

Chapter 14

Rúhíyyih Rabbani

Original English



Chapter 14

Guiding Lines

A proper understanding of the evolution of the Cause of God cannot be achieved unless certain fundamental truths enshrined in it are made clear. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated one of these when He wrote: *“From the beginning of time until the present day, the light of Divine Revelation hath risen in the East and shed its radiance upon the West. The illumination thus shed hath, however, acquired in the West an extraordinary brilliancy.”* This was the statement of a general principle common to the phenomenon of religion on this planet, but in this Bahá’í Dispensation the clear and specific working of this principle has been laid bare to our eyes over a period of more than one hundred and twenty-five years. In His first and mightiest book, the Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’, the Báb had called upon the people of the West to leave their cities and ensure the triumph of His Cause. Bahá’u’lláh in His Most Holy Book, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, had addressed the rulers of the American continent and called upon them to arise and respond to His Call. To the impetus released by these initial divine pronouncements uttered by the twin Manifestations of God for this day was added the concentrated personal attention of the Centre of the Covenant. From the time, immediately following the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh, when mention of Him was first made at the World’s Columbian Exhibition held in Chicago in 1893, North America has been lapped in the waves of divine outpourings emanating from the pen and person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and later the ceaseless directives and encouragement of Shoghi Effendi. The Guardian informed us that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and was in no small part a result of the direct contact of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with the American and Canadian believers in the course of His journey through North America.

The combination of the love of the Father for the first-born, for the first nation in the West to respond to His Message, and the vitality of the New World itself, seems, in a mysterious and beautiful way, to have invested the Bahá’ís of North America with a station and powers unparalleled in history. The Master Himself conferred on them the title of “Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh” and they became “the object”, Shoghi Effendi wrote, “of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s tender solicitude...the centre of His hopes, the recipient of His promises and the beneficiary of His blessings”. Throughout Shoghi Effendi’s ministry they received from him an affection and encouragement equal to that the Master had showered upon them — indeed it was the continuation of that same love and that same policy. The Guardian referred to them as the “indefatigable, irresistibly advancing, majestically unfolding American Bahá’í Community”, the “cradle and stronghold” of the Administrative Order, “singled out by the Almighty for such a unique measure of favour”. In his innumerable letters he addressed them often as his “most



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prized and best-beloved brethren", so "dearly-loved, richly-endowed, unflinchingly resolute". They had been invested, he said, with "spiritual primacy" by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and were "the appointed, the chief trustees" of that "divinely conceived, world-encompassing" Divine Plan which conferred on them a world mission which was the "sacred birthright of the American followers of Bahá'u'lláh". More, they were not only the executors of the Mandate enshrined in that Plan but the "Executors of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will" and because of these factors they were the "champion builders of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic Order" and the "torch bearers of a world civilization" and the "privileged framers and custodians of the constitution of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh" itself. In his observation of the fulfilment of the truths enshrined in the Teachings, Shoghi Effendi pointed out that there had been forces at work "which, through a remarkable swing of the pendulum, have caused the administrative centre of the Faith to gravitate away from its cradle, to the shores of the American Continent." "To their Persian brethren, who in the Heroic Age of the Faith had won the crown of Martyrdom, the American believers, forerunners of its Golden Age, were now worthily succeeding"; they had become the "spiritual descendants of the heroes of God's Cause". It was their destiny, the destiny of this "much loved", "high minded and valiant", "God-chosen" community, this "invincible arm, this mighty organ" of the Faith, as it carried on its "unique mission", to "be acclaimed as the creator and champion-builder of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh".

The rise of the American Bahá'í Community was, Shoghi Effendi considered, one of the noblest episodes in the first century of the Faith; its development was directly due to the operation of the Will of the Master. What the Guardian, in his usual intense self-effacement, neglected to add was that it was his own implementation of the Will, fidelity to it and the application of the directives it enshrined, that brought this about.

In one of his earliest letters as Guardian, addressed to the New York Spiritual Assembly in 1923, Shoghi Effendi states in a few words his attitude towards America, an attitude that never altered until the end of his life: "Conscious of the clear and emphatic predictions of our beloved Master as to the predominant part of the West is destined to play during the early stages in the universal triumph of the Movement, I have, ever since His departure, turned my eyes in hopeful expectation to the distant shores of that continent..." "How often", he wrote to the American National Assembly that same year, "I have wished and yearned to be nearer to the field of your activities and thus be able to keep in more constant and closer touch with every detail of the manifold and all-important services you render."

A mutually trusting and tender relationship grew up between the young Guardian and those he called "the children of 'Abdu'l-Bahá" from the very first moment they heard he had been named the Master's successor. When the provisions of His Will were promulgated, after its official reading on 7 January 1922, the national body, still known as the "Bahá'í Temple Unity" or "Executive Board", cabled him on 20 January "American rejoices appointment offers you its devoted services co-operation." They were both young, the Guardian and the American Community, and there is something about the way they grew up together, in his ministry, that is deeply moving. After his breakdown and withdrawal for a period of time during 1922, he cabled America on 16 December, after his return to Haifa, "The onward march of the Cause hath not been, nor can it ever be stayed. I pray the Almighty that my efforts, now refreshed and reassured, may with your undiminished support lead it to glorious victory." The National Assembly replied

on the 19th “Your Message refreshed and revived every heart like unto the refunctioning of the body of oneness may the power of a sustained unity in America be your ever present help our love loyalty devoted co-operation and happiness to you.”

In one of his first letters to them, itself revealing of the state of his mind and the beginnings of things, and captioned as follows “To the members of the Spiritual National Assembly, the elected representatives of all the believers throughout the continent of America”, dated 23 December 1922 and followed by their nine names, Shoghi Effendi says, amongst other things: “... The efficient manner in which you have carried out my humble suggestions has been a source of great encouragement to me and has revived confidence in my heart. I have read and re-read reports of your activities, have studied minutely all the steps you have taken to consolidate the foundations of the Movement in America, and have learned with a keen sense of satisfaction the plans you contemplate for the further rise and spread of the Cause in your great country...” He is not only, he assures them, awaiting “all the joyous news of the deepening as well as the spreading of the Cause for which our beloved Master has given his time, his life, his all”, but is remembering their “labours of love and service every time I lay my head on the Sacred Thresholds”. He signs himself: “Your brother in His service”.

We must always bear in mind that it was this early partnership with America, inherent in the destiny of the Faith, that led to the establishment and growth of the Administrative Order all over the world. The matrix of that Order was perfected in America, though in an embryonic form it had existed already in the days of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Shoghi Effendi, from the beginning in 1923, when he wrote “I assure you again of my readiness and wish to be of help and service to those faithful and devoted servants of Bahá’u’lláh in that land” never changed his attitude. In 1939 he wrote “I, for my part, am determined to reinforce the impulse that impels its members forward to meet their destiny.”

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ascended the North American Bahá’ís were in the midst of a crisis of Covenant-breaking. The blow of His departure, the wave of agony and despair that swept over them, was succeeded by a wave of hope and love when they fixed their eyes on their young Guardian. Help is dependent on two factors, someone who needs help and is willing to receive it, and someone who wants to help and can do so. Shoghi Effendi began to actively guide America, finding her eager and responsive, from the very outset of his ministry. To the 1923 Convention he cabled “that this year’s Convention may...inaugurate an unexampled campaign of teaching is indeed my ardent prayer. Let this be Ridván’s Message: unite, deepen, arise.” The captain had placed his hand on the helm. Through every storm, in calm waters, in years of trial and vicissitude, through war and peace, in youth, in middle age, at the end of his life, Shoghi Effendi never ceased to guide, turn to, love, admonish and hearten this “preeminent community of the Bahá’í World”, a Community which had been, as he once wrote, “singled out by the Almighty for such a unique measure of favour, ...distinguished from its sister communities through the revelation of a Plan emanating directly from the mind and pen of its Founder”, “recognized as the impregnable Citadel of the Faith of God, and the Cradle of the rising institutions of its World Order”, “whose elevation to the throne of everlasting dominion the Centre of the Covenant confidently anticipated.”

“Whenever”, Shoghi Effendi wrote to one of America’s local Assemblies on 6 January 1923 — a year after the reading of the Will of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá — “I recall the messages of love, of confidence and of hope which our Beloved has expressed in such glowing terms in His innumerable Tablets to the loved ones in America, I feel that sooner or later the secret of this unbounded love must appear and that great continent so near and dear to His heart, must soon unfold itself entirely to the Glory of His Revelation.”

It is utterly impossible to divorce the rise of the Administrative Order throughout the world from the evolution of the North American Bahá’í Community, and particularly the United States believers, because the two processes are practically one and the same thing. With few exceptions, for thirty-six years, the pattern in administrative matters, the great directives concerning teaching, the world-shaping concepts and plans conveyed in the general letters of the Guardian were addressed to, published by or relayed through this Community. This does not mean the Guardian ignored Persia and other Bahá’í communities; far from it. He had an independent, intensely personal and loving relationship to each and every one of them, formed, with the older communities, at the same time as that with America, which neither flagged nor suffered neglect throughout the years, but rather grew in scope and intensity with the passage of time. He was always everyone’s Guardian. But the North American body of the faithful was, according to the mysterious workings of Providence, burdened with unique responsibilities and the recipient of unique honours. In *America and the Most Great Peace* written in 1933, Shoghi Effendi states America’s position in unmistakable terms: out of the anguish following the Master’s passing, he wrote, “the Administration of Bahá’u’lláh’s invincible Faith was born”. The ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá released “potent energies” which “crystallized into this supreme, this infallible Organ for the accomplishment of a Divine Purpose.” The *Will and Testament* of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had set forth its character and provisions, America had espoused the cause of the Administration: “It was given to her, and to her alone,...to become the fearless champion of that Administration, the pivot of its new-born institutions and the leading promoter of its influence.”

