

## **Guidance for Today and Tomorrow**

[Resting place of Shoghi Effendi]

# **Guidance for Today and Tomorrow**

**A selection  
from the writings of  
Shoghi Effendi  
the late Guardian of  
the Bahá'í Faith**

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## Preface

This work gives a selection from the writings of Shoghi Effendi, appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith in the Will of the last of its Three Central Figures, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He occupies a unique position in Bahá'í history.

Since assuming office in 1921 he has guided the world-wide Bahá'í Community through the early stages of establishing the Administrative Order which is destined in due course to form the pattern and nucleus of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The Universal House of Justice, ordained to support this World Order as a twin pillar to the Guardianship, has not yet come into being. Shoghi Effendi has had to guide and nurse alone the infant National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'í World which will, when more fully developed, elect and support the Universal House of Justice. Although the Guardianship is not a legislative institution, he has had to evolve the basic principles of Bahá'í Administration for use throughout the Bahá'í World.

Bahá'ís believe the writings of the Guardian to be inspired. They do not constitute Revelation, as do the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb they are not regarded as holy in the way that the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are holy. Nevertheless, it is an essential part of Bahá'í belief that the Guardian receives guidance from God through the Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh when he is interpreting Bahá'í Scripture. This book is therefore authoritative on the implications of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh for the various subjects it treats.

Every word of the passages contained in it is significant. There are no loose phrases, no vague evasions of crucial issues. The style is one which renders it possible to state basic truths in parentheses and to list in one sentence the chief events of a lifetime. Such writing needs, and is worthy of, study, for the implications of its phrases are almost as important as the explicit statements made.

The Guardian's writings are both eternal and particularly suited to the moment. Eternal, because they expound fundamental principles which for ever guide mankind; suited to the moment because the principles are expounded with reference to the present state of the world and of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. They are not passing essays to be read once and laid aside; they are life-lines of the future, a source of guidance to unborn generations.

Yet their author is but a man. He has not, and definitely denies having, any higher order of spirit than other men. The guidance he gives comes from the Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi is the Guardian, not the Revealer, of the Message sent by God to lead mankind to its high destiny. He is the channel of God's mercy fulfilling Bahá'u'lláh's promise "This is the day which shall not be followed by night." Future generations alone can appreciate the contribution he has made to saving mankind from the deadening slough of spiritual degradation into which it has sunk.

## **Principles of selection**

Extracts from letters of the Guardian enumerating the principles of Bahá'í administration are contained in an-

other compilation.<sup>1</sup> This selection consists of more general statements.

In order to present as comprehensive a collection as possible in a brief space, two leading principles have been applied. When the Guardian has given similar guidance about a subject on more than one occasion, the shorter of the two versions has been chosen. Consequently the book contains a rather high proportion of passages in which much guidance is concentrated in few words.

Further, an attempt has been made to avoid passages containing more quotation from Bahá'í Scripture than original writing. As the interpreter of Bahá'í Holy Writings, Shoghi Effendi often quotes a number of scriptural passages to illustrate and confirm his interpretation. Some of the extracts in this book omit a few of these or close before the original quotations are completed.

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<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950.



# I

## Introduction

### The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh

The Faith established by Bahá'u'lláh was born in Persia about the middle of the nineteenth century and has, as a result of the successive banishments of its Founder, culminating in His exile to the Turkish<sup>1</sup> penal colony of 'Akká, and His subsequent death and burial in its vicinity, fixed its permanent spiritual centre in the Holy Land, and is now in the process of laying the foundations of its world administrative centre in the city of Haifa.

Alike in the claims unequivocally asserted by its Author and the general character of the growth of the Bahá'í community in every continent of the globe, it can be regarded in no other light than a world religion, destined to evolve in the course of time into a world-embracing commonwealth, whose advent must signalize the Golden Age of mankind, the age in which the unity of the human race will have been unassailably established, its maturity attained, and its glorious destiny unfolded through the birth and efflorescence of a world-encompassing civilization.

#### ***Restatement of eternal verities***

Though sprung from Shí'ih Islám, and regarded, in the early stages of its development, by the followers of

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<sup>1</sup> Ottoman Empire.

both the Muslim and Christian Faiths, as an obscure sect, an Asiatic cult or an offshoot of the Muslim religion, this Faith is now increasingly demonstrating its right to be recognized, not as one more religious system superimposed on the conflicting creeds which for so many generations have divided mankind and darkened its fortunes, but rather as a restatement of the eternal verities underlying all the religions of the past, as a unifying force instilling into the adherents of these religions a new spiritual vigour, infusing them with a new hope and love for mankind, firing them with a new vision of the fundamental unity of their religious doctrines, and unfolding to their eyes the glorious destiny that awaits the human race.

The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, the followers of His Faith firmly believe, is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.

### ***To reconcile conflicting creeds***

The aim of Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet of this new and great age which humanity has entered upon—He Whose advent fulfils the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments as well as those of the Qur'an regarding the com-

ing of the Promised One in the end of time, on the Day of Judgment—is not to destroy but to fulfil the Revelations of the past, to reconcile rather than accentuate the divergencies of the conflicting creeds which disrupt present-day society.

His purpose, far from belittling the station of the Prophets gone before Him or of whittling down their teachings, is to restate the basic truths which these teachings enshrine in a manner that would conform to the needs, and be in consonance with the capacity, and be applicable to the problems, the ills, and perplexities, of the age in which we live. His mission is to proclaim that the ages of the infancy and of the childhood of the human race are past, that the convulsions associated with the present stage of its adolescence are slowly and painfully preparing it to attain the stage of manhood, and are heralding the approach of that Age of Ages when swords will be beaten into plowshares, when the Kingdom promised by Jesus Christ will have been established, and the peace of the planet definitely and permanently ensured. Nor does Bahá'u'lláh claim finality for His own Revelation, but rather stipulates that a fuller measure of the truth He has been commissioned by the Almighty to vouchsafe to humanity, at so critical a juncture in its fortunes, must needs be disclosed at future stages in the constant and limitless evolution of mankind.

### ***Oneness of the human race***

The Bahá'í Faith upholds the unity of God, recognizes the unity of His Prophets, and inculcates the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the entire human race. It proclaims the necessity and the inevitability of the uni-

fication of mankind, asserts that it is gradually approaching, and claims that nothing short of the transmuting spirit of God, working through His chosen Mouthpiece in this day, can ultimately succeed in bringing it about. It, moreover, enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all manner of prejudice and superstition, declares the purpose of religion to be the promotion of amity and concord, proclaims its essential harmony with science, and recognizes it as the foremost agency for the pacification and the orderly progress of human society. It unequivocally maintains the principle of equal rights, opportunities, and privileges for men and women, insists on compulsory education, eliminates extremes of poverty and wealth, abolishes the institution of priesthood, prohibits slavery, asceticism, mendicancy, and monasticism, prescribes monogamy, discourages divorce, emphasizes the necessity of strict obedience to one's government, exalts any work performed in the spirit of service to the level of worship, urges either the creation or the selection of an auxiliary international language, and delineates the outlines of those institutions that must establish and perpetuate the general peace of mankind.

