

# Regarding The Establishment of The Universal House of Justice

Extracts from the Writings of  
Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice

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## CONTENTS

- I From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh
- II From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
- III From the Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
- IV From Letters and Cables Written by Shoghi Effendi
- V From the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice
- VI From Letters Written by the Universal House of Justice

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### I. From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh:

- 1 Endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the Revealer of Signs. None hath the right to dispose of them without leave from Him Who is the Dawning-place of Revelation. After Him, this authority shall pass to the Aghṣán, and after them to the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then—that they may use these endowments for the benefit of the Places which have been exalted in this Cause, and for whatsoever hath been enjoined upon them by Him Who is the God of might and power. Otherwise, the endowments shall revert to the people of Bahá who speak not except by His leave and judge not save in accordance with what God hath decreed in this Tablet—lo, they are the champions of victory betwixt heaven and earth—that they may use them in the manner that hath been laid down in the Book by God, the Mighty, the Bountiful.<sup>1</sup>

*("The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book, Bahá'u'lláh", Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992, ¶42, pp. 34-5)  
Ed. Note: See The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, note 67, p. 197 regards "people of Bahá" in this passage*

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1 A newer translation of this passage has been substituted for the translation originally included.

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- 2 O ye Men of Justice! Be ye in the realm of God shepherds unto His sheep and guard them from the ravening wolves that have appeared in disguise, even as ye would guard your own sons. Thus exhorteth you the Counsellor, the Faithful.

*("The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book, Bahá'u'lláh", Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992,, ¶52, p. 38)*

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- 3 The men of God's House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries.

O people of God! That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world. Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the Ministers of the House of Justice that they may act according to the needs and requirements of the time. They that, for the sake of God, arise to serve His Cause, are the recipients of divine inspiration from the unseen Kingdom. It is incumbent upon all to be obedient unto them. All matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book.

*("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", [rev. ed.] (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 26-7)*

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- 4 It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them. God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily, is the Provider, the Omniscient.

*("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", p. 68)*

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- 5 We exhort the men of the House of Justice and command them to ensure the protection and safeguarding of men, women and children. It is incumbent upon them to have the utmost regard for the interests of the people at all times and under all conditions. Blessed is the ruler who succoureth the captive, and the rich one who careth for the poor, and the just one who secureth from the wrong doer the rights of the downtrodden, and happy the trustee who observeth that which the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days hath prescribed unto him.

*("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", pp. 69-70)*

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- 6 First: It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser

Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. This matter is imperative and absolutely essential, inasmuch as hostilities and conflict lie at the root of affliction and calamity.

*("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", p. 89)*

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- 7 According to the fundamental laws which We have formerly revealed in the "Kitáb-i-Aqdas" and other Tablets, all affairs are committed to the care of just kings and presidents and of the Trustees of the House of Justice. Having pondered on that which We have enunciated, every man of equity and discernment will readily perceive, with his inner and outer eyes, the splendours of the day-star of justice which radiate therefrom.

*("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", p. 93)*

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- 8 In the abundance of Our grace and loving-kindness We have revealed specially for the rulers and ministers of the world that which is conducive to safety and protection, tranquillity and peace; haply the children of men may rest secure from the evils of oppression. He, verily, is the Protector, the Helper, the Giver of victory. It is incumbent upon the men of God's House of Justice to fix their gaze by day and by night upon that which hath shone forth from the Pen of Glory for the training of peoples, the upbuilding of nations, the protection of man and the safeguarding of his honour.

*("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", p. 125)*

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- 9 The purpose of religion as revealed from the heaven of God's holy Will is to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world; make it not the cause of dissension and strife. The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men. The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God. Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind. It behoveth the chiefs and rulers of the world, and in particular the Trustees of God's House of Justice, to endeavour to the utmost of their power to safeguard its position, promote its interests and exalt its station in the eyes of the world. In like manner it is incumbent upon them to enquire into the conditions of their subjects and to acquaint themselves with the affairs and activities of the divers communities in their dominions. We call upon the manifestations of the power of God—the sovereigns and rulers on earth—to bestir themselves and do all in their power that haply they may banish discord from this world and illumine it with the light of concord.

*("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", pp. 129-30)*

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## II. From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

- 10 ...for 'Abdu'l-Bahá is in a tempest of dangers and infinitely abhors differences of

opinion.... Praise be to God, there are no grounds for differences.

The Báb, the Exalted One, is the Morn of Truth, the splendour of Whose light shineth through all regions. He is also the Harbinger of the Most Great Light, the Abhá Luminary. The Blessed Beauty is the One promised by the sacred books of the past, the revelation of the Source of light that shone upon Mount Sinai, Whose fire glowed in the midst of the Burning Bush. We are, one and all, servants of Their threshold, and stand each as a lowly keeper at Their door.

My purpose is this, that ere the expiration of a thousand years, no one has the right to utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship. The Most Holy Book is the Book to which all peoples shall refer, and in it the Laws of God have been revealed. Laws not mentioned in the Book should be referred to the decision of the Universal House of Justice. There will be no grounds for difference.... Beware, beware lest anyone create a rift or stir up sedition. Should there be differences of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve the problems. Whatever will be its decision, by majority vote, shall be the real truth, inasmuch as that House is under the protection, unerring guidance and care of the one true Lord. He shall guard it from error and will protect it under the wing of His sanctity and infallibility. He who opposes it is cast out and will eventually be of the defeated.

The Supreme House of Justice should be elected according to the system followed in the election of the parliaments of Europe. And when the countries would be guided, the Houses of Justice of the various countries would elect the Supreme House of Justice.

At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme House of Justice.

The establishment of that House is not dependent upon the conversion of all the nations of the world. For example, if conditions were favourable and no disturbances would be caused, the friends in Persia would elect their representatives, and likewise the friends in America, in India, and other areas would also elect their representatives, and these would elect a House of Justice. That House of Justice would be the Supreme House of Justice. That is all.

*(“Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas”, vol. 3 (Chicago: Bahá’í Publishing Society, 1916), pp. 499-501; cited in “Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968”, 1st rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 47-48)*

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- 11 Those matters of major importance which constitute the foundation of the Law of God are explicitly recorded in the Text, but subsidiary laws are left to the House of Justice. The wisdom of this is that the times never remain the same, for change is a necessary quality and an essential attribute of this world, and of time and place. Therefore the House of Justice will take action accordingly.

Let it not be imagined that the House of Justice will take any decision according to its own concepts and opinions. God forbid! The Supreme House of Justice will take decisions and establish laws through the inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit, because it is in the safekeeping and under the shelter and protection of the Ancient Beauty, and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an absolute obligation, and

there is no escape for anyone.

Say, O people: Verily the Supreme House of Justice is under the wings of your Lord, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful, that is, under His protection, His care, and His shelter; for He has commanded the firm believers to obey that blessed, sanctified and all-subduing body, whose sovereignty is divinely ordained and of the Kingdom of Heaven and whose laws are inspired and spiritual.

Briefly, this is the wisdom of referring the laws of society to the House of Justice. In the religion of Islám, similarly, not every ordinance was explicitly revealed; nay not a tenth part of a tenth part was included in the Text; although all matters of major importance were specifically referred to, there were undoubtedly thousands of laws which were unspecified. These were devised by the divines of a later age according to the laws of Islamic jurisprudence, and individual divines made conflicting deductions from the original revealed ordinances. All these were enforced. Today this process of deduction is the right of the body of the House of Justice, and the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the conclusions and endorsements of the body of the House of Justice whose members are elected by and known to the worldwide Bahá'í community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of individual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and result in schism, division, and dispersion. The oneness of the Word would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken.

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Raḥíq-i-Makhtúm” vol. I, pp. 302-4; “Bahá’í News” 426 (September 1966), p. 2; cited in “Wellspring of Guidance” pp. 84-6)*

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- 12 The substance is, that prior to the completion of a thousand years, no individual may presume to breathe a word. All must consider themselves to be of the order of subjects, submissive and obedient to the commandments of God and the laws of the House of Justice. Should any deviate by so much as a needle’s point from the decrees of the Universal House of Justice, or falter in his compliance therewith, then is he of the outcast and rejected.

*(“Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1997), sec. 33, p. 73)*

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- 13 The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God’s, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.

*(“Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, sec. 38, p. 85)*

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- 14 Praise be to God, all such doors are closed in the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh for a special authoritative Centre hath been appointed—a Centre that solveth all difficulties and wardeth off all differences. The Universal House of Justice, likewise, wardeth off all differences and whatever it prescribeth must be accepted and he who transgresseth is rejected. But this Universal House of Justice which is the Legislature hath not yet been instituted.

Thus it is seen that no means for dissension hath been left, but carnal desires are the cause of difference as it is the case with the violators. These do not doubt the validity of the Covenant but selfish motives have dragged them to this condition. It is not that they do not know what they do—they are perfectly aware and still they exhibit opposition.