A born administrator, with a brain and temperament that were invariably orderly and tidy, Shoghi Effendi set about organizing the affairs of the Faith in a highly systematic manner. During the first two or three years he kept lists of his letters, before his correspondence, his problems, his fatigue and lack of proper helpers made it impossible for him to handle his mail in this manner. From these lists we gather he wrote to the following places: America, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Mesopotamia, Caucasus, Persia, Turkistan, Turkey, Australia, Switzerland, India, Syria, Italy, Burma, Canada, Pacific Islands, Egypt, Palestine, Sweden and Europe. He also wrote to many individual centres, in America, Europe, North Africa, the Middle and Far East. He lists sixty-seven of these in the 1922-3 period, eighty-eight during the period 1923-4, and ninety-six in the 1924-5 period. We see him stretch out his hands, probably literally

often trembling with shock and illness, and seize the reins of affairs in the far-flung kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh he became heir to in

The vast majority of Bahá'ís still resided in Persia and neighbouring territories; there was a small but equally loyal and devoted community in North America, even smaller ones in Europe, Africa, the Indian sub-continent and the Pacific region. Most of these believers — including some of the members of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own family — were anything but clear in their minds as to just what the Faith represented, had no idea of what form it was about to take, pursuant to the Master's instructions in His Will, and still less any real understanding of its Administrative Order. Although there were bodies called Spiritual Assemblies, they were often called by other names too, and their functioning and membership were frequently vague and bore small resemblance to what we now understand a Spiritual Assembly to be. America's national body, which had existed in some form since 1908, was known as "The Bahá'í Temple Unity"; in 1909 it was incorporated and had an "Executive Board"; in addition to delegates to the National Convention there were "alternate delegates"; the Chicago Assembly was known as "The House of Spirituality of the Bahá'ís of Chicago", at one time it had nine members and two "consulting members"; in New York there were nine people known as "The Board of Consultation, New York Metropolitan district"; the Bahá'ís in one Californian city wrote to Shoghi Effendi they had elected a committee of twelve people as their local Assembly; although for over a decade before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing elections had been taking place, the so-called administrative bodies were haphazard in their formation and functioning, embryonic in the truest sense of the word; the situation in Persia was not only equally confused but in addition the great amorphous mass of believers was so persecuted and suppressed that it took years for the Guardian to create any kind of order out of their chaos; other countries were equally ignorant of the principles of the Administrative Order of the Cause. The British Bahá'ís had spontaneously formed in 1922 a "Bahá'í Council" to foster national affairs; India had a National Assembly in some form, for Shoghi Effendi states, during 1923, that although Burma has its own "Central Council" it is nevertheless under the jurisdiction of the "All Indian National Assembly"; in 1921 Germany had held a National Convention, but a national body was not elected until 1936. During the early years of the unfoldment of the Administration the affairs of the Bahá'ís in Persia, in the Caucasus and in Turkistan were administered in each area by one prominent local Assembly fulfilling the functions of a National Assembly or National Council, pending the time when a representative and free National Convention could take place. Thus far 'Abdu'l-Bahá before His passing, and Shoghi Effendi and the Bahá'ís immediately after His passing, had been able to bring the new-born babe of Bahá'í Administration. In 1922 there cannot have been, throughout the Bahá'í world, more than one body — the American one — which remotely resembled a nationally elected National Assembly as we now know it.

This dispersed, heterogeneous, unorganized but loyal mass of believers throughout the world had other handicaps to overcome. The Persian friends, though fully aware of the completely independent character of their Faith — an independence they had unstintingly sacrificed their lives to assert — nevertheless had not yet succeeded in cutting themselves off completely from certain national customs and evils at complete variance with the teachings of its Founder. There

was still a twilight-land of overlapping with the customs of Islam and the many abuses to which its gradual decline had given rise over the centuries. The principle of monogamy was neither strictly practised nor properly understood; the drinking of alcohol was still widespread; the categoric ban of Bahá'u'lláh on the use of narcotics had not been fully grasped in a land riddled through and through with the pernicious use of opium and other drugs. In the West, particularly in America where the largest group of its occidental followers was to be found, the Bahá'ís, however attached they might be to this new Faith they had accepted, were still entangled with church affiliations and membership in various societies, which only served to dissipate their extremely limited resources, squander their capacity for concerted and concentrated activity for the Cause of God and weaken any claims they might make as to its independent character. Neither in the East nor in the West were the Bahá'ís clear in their minds as to the degree they should shun all political affiliations and activities. Shoghi Effendi attacked this somewhat nebulous condition of the Bahá'í world in two ways. The first was to create a universal, consistent and coherent method of carrying on Bahá'í community life and organizing its affairs, based on the Teachings and the Master's elaboration of them; and the second was to educate the believers in an understanding of the objectives and implications of their religion and the truths enshrined in it.

Shoghi Effendi's genius for organization — one of his strongest characteristics, no doubt divinely created in him to fulfil the needs of the Formative Age of the Faith — became increasingly manifest and a uniform system of national and local Assemblies was quickly and carefully built up by him throughout the world. The first step was to get the national body in America properly named and duly elected as such. Immediately after the announcement of the provisions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will a number of prominent America Bahá'ís proceeded to Haifa to visit the Shrines and their Guardian. One of these, Corinne True, reports to Shoghi Effendi in a letter written on 4 May 1922 that: "The spirit of the Convention was very wonderful and a new era in the Bahá'í Cause has been inaugurated through your letter. Sixty-five centres throughout Canada and the United States had delegates present...I tried to present to these friends the plan you had instructed me upon while I was in Haifa...The result of this Convention was the election of the 'National Spiritual Assembly' or Executive Board...These nine men and women are your servants at all times, begging confirmation from the Centre of the Covenant, that they may render you faithful service in all affairs for the advancement of the Cause..." Mrs True, as well as a number of the other old Bahá'ís who had received instructions from Shoghi Effendi in Haifa during the first months of his Guardianship, was elected to this Assembly.

On 4 April 1923 Shoghi Effendi cabled this new national body "strongly urge re-election all local Assemblies first Ridván April 21". The repercussions of this emphasis Shoghi Effendi placed on the need for system and uniformity in Bahá'í elections and what the proper title of these Bahá'í bodies should be, seem to have gone out all over the Bahá'í world. There was a movement everywhere, constantly encouraged and fostered by him, to elect local Assemblies and get them to function according to the principles 'Abdu'l-Bahá had already laid down, but which had not received sufficient attention. In spite of these early efforts to ensure Assemblies were actually formed, this was a task Shoghi Effendi had to pursue actively for many years, as very often the friends completely neglected to elect or re-elect their local body. The Bahá'ís, eager, but confused, welcomed this guidance from their Guardian. As he clarified matters for them things evidently grew clearer to him too. In carbon copies of two of his letters written in December 1922

to National representatives one finds the terms “the Spiritual National Assembly” and the “Spiritual Local Assemblies”. He later adopted permanently the more descriptive terms “National Spiritual Assembly” and “Local Spiritual Assembly”. In that same month he had written to the believers in Paris, France: “it would give me genuine satisfaction and pleasure to learn of the establishment of a local Spiritual Assembly, properly constituted, efficiently functioning, and officially recognized by the members of the great Bahá’í family. I would strongly urge you if such an assembly has not yet been founded to establish such a definite and fixed centre for the Cause which, though at first may appear a mere matter of form, will not only fill a gap in the uniform administration of the Movement throughout the world but would, I am certain, prove a nucleus around which would gather many a soul in future...” It is not surprising that when Shoghi Effendi approached the Bahá’ís with as much love, tact and straightforwardness as this extract from one of what must have been many similar letters shows, he should meet with universal co-operation, and whenever the response came he was quick to congratulate and praise. In this case he waited over a year until he could cable Paris “hearty congratulations on inauguration of Assemblée Spirituelle”.

Some communities already had, in response to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s encouragement, established committees. Correspondence in 1922 and 1923 between Shoghi Effendi and the American National Assembly shows that there were in existence such National committees as Teaching, Publishing and Reviewing, Children’s Education, Library, Star of the West, Race Amity and National Archives. In going over the Guardian’s early acts and communications it is both astonishing and fascinating to see how everything that was there at the end of his ministry was there at the beginning too. As the years went by he amplified his thoughts and elaborated his themes, himself matured, and the Cause matured with him, but it was all quite complete in embryo when he first started directing the affairs of the Faith. The instructions he had given the earliest national bodies and communities were only different in quality, but not in kind, at the end of his life. Take for instance his cable to the American National Convention in 1923 “...You stand at this challenging hour in the history of the Cause at the threshold of a new era; the functions you are called upon to discharge are fraught with immense possibilities; the responsibilities you shoulder are grave and momentous; and the eyes of many peoples are turned... towards you, expectant to behold the dawning of a Day that shall witness the fulfilment of His Divine Promise.” Almost thirty-five years of future events are caught up in those short phrases.

The education of the Bahá’ís in the principles underlying Bahá’u’lláh’s social system became, for many years, the paramount concern of the Guardian. They were used to believing in the Teachings, to trying to spread them amongst their fellow men, to at least a modicum of community life through feasts, meetings and commemoration of their Holy Days. They were not used to working in an organized manner as members of an organization in the truest sense of that word. They were also not used to keeping the system of communication within the Faith open. Shoghi Effendi realized from the outset that the work that lay before him required that he, in particular, should have a thorough knowledge of what was going on in the Bahá’í communities throughout the world and of the state of their activities and their response to the up-building of the administrative system of the Cause. This required a close correspondence with not only all the national bodies, but with all the local Assemblies; the national bodies were weak or practically non-existent, the local Assemblies usually even weaker. He felt it essential to

be in contact with them all, East and West. In December 1922 he informed the American National Assembly: "I would be pleased and gratified if you could inform all the various local spiritual assemblies of my wish and desire to receive as soon as possible from every local assembly a detailed and official report on their spiritual activities, the character and organization of their respective assemblies, accounts of their public and private gatherings, of the actual position of the Cause in their provinces and of their plans and arrangements for the future. Pray convey to all of them my best wishes and the assurance of my hearty assistance in their noble work of service to mankind." He wrote to the German national Assembly, in the same vein, a year later: "I am so desirous to receive from the National Spiritual Assembly frequent, comprehensive and up-to-date reports on the present position of the Cause throughout Germany, with an account of the activities of the various Bahá'í Centres recently established throughout that land."