### ***The Herald***

The Bahá'í Faith revolves around three central Figures, the first of whom was a youth, a native of Shíráz, named Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad, known as the Báb (Gate), who in May 1844, at the age of twenty-five, advanced the claim of being the Herald Who, according to the sacred Scriptures of previous Dispensations, must needs announce and prepare the way for the advent of



One greater than Himself, Whose mission would be, according to those same Scriptures, to inaugurate an era of righteousness and peace, an era that would be hailed as the consummation of all previous Dispensations, and initiate a new cycle in the religious history of mankind. Swift and severe persecution, launched by the organized forces of Church and State in His native land, precipitated successively His arrest, His exile to the mountains of Ádhirbayján, His imprisonment in the fortresses of Máh-Kú and Chihríq, and His execution, in July 1850, by a firing squad in the public square of Tabríz. No less than twenty thousand of his followers were put to death with such barbarous cruelty as to evoke the warm sympathy and the unqualified admiration of a number of Western writers, diplomats, travellers, and scholars, some of whom were witnesses of these abominable outrages, and were moved to record them in their books and diaries.

### ***Bahá'u'lláh***

Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí, surnamed Bahá'u'lláh (the Glory of God), a native of Mázindarán, Whose advent the Báb had foretold, was assailed by those same forces of ignorance and fanaticism, was imprisoned in Ṭíhrán, was banished, in 1852, from His native land to Baghdád, and thence to Constantinople and Adrianople, and finally to the prison city of 'Akká, where He remained incarcerated for no less than twenty-four years, and in whose neighbourhood He passed away in 1892. In the course of His banishment, and particularly in Adrianople and 'Akká, He formulated the laws and ordinances of His Dispensation, expounded, in over a hundred

volumes, the principles of His Faith, proclaimed His Message to the kings and rulers of both the East and the West, both Christian and Muslim, addressed the Pope, the Caliph of Islám, the Chief Magistrates of the Republics of the American continent, the entire Christian sacerdotal order, the leaders of Shí'ih and Sunní Islám, and the high priests of the Zoroastrian religion. In these writings He proclaimed His Revelation, summoned those whom He addressed to heed His call and espouse His Faith, warned them of the consequences of their refusal, and denounced, in some cases, their arrogance and tyranny.

### ***'Abdu'l-Bahá***

His eldest son, 'Abbas Effendi, known as 'Abdu'l-Bahá (the Servant of Bahá), appointed by Him as His lawful successor and the authorized interpreter of His teachings, Who since early childhood had been closely associated with His Father, and shared His exile and tribulations, remained a prisoner until 1908, when, as a result of the Young Turk Revolution, He was released from His confinement. Establishing His residence in Haifa, He embarked soon after on His three-year journey to Egypt, Europe, and North America, in the course of which He expounded before vast audiences, the teachings of His Father and predicted the approach of that catastrophe that was soon to befall mankind. He returned to His home on the eve of the First World War, in the course of which He was exposed to constant danger, until the liberation of Palestine by the forces under the command of General Allenby, who extended the utmost consideration to Him and to the small band of His fellow-

exiles in 'Akká and Haifa. In 1921 He passed away, and was buried in a vault in the mausoleum erected on Mount Carmel, at the express instruction of Bahá'u'lláh, for the remains of the Báb, which had previously been transferred from Tabríz to the Holy Land after having been preserved and concealed for no less than sixty years.

### ***Administrative Order***

The passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá marked the termination of the first and Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Faith and signaled the opening of the Formative Age destined to witness the gradual emergence of its Administrative Order, whose establishment had been foretold by the Báb, whose laws were revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, whose outlines were delineated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament, and whose foundations are now being laid by the national and local councils which are elected by the professed adherents of the Faith, and which are paving the way for the constitution of the World Council, to be designated as the Universal House of Justice, which, in conjunction with me, as its appointed Head and the authorized interpreter of the Bahá'í teachings, must co-ordinate and direct the affairs of the Bahá'í community, and whose seat will be permanently established in the Holy Land, in close proximity to its world spiritual centre, the resting-places of its Founders.

The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, which is destined to evolve into the Bahá'í World Commonwealth, and has already survived the assaults launched against its institutions by such formidable foes as the kings of the Qájár dynasty, the Caliphs of Islám,

the ecclesiastical leaders of Egypt, and the Nazi regime in Germany, has already extended its ramifications to every continent of the globe, stretching from Iceland to the extremity of Chile, has been established in no less than eighty-eighty<sup>1</sup> countries of the world, has gathered within its pale representatives of no less than thirty-one races, numbers among its supporters Christians of various denominations, Muslims of both Sunn  and Sh 'ih sects, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, and Buddhists. It has published and disseminated, through its appointed agencies, Bah '  literature in forty-eight languages; has already consolidated its structure through the incorporation of five National Assemblies and seventy-seven local Assemblies, in lands as far apart as South America, India, and the Antipodes—incorporations that legally empower its elected representatives to hold property as trustees of the Bah '  community. It disposes of international, national, and local endowments, estimated at several million pounds, and spread over every continent of the globe, enjoys in several countries the privilege of official recognition by the civil authorities, enabling it to secure exemption from taxation for its endowments and to solemnize Bah '  marriage, and numbers among its stately edifices two temples, the one erected in Russian Turkistan and the other on the shore of Lake Michigan at Wilmette, on the outskirts of Chicago.

This Administrative Order, unlike the systems evolved after the death of the Founders of the various religions, is divine in origin, rests securely on the laws, the precepts, the ordinances and institutions which the Founder of the Faith has Himself specifically laid down

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<sup>1</sup> Written in 1947.

and unequivocally established, and functions in strict accordance with the interpretations of the authorized Interpreters of its holy scriptures. Though fiercely assailed, ever since its inception, it has, by virtue of its character, unique in the annals of the world's religious history, succeeded in maintaining the unity of the diversified and far-flung body of its supporters, and enabled them to launch, unitedly and systematically, enterprises in both Hemispheres, designed to extend its limits and consolidate its administrative institutions.

The Faith which this order serves, safeguards, and promotes is, it should be noted in this connection, essentially supernatural, supranational, entirely non-political, non-partisan, and diametrically opposed to any policy or school of thought that seeks to exalt any particular race, class or nation. It is free from any form of ecclesiasticism, has neither priesthood nor rituals, and is supported exclusively by voluntary contributions made by its avowed adherents. Though loyal to their respective governments, though imbued with the love of their own country, and anxious to promote, at all times, its best interests, the followers of the Bahá'í Faith, nevertheless, viewing mankind as one entity, and profoundly attached to its vital interests, will not hesitate to subordinate every particular interest, be it personal, regional or national, to the over-riding interests of the generality of mankind, knowing full well that in a world of interdependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no lasting results can be achieved by any of the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are neglected.