*(From a Tablet dated 24 July, 1919 to an individual believer—translated from the Persian; published in "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 187, pp. 225-26)*

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- 15 The sacred and youthful branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God; whoso disputeth with him hath disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself and turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned aside from God. May the wrath, the fierce indignation, the vengeance of God rest upon him! The mighty stronghold shall remain impregnable and safe through obedience to him who is the Guardian of the Cause of God. It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice, upon all the Aghṣán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God to show their obedience, submissiveness and subordination unto the Guardian of the Cause of God, to turn unto him and be lowly before him....

*("Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 11)*

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- 16 And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers. Its members must be manifestations of the fear of God and daysprings of knowledge and understanding, must be steadfast in God's faith and the well-wishers of all mankind. By this House is meant the Universal House of Justice, that is, in all countries a secondary House of Justice must be instituted, and these secondary Houses of Justice must elect the members of the Universal one. Unto this body all things must be referred. It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text. By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved and the Guardian of the Cause of God is its sacred head and the distinguished member for life of that body. Should he not attend in person its deliberations, he must appoint one to represent him. Should any of the members commit a sin, injurious to the common weal, the Guardian of the Cause of God hath at his own discretion the right to expel him, whereupon the people must elect another one in his stead. This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth them. The legislative body must reinforce the executive, the executive must aid and assist the legislative body so that through the close union and harmony of these two forces, the foundation of fairness and justice may become firm and strong, that all the regions of the world may become even as Paradise itself.

*("Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", pp. 14-15)*

- 17 This is the foundation of the belief of the people of Bahá (may my life be offered up for them): “His Holiness, the Exalted One (the Báb), is the Manifestation of the Unity and Oneness of God and the Forerunner of the Ancient Beauty. His Holiness the Abhá Beauty (may my life be a sacrifice for His steadfast friends) is the Supreme Manifestation of God and the Dayspring of His Most Divine Essence. All others are servants unto Him and do His bidding.” Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth malice, and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant. By this House is meant that Universal House Justice which is to be elected from all countries, that is from those parts in the East and West where the loved ones are to be found, after the manner of the customary elections in Western countries such as those of England.

It is incumbent upon these members (of the Universal House of Justice) to gather in a certain place and deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book. Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself. And inasmuch as this House of Justice hath power to enact laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book and bear upon daily transactions, so also it hath power to repeal the same. Thus for example, the House of Justice enacteth today a certain law and enforceth it, and a hundred years hence, circumstances having profoundly changed and the conditions having altered, another House of Justice will then have power, according to the exigencies of the time, to alter that law. This it can do because that law formeth no part of the Divine Explicit Text. The House of Justice is both the initiator and the abrogator of its own laws.

*(“Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, pp. 19-20)*

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- 18 All must seek guidance and turn unto the Center of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.

The Glory of Glories rest upon you!

*(“Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, p. 26)*

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### III. From the Utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

- 19 To epitomize: essential infallibility belongs especially to the supreme Manifestations, and acquired infallibility is granted to every holy soul. For instance, the Universal House of Justice, if it be established under the necessary conditions—with members elected from all the people—that House of Justice will be under the protection and the unerring guidance of God. If that House of Justice shall decide unanimously, or by a majority, upon any question not mentioned in the Book, that decision and command will be guarded from mistake. Now the members of the House of Justice have not, individually, essential infallibility; but the body of the House of Justice is under the protection and unerring guidance of God: this is called conferred infallibility.

*("Some Answered Questions", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), pp. 172-73)*

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- 20 He [Bahá'u'lláh] has ordained and established the House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and blending of church and state. This institution is under the protecting power of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. A universal, or international, House of Justice shall also be organized. Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and that which the Universal House of Justice ordains shall be obeyed by all mankind. This international House of Justice shall be appointed and organized from the Houses of Justice of the whole world, and all the world shall come under its administration.

*("The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912", 2nd. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 455)*

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#### **IV. Extracts from Letters and Cables Written by Shoghi Effendi:**

- 21 As to the order and the management of the spiritual affairs of the friends, that which is very important now is the consolidation of the Spiritual Assemblies in every centre, because on these fortified and unshakable foundations, God's Supreme House of Justice shall be erected and firmly established in the days to come. When this most great edifice shall be reared on such an immovable foundation, God's purpose, wisdom, universal truths, mysteries and realities of the Kingdom, which the mystic Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has deposited within the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, shall gradually be revealed and made manifest.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 19 December 1922 to the Bahá'ís of the East—translated from the Persian; published in "The Bahá'í World", vol. XIV, p. 436)*

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- 22 With these Assemblies, local as well as national, harmoniously, vigorously, and efficiently functioning throughout the Bahá'í world, the only means for the establishment of the Supreme House of Justice will have been secured. And when this Supreme Body will have been properly established, it will have to consider afresh the whole situation, and lay down the principle which shall direct, so long as it deems advisable, the affairs of the Cause.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 12 March 1923, published in "Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932" [rev. ed.], (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 41)*

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- 23 We are called upon by our beloved Master in His Will and Testament not only to adopt it [Bahá'u'lláh's new world order] unreservedly, but to unveil its merit to all the world. To attempt to estimate its full value, and grasp its exact significance after so short a time since its inception would be premature and presumptuous on our part. We must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications....

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 23 February 1924, published in "Bahá'í Administration", p. 62)*



- 24 The purpose of so much perpetual and intensive emphasis on the support and consolidation of these Spiritual Assemblies is this—that the foundation of the Cause of God must become broader and stronger day by day, that no confusion ever enter the divine order, that new and strong ties be forged between East and West, that Bahá'í unity be safeguarded and illumine the eyes of the people of the world with its resplendent beauty, so that upon these Assemblies God's Houses of Justice may be firmly established and upon these secondary Houses of Justice the lofty edifice of the Universal House of Justice may, with complete order, perfection and glory, and with no delay, be raised up. When the Universal House of Justice shall have stepped forth from the realm of hope into that of visible fulfilment and its fame be established in every corner and clime of the world, then that august body—solidly grounded and founded on the firm and unshakable foundation of the entire Bahá'í community of East and West, and the recipient of the bounties of God and His inspiration—will proceed to devise and carry out important undertakings, world-wide activities and the establishment of glorious institutions. By this means the renown of the Cause of God will become world-wide and its light will illumine the whole earth.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 1924 to the Bahá'ís of the East—translated from the Persian; published in "The Bahá'í World" vol. XIV, p. 436)*

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- 25 These Spiritual Assemblies have been primarily constituted to carry out these affairs, and secondly to lay a perfect and strong foundation for the establishment of the divine and Universal House of Justice. When that central pivot of the people of Bahá shall be effectively, majestically and firmly established, a new era will dawn, heavenly bounties and graces will pour out from that Source, and the all-encompassing promises will be fulfilled.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 30 October 1924 to the Spiritual Assembly of Tíhrán—translated from the Persian; published in "The Bahá'í World" vol. XIV, p. 436)*

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- 26 Regarding the method to be adopted for the election of the National Spiritual Assemblies, it is clear that the text of the Beloved's Testament gives us no indication as to the manner in which these Assemblies are to be elected. In one of His earliest Tablets, however, addressed to a friend in Persia, the following is expressly recorded.

“At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme Baytu'l-'Adl (Universal House of Justice)”.

These words clearly indicate that a three-stage election has been provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the formation of the International House of Justice, and as it is explicitly provided in His Will and Testament that the “Secondary Houses of Justice (i.e. National Assemblies) must elect the members of the Universal One”, it is obvious that the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies will have to be indirectly elected by the body of the believers in their respective provinces. In view of these complementary instructions the

principle, set forth in my letter of March 12th, 1923, has been established requiring the believers (the beloved of God) in every country to elect a certain number of delegates who in turn will elect their national representatives (Secondary House of Justice or National Spiritual Assembly), whose sacred obligation and privilege will be to elect in time God's Universal House of Justice.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 12 May 1925, published in "Bahá'í Administration", p. 84)*

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- 27 It should be carefully borne in mind that the local as well as the international Houses of Justice have been expressly enjoined by the Kitáb-i-Aqdas; that the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly, as an intermediary body, and referred to in the Master's Will as the "Secondary House of Justice," has the express sanction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; and that the method to be pursued for the election of the International and National Houses of Justice has been set forth by Him in His Will, as well as in a number of His Tablets. Moreover, the institutions of the local and national Funds, that are now the necessary adjuncts to all local and national spiritual assemblies, have not only been established by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Tablets He revealed to the Bahá'ís of the Orient, but their importance and necessity have been repeatedly emphasized by Him in His utterances and writings. The concentration of authority in the hands of the elected representatives of the believers; the necessity of the submission of every adherent of the Faith to the considered judgment of Bahá'í Assemblies; His preference for unanimity in decision; the decisive character of the majority vote; and even the desirability for the exercise of close supervision over all Bahá'í publications, have been sedulously instilled by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as evidenced by His authenticated and widely-scattered Tablets. To accept His broad and humanitarian Teachings on one hand, and to reject and dismiss with neglectful indifference His more challenging and distinguishing precepts, would be an act of manifest disloyalty to that which He has cherished most in His life.