His plan was not only to collect information at the World Centre but to stimulate and encourage the oppressed oriental communities through relaying to them glad-tidings from their sister communities in the West. He made this clear in a letter to the New York Local Assembly written in February 1924: "As I have already intimated in my first letter to the National Spiritual Assembly, I shall be most pleased to receive from every Bahá'í Centre throughout America regular comprehensive reports on the position of the Cause and the activity of the friends. These I shall gladly transmit to the friends throughout the East who in their present hour of restlessness and turmoil will, I am sure, be cheered to hear of the steady and peaceful growth of the Faith in your land...awaiting your joyful news..."

This system was to work two ways, as he had already written to the "National Council" of the British Bahá'ís in December 1922: "I am now starting correspondence with every Bahá'í local Centre throughout the East and will not fail to instruct and urge the believers everywhere to send directly through their Spiritual Local Assemblies the joyful tidings of the progress of the Cause, in the form of regular detailed reports, to the various assemblies of their spiritual brethren and sisters in the West." He wrote to the Leipzig Bahá'ís: "I await lovingly and eagerly your letters". He wrote to the Japanese believers: "It is my hope that the friends in Japan will from now on write me frequent and detailed letters, setting forth the account of their various spiritual activities, and giving me the plans for their future services to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh." To the Bahá'ís in the Pacific Islands he wrote the same. Such sentiments were expressed over and over in his earliest letters to local centres in various countries. But it was not easy to stimulate the concrete response he sought. Much of his time, throughout his entire ministry, was spent in recalling the Bahá'ís to their duties and tasks. "Expecting frequent comprehensive reports from National Assembly" he cabled America in 1920. "No letter from National Assembly last two months" he cabled them in 1924. "Awaiting eagerly National Assembly's detailed frequent reports" he cabled India in 1925. Such reminders were by no means infrequent and went out to more than one country.

In their hearts the Bahá'ís, a sincere and loving group of people gathered about Bahá'u'lláh in belief and confidence, were deeply aware of their international bond of unity in faith. But this was not sufficient. The time had come for a dynamic, working, every-day consciousness of this to take place. In addition to creating a uniform system of Bahá'í elections and a flow of reports and correspondence to him and from him, Shoghi Effendi took steps to greatly reinforce and

reinvigorate certain Bahá'í publications already in existence when he became Guardian and which had been encouraged and supported by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself. The *Star of the West*, published in America, was the oldest and most famous of these. In addition there were the *Sun of Truth* published in Germany, *The Dawn* published in Burma, the *Bahá'í News of India* published there, and the *Khorshid-i-Khavar* published in Ishqabad. To all these Shoghi Effendi gave his enthusiastic support. He wrote to the Bahá'ís in Syria, in February 1923, that they should subscribe and contribute to the Bahá'í magazines the *Star of the West*, the *Bahá'í News of India* and the *Khorshid-i-Khavar* of the Russian believers. The standard he set for such publications was eloquently expressed in a letter to the editors of *The Dawn* in Burma, written two months later: "Universal in its outlook, progressive and practical in the measures it advocates, faithful to its sacred traditions and principles of the Cause, thorough in its methods, impartial in its views, and elevated and impressive in style, may it advance resolute and unhindered, towards the fulfillment of its destiny." During these first months of 1923 he wrote to the Editor of the Indian Bahá'í News: "I have recently requested the friends throughout Persia, Turkistan, Caucasus, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, America, Great Britain, Germany, Syria and Palestine to contribute regularly to the Bahá'í News of India reports of their activities and carefully written articles on spiritual matters, hoping thereby to widen its sphere and enhance its value as one the leading organs of the Bahá'í community throughout the world...I shall follow every stage of its progress with hopeful interest and shall not fail to contribute my share of assistance in the noble task it has purposed to achieve." Similar letters were sent to both Germany and America, urging the same policy in respect to their own Bahá'í magazines. He repeatedly urged the different national communities of the Bahá'í world to send news and appropriate articles to these various publications in order to support them, propagate the Faith and inspire the believers.

In addition to this Shoghi Effendi inaugurated a "circular letter which the Haifa Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly forwards every nineteen days to all Bahá'í Centres throughout the East." This was in Persian. It had an English counterpart. "The Spiritual Assembly which has been established in Haifa", he wrote to the Swiss Bahá'ís in February 1923, "will from now on send you regularly the news of the Holy Land..." This Haifa News Letter, closely supervised by the Guardian himself, with material provided by him, continued to be sent out until the Haifa Spiritual Assembly was disbanded by Shoghi Effendi at the time he sent the local community away in 1938 and¹¹³. Measures such as these had the effect of a giant spoon by which he vigorously stirred the entire community of the faithful all over the world, blending, stimulating, challenging its component parts to greater action, co-operation and understanding.

But what, we should pause and ask, was this Administration the Guardian was so tirelessly working to establish? As it evolved it would, he said: "at once incarnate, safeguard and foster" the spirit of this invincible Faith. It was unique in history, divinely conceived and different from any system which had existed in the religions of the past. Fundamentally it was the vehicle of a future World Order and World Civilization which would constitute no less than a World Commonwealth of all nations on this planet. Though its entire structure of elected bodies was based on principles of universal suffrage and election by secret ballot, its ultimate workings were conceived of in a different light, for, unlike the paramount principle of democracy by which the elected are constantly responsible to the electors, Bahá'í bodies are responsible at all times to

the Founder of their Faith and His teachings. Whereas in democracy the ruling factor at the top can go no higher than their own councils and their decisions are subject to the scrutiny and approval of those they represent, this ruling factor in the Cause of God is at once the servant of all the servants of God — in other words the body of the faithful — but responsible to a higher factor, divinely guided and inspired, the Guardian or sole interpreter, and the Universal House of Justice, the supreme elected body, or sole legislator. It will be seen that in this system the people, divorced from the corrupt influences of nomination, political canvassing and the violence of those whims and dissatisfactions so easily engendered in the masses by the working of the democratic principle alone, are free to choose those they deem best qualified to direct their affairs and safeguard their rights on the one hand, and to protect and serve the interests of the Cause of God on the other.

The elected Bahá'í bodies might be likened to a great network of irrigation pipes, selected and put together by the people for their own benefit. But life-giving waters from on high flow through this system, independent of the people, independent of any will of the pipes, and this water is the divinely guided and inspired counsels of the Guardian and the Supreme Body of the Cause, which they receive, in this Bahá'í Dispensation, from no less a source than the twin Manifestations of God. The system of Bahá'u'lláh, Shoghi Effendi wrote, "cannot ever degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagoguery which must sooner or later corrupt the machinery of all man-made and essentially defective political institutions." Already, in 1934, Shoghi Effendi was able to write of the workings of this system, which was so rapidly growing and spreading its roots steadily throughout the Bahá'í world, that it had evinced a power which a "disillusioned and sadly shaken society" could ill afford to ignore. The vitality of its institutions, the obstacles overcome by its administrators, the enthusiasm of its itinerant teachers, the heights of self-sacrifice attained by its champion-builders, the vision, hope, joy, inward peace, integrity, discipline and unity that were manifested by its stalwart defenders, the manner in which diversified peoples were cleansed of their prejudices and fused into the structure of this system — all testified, Shoghi Effendi wrote, to the power of this ever-expanding Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Shoghi Effendi had the qualities of true statesmanship. Unlike many of the Bahá'ís, who, alas are prone like Icarus to take off on wings of wax, full of hope and faith alone, Shoghi Effendi forged his flying machine of airworthy materials, building it carefully, piece by piece. Within the first few years of his ministry he had created uniformity in essential matters of Bahá'í Administration. He had established his bed-rock of local Assemblies and a national body, wherever the national communities were strong enough to support such an institution. By 1930 he had nine of these, which were listed in the "Bahá'í Directory" of the American National Assembly as follows: Caucasus, Egypt, Great Britain, Germany, India and Burma, Iraq, Persia, Turkistan and that of the United States and Canada. Those of the Caucasus, Turkistan and Persia were for many years of a different nature from the others in the sense that no National Convention could be held for delegates to meet freely and elect their national institution. Nevertheless, a governing body existed (referred to in English as a National Assembly by the Guardian, but in Persian by a different term from that later used when Persia's national elections took place), and carried on the communities' national affairs; the situation in Russia, however, led to the dissolution of the National Assemblies of the Caucasus and Turkistan when all Bahá'í activity there was later completely suspended.

In his labours to establish the Administrative Order of the Faith Shoghi Effendi found himself ably seconded by capable and devoted co-workers in both the West and the East who seemed to have been raised up by God for the purpose of catching the vision of the Guardian, responding to his instructions and behests, interacting on his mind with constructive suggestions, and swift to implement his wishes and adapt them to the local need.

Concurrent with this almost sudden coalescence of the Administrative Order went the other process of education in the true meaning and implications of the Faith — an education no one but him who had been given the sole right to interpret its teachings could have carried out. As one cannot separate the vehicle from the spirit let us try and catch a glimpse of some of the salient truths Shoghi Effendi called to our attention throughout the years.

One of the most wonderful things about Shoghi Effendi was that he pushed the horizons of our minds even further away. His vision of the Cause was seen from the Everest of his all-embracing understanding of its implications. In thirty-six years nothing ever grew smaller, everything grew bigger and bigger. There was infinite room not only to breathe but to dream. Bahá'u'lláh was the Inaugurator of a five-hundred-thousand-year cycle. He was the culmination of a six-thousand-year cycle of prophecy beginning with Adam. Withal, His Revelation was but part of an infinite chain of Divine Guidance. The Guardian summed up this concept in his masterly statement submitted to the United Nations Special Palestine Committee: "The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh...is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society. The aim of Bahá'u'lláh...is not to destroy but to fulfil the Revelations of the past... His purpose...is to restate the basic truths which these teachings enshrine in a manner that would conform to the needs...of the age in which we live...Nor does Bahá'u'lláh claim finality for His own Revelation, but rather stipulates that a fuller measure of truth...must needs be disclosed at future stages in the constant and limitless evolution of mankind."

In that same statement he places the Administrative Order, in words of crystal clearness, in its proper relationship to this Revelation: "The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, which is destined to evolve into the Bahá'í World Commonwealth... unlike the systems evolved after the death of the Founders of the various religions, is divine in origin...The Faith which this Order serves, safeguards and promotes, is, it should be noted in this connection, essentially supernatural, supranational, entirely non-political, non-partisan, and diametrically opposed to any policy or school of thought that seeks to exalt any particular race, class or nation. It is free from any form of ecclesiasticism, has neither priesthood nor rituals, and is supported exclusively by voluntary contributions made by its avowed adherents."