Nor should the fact be overlooked that the Faith has already asserted and demonstrated its independent religious character, has been emancipated from the fetters of orthodoxy in certain Islamic countries, has obtained in one of them an unsolicited testimony to its independent religious status, and succeeded in winning the allegiance of royalty to its cause.

## 2

# Bahá'u'lláh

## **This stupendous Revelation**

To strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation must, it is my unalterable conviction, remain the first obligation and the object of the constant endeavour of each one of its loyal adherents. An exact and thorough comprehension of so vast a system, so sublime a revelation, so sacred a trust, is for obvious reasons beyond the reach and ken of our finite minds. We can, however, and it is our bounden duty to seek to, derive fresh inspiration and added sustenance as we labour for the propagation of His Faith through a clearer apprehension of the truths it enshrines and the principles on which it is based.

## **The station of Bahá'u'lláh**

He Who in such dramatic circumstances was made to sustain the overpowering weight of so glorious a Mission was none other than the One Whom posterity will acclaim, and Whom innumerable followers already recognize, as the Judge, the Lawgiver and Redeemer of all mankind, as the Organizer of the entire planet, as the Unifier of the children of men, as the Inaugurator of the long-awaited millennium, as the Originator of a new

“Universal Cycle”, as the Establisher of the Most Great Peace, as the Fountain of the Most Great Justice, as the Proclaimer of the coming of age of the entire human race, as the Creator of a new World Order, and as the Inspirer and Founder of a world civilization.

To Israel He was neither more nor less than the incarnation of the “Everlasting Father”, the “Lord of Hosts” come down “with ten thousands of saints”; to Christendom Christ returned “in the glory of the Father”, to Shí’ih Islám the return of the Imám Ḥusayn; to Sunní Islám the descent of the “Spirit of God” (Jesus Christ); to the Zoroastrians the promised Sháh-Bahrám; to the Hindus the reincarnation of Krishna; to the Buddhists the fifth Buddha.

In the name He bore He combined those of the Imám Ḥusayn, the most illustrious of the successors of the Apostle of God—the brightest “star” shining in the “crown” mentioned in the Revelation of St John—and of the Imám ‘Alí, the Commander of the Faithful, the second of the two “witnesses” extolled in that same Book. He was formally designated Bahá’u’lláh, an appellation specifically recorded in the Persian Bayán, signifying at once the glory, the light and the splendour of God, and was styled the “Lord of Lords”, the “Most Great Name”, the “Ancient Beauty”, the “Pen of the Most High”, the “Hidden Name”, the “Preserved Treasure”, “He Whom God will make manifest”, the “Most Great Light”, the “All-Highest Horizon”, the “Most Great Ocean”, the “Supreme Heaven”, the “Pre-Existent Root”, the “Self-Subsistent”, the “Day-Star of the Universe”, the “Great Announcement”, the “Speaker on Sinai”, the “Sifter of Men”, the “Wronged



One of the World”, the “Desire of the Nations”, the “Lord of the Covenant”, the “Tree beyond which there is no passing”. He derived His descent, on the one hand, from Abraham (the Father of the Faithful) through his wife Katurah, and on the other from Zoroaster, as well as from Yazdigird, the last king of the Sásáníyán dynasty. He was moreover a descendant of Jesse, and belonged, through His father, Mírzá ‘Abbás, better known as Mírzá Buzurg—a nobleman closely associated with the ministerial circles of the Court of Fath-‘Alí Sháh—to one of the most ancient and renowned families of Mázindarán.

To Him Isaiah, the greatest of the Jewish prophets, had alluded as the *“Glory of the Lord”*, the *“Everlasting Father”*, the *“Prince of Peace”*, the *“Wonderful”*, the *“Counsellor”*, the *“Rod come forth out of the stern of Jesse”* and the *“Branch grown out of His roots”*, Who *“shall be established upon the throne of David”*, Who *“will come with strong hand”*, Who *“shall judge among the nations”*, Who *“shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips slay the wicked”*, and Who *“shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth”*. Of Him David had sung in his Psalms, acclaiming Him as the *“Lord of Hosts”* and the *“King of Glory”*.

To Him Haggai had referred as the *“Desire of all nations”*, and Zachariah as the *“Branch”* Who *“shall grow up out of His place”*, and *“shall build the Temple of the Lord”*. Ezekiel had extolled Him as the *“Lord”* Who *“shall be king over all the earth”*, while to His day Joel and Zephaniah had both referred as the *“day of Jehovah”*, the latter describing it as *“a day of wrath, a day*

*of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers".* His Day Ezekiel and Daniel had, moreover, both acclaimed as the "*day of the Lord*", and Malachi described as "*the great and dreadful day of the Lord*" when "*the Sun of Righteousness*" will "*arise, with healing in His wings*", whilst Daniel had pronounced His advent as signaling the end of the "*abomination that maketh desolate*".

To His Dispensation the sacred books of the followers of Zoroaster had referred as that in which the sun must needs be brought to a standstill for no less than one whole month. To Him Zoroaster must have alluded when, according to tradition, He foretold that a period of three thousand years of conflict and contention must needs precede the advent of the World-Saviour Sháh-Bahrám, Who would triumph over Ahriman and usher in an era of blessedness and peace.

He alone is meant by the prophecy attributed to Gautama Buddha Himself, that "*a Buddha named Maitreye, the Buddha of universal fellowship*" should, in the fullness of time, arise and reveal "*His boundless glory*". To Him the Bhagavad-Gita of the Hindus had referred as the "*Most Great Spirit*", the "*Tenth Avatar*", the "*Immaculate Manifestation of Krishna*".

To Him Jesus Christ had referred as the "*Prince of this world*", as the "*Comforter*" Who will "*reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*", as the "*Spirit of Truth*" Who "*will guide you into all truth*", Who "*shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak*", as the "*Lord of the Vineyard*"

and as the *"Son of Man"* Who *"shall come in the glory of His Father"* *"in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"*, with *"all the holy angels"* about Him, and *"all nations"* gathered before His throne. To Him the Author of the Apocalypse had alluded as the *"Glory of God"*, as *"Alpha and Omega"*, *"the Beginning and the End"*, *"the First and the Last"*. Identifying His Revelation with the *"third woe"*, he, moreover, had extolled His Law as *"a new heaven and a new earth"*, as the *"Tabernacle of God"*, as the *"Holy City"*, as the *"New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"*. To His Day Jesus Christ Himself had referred as *"the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory"*. To the hour of His advent St Paul had alluded as the hour of the *"last trump"*, the *"trump of God"*, whilst St Peter had spoken of it as the *"Day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat"*. His Day he, furthermore, had described as *"the times of refreshing"*, *"the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy Prophets since the world began"*.