That the Spiritual Assemblies of today will be replaced in time by the Houses of Justice, and are to all intents and purposes identical and not separate bodies, is abundantly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself. He has in fact in a Tablet addressed to the members of the first Chicago Spiritual Assembly, the first elected Bahá'í body instituted in the United States, referred to them as the members of the "House of Justice" for that city, and has thus with His own pen established beyond any doubt the identity of the present Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies with the Houses of Justice referred to by Bahá'u'lláh. For reasons which are not difficult to discover, it has been found advisable to bestow upon the elected representatives of Bahá'í communities throughout the world the temporary appellation of Spiritual Assemblies, a term which, as the position and aims of the Bahá'í Faith are better understood and more fully recognized, will gradually be superseded by the permanent and more appropriate designation of House of Justice. Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differently in future, but they will be enabled also to add to their present functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the recognition of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, not merely as one of the recognized religious systems of the world, but as the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power. And as the Bahá'í Faith permeates the masses of the peoples of East and West, and its truth is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power, and

exercise, as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth, all the rights, the duties, and responsibilities incumbent upon the world's future super-state.

It must be pointed out, however, in this connection that, contrary to what has been confidently asserted, the establishment of the Supreme House of Justice is in no way dependent upon the adoption of the Bahá'í Faith by the mass of the peoples of the world, nor does it presuppose its acceptance by the majority of the inhabitants of any one country. In fact, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Himself, in one of His earliest Tablets, contemplated the possibility of the formation of the Universal House of Justice in His own lifetime, and but for the unfavorable circumstances prevailing under the Turkish regime, would have, in all probability, taken the preliminary steps for its establishment. It will be evident, therefore, that given favorable circumstances, under which the Bahá'ís of Persia and of the adjoining countries under Soviet rule, may be enabled to elect their national representatives, in accordance with the guiding principles laid down in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings, the only remaining obstacle in the way of the definite formation of the International House of Justice will have been removed. For upon the National Houses of Justice of the East and the West devolves the task, in conformity with the explicit provisions of the Will, of electing directly the members of the International House of Justice. Not until they are themselves fully representative of the rank and file of the believers in their respective countries, not until they have acquired the weight and the experience that will enable them to function vigorously in the organic life of the Cause, can they approach their sacred task, and provide the spiritual basis for the constitution of so august a body in the Bahá'í world.

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It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to the Universal House of Justice by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and repeatedly and solemnly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will. It does not constitute in any manner a contradiction to the Will and Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, nor does it nullify any of His revealed instructions. It enhances the prestige of that exalted assembly, stabilizes its supreme position, safeguards its unity, assures the continuity of its labors, without presuming in the slightest to infringe upon the inviolability of its clearly-defined sphere of jurisdiction. We stand indeed too close to so monumental a document to claim for ourselves a complete understanding of all its implications, or to presume to have grasped the manifold mysteries it undoubtedly contains. Only future generations can comprehend the value and significance attached to this Divine Masterpiece, which the Master-builder of the world has designed for the unification and triumph of the world-wide Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Only those who come after us will be in a position to realize the value of the surprisingly strong emphasis that has been placed on the institution of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship....

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 27 February 1929, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters" rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 5-8)*

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28 The National Spiritual Assemblies, like unto pillars, will be gradually and firmly established in every country on the strong and fortified foundations of the Local Assemblies. On these pillars, the mighty edifice, the Universal House of Justice, will be

erected, raising high its noble frame above the world of existence. The unity of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will thus be realized and fulfilled from one end of the earth to the other. The explicit ordinances of His Most Holy Book will be promulgated, applied and carried out most befittingly in the world of creation, and the living waters of everlasting life will stream forth from that fountain-head of God's World Order upon all the warring nations and peoples of the world, to wash away the evils and iniquities of the realm of dust, heal man's age-old ills and ailments. Then will the visible sovereignty of the Most Great Name shake the foundations of the countries and nations of the world, strike fear and remorse in the hearts of some of the traditional ecclesiastical divines of various creeds and nations, and cause others to become frustrated, disturbed, vanquished and obliterated....

In these days the things that are regarded as the most imperative of all and upon which will depend the development of the Cause of God, the enhancement of its position and prestige and the promulgation of the laws of His Faith, are but two momentous tasks: first, to expedite preparations for the formation of the divinely ordained, the Supreme House of Justice; second, to complete the construction of the Temple in the United States.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 27 November 1929 to the Bahá'ís of Persia—translated from the Persian)*

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- 29 Then will the Throne of Bahá'u'lláh's sovereignty be founded in the promised land and the scales of justice be raised on high. Then will the banner of the independence of the Faith be unfurled, and His Most Great Law be unveiled and rivers of laws and ordinances stream forth from this snow-white spot with all-conquering power and awe-inspiring majesty, the like of which past ages have never seen. Then will appear the truth of what was revealed by the Tongue of Grandeur: "Call out to Zion, O Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendour is revealed." "...O Carmel... Well is it with him that circleteth around thee, that proclaimeth the revelation of thy glory, and recounteth that which the bounty of the Lord, thy God, hath showered upon thee... Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names."<sup>2</sup>

Through it the pillars of the Faith on this earth will be firmly established and its hidden powers be revealed, its signs shine forth, its banners be unfurled and its light be shed upon all peoples.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 27 November 1929 to the Bahá'ís of Persia—translated from the Arabic; published in "The Bahá'í World", vol. XIV, p. 438)*

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by Shoghi Effendi, "Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 16

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- 30 For Bahá'u'lláh, we should readily recognize, has not only imbued mankind with a new and regenerating Spirit. He has not merely enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy, however potent, sound and universal these may be. In addition to these He, as well as 'Abdu'l-Bahá after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions,

and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth. Not only have They revealed all the directions required for the practical realization of those ideals which the Prophets of God have visualized, and which from time immemorial have inflamed the imagination of seers and poets in every age. They have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as Their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 28 November 1931, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", pp. 1920)*

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- 31 Then will all our cherished hopes and aspirations be realized, the tree of our endeavours bear fruit, the Will and Testament of our Master and our Beloved be fully and firmly established, and the hidden powers of the Cause of our Lord and God be fully manifested. Then will be unveiled before our eyes the inauguration of an era the like of which has never been witnessed in past ages....

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 13 December 1932 to the Bahá'ís of Persia—translated from the Arabic; published in "The Bahá'í World, vol. XIV, p. 438)*

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- 32 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, bearing in their turn the palm of a hard-won victory. The unbroken record of their illustrious deeds had established beyond the shadow of a doubt their preponderating share in shaping the destinies of their Faith. In a world writhing with pain and declining into chaos this community—the vanguard of the liberating forces of Bahá'u'lláh—succeeded in the years following 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing in raising high above the institutions established by its sister communities in East and West what may well constitute the chief pillar of that future House—a House which posterity will regard as the last refuge of a tottering civilization.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 21 April 1933, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 89)*

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- 33 In the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh where institutions of the International and Local Houses of Justice are specifically designated and formally established; in the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God which first Bahá'u'lláh and then 'Abdu'l-Bahá brought into being; in the institution of both local and national Assemblies which in their embryonic stage were already functioning in the days preceding 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension; in the authority with which the Author of our Faith and the Center of His Covenant have in their Tablets chosen to confer upon them; in the institution of the Local Fund which operated according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's specific injunctions addressed to certain Assemblies in Persia;

in the verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas the implications of which clearly anticipate the institution of the Guardianship; in the explanation which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in one of His Tablets, has given to, and the emphasis He has placed upon, the hereditary principle and the law of primogeniture as having been upheld by the Prophets of the past—in these we can discern the faint glimmerings and discover the earliest intimation of the nature and working of the Administrative Order which the Will of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was at a later time destined to proclaim and formally establish.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 8 February 1934, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 147)*

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- 34 Acting in conjunction with each other these two inseparable institutions administer its affairs, coordinate its activities, promote its interests, execute its laws and defend its subsidiary institutions. Severally, each operates within a clearly defined sphere of jurisdiction; each is equipped with its own attendant institutions—instruments designed for the effective discharge of its particular responsibilities and duties. Each exercises, within the limitations imposed upon it, its powers, its authority, its rights and prerogatives. These are neither contradictory, nor detract in the slightest degree from the position which each of these institutions occupies. Far from being incompatible or mutually destructive, they supplement each other's authority and functions, and are permanently and fundamentally united in their aims.

...

Severed from the no less essential institution of the Universal House of Justice this same System of the Will of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would be paralyzed in its action and would be powerless to fill in those gaps which the Author of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has deliberately left in the body of His legislative and administrative ordinances.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 8 February 1934, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 148)*

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- 35 From these statements it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.

Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning and to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed utterances....

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 8 February 1934, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", pp.*

149-50)

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- 36 The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh must in no wise be regarded as purely democratic in character inasmuch as the basic assumption which requires all democracies to depend fundamentally upon getting their mandate from the people is altogether lacking in this Dispensation. In the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, in the enactment of the legislation necessary to supplement the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the members of the Universal House of Justice, it should be borne in mind, are not, as Bahá'u'lláh's utterances clearly imply, responsible to those whom they represent, nor are they allowed to be governed by the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful, or of those who directly elect them. They are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience. They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration, but must reserve for themselves the right of an unfettered decision. "God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth," is Bahá'u'lláh's incontrovertible assurance. They, and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation....

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 8 February 1934, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 153)*

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- 37 The first [a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities] is specially, though not exclusively, directed to their elected representatives, whether local, regional, or national, who, in their capacity as the custodians and members of the nascent institutions of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, are shouldering the chief responsibility in laying an unassailable foundation for that Universal House of Justice which, as its title implies, is to be the exponent and guardian of that Divine Justice which can alone insure the security of, and establish the reign of law and order in, a strangely disordered world....

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 25 December 1938, published in "The Advent of Divine Justice", (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 22)*

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- 38 For it must be clearly understood, nor can it be sufficiently emphasized, that the conjunction of the resting-place of the Greatest Holy Leaf with those of her brother and mother incalculably reinforces the spiritual potencies of that consecrated Spot which, under the wings of the Báb's overshadowing Sepulchre, and in the vicinity of the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár which will be reared on its flank, is destined to evolve into the focal centre of those worldshaking, world-embracing, world-directing administrative institutions, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh and anticipated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and which are to function in consonance with the principles that govern the twin institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. Then, and then only, will this momentous prophecy which illuminates the concluding passages of the Tablet of Carmel be fulfilled: "Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee (Carmel), and will manifest the

people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.”

To attempt to visualize, even in its barest outline, the glory that must envelop these institutions, to essay even a tentative and partial description of their character or the manner of their operation, or to trace however inadequately the course of events leading to their rise and eventual establishment is far beyond my own capacity and power. Suffice it to say that at this troubled stage in world history the association of these three incomparably precious souls who, next to the three Central Figures of our Faith, tower in rank above the vast multitude of the heroes, Letters, martyrs, Hands, teachers and administrators of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, in such a potentially powerful spiritual and administrative Centre, is in itself an event which will release forces that are bound to hasten the emergence in a land which, geographically, spiritually and administratively, constitutes the heart of the entire planet, of some of the brightest gems of that World Order now shaping in the womb of this travailing age.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 21 December 1939, published in "Messages to America: Selected Letters and Cablegrams Addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America 1932-1946", (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1947), pp. 32-33)*

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- 39 In this Charter of the future world civilization [Kitáb-i-Aqdas] its Author—at once the Judge, the Lawgiver, the Unifier and Redeemer of mankind—announces to the kings of the earth the promulgation of the “Most Great Law” ... In it He formally ordains the institution of the “House of Justice,” defines its functions, fixes its revenues, and designates its members as the “Men of Justice,” the “Deputies of God,” the “Trustees of the All-Merciful”.

*(Shoghi Effendi, "God Passes By", Rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), p. 214)*

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- 40 Parallel with this double process of consolidation and construction particular attention should be devoted to the provision of the necessary means whereby the newly fledged centres in the Dominion of Canada and throughout the Republics of Latin America can be co-ordinated and further consolidated, through the formation of three National Spiritual Assemblies, designed to participate in time in the international elections that must precede the constitution of the First Universal House of Justice. The erection of these three pillars, raising to eleven the number of existing National Spiritual Assemblies, which are to be designated in future as Secondary Houses of Justice, and are designed to support the highest legislative body in the administrative hierarchy of the Faith, will, as the Divine Plan continues to unfold, be supplemented by the formation of similar bodies which, as they multiply, will, of necessity, broaden the basis, and reinforce the representative character, of the supreme elective Institution which, in conjunction with the institution of Guardianship, must direct and coordinate the activities of a world-encircling Faith. Through the formation of these National Spiritual Assemblies, as the implications of the Divine Plan gradually unfold in the coming years, the American Bahá'í Community will, in addition to its missionary activities throughout five continents and the islands of the seven seas, be contributing directly to the laying of the foundation, and hastening the formation, of an institution which, when constituted, will have consummated the threefold process involved in the erection of the total structure of the



Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 15 June 1946, published in "Messages to America", p. 94)*

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- 41 On the success of this enterprise [the Africa Campaign], unprecedented in its character and immense in its spiritual potentialities, must depend the initiation, at a later period in the Formative Age of the Faith, of undertakings embracing within their range all National Assemblies functioning throughout the Bahá'í world—undertakings constituting in themselves a prelude to the launching of world-wide enterprises destined to be embarked upon, in future epochs of that same Age, by the Universal House of Justice, that will symbolize the unity and co-ordinate and unify the activities of these National Assemblies.

Indeed the birth of this African enterprise, in the opening decade of the second Bahá'í century, coinciding as it does with the formation of the International Bahá'í Council, should be acclaimed as an event of peculiar significance in the evolution of our beloved Faith. Both events will, no doubt, be hailed by posterity as simultaneous and compelling evidences of the irresistible unfoldment of a divinely appointed Administrative Order and of the development, on an international scale, of its subsidiary agencies, heralding the establishment of the Supreme Legislative Body designed to crown the Administrative Edifice now being laboriously erected by the privileged builders of a Divine Order, whose features have been delineated by the Centre of the Covenant in His Will and Testament, whose fundamental laws have been revealed by the Founder of our Faith in His "Kitáb-i-Aqdas", and whose advent has been foreshadowed by the Herald of the Bahá'í Dispensation in the "Bayán", His most weighty Book.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 25 February 1951, published in "Unfolding Destiny: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'í Community of the British Isles", (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 261)*

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- 42 HOUR NOW RIPE TAKE LONG INEVITABLY DEFERRED STEP CONFORMITY PROVISIONS 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S TESTAMENT CONJUNCTION WITH SIX ABOVE MENTIONED STEPS THROUGH APPOINTMENT FIRST CONTINGENT HANDS CAUSE GOD TWELVE IN NUMBER EQUALLY ALLOCATED HOLY LAND ASIATIC AMERICAN EUROPEAN CONTINENTS. INITIAL STEP NOW TAKEN REGARDED PREPARATORY FULL DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTION PROVIDED 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S WILL PARALLELED PRELIMINARY MEASURE FORMATION INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL DESTINED CULMINATE EMERGENCE UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE. NASCENT INSTITUTION FORGING FRESH LINKS BINDING RISING WORLD CENTRE FAITH TO CONSOLIDATING WORLD COMMUNITY FOLLOWERS MOST GREAT NAME PAVING WAY ADOPTION SUPPLEMENTARY MEASURES CALCULATED REINFORCE FOUNDATIONS STRUCTURE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER....

*(In a cable written by Shoghi Effendi, 24 December 1951, published in "Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957", (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 20)*

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- 43 In this great Tablet [of Carmel] which unveils divine mysteries and heralds the establishment of two mighty, majestic and momentous undertakings—one of which is spiritual and the other administrative, both at the World Centre of the Faith—Bahá'u'lláh

refers to an “Ark”, whose dwellers are the men of the Supreme House of Justice, which, in conformity with the exact provisions of the Will and Testament of the Centre of the Mighty Covenant, is the body which should lay down laws not explicitly revealed in the Text. In this Dispensation, these laws are destined to flow from this Holy Mountain, even as in the Mosaic Dispensation the law of God was promulgated from Zion. The “sailing of the Ark” of His laws is a reference to the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, which is indeed the Seat of Legislation, one of the branches of the World Administrative Centre of the Bahá’ís on this Holy Mountain ....

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, Naw-Rúz 111-1954 to the Bahá’ís of the East—translated from the Persian; published in “The Bahá’í World”, vol. XIV, p. 438)*

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- 44 The raising of this Edifice will in turn herald the construction, in the course of successive epochs of the Formative Age of the Faith, of several other structures, which will serve as the administrative seats of such divinely appointed institutions as the Guardianship, the Hands of the Cause, and the Universal House of Justice. These Edifices will, in the shape of a far-flung arc, and following a harmonizing style of architecture, surround the resting-places of the Greatest Holy Leaf, ranking as foremost among the members of her sex in the Bahá’í Dispensation, of her Brother, offered up as a ransom by Bahá’u’lláh for the quickening of the world and its unification, and of their Mother, proclaimed by Him to be His chosen “consort in all the worlds of God”. The ultimate completion of this stupendous undertaking will mark the culmination of the development of a world-wide divinely-appointed Administrative Order whose beginnings may be traced as far back as the concluding years of the Heroic Age of the Faith.