What this concept would lead to was expressed on another occasion in one of the Guardian's communications to the Bahá'ís of the West: "A world federal system, ruling the whole earth... blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war...a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its

universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation — such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.”

All this being so, something was very much the matter with the world. What it was Shoghi Effendi also made clear to us in *The Promised Day Is Come*: “For a whole century God has respited mankind, that it might acknowledge the Founder of such a Revelation, espouse His Cause, proclaim His greatness, and establish His Order. In a hundred volumes...the Bearer of such a Message has proclaimed, as no Prophet before Him has done, the Mission with which God had entrusted Him...How — we may well ask ourselves — has the world, the object of such Divine solicitude, repaid Him Who sacrificed His all for its sake?” Bahá’u’lláh’s Message met, Shoghi Effendi wrote, with unmitigated indifference from the elite, unrelenting hatred from the ecclesiastics, scorn from the people of Persia, utter contempt from most of the rulers addressed by Him, the envy and malice of those in foreign lands, all of which were evidences of the treatment such a Message received from “a generation sunk in self-content, careless of its God, and oblivious of the omens, warnings and admonitions revealed by His Messengers.” Man was therefore to taste what his own hands had wrought. He had refused to take the direct road leading him to his great destiny, through acceptance of the Promised One for this Day, and had chosen the long road, bitter, blood-stained, dark, literally leading him through hell, before he once again could near the goal originally placed at his fingertips for him to seize.

The words of Bahá’u’lláh Himself make abundantly clear to us what mankind, through refusing to accept His Revelation in the beginning, must expect: *“We have fixed a time for you, O people! If ye fail, at the appointed hour, to turn towards God, He, verily, will lay violent hold on you, and will cause grievous afflictions to assail you from every direction. How severe indeed is the chastisement with which your Lord will then chastise you.” “The time for the destruction of the world and its people hath arrived.” “The promised day is come, the day when tormenting trials will have surged above your heads, and beneath your feet...” “Soon shall the blasts of His chastisement beat upon you, and the dust of hell enshroud you.”*

From the very beginning of his ministry, steeped as he was in the Teachings, Shoghi Effendi foresaw the course events seemed inevitably to be taking. As early as January 1923 he painted the picture of the future in a letter to an American local Assembly: “Individuals and nations”, he wrote, “are being swept by a whirlwind of insincerity and selfishness, which if not resisted may imperil, nay destroy civilization itself. It is our task and privilege to capture gradually and persistently the attention of the world by the sincerity of our motives, by the breadth of our outlook and the devotion and tenacity with which we pursue our work of service to mankind.” He was not only clear as to the situation and the remedy, but sufficiently shrewd to doubt the possibility, after eighty years of neglect on the part of humanity, of averting universal catastrophe. “The world”, he wrote in February 1923, was “apparently drifting further and further from the spirit of the Divine Teachings...” Many times, in both his writings and his words to visiting pilgrims, Shoghi Effendi reminded the Bahá’ís of the formidable warning of Bahá’u’lláh: *“The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men. Thus warneth you He Who is the All-Knowing. If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation...The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities.”*

From the outset Shoghi Effendi realized that there was a great cancer eating away at the vitals of men, a materialism reaching a state of development in the West unrivalled by the decadence it had invariably produced in past civilizations when their decline set in. As very many people do not know what materialism means it can do no harm to quote Webster who defines certain of its aspects as “the tendency to give undue importance to material interests; devotion to the material nature and its wants” and says another definition is the theory that human phenomena should be viewed and interpreted in terms of physical and material causes rather than spiritual and ethical causes. Shoghi Effendi’s attitude towards this subject, the evils that produce it and the evils it in turn gives rise to, is reflected in innumerable passages of his writings, beginning in 1923 and going on to 1952. In 1923 he refers to “the confusion and the gross materialism in which mankind is now sunk”. A few years later he writes of “the apathy, the gross materialism and superficiality of society today”. In 1927 he wrote to the American National Assembly: “in the heart of society itself, where the ominous signs of increasing extravagance and profligacy are but lending fresh impetus to the forces of revolt and reaction that are growing more distinct every day”. In 1933, in a general letter to the American Bahá’ís, he speaks of the “follies and furies, the shifts, shams and compromises that characterize the present age”. In 1934, in a general letter to the Bahá’ís throughout the West, he speaks of “the signs of an impending catastrophe, strongly reminiscent of the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West, which threatens to engulf the whole structure of present-day civilization”. In that same communication he says: “How disquieting the lawlessness, the corruption, the unbelief that are eating into the vitals of a tottering civilization!” In his general letter to the Bahá’ís of the West, in 1936, he says: “in whichever direction we turn our gaze...we cannot fail to be struck by the evidences of moral decadence which, in their individual lives no less than in their collective capacity, men and women around us exhibit”. In 1938 he warned of “the challenge of these times, so fraught with peril, so full of corruption” and speaks of the root-evil of all: “as the chill of irreligion creeps relentlessly over the limbs of mankind” and of “A world, dimmed by the steadily dying-out light of religion”, a world in which nationalism was blind and triumphant, in which racial and religious persecution was pitiless, a world in which false theories and doctrines threatened to supplant the worship of God, a world, in sum, “enervated by a rampant and brutal materialism; disintegrating through the corrosive influence of moral and spiritual decadence”.

In 1941 Shoghi Effendi castigated the prevalent trends of society in no uncertain terms: “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.” In 1948 he again stigmatizes modern society as being: “politically convulsed, economically disrupted, socially subverted, morally decadent and spiritually moribund”. By such oft-repeated words as these the Guardian sought to protect the Bahá’í communities and alert them to the dangers by which they were surrounded.

However it was towards the end of his life that Shoghi Effendi dwelt more openly and frequently on this subject, pointing out that although Europe was the cradle of a “godless”, a “highly-vaunted yet lamentably defective civilization”, the foremost protagonist of that civilization was now the United States and that in that country, at the present time, its manifestations had led to a degree of unbridled materialism which now presented a danger to the entire world. In 1954, in a letter to the Bahá’ís of the United States, couched in terms he had never used before, he recapitulated the extraordinary privileges this Community had enjoyed, the extraordinary victories it had won, but said it stood at a most critical juncture in its history, not only its own history but its nation’s history, a nation he had described as “the shell that enshrines so precious a member of the world community of the followers” of Bahá’u’lláh. In this letter he pointed out that the country of which the American Bahá’ís formed a part “is passing through a crisis which, in its spiritual, moral, social and political aspects, is of extreme seriousness — a seriousness which to a superficial observer is liable to be dangerously underestimated.

“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.”

Shoghi Effendi reminded us that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, during His visit to both Europe and America, had, from platform and pulpit, raised His voice “with pathetic persistence” against this “all-pervasive, pernicious materialism” and pointed out that as “this ominous laxity in morals, this progressive stress laid on man’s material pursuits and well-being” continued, the political horizon was also darkening “as witnessed by the widening of the gulf separating the protagonists of two antagonistic schools of thought which, however divergent in their ideologies, are to be commonly condemned by the upholders of the standard of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh for their materialistic philosophies and their neglect of those spiritual values and eternal verities on which alone a stable and flourishing civilization can be ultimately established.”

The Guardian constantly called to our attention that the objectives, standards and practices of the present-day world were, for the most part, in opposition to or a corrupt form of what the Bahá’ís believe and seek to establish. The guidance he gave us in such matters was not confined

to issues as blatant and burning as those cited in the above quotations. He educated us as well — if we accept to be educated by him — in matters of good taste, sound judgment and good breeding. So often he would say: this is a religion of the golden mean, the middle of the way, neither this extreme nor that. What he meant by this was not compromise but the very essence of the thought conveyed in these words of Bahá'u'lláh Himself: *“_overstep not the bounds of moderation”; “whoso cleaveth to justice can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation.”* We live in perhaps the most immoderate society the world has ever seen, shaking itself to pieces because it has turned its back on God and refused His Messenger.

Shoghi Effendi did not see this society with the eyes that we see it. Had he done so he would not have been our guide and our shield. Whereas the Manifestation of God appears from celestial realms and brings a new age with Him, the Guardian's station and function was entirely different. He was very much a man of the twentieth century. Far from being alien to the world in which he lived one might say he represented the best of it in his clear and logical mind, his unembarrassed, uninhibited appraisal of it. His understanding of the weaknesses of others, however, produced in him no compromise, no acceptance of wrong trends as evils to be condoned because they were universal. Too much stress cannot be laid on this point. We are prone to think that because a thing is general it is the right thing; because our leaders and scholars hold a view, it is the right view; because experts assure us that this, that or the other thing is proper and enduring they speak with the voice of authority. No such complacency afflicted Shoghi Effendi. He saw everything in the world today — in the realm of politics, morality, art, music, literature, medicine, social science — against the framework of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. Did it fit into the guiding lines laid down by Bahá'u'lláh? It was a sound trend. Did it not? It was on a wrong and dangerous track.

Shoghi Effendi gave us, over the years, what I like to call “guiding lines”, clarification of great principles, doctrines and thoughts in our religion. Only a few can be arbitrarily selected for a work of this scope, but they are ones which to me have a special significance in shaping our Bahá'í outlook in the world we live in today. One of the most fallacious modern doctrines, diametrically opposed to the teachings of all religions, is that man is not responsible for his acts but is excused his wrongdoing because it is brought about by conditioning factors. This is a contention with which Shoghi Effendi had no patience, for it was not in accordance with the words of Bahá'u'lláh: *“That which traineth the world is justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the source of life to the world.”* Individuals, nations, Bahá'í communities, the human race, are all held accountable for their acts. Though there are many factors involved in all our decisions, the essence of Bahá'í belief is that God gives us the chance, the help, and the strength, to make the right one and that for it we will be rewarded and failing it we will be punished. This concept is almost the opposite of the teachings of modern psychology. This principle was brought home very vividly to me in my personal life. When the beloved Guardian did me the great and unexpected honour of choosing me to be his wife, I had the idea that for me, at least, all my troubles of wondering what my spiritual end would be were over. I was going to be near him. It was like dying and going to heaven where nothing more could get at me. One day, in the course of conversation, Shoghi Effendi said to me words to this effect: “Your destiny lies in the palm of your own hand!” I was horrified! It had come back to me, the life-long struggle to do the right thing for the sake of my own soul.

