessed words: 'He doeth whatsoever He willeth.' Whoso tenaciously cleaveth unto this sublime word and drinketh deep from the living waters of utterance which are inherent therein, will be imbued with such a constancy that all the books of the world will be powerless to deter him from the Mother Book. O how glorious is this sublime station, this exalted rank, this ultimate purpose! " (TB, p. 51).
- [41] *God Passes By*, p. 93.
- [42] *The Promised Day Is Come*, pp. 123-24.
- [43] *ibid*, p. 17.