To Him Muḥammad, the Apostle of God, had alluded in His Book as the *"Great Announcement"*, and declared His Day to be the Day whereon *"God"* will *"come down"* *"overshadowed with clouds"*, the Day whereon *"thy Lord shall come and the angels rank on rank"*, and *"The Spirit shall arise and the angels shall be ranged in order."* His advent He, in that Book, in a Súrih said to have been termed by Him *"the heart of the Qur'án"*, had foreshadowed as that of the *"third"* Mes-

senger, sent down to *“strengthen”* the two who preceded Him. To His Day He, in the pages of that same Book, had paid a glowing tribute, glorifying it as the *“Great Day”*, the *“Last Day”*, the *“Day of God”*, the *“Day of Judgment”*, the *“Day of Reckoning”*, the *“Day of Mutual Deceit”*, the *“Day of Severing”*, the *“Day of Sighing”*, the *“Day of Meeting”*, the Day *“when the Decree shall be accomplished”*, the Day whereon the second *“Trumpet blast”* will be sounded, the *“Day when mankind shall stand before the Lord of the world”*, and *“all shall come to Him in humble guise”*, the Day when *“thou shalt see the mountains, which thou thinkest so firm, pass away with the passing of a cloud”*, the Day *“wherein account shall be taken”*, *“the approaching Day, when men’s hearts shall rise up, choking them, into their throats”*, the Day when *“all that are in the heavens and all that are on the earth shall be terror-stricken, save him whom God pleaseth to deliver”*, the Day whereon *“every suckling woman shall forsake her sucking babe, and every woman that hath a burden in her womb shall cast her burden”*, the Day *“when the earth shall shine with the light of her Lord, and the Book shall be set, and the Prophets shall be brought up, and the witnesses; and judgment shall be given between them with equity; and none shall be wronged”*.

The plenitude of His glory the Apostle of God had, moreover, as attested by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, compared to the *“full moon on its fourteenth night”*. His station the Imám ‘Alí, the Commander of the Faithful, had, according to the same testimony, identified with *“Him Who conversed with Moses from the Burning Bush on Sinai”*. To the transcendent character of His mission the Imám Ḥusayn had, again according to Bahá'u'lláh, borne wit-

ness as a *“Revelation whose Revealer will be He Who revealed”* the Apostle of God Himself.

About Him Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Aḥsá'í, the herald of the Bábí Dispensation, who had foreshadowed the “strange happenings” that would transpire “between the years sixty and sixty-seven”, and had categorically affirmed the inevitability of His Revelation had, as previously mentioned, written the following “The Mystery of this Cause must needs be made manifest, and the Secret of this Message must needs be divulged. I can say no more, I can appoint no time. His Cause will be made known after Hín (68)” (i.e. after a while).

Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashtí, Shaykh Aḥmad's disciple and successor, had likewise written: “The Qá'im must needs be put to death. After He has been slain the world will have attained the age of eighteen.” In his Sharḥ-i-Qaṣídiy-i-Lámiyyih he had even alluded to the name “Bahá”. Furthermore, to his disciples, as his days drew to a close, he had significantly declared “Verily, I say, after the Qá'im the Qayyúm will be made manifest. For when the star of the former has set the sun of the beauty of Ḥusayn will rise and illuminate the whole world. Then will be unfolded in all its glory the ‘Mystery’ and the ‘Secret’ spoken of by Shaykh Aḥmad. .... To have attained unto that Day of Days is to have attained unto the crowning glory of past generations, and one goodly deed performed in that age is equal to the pious worship of countless centuries.”

The Báb had no less significantly extolled Him as the *“Essence of Being”*, as the *“Remnant of God”*, as the *“Omnipotent Master”*, as the *“Crimson, all-encompassing Light”*, as *“Lord of the visible and invisible”*, as the *“sole*

*Object of all previous Revelations, including the Revelation of the Qá'im Himself". He had formally designated Him as "He Whom God shall make manifest", had alluded to Him as the "Abhá Horizon" wherein He Himself lived and dwelt, had specifically recorded His title, and eulogized His "Order" in His best-known work, the Persian Bayán, had disclosed His name through His allusion to the "Son of 'Alí, a true and undoubted Leader of men", had, repeatedly, orally and in writing, fixed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the time of His Revelation, and warned His followers lest "the Bayán and all that hath been revealed therein" should "shut them out as by a veil" from Him. He had, moreover, declared that He was the "first servant to believe in Him", that He bore Him allegiance "before all things were created", that "no allusion" of His "could allude unto Him", that "the year-old germ that holdeth within itself the potentialities of the Revelation that is to come is endowed with a potency superior to the combined forces of the whole of the Bayán". He had, moreover, clearly asserted that He had "covenanted with all created things" concerning Him Whom God shall make manifest ere the covenant concerning His own mission had been established. He had readily acknowledged that He was but "a letter" of that "Most Mighty Book", "a dew-drop" from that "Limitless Ocean", that His Revelation was "only a leaf amongst the leaves of His Paradise", that "all that hath been exalted in the Bayán" was but "a ring" upon His own hand, and He Himself "a ring upon the hand of Him Whom God shall make manifest", Who, "turneth it as He pleaseth, for whatsoever He pleaseth, and through whatsoever He pleaseth". He had unmistakably declared that He had*

*“sacrificed” Himself “wholly” for Him, that He had “consented to be cursed” for His sake, and to have “yearned for naught but martyrdom” in the path of His love. Finally, He had unequivocally prophesied: “Today the Bayán is in the stage of seed; at the beginning of the manifestation of Him Whom God shall make manifest its ultimate perfection will become apparent.” “Ere nine will have elapsed from the inception of this Cause the realities of the created things will not be made manifest. All that thou hast as yet seen is but the stage from the moist germ until We clothed it with flesh. Be patient until thou beholdest a new creation. Say: Blessed, therefore, be God, the Most Excellent of Makers!”*

*“He around Whom the Point of the Bayán (Báb) hath revolved is come” is Bahá'u'lláh's confirmatory testimony to the inconceivable greatness and pre-eminent character of His own Revelation. “If all who are in heaven and on earth,” He moreover affirms, “be invested in this day with the powers and attributes destined for the Letters of the Bayán, whose station is ten thousand times more glorious than that of the Letters of the Qur'anic Dispensation, and if they one and all should, swift as the twinkling of an eye, hesitate to recognize My Revelation, they shall be accounted, in the sight of God, of those that have gone astray, and regarded as ‘Letters of Negation’.” “Powerful is He, the King of Divine might,” He, alluding to Himself in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, asserts, “to extinguish with one letter of His wondrous words, the breath of life in the whole of the Bayán and the people thereof, and with one letter bestow upon them a new and everlasting life, and cause them to arise and speed out of the sepulchres of their vain and selfish desires.” “This,” He furthermore de-*

clares, *"is the king of days"*, the *"Day of God Himself"*, the *"Day which shall never be followed by night"*, the *"Spring-time which autumn will never overtake"*, *"the eye to past ages and centuries"*, for which *"the soul of every Prophet of God, of every Divine Messenger, hath thirsted"*, for which *"all the divers kindreds of the earth have yearned"*, through which *"God hath proved the hearts of the entire company of His Messengers and Prophets, and beyond them those that stand guard over His sacred and inviolable Sanctuary, the inmates of the Celestial Pavilion and dwellers of the Tabernacle of Glory"*. *"In this most mighty Revelation,"* He moreover states, *"all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation."* And again: *"None among the Manifestations of old, except to a prescribed degree, hath ever completely apprehended the nature of this Revelation"*. Referring to His own station He declares: *"But for Him no Divine Messenger would have been invested with the Robe of Prophethood, nor would any of the sacred Scriptures have been revealed"*