The Guardian's relationship with the entire Bahá'í world, as well as individuals, officials and non-Bahá'ís, was based on this principle. He was immensely patient, but in the end punishment was swift and just; his rewards were swift too, and to me seemed always greater than deserved by those who received them.

The highest standards of literature and language are reflected, whether in Persian, Arabic or English, in the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. No debased coin of words was used by any of them. I remember once when a pilgrim sincerely and modestly remonstrated with the Guardian about the difficulty ordinary people in America had in understanding his writings and suggested he make them a little bit easier. The Guardian pointed out, firmly, that this was not the answer; the answer was for people to raise their standard of English, adding, in his beautiful voice with its beautiful pronunciation — and a slight twinkle in his eye — that he himself wrote in English. The implication that a great deal of the writing on the other side of the Atlantic did not always fall in this category was quite clear! He urged Bahá'í magazines to use an "elevated and impressive style" and certainly set the example himself at all times.

When I was first married I was a little apprehensive of what the Guardian's attitude might be towards modern art. Loving the great periods of art in our own and other cultures I wondered what I would do if I found he admired modern trends in painting, sculpture and architecture. I need have had no fears. Occasionally we were able to visit famous European museums and art galleries together. I soon discovered, to my great relief, that his love of symmetry and beauty, of a mature style and a noble expression of real values, was deep and true. The blind search for a new style, however sincere and logical it may be, which has followed upon the general crumbling of the old order of things in the world, Shoghi Effendi never mistook for the evidence of a new, evolved expression of art, least of all a Bahá'í expression of anything. He knew history too well to mistake the lowest point of decay, the reflection of a decadent and moribund society, for the birth of a new style inspired by Bahá'u'lláh's World Order! He knew the fruit is the end product of the growth of the tree and not the first; he knew that a world system, drawing strength from world peace and unification, must come first and then be followed by the flowering, in the Golden Age, of a new, mature expression of art. Lest there be any doubt of this, look at the superstructure of the Shrine of the Bab and the International Archives building which he built; look at the four designs of the Temples for Mt Carmel, Tehran, Sydney and Kampala he himself chose. They were admittedly conservative, based on past experience; but they were also based on styles that had withstood the test of time and would continue to do so until a new and organically evolved style could be produced as the world evolved under the influence of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. I wrote down one remark of his made when viewing a design that had been submitted for the Kampala Temple: "Poor Africans! They became Bahá'ís to gather under such monstrosities?" He came to the defence of his much-loved brothers and sisters in that continent through ordering for them a design created at the World Centre and which he himself liked and approved. One has only to turn to his own letters for confirmation. In letters he wrote in 1956 to two different National Assemblies about two different Temples his secretary stated his views as follows: "He feels that, as this is the Mother Temple...it has a very great importance; and must under all circumstances be dignified, and not represent an extremist point of view in architecture. No one knows how the styles of the present day may be judged two or three generations from now; but the Bahá'ís cannot afford to build a second

Temple if the one they build at the present time should seem too extreme and unsuitable at a future date." "He was sorry to have to disappoint Mr. F__ ...However, there was no possible question of accepting something as extreme as this. The Guardian feels very strongly that, regardless of what the opinion of the latest school of architecture may be on the subject, the styles represented at present all over the world in architecture are not only very ugly, but completely lack the dignity and grace which must be at least partially present in a Bahá'í House of Worship. One must always bear in mind that the vast majority of human beings are not either very modern or very extreme in their tastes, and that what the advanced school may think is marvellous is often very distasteful indeed to just plain, simple people."

The same thoughts that moved the Guardian as regards literature and art applied to his feelings about music, of which he had a great love.

What one gleans from the above is that the Guardian desired to safeguard the Cause, to maintain for it and its precious institutions a standard of dignity and beauty that would protect its Holy Name, the sacred nature of its institutions, its international character, its newness and promise, from the whims and caprices of an age in transition and from the undue influence of a corrupt, wholly western civilization. For it should be borne in mind that until the present time the majority of the followers of the Faith have been of Aryan extraction, whereas the majority of the human race is not. I remember watching the face of the first Japanese Bahá'í pilgrim when Shoghi Effendi, with those wonderfully expressive eyes of his fixed upon him, said that as the majority of the human race was not white there was no reason why the majority of Bahá'ís should be white. The emphasis and openness with which Shoghi Effendi stated this was clearly a revelation to this man from the Far East who was returning from a protracted stay in the United States.

How many Bahá'ís appreciate the fact that just as chastity, honesty and truthfulness are required of them, courtesy, dignity and reverence are qualities upheld in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh? One of Shoghi Effendi's early cables to America stresses this point: "Dignity of Cause requires restraint use Master's voice record." The sense of the holiness of things is one of the greatest blessings for man. Many times the Guardian brought this to our attention in instructions such as these: "ensure no one photographs Báb's portrait during display." To gaze upon the reproduction of the face of the Manifestation of God, were it the Báb or Bahá'u'lláh, was a unique privilege, to be approached as such, not just as one more reproduction to be passed about from hand to hand.

Shoghi Effendi's exposition of the teachings on the role certain nations have been called upon to play in history at the inception of the Bahá'í Cycle was illuminating, thought-provoking and often at sharp variance with our own limited understanding. The reason Persia was the Cradle of the Faith and America the Cradle of its Administrative Order was based on the teaching that the greatest power in the world is the power of the Holy Spirit, a divine alchemy which can transmute the base material of copper into the precious metal of gold. In *The Advent of Divine Justice* the Guardian educated us in this fundamental truth: "To contend", he wrote, "that the innate worthiness, the high moral standard, the political aptitude and social attainments of any race or nation is the reason for the appearance in its midst of any of these Divine Luminaries, would be an absolute perversion of historical facts, and would amount to a complete repudiation of the undoubted interpretation placed upon them, so clearly and emphatically, by

both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá." He goes on to say that such races and nations as are chosen specially by God must unreservedly recognize and courageously testify to the fact that they have been so chosen because of their crying needs, their lamentable degeneracy, their irremediable perversity, and not because of any racial superiority, political capacity or spiritual virtue. For such reasons as these the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh had chosen Persia to be the Cradle of the Faith and America the Cradle of its World Order. Through the fulfilment of this great law the glory of God is manifest and man is made to realize that the source of his own powers and glory is God alone. That members of "one of the most backward, the most cowardly, and perverse of peoples" should, when they accepted the Divine Message, have been transformed into a race of heroes "fit to effect in turn a similar revolution in the life of mankind", was proof of the regenerating spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. The same principle applied, Shoghi Effendi stated, to 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 it has been singled out to become the standard-bearer of the New World Order. "It is by means such as this", he went on to say, "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 spiritual insight" which will fit them to play a preponderating role in the establishment of Bahá'u'lláh's World System.

When Shoghi Effendi was beginning to write *The Advent of Divine Justice* he was one day expatiating on this theme and suddenly stated that the United States was the most corrupt country politically in the world. I was simply stupefied by this remark as I had always taken it for granted that it was because of our system of democracy and our political prominence that God had chosen us to build His Administrative Order! I ventured to remonstrate and said surely Persia was more corrupt politically. He said no, America was the most corrupt politically. He must have seen in my face how hard and unbelievable this new idea was for me to accept for he suddenly pointed his finger at me and said: "Swallow it, it is good for you." I swallowed it and kept silent and as he elaborated this theme, and when he wrote his memorable passages on it, and, indeed, in the course of years, I came to see clearly how he was enunciating, clarifying from the teachings, great spiritual laws and truths in which lie healing and strength for us if we but grasp them. We derive no advantage, as Bahá'ís, from having the wrong concepts, from colouring the teachings of the Divine Educator with our limited, prejudiced, environment-produced ideas. Nothing is improved or rendered more serviceable by distortion. That is why I think of these great themes, these statements of truth given us by the Guardian, as guiding lines of thought which enable us to see things as they are and obtain a correct understanding of our Faith.

This factual, realistic approach of the Guardian meant that he not only estimated the true force of the Cause but was also aware of its limitations at the present time. He never confused the two. In a letter to a non-Bahá'í youth leader in the United States, in 1926, he said: "We believe that the spirit of the Cause is gradually directing peoples and nations, and that all Bahá'ís are called upon to do is to persevere in their advocacy of the sublime principles revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.

They will never hold aloof from the great humanitarian endeavours of the true leaders of public thought and always welcome every opportunity of raising their voice, in conjunction with other movements, on behalf of peace, truth and justice." In spite of this he had no illusions as to how much power we could wield. In July 1939 he wrote to the American National Assembly (representing the freest and most powerful community of the Bahá'í world) that they could not impose their will upon those in whose hands the destiny of the Persian Bahá'ís lay; that they were not yet capable of launching a campaign of sufficient magnitude to capture the imagination and arouse the conscience of mankind and thereby ensure the redress of the wrongs their persecuted brethren were suffering; that they could wield no power at the present time in the councils of nations commensurate with the claims and greatness of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh; nor could they assume a position and exercise responsibilities that would enable them to "reverse the process which is urging so tragically the decline of human society and its institutions."

It was, Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1948, "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." Many times he spoke to the pilgrims about two plans: our own internal one — the workings of the Divine Plan, which lies in our hands to implement — and Almighty God's over-all Plan for the entire planet, which He was implementing in His own way, through forces outside the Cause, to achieve and hasten His own ends. To the degree the Bahá'ís work within the framework of their own Plan and labour for its speedy fulfilment — the establishment of the Kingdom of the Lord of Hosts throughout the world — will Bahá'u'lláh's blessings be rained upon them; to the degree to which the world ignores His Message and pursues its own perverse ends will the visitation of God descend on peoples and nations alike, pounding, crumbling, grinding them into one world because they have refused to create that world peaceably through the instructions given them by God's Messenger in this day.