*(In a letter written by Shoghi Effendi, 27 November 1954, published in “Messages to the Bahá’í World 1950-1957” p. 74)*

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## V. From the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice:

- 45 Bahá’u’lláh, the Revealer of God’s Word in this Day, the Source of Authority, the Fountainhead of Justice, the Creator of a new World Order, the Establisher of the Most Great Peace, the Inspirer and Founder of a world civilization, the Judge, the Lawgiver, the Unifier and Redeemer of all mankind, has proclaimed the advent of God’s Kingdom on earth, has formulated its laws and ordinances, enunciated its principles, and ordained its institutions. To direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation He instituted His Covenant, whose power has preserved the integrity of His Faith, maintained its unity and stimulated its worldwide expansion throughout the successive ministries of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. It continues to fulfil its life-giving purpose through the agency of the Universal House of Justice whose fundamental object, as one of the twin successors of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings.

...

The provenance, the authority, the duties, the sphere of action of the Universal House of Justice all derive from the revealed Word of Bahá’u’lláh which, together with the

interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and of the Guardian of the Cause—who, after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is the sole authority in the interpretation of Bahá’í Scripture—constitute the binding terms of reference of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation. The authority of these Texts is absolute and immutable until such time as Almighty God shall reveal His new Manifestation to Whom will belong all authority and power.

There being no successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, the Universal House of Justice is the Head of the Faith and its supreme institution, to which all must turn, and on it rests the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the unity and progress of the Cause of God....

*(From the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, pp. 3-4)*

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## **VI. From letters written by the Universal House of Justice**

46 We are glad that you have brought to our attention the questions perplexing some of the believers. It is much better for these questions to be put freely and openly than to have them, unexpressed, burdening the hearts of devoted believers. Once one grasps certain basic principles of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh such uncertainties are easily dispelled. This is not to say that the Cause of God contains no mysteries. Mysteries there are indeed, but they are not of a kind to shake one’s faith once the essential tenets of the Cause and the indisputable facts of any situation are clearly understood.

The questions put by the various believers fall into three groups. The first group centres upon the following queries: Why were steps taken to elect a Universal House of Justice with the foreknowledge that there would be no Guardian? Was the time ripe for such an action? Could not the International Bahá’í Council have carried on the work?

At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi’s death it was evident, from the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy Texts, that it had been impossible for him to appoint a successor in accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This situation, in which the Guardian died without being able to appoint a successor, presented an obscure question not covered by the explicit Holy Text, and had to be referred to the Universal House of Justice. The friends should clearly understand that before the election of the Universal House of Justice there was no knowledge that there would be no Guardian. There could not have been any such foreknowledge, whatever opinions individual believers may have held. Neither the Hands of the Cause of God, nor the International Bahá’í Council, nor any other existing body could make a decision upon this all-important matter. Only the House of Justice had authority to pronounce upon it. This was one urgent reason for calling the election of the Universal House of Justice as soon as possible.

Following the passing of Shoghi Effendi the international administration of the Faith was carried on by the Hands of the Cause of God with the complete agreement and loyalty of the National Spiritual Assemblies and the body of the believers. This was in accordance with the Guardian’s designation of the Hands as the “Chief Stewards of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Commonwealth”.

From the very outset of their custodianship of the Cause of God the Hands realized

that since they had no certainty of divine guidance such as is incontrovertibly assured to the Guardian and to the Universal House of Justice, their one safe course was to follow with undeviating firmness the instructions and policies of Shoghi Effendi. The entire history of religion shows no comparable record of such strict self-discipline, such absolute loyalty and such complete self-abnegation by the leaders of a religion finding themselves suddenly deprived of their divinely inspired guide. The debt of gratitude which mankind for generations, nay, ages to come, owes to this handful of grief-stricken, steadfast, heroic souls is beyond estimation.

The Guardian had given the Bahá'í world explicit and detailed plans covering the period until Riḍván 1963, the end of the Ten Year Crusade. From that point onward, unless the Faith were to be endangered, further divine guidance was essential. This was the second pressing reason for the calling of the election of the Universal House of Justice. The rightness of the time was further confirmed by references in Shoghi Effendi's letters to the Ten Year Crusade's being followed by other plans under the direction of the Universal House of Justice. One such reference is the following passage from a letter addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles on 25th February 1951, concerning its Two Year Plan which immediately preceded the Ten Year Crusade:

On the success of this enterprise, unprecedented in its scope, unique in its character and immense in its spiritual potentialities, must depend the initiation, at a later period in the Formative Age of the Faith, of undertakings embracing within their range all National Assemblies functioning throughout the Bahá'í world— undertakings constituting in themselves a prelude to the launching of world-wide enterprises destined to be embarked upon, in future epochs of that same Age, by the Universal House of Justice, that will symbolize the unity and co-ordinate and unify the activities of these National Assemblies.

Having been in charge of the Cause of God for six years, the Hands, with absolute faith in the Holy Writings, called upon the believers to elect the Universal House of Justice, and even went so far as to ask that they themselves be not voted for. The sole, sad instance of anyone succumbing to the allurements of power was the pitiful attempt of Charles Mason Remey to usurp the Guardianship.

The following excerpts from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá state clearly and emphatically the principles with which the friends are already familiar from the Will and Testament of the Master and the various letters of Shoghi Effendi, and explain the basis for the election of the Universal House of Justice. This Tablet was sent to Persia by the beloved Guardian himself, in the early years of his ministry, for circulation among the believers.

...for 'Abdu'l-Bahá is in a tempest of dangers and infinitely abhors differences of opinion... Praise be to God, there are no grounds for differences.

The Báb, the Exalted One, is the Morn of Truth, the splendour of Whose light shineth through all regions. He is also the Harbinger of the Most Great Light, the Abhá Luminary. The Blessed Beauty is the One promised by the sacred books of the past, the revelation of the Source of light that shone upon Mount Sinai, Whose fire glowed in the midst of the Burning Bush. We are, one and all, servants of Their threshold, and stand each as a lowly keeper at Their door.

My purpose is this, that ere the expiration of a thousand years, no one has the right to utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship. The Most Holy Book is the Book to which all peoples shall refer, and in it the Laws of God have been revealed. Laws not mentioned in the Book should be referred to the decision of the Universal House of Justice. There will be no grounds for difference... Beware, beware lest anyone create a rift or stir up sedition. Should there be differences of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve the problems. Whatever will be its decision, by majority vote, shall be the real truth, inasmuch as that House is under the protection, unerring guidance and care of the one true Lord. He shall guard it from error and will protect it under the wing of His sanctity and infallibility. He who opposes it is cast out and will eventually be of the defeated.

The Supreme House of Justice should be elected according to the system followed in the election of the parliaments of Europe. And when the countries would be guided, the Houses of Justice of the various countries would elect the Supreme House of Justice.

At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme House of Justice.

The establishment of that House is not dependent upon the conversion of all the nations of the world. For example, if conditions were favourable and no disturbances would be caused, the friends in Persia would elect their representatives, and likewise the friends in America, in India, and other areas would also elect their representatives, and these would elect a House of Justice. That House of Justice would be the Supreme House of Justice. That is all.

*("Makátíb-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá", Vol. 111, pp. 500-501)*

The friends should realize that there is nothing in the Texts to indicate that the election of the Universal House of Justice could be called only by the Guardian. On the contrary, 'Abdu'l-Bahá envisaged the calling of its election in His own life-time. At a time described by the Guardian as "the darkest moments of His [the Master's] life, under 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd's regime, when He stood ready to be deported to the most inhospitable regions of Northern Africa", and when even His life was threatened, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to Ḥájí Mírzá Taqí Afnán, the cousin of the Báb and chief builder of the 'Ishqábád Temple, commanding him to arrange for the election of the Universal House of Justice should the threats against the Master materialize. The second part of the Master's Will is also relevant to such a situation and should be studied by the friends.

The second series of problems vexing some of the friends centres on the question of the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice and its ability to function without the presence of the Guardian. Particular difficulty has been experienced in understanding the implications of the following statement by the beloved Guardian:

Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would be mutilated and permanently deprived of that hereditary principle which, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, has been invariably upheld by

the Law of God. "In all the Divine Dispensations," He states, in a Tablet addressed to a follower of the Faith in Persia, "the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright." Without such an institution the integrity of the Faith would be imperilled, and the stability of the entire fabric would be gravely endangered. Its prestige would suffer, the means required to enable it to take a long, an uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking, and the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn.

*("The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh", "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 148)*

Let the friends who wish for a clearer understanding of this passage at the present time consider it in the light of the many other texts which deal with the same subject, for example the following passages gleaned from the letters of Shoghi Effendi.

They have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.