And last but not least is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own tribute to the transcendent character of the Revelation identified with His Father: *"Centuries, nay ages, must pass away, ere the Day-Star of Truth shineth again in its midsummer splendour, or appeareth once more in the radiance of its vernal glory."* *"The mere contemplation of the Dispensation inaugurated by the Blessed Beauty,"* He furthermore affirms, *"would have sufficed to overwhelm the saints of bygone ages—saints who longed to partake for one moment of its great glory."* *"Concerning the Manifestations that will come down in the future 'in the shadows of the clouds', know verily,"* is His significant statement, *"that in so far*



*as their relation to the source of their inspiration is concerned they are under the shadow of the Ancient Beauty. In their relation, however, to the age in which they appear, each and every one of them 'doeth whatsoever He willeth.'*" And finally stands this, His illuminating explanation, setting forth conclusively the true relationship between the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and that of the Báb *"The Revelation of the Báb may be likened to the sun, its station corresponding to the first sign of the Zodiac the sign Aries—which the sun enters at the vernal equinox. The station of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, on the other hand, is represented by the sign Leo, the sun's midsummer and highest station. By this is meant that this holy Dispensation is illumined with the light of the Sun of Truth shining from its most exalted station, and in the plenitude of its resplendency, its heat and glory."*

To attempt an exhaustive survey of the prophetic references to Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation would indeed be an impossible task. To this the pen of Bahá'u'lláh Himself bears witness: *"All the Divine Books and Scriptures have predicted and announced unto men the advent of the Most Great Revelation. None can adequately recount the verses recorded in the Books of former ages which forecast this supreme Bounty, this most mighty Bestowal."*

In conclusion of this theme, I feel, it should be stated that the Revelation identified with Bahá'u'lláh abrogates unconditionally all the Dispensations gone before it, upholds uncompromisingly the eternal verities they enshrine, recognizes firmly and absolutely the Divine origin of their Authors, preserves inviolate the sanctity of their authentic Scriptures, disclaims any intention of lowering the status of their Founders or of abating the

spiritual ideals they inculcate, clarifies and correlates their functions, reaffirms their common, their unchangeable and fundamental purpose, reconciles their seemingly divergent claims and doctrines, readily and gratefully recognizes their respective contributions to the gradual unfoldment of one Divine Revelation, unhesitatingly acknowledges itself to be but one link in the chain of continually progressive Revelations, supplements their teachings with such laws and ordinances as conform to the imperative needs, and are dictated by the growing receptivity, of a fast evolving and constantly changing society, and proclaims its readiness and ability to fuse and incorporate the contending sects and factions into which they have fallen into a universal Fellowship, functioning within the framework, and in accordance with the precepts, of a divinely conceived, a world-unifying, a world-redeeming Order.

### **The significance of His Revelation**

The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh should indeed be regarded, if we wish to be faithful to the tremendous implications of its message, as the culmination of a cycle, the final stage in a series of successive, of preliminary, and progressive revelations. These, beginning with Adam and ending with the Báb, have paved the way and anticipated with an ever-increasing emphasis the advent of that Day of Days in which He Who is the Promise of All Ages should be made manifest.

To this truth the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh abundantly

testify. A mere reference to the claims which, in vehement language and with compelling power, He Himself has repeatedly advanced cannot but fully demonstrate the character of the Revelation of which He was the chosen bearer. To the words that have streamed from His pen—the fountain-head of so impetuous a Revelation—we should, therefore, direct our attention if we wish to obtain a clearer understanding of its importance and meaning. Whether in His assertion of the unprecedented claim He has advanced, or in His allusions to the mysterious forces He has released, whether in such passages as extol the glories of His long-awaited Day, or magnify the station which they who have recognized its hidden virtues will attain, Bahá'u'lláh and, to an almost equal extent, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, have bequeathed to posterity mines of such inestimable wealth as none of us who belong to this generation can befittingly estimate. Such testimonies bearing on this theme are impregnated with such power and reveal such beauty as only those who are versed in the languages in which they were originally revealed can claim to have sufficiently appreciated. So numerous are these testimonies that a whole volume would be required to be written in order to compile the most outstanding among them.

### 3 The Báb

#### **His twofold station**

That the Báb, the inaugurator of the Bábí Dispensation, is fully entitled to rank as one of the self-sufficient Manifestations of God, that He has been invested with sovereign power and authority, and exercises all the rights and prerogatives of independent Prophethood, is yet another fundamental verity which the Message of Bahá'u'lláh insistently proclaims and which its followers must uncompromisingly uphold. That He is not to be regarded merely as an inspired Precursor of the Bahá'í Revelation, that in His person, as He Himself bears witness in the Persian Bayán, the object of all the Prophets gone before Him has been fulfilled, is a truth which I feel it my duty to demonstrate and emphasize. We would assuredly be failing in our duty to the Faith we profess and would be violating one of its basic and sacred principles if in our words or by our conduct we hesitate to recognize the implications of this root principle of Bahá'í belief, or refuse to uphold unreservedly its integrity and demonstrate its truth. Indeed the chief motive actuating me to undertake the task of editing and translating Nabíl's immortal Narrative has been to enable every follower of the Faith in the West to better understand and more readily grasp the tremendous im-

plications of His exalted station and to more ardently admire and love Him.

There can be no doubt that the claim to the twofold station ordained for the Báb by the Almighty, a claim which He Himself has so boldly advanced, which Bahá'u'lláh has repeatedly affirmed, and to which the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá has finally given the sanction of its testimony, constitutes the most distinctive feature of the Bahá'í Dispensation. It is a further evidence of its uniqueness, a tremendous accession to the strength, to the mysterious power and authority with which this holy cycle has been invested. Indeed the greatness of the Báb consists primarily, not in His being the divinely appointed Forerunner of so transcendent a Revelation, but rather in His having been invested with the powers inherent in the inaugurator of a separate religious Dispensation, and in His wielding, to a degree unrivalled by the Messengers gone before Him, the sceptre of independent Prophethood.