The sharp distinction between the coalescence of Bahá'u'lláh's followers in a unified, spiritually motivated world system and the disintegration, side-taking and hatred decimating the races, religions and political parties of the world, was constantly pointed out by the Guardian and the dangers involved if the Bahá'ís did not hold themselves strictly aloof from these dissensions repeatedly emphasized. In September 1938, as humanity drifted towards the precipice of a second world war, Shoghi Effendi cabled a stern warning and unambiguous instruction to the believers on this policy of strict neutrality: "Loyalty World Order Bahá'u'lláh security its basic institutions both imperatively demand all its avowed supporters particularly its champion-builders American continent in these days when sinister uncontrollable forces are deepening cleavage sundering peoples nations creeds classes resolve despite pressure fast crystallizing public opinion abstain individually collectively in word action informally as well in all official utterances publications from assigning blame taking sides however indirectly in recurring political crises now agitating ultimately engulfing human society. Grave apprehension lest cumulative effect such compromises disintegrate fabric clog channel grace that sustains system God's essentially supranational supernatural order so laboriously evolved so recently established."

The patriotism of Bahá'ís is not manifest in an allegiance to national prejudices and political systems but rather in two ways: to serve one's country by fostering its highest spiritual interests and by implicit obedience to government, whatever that government may be. The Guardian pointed out, in 1932, that the extension of Bahá'í activities throughout the world and "the variety of the communities which labour under divers forms of government, so essentially different in their standards, policies and methods, make it absolutely essential for all...members of any one of these communities to avoid any action that might, by arousing the suspicion or exciting the antagonism of any one government, involve their brethren in fresh persecutions..." and went on to say: "How else, might I ask, could such a far-flung Faith, which transcends political and social boundaries, which includes within its pale so great a variety of races and nations, which will have to rely increasingly, as it forges ahead, on the good-will and support of the diversified and contending governments of the earth — how else could such a Faith succeed in preserving its unity, in safeguarding its interests, and in ensuring the steady and peaceful development of its institutions?" On another occasion Shoghi Effendi wrote: "Let them proclaim that in whatever country they reside, and however advanced their institutions, or profound their desire to enforce the laws, and apply the principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, they will, unhesitatingly, subordinate the operation of such laws and the application of such principles to the requirements of their respective governments. Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavouring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their Administration to supersede the government of their respective countries." A telegram of the Guardian, sent in 1930 to one of the Near Eastern Assemblies, points very clearly to the correct Bahá'í attitude: "unless government objects formation Assembly essential". The Bahá'ís, as Shoghi Effendi said so aptly, belong to no political party but to "God's party". They are the agents of His Divine Polity.

The freedom of a sovereign state to pursue its own policies — however detrimental they might be to Bahá'í interests — was upheld by Shoghi Effendi in 1929 when the Soviet Government expropriated the first Bahá'í Temple of the world. In spite of the sorrow this action caused the Guardian he wrote that because of the articles of its own constitution the authorities had acted "within their recognized and legitimate rights". When every appeal had failed of its purpose, he instructed the Bahá'ís in that country to obey the decrees of their Government, trusting that in time, as he wrote, God would "lift the veil that now obscures the vision of their rulers, and reveal the nobility of aim, the innocence of purpose, the rectitude of conduct, and the humanitarian ideals that characterize the as yet small yet potentially powerful Bahá'í communities in every land and under any government."

It must not be thought that as this Faith grew in strength and passed from victory to victory there was a change in this fundamental policy enunciated by Shoghi Effendi only eight years after he became Guardian. Far from it. In 1955 he cabled a message to all National Assemblies, at a time when the number of countries enrolled under the banner of the Faith had almost doubled during two years, appealing to the believers who were engaged in the mightiest Crusade ever launched since the inception of the Faith "whether residing homelands overseas however repressive regimes under which they labour ponder anew full implications essential requirements their stewardship Cause Bahá'u'lláh...rise higher levels consecration vigilantly combat all forms misrepresentations eradicate suspicions dispel misgivings silence criticisms

through still more compelling demonstration loyalty their respective governments win maintain strengthen confidence civil authorities their integrity sincerity reaffirm universality aims purposes Faith proclaim spiritual character its fundamental principles assert non-political character its Administrative institutions..."

There are three factors involved in this question of loyalty to government yet complete aloofness from politics: one is obedience, another is wisdom and the third is the use of approved legal channels. Too often the factor of wisdom is overlooked, and yet the Guardian made it abundantly clear that it should always be considered, not only in these words "the variety of the communities which labour under divers forms of government...make it absolutely essential for all...members of any one of these communities to avoid any action that might, by arousing suspicion or exciting the antagonism of any one government, involve their brethren in fresh persecutions..." but in his repeated instructions to different communities and individuals that they must exercise the greatest wisdom in serving the Faith. In a world where press and radio are hourly pouring out accusations, indictments and abuse upon the systems and policies of other nations, the Bahá'ís cannot be too wise. When one remembers the pride and joy of Shoghi Effendi when in the very heart of Islam the first Spiritual Assembly was formed, the lavish praise he bestowed upon the pioneer responsible — who was of Jewish background in addition to being a Bahá'í and thus endangered his life twice over — and recalls that for two years this man did not open his mouth to betray he was a Bahá'í, until the day when, in fear and trembling and with a prayer in his heart, he invited his first prospective believer into the back of his shop and began to broach the subject of the Faith, one gets an idea of what Shoghi Effendi meant by wisdom.

In various countries he forbade the Bahá'ís to seek publicity and told them to shun all contact with certain sects and nationalities who, if they heard of the Faith or accepted it, could place the entire work of the pioneers in jeopardy. This was the essence of wisdom and every time it was ignored it led to disaster.

On the other hand, in different countries at different times, the Guardian strongly urged the Assemblies and the pioneers, wherever the way was open to do so, to protect the interests of the Faith through legal channels and through securing for it legal recognition, as well as through ensuring the support of public opinion through the media of the press and radio.

In such matters of policy as these, however, which affect the international interests and well-being of the Faith, guidance and protection must come from the World Centre, which, by its very nature, is the sole authority in a position to use its judgment on such vital and delicate questions.

Another great guiding line of thought was the Guardian's exposition of what unity means in the Bahá'í teachings. Shoghi Effendi wrote the "the principle of unification which" the Cause "advocates and with which it stands identified" the enemies of the Faith "have misconceived as a shallow attempt at uniformity"; "Let there be no misgivings as to the animating purpose of the world-wide Law of Bahá'u'lláh...it repudiates excessive centralization on the one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity..." The principle of the Oneness of Mankind, Shoghi Effendi stated, though it aimed at creating "a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life" was nevertheless to be a world "infinite in

the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units." He wrote of "the highly diversified Bahá'í society of the future" and, urging the Bahá'ís to pay special attention to winning the adherence to the Faith of different races, said: "A blending of these highly differentiated elements of the human race, harmoniously interwoven into the fabric of an all-embracing Bahá'í fraternity and assimilated through the processes of a divinely-appointed Administrative Order, and contributing each its share to the enrichment and glory of Bahá'í community life, is surely an achievement the contemplation of which must warm and thrill every Bahá'í heart." This Faith, Shoghi Effendi wrote, "does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world."

In an age of proselytizing, when nations and blocks of nations, various societies and organizations are hammering away at people's minds day and night, seeking to make them over in their own image, seeking to force their political systems, their clothes, their way of living, their housing, their medical systems, their philosophy and moral and social codes on each other, it is surely of the greatest importance for Bahá'ís to ponder their own teachings and the illuminating interpretation of them given by their Guardian. The Western World today has a passion for uniformity. As fast as it can it is trying to make everyone alike. The result is that while much good is undoubtedly being spread, and material benefits are reaching an ever larger number of people, many things diametrically opposed to the methods and objectives of Bahá'u'lláh are also taking place.

One of the things our western materialism is rapidly spreading — in addition to irreligion, immorality and the worship of money and possessions — is a wave of despair, unrest and a feeling of deep inferiority among the so-called backward peoples of the world. We might well pause to contrast the impact — so deadly — that this self-importance, self-satisfaction and wealth is having upon other peoples with where the Guardian placed the emphasis in his relation to such peoples. Why did Shoghi Effendi keep and publish such exhaustive lists of the "races" and the "tribes" enlisted under the banner of the Faith? Did he perhaps collect them, each as a separate pearl, to weave into precious adornments for the body of Bahá'u'lláh's Cause? Why did he hang on the walls of the Mansion in Bahji a picture of the first Pygmy Bahá'í, and the first descendant of the Inca Indians to accept the Faith? Surely it was not as curiosities or trophies but rather because the beloved Josephs of the world were come home to the tent of their Father. So well I remember when Shoghi Effendi discovered that one of his pilgrims was a descendant of the old royal family of Hawaiian kings. He seemed to radiate with a joy and delight that was almost tangible and this glow enveloped a man whose portion in life had been mostly compounded of scorn for his native blood! It must not be thought that such things were personal peculiarities of Shoghi Effendi or matters of policy. Far, far from it. It was the reflection of the very essence of the teachings that each division of the human race is endowed with gifts of its own needed to make the new Order of Bahá'u'lláh diversified, rich and perfect.

Not only did Shoghi Effendi preach this, he actively pursued it, through announcements, appeals and instructions to Bahá'í Assemblies: "First all red Indian Assembly consolidated Macy Nebraska" he cabled triumphantly in³². Constantly remembering 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* to "give great importance to teaching the Indians, i.e., the aborigines of America", Shoghi Effendi pursued this objective until the last months of his life, when he

wrote, in July 1957, to the Canadian National Assembly, that the “long overdue conversion” of the American Indians, the Eskimos and other minorities should receive such an impetus “as to astonish and stimulate the members of all Bahá’í communities throughout the length and breadth of the Western Hemisphere”.

A year before, in one of Shoghi Effendi’s letters to the United States National Assembly, his secretary had written: “The beloved Guardian feels that sufficient attention is not being paid to the matter of contacting minorities in the United States...He feels your Assembly should appoint a special committee to survey the possibilities of this kind of work, and then instruct local Assemblies accordingly, and in the meantime encourage the Bahá’ís to be active in this field, which is one open to everybody, as the minorities are invariably lonely, and often respond to kindness much more quickly than the well-established majority of the population.”