*(Letter dated 21 March 1930, "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 20)*

It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to the Universal House of Justice by Bahá'u'lláh in the "Kitáb-i-Aqdas", and repeatedly and solemnly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will. It does not constitute in any manner a contradiction to the Will and Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, nor does it nullify any of His revealed instructions. It enhances the prestige of that exalted assembly, stabilizes its supreme position, safeguards its unity, assures the continuity of its labours, without presuming in the slightest to infringe upon the inviolability of its clearly-defined sphere of jurisdiction. We stand indeed too close to so monumental a document to claim for ourselves a complete understanding of all its implications, or to presume to have grasped the manifold mysteries it undoubtedly contains....

*(Letter dated 27 February 1929, "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 8)*

From these statements it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.

*("The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh", "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", pp. 149-50)*

Each exercises, within the limitations imposed upon it, its powers, its authority, its rights and prerogatives. These are neither contradictory, nor detract in the slightest degree from the position which each of these institutions occupies.

*("The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh", "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 148)*

Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members....

*("The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh", "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 150)*

Above all, let the hearts of the friends be assured by these words of Bahá'u'lláh:

The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure.

*("The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh" p. 109)*

and these of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Verily, God effecteth that which He pleaseth; naught can annul His Covenant; naught can obstruct His favor nor oppose His Cause! He doeth with His will that which pleaseth Him and He is powerful over all things!....

*("Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas", Vol. III, p. 598)*

It should be understood by the friends that before legislating upon any matter the Universal House of Justice studies carefully and exhaustively both the Sacred Texts and the Writings of Shoghi Effendi on the subject. The interpretations written by the beloved Guardian cover a vast range of subjects and are equally as binding as the Text itself.

There is a profound difference between the interpretations of the Guardian and the elucidations of the House of Justice in exercise of its function to "deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book". The Guardian reveals what the Scripture means; his interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied. Upon the Universal House of Justice, in the words of the Guardian, "has been conferred the exclusive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the Bahá'í writings". Its pronouncements, which are susceptible of amendment or abrogation by the House of Justice itself, serve to supplement and apply the Law of God. Although not invested with the function of interpretation, the House of Justice is in a position to do everything necessary to establish the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh on this earth. Unity of doctrine is maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and the voluminous interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, together with the absolute prohibition against anyone propounding "authoritative" or "inspired" interpretations or usurping the function of Guardian. Unity of administration is assured by the authority of the Universal House of Justice.

"Such", in the words of Shoghi Effendi, "is the immutability of His revealed Word. Such is the elasticity which characterizes the functions of His appointed ministers. The first preserves the identity of His Faith, and guards the integrity of His law. The second enables it, even as a living organism, to

expand and adapt itself to the needs and requirements of an ever-changing society.”

*(Letter dated 21 March 1930, "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 25)*

Every true believer, if he is to deepen in his understanding of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, must needs combine profound faith in the unfailing efficacy of His Message and His Covenant, with the humility of recognizing that no one of this generation can claim to have embraced the vastness of His Cause nor to have comprehended the manifold mysteries and potentialities it contains. The words of Shoghi Effendi bear ample testimony to this fact:

How vast is the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh! How great the magnitude of His blessings showered upon humanity in this day! And yet, how poor, how inadequate our conception of their significance and glory! This generation stands too close to so colossal a Revelation to appreciate, in their full measure, the infinite possibilities of His Faith, the unprecedented character of His Cause, and the mysterious dispensations of His Providence.

*(Letter dated 21 March 1930, "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 24)*

We are called upon by our beloved Master in His Will and Testament not only to adopt it [Bahá'u'lláh's new world order] unreservedly, but to unveil its merit to all the world. To attempt to estimate its full value, and grasp its exact significance after so short a time since its inception would be premature and presumptuous on our part. We must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications....

*(Letter dated 23 February 1924, published in "Bahá'í Administration", p. 62)*

As to the order and the management of the spiritual affairs of the friends, that which is very important now is the consolidation of the Spiritual Assemblies in every centre, because on these fortified and unshakable foundations, God's Supreme House of Justice shall be erected and firmly established in the days to come. When this most great Edifice shall be reared on such an immovable foundation, God's purpose, wisdom, universal truths, mysteries and realities of the Kingdom, which the mystic revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has deposited within the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, shall gradually be revealed and made manifest.

*(Letter dated 19 December 1922—translated from the Persian)*

Statements such as these indicate that the full meaning of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as an understanding of the implications of the World Order ushered in by that remarkable Document can be revealed only gradually to men's eyes, and after the Universal House of Justice has come into being. The friends are called upon to trust to time and to await the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, which, as circumstances require, will make pronouncements that will resolve and clarify obscure matters.

The third group of queries raised by the friends concerns details of functioning of the Universal House of Justice in the absence of the Guardian, particularly the matter of expulsion of members of the House of Justice. Such questions will be clarified in the Constitution of the House of Justice, the formulation of which is a goal of the Nine Year Plan. Meanwhile the friends are informed that any member committing a "sin injurious



to the common weal”, may be expelled from membership of the House of Justice by a majority vote of the House itself. Should any member, God forbid, be guilty of breaking the Covenant, the matter would be investigated by the Hands of the Cause of God, and the Covenant-breaker would be expelled by decision of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, subject to the approval of the House of Justice, as in the case of any other believer. The decision of the Hands in such a case would be announced to the Bahá’í world by the Universal House of Justice.

We are certain that when you share this letter with the friends and they have these quotations from the Scriptures and the Writings of the Guardian drawn to their attention, their doubts and misgivings will be dispelled and they will be able to devote their every effort to spreading the Message of Bahá’u’lláh, serenely confident in the power of His Covenant to overcome whatever tests an inscrutable Providence may shower upon it, thus demonstrating its ability to redeem a travailing world and to upraise the Standard of the Kingdom of God on earth.

*(9 March 1965 to a National Spiritual Assembly, published in “Wellspring of Guidance: Messages, 1963-1968”, pp. 44-56)*

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- 47 You query the timing of the election of the Universal House of Justice in view of the Guardian’s statement: “...given favourable circumstances, under which the Bahá’ís of Persia and of the adjoining countries under Soviet rule, may be enabled to elect their national representatives ... the only remaining obstacle in the way of the definite formation of the International House of Justice will have been removed.” On 19th April 1947 the Guardian, in a letter written on his behalf by his secretary, replied to the enquiry of an individual believer about this passage: “At the time he referred to Russia there were Bahá’ís there, now the Community has practically ceased to exist; therefore the formation of the International House of Justice cannot depend on a Russian National Spiritual Assembly. But other strong National Spiritual Assemblies will have to be built up before it can be established.”

You suggest the possibility that, for the good of the Cause, certain information concerning the succession to Shoghi Effendi is being withheld from the believers. We assure you that nothing whatsoever is being withheld from the friends for whatever reason. There is no doubt at all that in the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Shoghi Effendi was the authority designated to appoint his successor, but he had no children and all the surviving Aghṣán had broken the Covenant. Thus, as the Hands of the Cause stated in 1957, it is clear that there was no one he could have appointed in accordance with the provisions of the Will. To have made an appointment outside the clear and specific provisions of the Master’s Will and Testament would obviously have been an impossible and unthinkable course of action for the Guardian, the divinely-appointed upholder and defender of the Covenant. Moreover, that same Will had provided a clear means for the confirmation of the Guardian’s appointment of his successor, as you are aware. The nine Hands to be elected by the body of the Hands were to give their assent by secret ballot to the Guardian’s choice. In 1957 the entire body of the Hands, after fully investigating the matter, announced that Shoghi Effendi had appointed no successor and left no will. This is documented and established.

The fact that Shoghi Effendi did not leave a will cannot be adduced as evidence of his

failure to obey Bahá'u'lláh—rather should we acknowledge that in his very silence there is a wisdom and a sign of his infallible guidance. We should ponder deeply the writings that we have, and seek to understand the multitudinous significances that they contain. Do not forget that Shoghi Effendi said two things were necessary for a growing understanding of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: the passage of time and the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. The infallibility of the Universal House of Justice, operating within its ordained sphere, has not been made dependent upon the presence in its membership of the Guardian of the Cause. Although in the realm of interpretation the Guardian's pronouncements are always binding, in the area of the Guardian's participation in legislation it is always the decision of the House itself which must prevail. This is supported by the words of the Guardian: "The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.

"Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning and to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed utterances." [Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 150]

However, quite apart from his function as a member and sacred head for life of the Universal House of Justice, the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, had the right and duty "to define the sphere of the legislative action" of the Universal House of Justice. In other words, he had the authority to state whether a matter was or was not already covered by the Sacred Texts and therefore whether it was within the authority of the Universal House of Justice to legislate upon it. No other person, apart from the Guardian, has the right or authority to make such definitions. The question therefore arises: In the absence of the Guardian, is the Universal House of Justice in danger of straying outside its proper sphere and thus falling into error? Here we must remember three things: First, Shoghi Effendi, during the thirty-six years of his Guardianship, has already made innumerable such definitions, supplementing those made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and by Bahá'u'lláh Himself. As already announced to the friends, a careful study of the Writings and interpretations on any subject on which the House of Justice proposes to legislate always precedes its act of legislation. Second, the Universal House of Justice, itself assured of divine guidance, is well aware of the absence of the Guardian and will approach all matters of legislation only when certain of its sphere of jurisdiction, a sphere which the Guardian has confidently described as "clearly defined". Third, we must not forget the Guardian's written statement about these two Institutions: "Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other."