The short duration of His Dispensation, the restricted range within which His laws and ordinances have been made to operate, supply no criterion whatever wherewith to judge its Divine origin and to evaluate the potency of its message. *"That so brief a span,"* Bahá'u'lláh Himself explains, *"should have separated this most mighty and wondrous Revelation from Mine own previous Manifestation, is a secret that no man can unravel and a mystery such as no mind can fathom. Its duration had been foreordained, and no man shall ever discover its reason unless and until he be informed of the contents of My Hidden Book."* *"Behold,"* Bahá'u'lláh further explains in the Kitáb-i-Badí', one of His works refuting the arguments

of the people of the Bayán, *“behold, how immediately upon the completion of the ninth year of this wondrous, this most holy and merciful Dispensation, the requisite number of pure, of wholly consecrated and sanctified souls had been most secretly consummated.”*

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

### **Actors in the drama**

He Who communicated the original impulse to so incalculable a Movement was none other than the promised Qá’im (He who ariseth), the Şáhibu’z-Zamán (the Lord of the Age), Who assumed the exclusive right of annulling the whole Qur’anic Dispensation, Who styled Himself *“the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things ... the Countenance of God Whose splendour can never be obscured, the Light of God Whose radiance can never fade.”* The people among whom He appeared were the most decadent race in the civilized world, grossly ignorant, savage, cruel, steeped in prejudice, servile in their submission to an almost deified hierarchy, recalling in their abjectness the Israelites of Egypt in the days of Moses, in their fanaticism the

Jews in the days of Jesus, and in their perversity the idolators of Arabia in the days of Muḥammad. The arch-enemy who repudiated His claim, challenged His authority, persecuted His Cause, succeeded in almost quenching His light, and who eventually became disintegrated under the impact of His Revelation was the Shí'ih priesthood. Fiercely fanatic, unspeakably corrupt, enjoying unlimited ascendancy over the masses, jealous of their position, and irreconcilably opposed to all liberal ideas, the members of this caste had for one thousand years invoked the name of the Hidden Imám, their breasts had glowed with the expectation of His advent, their pulpits had rung with the praises of His world-embracing dominion, their lips were still devoutly and perpetually murmuring prayers for the hastening of His coming. The willing tools who prostituted their high office for the accomplishment of the enemy's designs were no less than the sovereigns of the Qájár dynasty, first, the bigoted, the sickly, the vacillating Muḥammad Sháh, who at the last moment cancelled the Báb's imminent visit to the capital, and, second, the youthful and inexperienced Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, who gave his ready assent to the sentence of his Captive's death. The arch villains who joined hands with the prime movers of so wicked a conspiracy were the two grand vizirs, Ḥájí Mírzá Áqásí, the idolized tutor of Muḥammad Sháh, a vulgar, false-hearted, and fickle-minded schemer, and the arbitrary, bloodthirsty, reckless Amír-Nizám, Mírzá Taqí Khán, the first of whom exiled the Báb to the mountain fastnesses of Ádhirbayján, and the latter decreed His death in Tabríz. Their accomplice in these and other heinous crimes was a government bol-

stered up by a flock of idle, parasitical princelings and governors, corrupt, incompetent, tenaciously holding to their ill-gotten privileges, and utterly subservient to a notoriously degraded clerical order. The heroes whose deeds shine upon the record of this fierce spiritual contest, involving at once people, clergy, monarch, and government, were the Báb's chosen disciples, the Letters of the Living, and their companions, the trail-breakers of the New Day, who to so much intrigue, ignorance, depravity, cruelty, superstition, and cowardice opposed a spirit exalted, unquenchable, and awe-inspiring, a knowledge surprisingly profound, an eloquence sweeping in its force, a piety unexcelled in fervour, a courage leonine in its fierceness, a self-abnegation saintly in its purity, a resolve granite-like in its firmness, a vision stupendous in its range, a veneration for the Prophet and His Imams disconcerting to their adversaries, a power of persuasion alarming to their antagonists, a standard of faith and a code of conduct that challenged and revolutionized the lives of their countrymen.

### **Comparison with Jesus Christ**

It would indeed be no exaggeration to say that nowhere in the whole compass of the world's religious literature, except in the Gospels, do we find any record relating to the death of any of the religion-founders of the past comparable to the martyrdom suffered by the Prophet of Shíráz. So strange, so inexplicable a phenomenon, attested by eye-witnesses, corroborated by men of recognized standing, and acknowledged by



government as well as unofficial historians among the people who had sworn undying hostility to the Bábí Faith, may be truly regarded as the most marvellous manifestation of the unique potentialities with which a Dispensation promised by all the Dispensations of the past had been endowed. The passion of Jesus Christ, and indeed His whole public ministry, alone offer a parallel to the Mission and death of the Báb, a parallel which no student of comparative religion can fail to perceive or ignore. In the youthfulness and meekness of the Inaugurator of the Bábí Dispensation; in the extreme brevity and turbulence of His public ministry; in the dramatic swiftness with which that ministry moved towards its climax; in the apostolic order which He instituted, and the primacy which He conferred on one of its members; in the boldness of His challenge to the time-honoured conventions, rites, and laws which had been woven into the fabric of the religion He Himself had been born into; in the role which an officially recognized and firmly entrenched religious hierarchy played as chief instigator of the outrages which He was made to suffer; in the indignities heaped upon Him; in the suddenness of His arrest; in the interrogation to which He was subjected; in the derision poured, and the scourging inflicted, upon Him; in the public affront He sustained; and, finally, in His ignominious suspension before the gaze of a hostile multitude—in all these we cannot fail to discern a remarkable similarity to the distinguishing features of the career of Jesus Christ.

It should be remembered, however, that apart from the miracle associated with the Báb's execution, He, unlike the Founder of the Christian religion, is not only to

be regarded as the independent Author of a divinely revealed Dispensation, but must also be recognized as the Herald of a new Era and the Inaugurator of a great universal prophetic cycle. Nor should the important fact be overlooked that, whereas the chief adversaries of Jesus Christ, in His lifetime, were the Jewish rabbis and their associates, the forces arrayed against the Báb represented the combined civil and ecclesiastical powers of Persia, which, from the moment of His declaration to the hour of His death, persisted, unitedly and by every means at their disposal, in conspiring against the upholders and in vilifying the tenets of His Revelation.