The natural outcome of this policy is the unique attitude the Bahá’í Faith has towards minorities, which was set forth so clearly by Shoghi Effendi in *The Advent of Divine Justice*: “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”. Once a person accepts this Faith “every differentiation of class, creed, or colour must automatically be obliterated, and never be allowed, under any pretext, and however great the pressure of events or public opinion, to reassert itself.” Shoghi Effendi then goes on to state a principle so at variance with the political thinking of the entire world that it deserves far more consideration than we usually give it: “If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favour 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 has 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.” Shoghi Effendi once expressed the workings of this principle so succinctly and brilliantly that I wrote it down in his own words: “the minority of a majority is more important than the majority of a minority.” In other words it is not the numerical strength or weakness in the nation that is the index of a minority, but its numerical strength or weakness inside the Bahá’í community holding the election — so great is the protection of any minority. The Guardian used to say that when the day came that a Bahá’í state existed the rights of non-Bahá’í religious minorities would be rigorously protected by the Bahá’ís.

The Bahá’í Faith not only safeguards society as a whole and protects the rights of minorities, it upholds the rights of the individual, internationally the individual nation, and within the community, the individual human being. “The unity of the human race, as envisaged by

Bahá'u'lláh," Shoghi Effendi wrote, "implies the establishment of a world commonwealth...in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded."

Staunchly as the Guardian upheld the authority of the Assemblies, he was also a stout defender of the individual believer and had a deep bond of love with the "rank and file" of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh. Scarcely an appeal was made to the Bahá'í world or to national communities that did not address the individual Bahá'í and not only encourage his initiative, but point out that without it all plans must fail. In a letter to the American National Assembly in 1927 he wrote: "In my hours of prayer at the Holy Shrines, I will supplicate that the light of Divine Guidance may illumine your path and enable you to utilize in the most effective manner that spirit of individual enterprise which, once kindled in the breasts of each and every believer and directed by the Majestic Law of Bahá'u'lláh, imposed upon us, will carry our beloved Cause forward to achieve its glorious destiny." He pointed out, in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, that it was the duty of every believer "as the faithful trustee of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan...to initiate, promote, and consolidate" any activity he or she considered would assist in the fulfilment of that Plan, always providing this was done within the limits fixed by the administrative principles of the Faith. He told the American National Assembly that while retaining the guidance of Bahá'í affairs and the right of final decision in its own hands it should "foster the sense of interdependence and copartnership, of understanding and mutual confidence" between itself and the Assemblies and individual believers.

The humble have ever been singled out for unique blessings. In 1925 Shoghi Effendi wrote: "Not infrequently, nay oftentimes, the most lowly, untutored and inexperienced among the friends will, by sheer inspiring force of selfless and ardent devotion, contribute a distinct and memorable share to a highly involved discussion in any given Assembly." The Guardian was a passionate admirer of the meek and pure in heart and disliked aggressive and, particularly, ambitious individuals. His appeals for pioneers made his attitude quite plain. During the Seven Year Plan he wrote: "no believer, however humble," was to feel himself debarred from participation in the great pioneer movement taking place, and obstacles should not be put in the way of those who wished to go forth and serve, "whether young or old, rich or poor". He went very much further, in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, when he wrote: "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 unfavourable the environment in which they live...How often...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." Shoghi Effendi then points out that if Christ, the Son, was able to infuse into Peter, who was so ignorant he divided his food into seven portions and rested when he came to the seventh, knowing it was the Sabbath, such spirit as to enable him to become His successor, then what must the power of Bahá'u'lláh, the Father, be to empower the puniest and most insignificant of His followers to achieve wonders that will dwarf the achievements of the first apostle of Jesus. Not satisfied with emphasizing the duties of the humble, the Guardian, in no uncertain terms, also admonished those of a different category: "It is therefore imperative for the individual American believer, and particularly for the affluent, the independent, the comfort-loving and those obsessed by material

pursuits, to step forward, and dedicate their resources, their time, their very lives to a Cause of such transcendence that no human eye can even dimly perceive its glory.” He said, most touchingly, that “the heart of the Guardian cannot but leap with joy, and his mind derive fresh inspiration, at every evidence testifying to the response of the individual to his allotted task.”

The question of who is a believer and how he becomes one and is knit into the supple but well organized, world-wide Administrative Order of the Faith, was quite clear to Shoghi Effendi — though not always so clear to the Bahá’ís themselves. It must be understood that at all times the Guardian saw the Cause as a growing and living thing, expanding at different rates in different places. There must be uniformity in essentials; there could be and needed to be diversity in other matters. A Ford car, for instance, being a machine, is the same car everywhere. But the members of a large family, not remotely being machines, are all different, each at a different age, at a different stage of growth. No one expects of the five-month-old grandson the same conduct and understanding as the university-professor-of-physics grandfather of the family. From the very beginning more was expected of the old, oriental communities, particularly in Persia, than of the younger, western Bahá’í communities such as those in America and Europe, and a great deal more was expected of these than, for instance, the still younger communities in Africa and the Pacific. We must always bear in mind that Islam, next to our own Faith, is the world’s youngest revealed religion. The Bahá’ís coming from this background are closer, so to speak, to the laws given us by Bahá’u’lláh because His law grew out of and at the same time abrogated, in many instances, the laws of Islam. It is therefore not surprising that the believers who came from this background should have been expected to conform to the Bahá’í pattern in matters of personal status and to follow from the outset those laws and ordinances of Bahá’u’lláh which could be applied in the society in which they lived, and that those who accepted the Faith and came from the background of either paganism or much older revealed religions should require more, gradual and patient education until they too could do so.

Before trying to understand what entitles a person to be a Bahá’í let us first try to see how the Guardian conceived of and managed the Cause of God. If we study the course of past religions we see that one of the main ills which has affected them was the strong tendency of their followers to want to get the mobile, expansive, inspiring power of the Faith into moulds, to crystallize it into forms. A religion is a growing thing. Shoghi Effendi himself gave the most beautiful and poetic description of this natural process of growth in his message to the Intercontinental Conference held in Chicago in 1953, in which he likened the history of religion to a tree, which grew for thousands of years, from the days of Adam until the days of the Báb, putting forth branches, leaves, buds, blossoms and finally producing a Holy seed which was the Manifestation and Revelation of the Báb. That Seed, ground in the mill of martyrdom after only six years of existence, had yielded an oil whose light had flickered upon Bahá’u’lláh in the Sýáh-Çhál, whose fire had gathered brilliance in Baghdad and shone resplendently in Adrianople, whose rays had later been cast upon the fringes of the American, European and Australian continents, whose radiance was now overspreading the entire globe during this Formative Age

and whose full splendour, he said, was destined in the course of future millenniums to suffuse the entire planet. How nascent then must be our present stage of development!

Little minds instinctively seek to circumscribe the things around them, to pull in the walls to the size of their own small existence, to get everything squared off to their own scale so they can feel safe and snug. This process invariably means that a lot of the material used in their walls is from the last house they lived in, is very much what they were accustomed to before they moved, so to speak. Big minds, on the contrary, push the horizons farther away, create new frontiers, leave room for growth. It is not difficult, when one reads over the letters to and from the Guardian, to see how he kept a perfect balance between what was wise and essential for the present stage of the Faith, and what would unduly circumscribe its unfoldment and crystallize its living teachings into a premature form, too small, too national or provincial, too sectarian or racial, to expand into a World Order, with its attendant world government and world society. I have often wondered in the course of my Bahá'í life why so many people who are eminently practical and sensible in their lives as business men, doctors, lawyers, ditch-diggers or whatever it may be, do not carry these faculties into their Bahá'í activity. It is almost as if to them Utopia was a film and all you had to do was project it on a screen and it would become reality.

Not so the Guardian. He went about his own tasks — building up the Administrative Order, implementing the Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, organizing his work and the work of the Bahá'í world — very much as the great Renaissance painters created their vast frescoes and canvases. First came the cartoon, the whole idea, scale, colour, proportion; then it was quartered, divided into a grid of squares; this was transferred to the permanent surface and the great guiding lines filled in, the outlines, the figures in shadow; then came the detail and colours, applied with infinite patience until perfection was achieved. Such was the method of Shoghi Effendi and he allowed no one to start painting in figures or details before the canvas was ready to take them. What does this mean in actual facts?

So many examples come to one's mind. After the Master's passing, we wanted the House of Justice the next day. It had to wait forty-two years, until a foundation to support it, tier on tier of local Assemblies and National Assemblies was built, on which it could firmly stand. We wanted the Aqdas in English. Slowly, much of it was translated and given us by Shoghi Effendi himself as he repeatedly quoted from it; the few laws and ordinances and details not already given were to come later; they required very careful work, part of which he undertook himself at the end of his life. Many times an enthusiastic individual or group wanted to start, now, at once, in some quiet country spot, a Bahá'í settlement where all the economic teachings could be put in practice — the Utopia projection on the flat not in the round — but the answer from Shoghi Effendi would come: now is not the time, concentrate on increasing the number of believers, groups, Assemblies. We wanted to build a school in the capital; no, not in the capital, where any failure would humiliate the Cause, with its limited funds and workers, but in the bush, a simple, humble beginning. We wanted a Bahá'í university — it never seemed to occur to the writer, who in his own life probably never got into debt or tried to pretend he was a millionaire, that such an undertaking would paralyse every other national activity and even require funds, already so limited, that were being used to open the whole world to the Faith! Every instinct prevented Shoghi Effendi from embarking on what is known in commerce as over-expansion. Risks he

would take, but always reasonable ones and never foolish ones. His judgment was equal to his faith. Miracles he firmly believed in, but he never treated the Almighty as if He were a conjuror. If we study the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá we see there too this wonderful balance between the practical, reasonable mind and the sublime assurance of faith.

A small, but no less indicative example comes to mind. What about Spiritualism? "The Guardian does not feel that this is the time for him to make any special statement on this subject," his secretary wrote, "...there are more important things for the friends to concentrate their attention upon, namely the establishment of new assemblies and groups." So often the answer was the same, not the right time, not yet. Plant the Banner of Bahá'u'lláh in the farthest corners of the earth, bring into His fold humanity, lay the foundations of the Kingdom, don't start putting nicknacks about in a house not even built.