As regards the need to have deductions made from the Writings to help in the formulation of the enactments of the House of Justice, there is the following text from the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Those matters of major importance which constitute the foundation of the Law of God are explicitly recorded in the Text, but subsidiary laws are left to the House of Justice. The wisdom of this is that the times never remain the same, for change is a necessary quality and an essential attribute of this world, and of time and place. Therefore the House of Justice will take action accordingly.

Let it not be imagined that the House of Justice will take any decision according to its own concepts and opinions. God forbid! The Supreme House of Justice will take decisions and establish laws through the inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit, because it is in the safekeeping and under the shelter and protection of the Ancient Beauty, and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an absolute obligation, and there is no escape for anyone.

Say, O people: Verily the Supreme House of Justice is under the wings of your Lord, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful, that is, under His protection, His care, and His shelter; for He has commanded the firm believers to obey that blessed, sanctified and all-subduing body, whose sovereignty is divinely ordained and of the Kingdom of Heaven and whose laws are inspired and spiritual.

Briefly, this is the wisdom of referring the laws of society to the House of Justice. In the religion of Islám, similarly, not every ordinance was explicitly revealed; nay not a tenth part of a tenth part was included in the Text; although all matters of major importance were specifically referred to, there were undoubtedly thousands of laws which were unspecified. These were devised by the divines of a later age according to the laws of Islamic jurisprudence, and individual divines made conflicting deductions from the original revealed ordinances. All these were enforced. Today this process of deduction is the right of the body of the House of Justice, and the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the conclusions and endorsements of the body of the House of Justice whose members are elected by and known to the worldwide Bahá'í community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of individual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and result in schism, division, and dispersion. The oneness of the Word would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken.

*("Letters", 2nd rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 148 (both quotes)*

In the Order of Bahá'u'lláh there are certain functions which are reserved to certain institutions, and others which are shared in common, even though they may be more in the special province of one or the other. For example, although the Hands of the Cause of God have the specific functions of protection and propagation, and are specialized for these functions, it is also the duty of the Universal House of Justice and the Spiritual Assemblies to protect and teach the Cause—indeed teaching is a sacred obligation placed upon every believer by Bahá'u'lláh. Similarly, although after the Master authoritative interpretation was exclusively vested in the Guardian, and although legislation is exclusively the function of the Universal House of Justice, these two Institutions are, in

Shoghi Effendi's words, "complementary in their aim and purpose."<sup>3</sup> "Their common, their fundamental object is to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings."<sup>4</sup> Whereas the Universal House of Justice cannot undertake any function which exclusively appertained to the Guardian, it must continue to pursue the object which it shares in common with the Guardianship.

As you point out with many quotations, Shoghi Effendi repeatedly stressed the inseparability of these two institutions. Whereas he obviously envisaged their functioning together, it cannot logically be deduced from this that one is unable to function in the absence of the other. During the whole thirty-six years of his Guardianship Shoghi Effendi functioned without the Universal House of Justice. Now the Universal House of Justice must function without the Guardian, but the principle of inseparability remains. The Guardianship does not lose its significance nor position in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh merely because there is no living Guardian. We must guard against two extremes: one is to argue that because there is no Guardian all that was written about the Guardianship and its position in the Bahá'í World Order is a dead letter and was unimportant; the other is to be so overwhelmed by the significance of the Guardianship as to underestimate the strength of the Covenant, or to be tempted to compromise with the clear texts in order to find somehow, in some way, a "Guardian".

Service to the Cause of God requires absolute fidelity and integrity and unwavering faith in Him. No good but only evil can come from taking the responsibility for the future of God's Cause into our own hands and trying to force it into ways that we wish it to go regardless of the clear texts and our own limitations. It is His Cause. He has promised that its light will not fail. Our part is to cling tenaciously to the revealed Word and to the Institutions that He has created to preserve His Covenant.

It is precisely in this connection that the believers must recognize the importance of intellectual honesty and humility. In past dispensations many errors arose because the believers in God's Revelation were over-anxious to encompass the Divine Message within the framework of their limited understanding, to define doctrines where definition was beyond their power, to explain mysteries which only the wisdom and experience of a later age would make comprehensible, to argue that something was true because it appeared desirable and necessary. Such compromises with essential truth, such intellectual pride, we must scrupulously avoid.

If some of the statements of the Universal House of Justice are not detailed the friends should realize that the cause of this is not secretiveness, but rather the determination of this body to refrain from interpreting the teachings and to preserve the truth of the Guardian's statement that "Leaders of religion, exponents of political theories, governors of human institutions ... need have no doubt or anxiety regarding the nature, the origin, or validity of the institutions which the adherents of the Faith are building up throughout the world. For these lie embedded in the teachings themselves, unadulterated and unobscured by unwarranted inferences, or unauthorized interpretations of His Word."

A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself from his study of its teachings. While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter, according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should by no means be suppressed. In fact

such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings. As Shoghi Effendi explained:<sup>5</sup> "To deepen in the Cause means to read the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form. There are many who have some superficial idea of what the Cause stands for. They, therefore, present it together with all sorts of ideas that are their own. As the Cause is still in its early days we must be most careful lest we fall under this error and injure the Movement we so much adore. There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the Writings the more truths we can find in them and the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous." So, although individual insights can be enlightening and helpful, they can also be misleading. The friends must therefore learn to listen to the views of others without being over-awed or allowing their faith to be shaken, and to express their own views without pressing them on their fellow Bahá'ís.

The Cause of God is organic, growing and developing like a living being. Time and again it has faced crises which have perplexed the believers, but each time the Cause, impelled by the immutable purpose of God, overcame the crisis and went on to greater heights.

However great may be our inability to understand the mystery and the implications of the passing of Shoghi Effendi, the strong cord to which all must cling with assurance is the Covenant. The emphatic and vigorous language of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament is at this time, as at the time of His own passing, the safeguard of the Cause:

"Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth malice and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant..." And again: "...All must seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error."

The Universal House of Justice, which the Guardian said would be regarded by posterity as "the last refuge of a tottering civilization" is now, in the absence of the Guardian, the sole infallibly guided institution in the world to which all must turn, and on it rests the responsibility for ensuring the unity and progress of the Cause of God in accordance with the revealed Word. There are statements from the Master and the Guardian indicating that the Universal House of Justice, in addition to being the Highest Legislative Body of the Faith, is also the body to which all must turn, and is the "apex" of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, as well as the "supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth". The Guardian has in his writings specified for the House of Justice such fundamental functions as the formulation of future world-wide teaching plans, the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, and the guidance, organisation and unification of the affairs of the Cause throughout the world. Furthermore in "God Passes By" the Guardian makes the following statement: "the Kitáb-i-Aqdas ... not only preserves for posterity the basic laws and ordinances on which the fabric of His future World Order

must rest, but ordains, in addition to the function of interpretation which it confers upon His Successor, the necessary institutions through which the integrity and unity of His Faith can alone be safeguarded.” He has also, in “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh”, written that the members of the Universal House of Justice “and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation.”

As the Universal House of Justice has already announced, it cannot legislate to make possible the appointment of a successor to Shoghi Effendi, nor can it legislate to make possible the appointment of any more Hands of the Cause, but it must do everything within its power to ensure the performance of all those functions which it shares with these two mighty Institutions. It must make provision for the proper discharge in future of the functions of protection and propagation, which the administrative bodies share with the Guardianship and the Hands of the Cause; it must, in the absence of the Guardian, receive and disburse the Ḥuqúqu’lláh, in accordance with the following statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “Disposition of the Ḥuqúq, wholly or partly, is permissible, but this should be done by permission of the authority in the Cause to whom all must turn.”; it must make provision in its Constitution for the removal of any of its members who commits a sin “injurious to the common weal”. Above all, it must, with perfect faith in Bahá’u’lláh, proclaim His Cause and enforce His Law so that the Most Great Peace shall be firmly established in this world and the foundation of the Kingdom of God on earth shall be accomplished.

*(27 May 1966 to an individual, published in “Wellspring of Guidance: Messages, 1963-1968”, pp. 81-91)*

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3 “Wellspring of Guidance” “Letters”, p. 148

4 “Wellspring of Guidance” “Letters”, p. 148

5 Written by the Guardian’s secretary to an individual believer, on 25 August 1926.

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- 48 Your recent letter, in which you share with us the questions that have occurred to some of the youth in studying “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh”, has been carefully considered, and we feel that we should comment both on the particular passage you mention and on a related passage in the same work, because both bear on the relationship between the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice.