### **His place in religious history**

The Báb, acclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh as the *“Essence of Essences”*, the *“Sea of Seas”*, the *“Point round Whom the realities of the Prophets and Messengers revolve”*, *“from Whom God hath caused to proceed the knowledge of all that was and shall be”*, Whose *“rank excelleth that of all the Prophets”*, and Whose *“Revelation transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their chosen ones”*, had delivered His Message and discharged His mission. He Who was, in the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the *“Morn of Truth”* and *“Harbinger of the Most Great Light”*, Whose advent at once signaled the termination of the *“Prophetic Cycle”* and the inception of the *“Cycle of Fulfillment”*, had simultaneously through His Revelation banished the shades of night that had descended upon His country, and proclaimed the impending rise of that Incomparable Orb Whose radiance was to envelop the whole of

mankind. He, as affirmed by Himself, *"the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things"*, *"one of the sustaining pillars of the Primal. Word of God"*, the *"Mystic Fane"*, the *"Great Announcement"*, the *"Flame of that supernal Light that glowed upon Sinai"*, the *"Remembrance of God"* concerning Whom *"a separate Covenant hath been established with each and every Prophet"* had, through His advent, at once fulfilled the promise of all ages and ushered in the consummation of all Revelations. He the *"Qá'im"* (He Who ariseth) promised to the Shi'íhs, the *"Mihdí"* (One Who is guided) awaited by the Sunnis, the *"Return of John the Baptist"* expected by the Christians, the *"Úshídar-Máh"* referred to in the Zoroastrian scriptures, the *"Return of Elijah"* anticipated by the Jews, Whose Revelation was to show forth *"the signs and tokens of all the Prophets"*, Who was to *"manifest the perfection of Moses, the radiance of Jesus and the patience of Job"* had appeared, proclaimed His Cause, been mercilessly persecuted and died gloriously. The *"Second Woe"*, spoken of in the Apocalypse of St John the Divine, had, at long last, appeared, and the first of the two *"Messengers"*, Whose appearance had been prophesied in the Qur'an, had been sent down. The first *"Trumpet-Blast"*, destined to smite the earth with extermination, announced in the latter Book, had finally been sounded, *"The Inevitable"*, *"The Catastrophe"*, *"The Resurrection"*, *"The Earthquake of the Last Hour"*, foretold by that same Book, had all come to pass. The *"clear tokens"* had been *"sent down"* and the *"Spirit"* had *"breathed"*, and the *"souls"* had *"waked up"*, and the *"heaven"* had been *"cleft"*, and the *"angels"* had *"ranged in order"*, and the *"stars"* had been *"blotted out"*,

and the "earth" had "cast forth her burden", and "Paradise" had been "brought near", and "hell" had been "made to blaze", and the "Book" had been "set", and the "Bridge" had been "laid out", and the "Balance" had been "set up", and the "mountains scattered in dust". The "cleansing of the Sanctuary", prophesied by Daniel and confirmed by Jesus Christ in His reference to "the abomination of desolation", had been accomplished. The "day whose length shall be a thousand years", foretold by the Apostle of God in His Book, had terminated. The "forty and two months", during which the "Holy City", as predicted by St John the Divine, would be trodden under foot, had elapsed. The "time of the end" had been ushered in, and the first of the "two Witnesses" into Whom, "after three days and a half the Spirit of Life from God" would enter, had arisen and had "ascended up to heaven in a cloud". The "remaining twenty and five letters to be made manifest", according to Islamic tradition, out of the "twenty and seven letters" of which Knowledge has been declared to consist, had been revealed. The "Man Child", mentioned in the Book of Revelation, destined to "rule all nations with a rod of iron", had released, through His coming, the creative energies which, reinforced by the effusions of a swiftly succeeding and infinitely mightier Revelation, were to instil into the entire human race the capacity to achieve its organic unification, attain maturity and thereby reach the final stage in its age-long evolution. The clarion-call addressed to the "concourse of kings and of the sons of kings", marking the inception of a process which, accelerated by Bahá'u'lláh's subsequent warnings to the entire company of the monarchs of East and West, was to produce

so widespread a revolution in the fortunes of royalty, had been raised in the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'. The "*Order*", whose foundation the Promised One was to establish in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and the features of which the Centre of the Covenant was to delineate in His Testament, and whose administrative framework the entire body of His followers are now erecting, had been categorically announced in the Persian Bayán. The laws which were designed, on the one hand, to abolish at a stroke the privileges and ceremonials, the ordinances and institutions of a superannuated Dispensation, and to bridge, on the other, the gap between an obsolete system and the institutions of a world-encompassing Order destined to supersede it, had been clearly formulated and proclaimed. The Covenant which, despite the determined assaults launched against it, succeeded, unlike all previous Dispensations, in preserving the integrity of the Faith of its Author, and in paving the way for the advent of the One Who was to be its Centre and Object, had been firmly and irrevocably established. The light which, throughout successive periods, was to propagate itself gradually from its cradle as far as Vancouver in the West and the China Sea in the East, and to diffuse its radiance as far as Iceland in the North and the Tasman Sea in the South, had broken. The forces of darkness, at first confined to the concerted hostility of the civil and ecclesiastical powers of Shí'ih Persia, gathering momentum, at a later stage, through the avowed and persistent opposition of the Caliph of Islám and the Sunní hierarchy in Turkey, and destined to culminate in the fierce antagonism of the sacerdotal orders associated with other and still more powerful religious systems,

had launched their initial assault. The nucleus of the divinely ordained, world-embracing Community—a Community whose infant strength had already plucked asunder the fetters of Shi'ih orthodoxy, and which was, with every expansion in the range of its fellowship, to seek and obtain a wider and still more significant recognition of its claims to be the world religion of the future, had been formed and was slowly crystallizing. And, lastly, the seed, endowed by the Hand of Omnipotence with such vast potentialities, though rudely trampled underfoot and seemingly perished from the face of the earth, had, through this very process, been vouchsafed the opportunity to germinate and remanifest itself, in the shape of a still more compelling Revelation—a Revelation destined to blossom forth, in a later period, into the flourishing institutions of a world-wide administrative System, and to ripen, in the Golden Age as yet unborn, into mighty agencies functioning in consonance with the principles of a world-unifying, world-redeeming Order.

## 4 “Abdu’l-Bahá

### **The station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá**

An attempt I strongly feel should now be made to clarify our minds regarding the station occupied by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the significance of His position in this holy Dispensation. It would be indeed difficult for us, who stand so close to such a tremendous figure and are drawn by the mysterious power of so magnetic a personality, to obtain a clear and exact understanding of the role and character of One Who, not only in the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh but in the entire field of religious history, fulfils a unique function. Though moving in a sphere of His own and holding a rank radically different from that of the Author and the Forerunner of the Bahá’í Revelation, He, by virtue of the station ordained for Him through the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, forms together with Them what may be termed the Three Central Figures of a Faith that stands unapproached in the world’s spiritual history. He towers, in conjunction with Them, above the destinies of this infant Faith of God from a level to which no individual or body ministering to its needs after Him, and for no less a period than a full thousand years, can ever hope to rise. To degrade His lofty rank by identifying His station with or by regarding it as roughly equivalent to, the

position of those on whom the mantle of His authority has fallen would be an act of impiety as grave as the no less heretical belief that inclines to exalt Him to a state of absolute equality with either the central Figure or Fore-runner of our Faith. For wide as is the gulf that separates 'Abdu'l-Bahá from Him Who is the Source of an independent Revelation, it can never be regarded as commensurate with the greater distance that stands between Him Who is the Centre of the Covenant and His ministers who are to carry on His work, whatever be their name, their rank, their functions or their future achievements. Let those who have known 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who through their contact with His magnetic personality have come to cherish for Him so fervent an admiration, reflect, in the light of this statement, on the greatness of One Who is so far above Him in station.