From the earliest days of his ministry Shoghi Effendi set about creating order in what was then a very small Bahá'í world, barely existing in some of the thirty-five countries which had received at least a ray of illumination from the Light of Bahá'u'lláh. The great, guiding lines were clear in his mind and as he grew older, and the community of believers grew and increased in experience, these lines became clearer and details were added. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself in His *Will and Testament* had foreshadowed this unfoldment when He said of the Guardian, *"that day by day he may wax greater in happiness, in joy and spirituality, and may grow to become even as a fruitful tree."* Time and space do not permit of a chronological recapitulation of this evolution. We must try to catch the great vision he gave us and see how the details were gradually filled in. So often, as I listened to and observed Shoghi Effendi, I felt he was the only real Bahá'í in the world. Everyone else, claiming to be a Bahá'í, had a portion of the Faith, an angle on it, a concept, however large, tintured by his own limitations, but the Guardian saw it as a whole, in all its greatness and perfect balance. He had not only the capacity to see but to analyse and express with brilliant clarity what he saw.

For instance take this epitome of what he felt the Bahá'í Faith is in the scheme of things: "...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, reaffirms their common, their unchangeable and fundamental purpose, reconciles their seemingly divergent claims and doctrines, readily and gratefully recognizes their respective contributions to the gradual unfoldment of one Divine Revelation, unhesitatingly acknowledges itself to be but one link in the chain of continually progressive Revelations, supplements their teachings with such laws and ordinances as conform to the imperative needs, and are dictated by the growing receptivity, of a fast evolving and constantly changing society, and proclaims its readiness and ability to fuse and incorporate the contending sects and factions into which they have fallen into a universal Fellowship, functioning within the framework, and in accordance with the precepts, of a divinely conceived, a world-unifying, a world-redeeming Order." Immediately one sees where this "greatest religious Dispensation in the spiritual history of mankind" fits into the panorama of history.

This Faith, “at once the essence, the promise, the reconciler, and the unifier of all religions”, had, as its “primary mission”, the establishment of a Divine Civilization. I remember in the course of a conversation Shoghi Effendi had with a former teacher of his at the American University in Beirut, how beautifully he answered this man’s question as to what was the purpose of life to a Bahá’í. The Guardian answered that the object of life to a Bahá’í was to promote the oneness of mankind. He then went on to point out that Bahá’u’lláh had appeared at a time when His Message could and should be directed to the whole world and not merely to individuals; that salvation today was through world salvation, world change, world reform of society and that the world civilization resulting from this would in turn reflect upon the individuals composing it and lead to their redemption and reformation. Over and over Shoghi Effendi made it clear in his writings and talks that the two processes must go on together — reform of society, reform of personal character. There was never any doubt that individual regeneration, as he wrote to a non-Bahá’í in 1926, was the “sure and enduring foundation on which a reconstructed society” could develop and prosper. But how could one create a pattern for future society, even a tiny embryo of the future World Commonwealth of Bahá’u’lláh, if all around its fringes it was still interwoven with the fabric of that society which was dying out, must die out, to make way for the new?

Shoghi Effendi took up his scalpel — the interpretation of the writings of the Faith — and began to cut. Although the reading aright of our doctrines showed that there was only one religion, that of God Almighty, all down the ages, and the Prophets were its exponents at various times in history, the fact remained, Shoghi Effendi made us understand, that the duty of man in each new Dispensation was to adhere to it in all its forms and cut one’s self away from the outer forms and secondary laws of the previous religion. How could any honest Christian remain in the church and pray for the coming of the Father and His Kingdom while in his heart he very well knew Bahá’u’lláh was the Father and the Kingdom was beginning to emerge through the establishment of His laws and system as reflected and embodied in the Administrative Order? The Bahá’ís — East and West — had vaguely understood this to a greater or lesser degree in different places, but now, through the communications of the Guardian, they began to see a sharp line where shadow and light met, with no comfortable twilight zone of compromise with family feelings, community opinion, personal convenience left. You were expected to either get in or get out. This had a purifying and stiffening effect on the entire body of believers the world over and made them, as never before, conscious of the fact that they were a world body of people, the people of the new Day, of the new Dispensation. To use a homely simile: if Bahá’u’lláh had built the boat, it was the Master who had got up steam and Shoghi Effendi who cast off the hawsers and calmly set sail. As the years went by not only the non-Bahá’ís began to look at us with new eyes, but we began to look at ourselves with new eyes. We gradually came to realize we were not a new aspect of the society in which we lived, we were the new society, we were the future.

It is in the light of this process that we must see how the emphasis shifted, over the years, in relation to the acceptance of new Bahá’ís. During the first decade-and-a-half of Shoghi Effendi’s ministry Bahá’í bodies, in the West in particular, were encouraged to be sure that those who became Bahá’ís were well aware of the greatness of the step they took. A clear break with the past was required of them. “Otherwise”, Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1927, “those whose faith is still unripe may thereby remain indefinitely along the circumference and continue in their attitude

of half-hearted allegiance to the teachings of the Cause in their entirety.” During those years the Faith rose in fame and stature, won in many western lands recognition as an independent religion with laws and a system of its own — greatly helped in this process by the ruling of a Muslim court in Egypt which stated we were not part of Islam but as distinct from it as Christianity or Judaism — and became increasingly acknowledged as a Faith in its own right. Shoghi Effendi, however, constantly vigilant and unnaturally sensitive to whatever affected the life of the Cause, detected a trend amongst the administrative institutions to carry his original instruction in such matters (given in 1933) that the Assemblies should be “slow to accept” new believers, too far. A new rigidity was in danger of frustrating the main animating purpose of all Bahá’í institutions — to convert mankind to the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. The Bahá’ís, in their eagerness to obey Shoghi Effendi’s instructions, had gone to extremes and were so interested in screening applicants that it was getting difficult to become a Bahá’í at all. In 1938 Shoghi Effendi, therefore, found it necessary to instruct the American Assemblies “to desist from insisting too rigidly on the minor observations and beliefs, which might prove a stumbling block in the way of any sincere applicant” and pointed out the duty of Bahá’í communities was to nurse the new believers, subsequent to their acceptance of the Faith, into Bahá’í maturity.

As the Faith grew in inner cohesion and strength, as National Assembly after National Assembly was formed in East and West and began to function strongly and systematically, as the people of the world became increasingly aware of the existence of this new religion as an independent Revelation with a system of its own, the instructions of Shoghi Effendi changed. Particularly during the great Ten Year Plan of Teaching and Consolidation the whole emphasis in relation to the enrolment of new Bahá’ís was modified; now we were strong, now our foundations had been unassailably laid, now we could deal, at last, at last, with the masses of mankind in all the countries of the world. Fling open the doors and bring them into the ark of Bahá’u’lláh’s salvation! The time had come to obey ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s injunction: *“Summon the people in these countries, capitals, islands, assemblies and churches to enter the Abhá Kingdom.”* In other words having achieved his end Shoghi Effendi changed his tactic. He informed the American National Assembly that the fundamental and primary requisites a candidate should have were acceptance of the stations of the Báb, the Forerunner; Bahá’u’lláh, the Author; and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Exemplar of the Faith; submission to whatever They had revealed; loyal and steadfast adherence to the provisions of the Will of the Master; and close association with the spirit and form of the world-wide Bahá’í Administration. These were the “principal factors” and any attempt to analyse and elucidate further, he said, would only lead to barren discussion and controversy and be detrimental to the growth of the Cause. He ended up his exposition on this delicate subject by urging the friends, unless some particular circumstance made it absolutely necessary, to “refrain from drawing rigidly the line of demarcation”.

The Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi were the Great Teachers. Their ministries — each so different in character — were primarily devoted to the sublime aim of bringing all mankind under the tent of this healing, peace-giving, soul-regenerating Faith. Over and over again, insistently, for thirty-six years Shoghi Effendi rallied us to “the preeminent task of teaching the Faith to the multitudes...a task”, he assured us in his last Ridván Message to the Bahá’í world, “...at once so sacred, so fundamental, and so urgent; primarily involving and challenging every single individual; the bed-rock on which the solidity and the stability of the multiplying institutions of a rising Order must rest — such a task must, in the course of this year, be

accorded priority over every other Bahá'í activity", a task to which Bahá'u'lláh Himself had accorded priority, as Shoghi Effendi repeatedly reminded us, supporting with quotations such as these: *"Teach ye the Cause of God, O people of Bahá, for God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of proclaiming His Message, and regardeth it as the most meritorious of all deeds."* *"Centre your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God."* *"This is the day in which to speak. It is incumbent upon the people of Bahá to strive, with the utmost patience and forbearance, to guide the peoples of the world to the Most Great Horizon [Himself]."* *"Unloose your tongues, and proclaim unceasingly His Cause. This shall be better for you than all the treasures of the past and the future..."* Bahá'u'lláh attached such importance to the teaching of His Cause that He firmly admonishes His followers that whoso is unable to go forth himself, *"it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation"*. Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1938 that this "Mandate of Teaching, so vitally binding upon all," should become "the all-pervading concern" of every individual Bahá'í and that the Assemblies should, at each of their sessions, set aside time for the "earnest and prayerful consideration of such ways and means as may foster the campaign of teaching."

The Guardian made it quite clear that the one who was teaching should "refrain, at the outset, from insisting on such laws and observances as might impose too severe a strain on the seeker's newly-awakened faith...Let him not be content until he has infused into his spiritual child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise independently, in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of other souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his newly-adopted Faith."

If one compiled what the Guardian has written on the subject of teaching it would be a good-sized book. But one sees throughout that the objective was clear, the duty fixed, the methods adaptable and fluid. Shoghi Effendi used so many words in connection with new Bahá'ís and their acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh: he called them "converts", "candidates", "avowed adherents", "new believers", "unreserved" supporters of the Faith and many other descriptive and satisfying names; he said they were "enrolled", "converted", "declared their faith", "embraced the Faith", "enlisted" under Bahá'u'lláh's banner, "espoused His Cause", "joined the ranks" of the faithful and so on. In an age of banal, stereotyped clichés we might do well to remember this. I might add that I never heard him debase acceptance of the Supreme Manifestation of God into that horrible and meaningless phrase when applied to spiritual rebirth, "he signed his card." Shoghi Effendi never gave up the correct use of the English language because certain words had developed an unpopular connotation. The Bahá'í Faith has neither priest nor missionary — but the Bahá'ís undertook "missionary journeys" for the avowed purpose of "conversion".