The first passage concerns the Guardian’s duty to insist upon a reconsideration by his fellow-members in the Universal House of Justice of any enactment which he believes conflicts with the meaning and departs from the spirit of the Sacred Writings. The second passage concerns the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice without the Guardian, namely Shoghi Effendi’s statement that “Without such an institution [the Guardianship] ... the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn.”

Some of the youth, you indicate, were puzzled as to how to reconcile the former of these two passages with such statements as that in the Will of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá which affirms that the Universal House of Justice is “freed from all error”.

Just as the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not in any way contradict the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas” but, in the Guardian’s words, “confirms, supplements, and correlates the provisions of the “Aqdas”, so the writings of the Guardian contradict neither the revealed

Word nor the interpretations of the Master. In attempting to understand the Writings, therefore, one must first realize that there is and can be no real contradiction in them, and in the light of this we can confidently seek the unity of meaning which they contain.

The Guardian and the Universal House of Justice have certain duties and functions in common; each also operates within a separate and distinct sphere. As Shoghi Effendi explained, "...it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed." He goes on to affirm, "Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested." It is impossible to conceive that two centres of authority, which the Master has stated "are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One", could conflict with one another, because both are vehicles of the same Divine Guidance.

The Universal House of Justice, beyond its function as the enactor of legislation, has been invested with the more general functions of protecting and administering the Cause, solving obscure questions and deciding upon matters that have caused difference. Nowhere is it stated that the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice is by virtue of the Guardian's membership or presence on that body. Indeed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Shoghi Effendi in his "Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" have both explicitly stated that the elected members of the Universal House of Justice in consultation are recipients of unfailing Divine Guidance. Furthermore the Guardian himself in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh" asserted that "It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to the Universal House of Justice by Bahá'u'lláh in the 'Kitáb-i-Aqdas', and repeatedly and solemnly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will. It does not constitute in any manner a contradiction to the Will and Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, nor does it nullify any of His revealed instructions."

While the specific responsibility of the Guardian is the interpretation of the Word, he is also invested with all the powers and prerogatives necessary to discharge his function as Guardian of the Cause, its Head and supreme protector. He is, furthermore, made the irremovable head and member for life of the supreme legislative body of the Faith. It is as the head of the Universal House of Justice, and as a member of that body, that the Guardian takes part in the process of legislation. If the following passage, which gave rise to your query, is considered as referring to this last relationship, you will see that there is no contradiction between it and the other texts: "Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning and to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed utterances."

Although the Guardian, in relation to his fellow-members within the Universal House

of Justice, cannot override the decision of the majority, it is inconceivable that the other members would ignore any objection he raised in the course of consultation or pass legislation contrary to what he expressed as being in harmony with the spirit of the Cause. It is, after all, the final act of judgement delivered by the Universal House of Justice that is vouchsafed infallibility, not any views expressed in the course of the process of enactment.

It can be seen, therefore, that there is no conflict between the Master's statements concerning the unfailing divine guidance conferred upon the Universal House of Justice and the above passage from "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh".

It may help the friends to understand this relationship if they are aware of some of the processes that the Universal House of Justice follows when legislating. First, of course, it observes the greatest care in studying the Sacred Texts and the interpretations of the Guardian as well as considering the views of all the members. After long consultation the process of drafting a pronouncement is put into effect. During this process the whole matter may well be reconsidered. As a result of such reconsideration the final judgement may be significantly different from the conclusion earlier favoured, or possibly it may be decided not to legislate at all on that subject at that time. One can understand how great would be the attention paid to the views of the Guardian during the above process were he alive.

In considering the second passage we must once more hold fast to the principle that the teachings do not contradict themselves.

Future Guardians are clearly envisaged and referred to in the Writings, but there is nowhere any promise or guarantee that the line of Guardians would endure for ever; on the contrary there are clear indications that the line could be broken. Yet, in spite of this, there is a repeated insistence in the Writings on the indestructibility of the Covenant and the immutability of God's Purpose for this Day.

One of the most striking passages which envisage the possibility of such a break in the line of Guardians is in the "Kitáb-i-Aqdas" itself:

The endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the Revealer of Signs. No one has the right to lay hold on them without leave from the Dawning-Place of Revelation. After Him the decision rests with the Aghṣán [Branches], and after them with the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then—so that they may use these endowments for the benefit of the Sites exalted in this Cause, and for that which they have been commanded by God, the Almighty, the All-Powerful. Otherwise the endowments should be referred to the people of Bahá, who speak not without His leave and who pass no judgement but in accordance with that which God has ordained in this Tablet, they who are the champions of victory betwixt heaven and earth, so that they may spend them on that which has been decreed in the Holy Book by God, the Mighty, the Bountiful.

The passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957 precipitated the very situation provided for in this passage, in that the line of Aghṣán ended before the House of Justice had been elected. Although, as is seen, the ending of the line of Aghṣán at some stage was provided for, we must never underestimate the grievous loss that the Faith has suffered. God's purpose for mankind remains unchanged, however, and the mighty Covenant of



Bahá'u'lláh remains impregnable. Has not Bahá'u'lláh stated categorically, “The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation.” While ‘Abdu’l-Bahá confirms: “Verily, God effecteth that which He pleaseth; naught can annul His Covenant; naught can obstruct His favour nor oppose His Cause!” “Everything is subject to corruption; but the Covenant of thy Lord shall continue to pervade all regions.” “The tests of every dispensation are in direct proportion to the greatness of the Cause, and as heretofore such a manifest Covenant, written by the Supreme Pen, hath not been entered upon, the tests are proportionately severe.... These agitations of the violators are no more than the foam of the ocean, ... This foam of the ocean shall not endure and shall soon disperse and vanish, while the ocean of the Covenant shall eternally surge and roar.” And Shoghi Effendi has clearly stated: “The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God’s immutable Purpose for mankind in this day.” “...this priceless gem of Divine Revelation, now still in its embryonic state, shall evolve within the shell of His law, and shall forge ahead, undivided and unimpaired, till it embraces the whole of mankind.”

In the Bahá'í Faith there are two authoritative centres appointed to which the believers must turn, for in reality the Interpreter of the Word is an extension of that centre which is the Word itself. The Book is the record of the utterance of Bahá'u'lláh, while the divinely inspired Interpreter is the living Mouth of that Book—it is he and he alone who can authoritatively state what the Book means. Thus one centre is the Book with its Interpreter, and the other is the Universal House of Justice guided by God to decide on whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Book. This pattern of centres and their relationships is apparent at every stage in the unfoldment of the Cause. In the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas” Bahá'u'lláh tells the believers to refer after His passing to the Book, and to “Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.” In the “Kitáb-i-‘Ahdí” (the Book of Bahá'u'lláh’s Covenant), He makes it clear that this reference is to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In the “Aqdas” Bahá'u'lláh also ordains the institution of the Universal House of Justice, and confers upon it the powers necessary for it to discharge its ordained functions. The Master in His Will and Testament explicitly institutes the Guardianship, which Shoghi Effendi states was clearly anticipated in the verses of the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, reaffirms and elucidates the authority of the Universal House of Justice, and refers the believers once again to the Book: “Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice.”, and at the very end of the Will He says: “All must seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.”

As the sphere of jurisdiction of the Universal House of Justice in matters of legislation extends to whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Sacred Text, it is clear that the Book itself is the highest authority and delimits the sphere of action of the House of Justice. Likewise, the Interpreter of the Book must also have the authority to define the sphere of the legislative action of the elected representatives of the Cause. The writings of the Guardian and the advice given by him over the thirty-six years of his Guardianship show the way in which he exercised this function in relation to the Universal House of Justice as well as to National and Local Spiritual Assemblies.

The fact that the Guardian has the authority to define the sphere of the legislative action of the Universal House of Justice does not carry with it the corollary that without

such guidance the Universal House of Justice might stray beyond the limits of its proper authority; such a deduction would conflict with all the other texts referring to its infallibility, and specifically with the Guardian's own clear assertion that the Universal House of Justice never can or will infringe on the sacred and prescribed domain of the Guardianship. It should be remembered, however, that although National and Local Spiritual Assemblies can receive divine guidance if they consult in the manner and spirit described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, they do not share in the explicit guarantees of infallibility conferred upon the Universal House of Justice. Any careful student of the Cause can see with what care the Guardian, after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, guided these elected representatives of the believers in the painstaking erection of the Administrative Order and in the formulation of Local and National Bahá'í Constitutions.

We hope that these elucidations will assist the friends in understanding these relationships more clearly, but we must all remember that we stand too close to the beginnings of the System ordained by Bahá'u'lláh to be able fully to understand its potentialities or the interrelationships of its component parts. As Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf to an individual believer on 25 March 1930, "The contents of the Will of the Master are far too much for the present generation to comprehend. It needs at least a century of actual working before the treasures of wisdom hidden in it can be revealed...."

*(7 December 1969 to an individual, published in "Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973" Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 37-44)*