That 'Abdu'l-Bahá is not a Manifestation of God, that, though the successor of His Father, He does not occupy a cognate station, that no one else except the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh can ever lay claim to such a station before the expiration of a full thousand years—are verities which lie embedded in the specific utterances of both the Founder of our Faith and the Interpreter of His teachings.

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



light is a manifest betrayal of the priceless heritage bequeathed by Bahá'u'lláh to mankind. Immeasurably exalted is the station conferred upon Him by the supreme Pen above and beyond the implications of these, His own written statements. Whether in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the most weighty and sacred of all the works of Bahá'u'lláh, or in the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, the Book of His Covenant, or in the Súriy-i-Ghuṣn (Tablet of the Branch), such references as have been recorded by the pen of Bahá'u'lláh—which the Tablets of His Father addressed to Him mightily reinforce—invest 'Abdu'l-Bahá with a power, and surround Him with a halo, which the present generation can never adequately appreciate.

He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Centre and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being "*round Whom all names revolve*", the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation—styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the "Mystery of God"—an expression by which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us in assigning to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of 'Abdu'l-

Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.

***Evidence of greatness: Some achievements***

That such a unique and sublime station should have been conferred upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not, and indeed could not, surprise those exiled companions who had for so long been privileged to observe His life and conduct, nor the pilgrims who had been brought, however fleetingly, into personal contact with Him, nor indeed the vast concourse of the faithful who, in distant lands, had grown to revere His name and to appreciate His labours, nor even the wide circle of His friends and acquaintances who, in the Holy Land and the adjoining countries, were already well familiar with the position He had occupied during the lifetime of His Father.

He it was Whose auspicious birth occurred on that never-to-be-forgotten night when the Báb laid bare the transcendental character of His Mission to His first disciple Mullá Ḥusayn. He it was Who, as a mere child, seated on the lap of Ṭáhiriḥ, had registered the thrilling significance of the stirring challenge which that indomitable heroine had addressed to her fellow-disciple, the erudite and far-famed Vaḥíd. He it was Whose tender soul had been seared with the ineffaceable vision of a Father, haggard, dishevelled, freighted with chains, on the occasion of a visit, as a boy of nine, to the Síyáh-Chál of Ṭihrán. Against Him, in His early childhood, whilst His Father lay a prisoner in that dungeon, had been directed the malice of a mob of street urchins who pelted Him with stones, vilified Him, and overwhelmed Him

with ridicule. His had been the lot to share with His Father, soon after His release from imprisonment, the rigours and miseries of a cruel banishment from His native land, and the trials which culminated in His enforced withdrawal to the mountains of Kurdistan. He it was Who, in His inconsolable grief at His separation from an adored Father, had confided to Nabíl, as attested by him in his narrative, that He felt Himself to have grown old though still but a child of tender years. His had been the unique distinction of recognizing, while still in His childhood, the full glory of His Father's as yet unrevealed station, a recognition which had impelled Him to throw Himself at His feet and to spontaneously implore the privilege of laying down His life for His sake. From His pen, while still in His adolescence in Baghdád, had issued that superb commentary on a well-known Muslim tradition, written at the suggestion of Bahá'u'lláh, in answer to a request made by 'Alí-Shawkat Páshá, which was so illuminating as to excite the unbounded admiration of its recipient. It was His discussions and discourses with the learned doctors with whom He came in contact in Baghdád that first aroused that general admiration for Him and for His knowledge which was steadily to increase as the circle of His acquaintances was widened, at a later date, first in Adrianople and then in 'Akká. It was to Him that the highly accomplished Khurshíd Páshá, the governor of Adrianople, had been moved to pay a public and glowing tribute when, in the presence of a number of distinguished divines of that city, his youthful Guest had, briefly and amazingly, resolved the intricacies of a problem that had baffled the minds of the assembled company—an achievement that

affected so deeply the Páshá that from that time onwards he could hardly reconcile himself to that Youth's absence from such gatherings.

On Him Bahá'u'lláh, as the scope and influence of His Mission extended, had been led to place an ever greater degree of reliance by appointing Him, on numerous occasions, as His deputy, by enabling Him to plead His Cause before the public, by assigning Him the task of transcribing His Tablets, by allowing Him to assume the responsibility of shielding Him from His enemies, and by investing Him with the function of watching over and promoting the interests of His fellow-exiles and companions. He it was Who had been commissioned to undertake, as soon as circumstances might permit, the delicate and all-important task of purchasing the site that was to serve as the permanent resting-place of the Báb, of insuring the safe transfer of His remains to the Holy Land, and of erecting for Him a befitting sepulchre on Mt. Carmel. He it was Who had been chiefly instrumental in providing the necessary means for Bahá'u'lláh's release from His nine-year confinement within the city walls of 'Akká, and in enabling Him to enjoy, in the evening of His life, a measure of that peace and security from which He had so long been debarred. It was through His unremitting efforts that the illustrious Badí' had been granted his memorable interviews with Bahá'u'lláh, that the hostility evinced by several governors of 'Akká towards the exiled community had been transmuted into esteem and admiration, that the purchase of properties adjoining the Sea of Galilee and the River Jordan had been effected, and that the ablest and most valuable presentation of the early history of the

Faith and of its tenets had been transmitted to posterity. It was through the extraordinarily warm reception accorded Him during His visit to Beirut, through His contact with Midḥat Páshá, a former Grand Vizir of Turkey,<sup>1</sup> through His friendship with 'Azíz Páshá, whom He had previously known in Adrianople, and who had subsequently been promoted to the rank of Vali, and through His constant association with officials, notables, and leading ecclesiastics who, in increasing number had besought His presence, during the final years of His Father's ministry, that He had succeeded in raising the prestige of the Cause He had championed to a level it had never previously attained.

### ***His titles***

He alone had been accorded the privilege of being called "*the Master*", an honour from which His Father had strictly excluded all His other sons. Upon Him that loving and unerring Father had chosen to confer the unique title of "*Sirru'lláh*" (the Mystery of God), a designation so appropriate to One Who, though essentially human and holding a station radically and fundamentally different from that occupied by Bahá'u'lláh and His Forerunner, could still claim to be the perfect Exemplar of His Faith, to be endowed with superhuman knowledge, and to be regarded as the stainless mirror reflecting His light. To Him, whilst in Adrianople that same Father had, in the Súriy-i-Ghuṣn (Tablet of the Branch), referred as "*this sacred and glorious Being, this Branch of Holiness*", as "*the Limb of the Law of God*", as His "*most great favour*" unto men, as His "*most perfect bounty*" conferred upon them, as One through Whom

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<sup>1</sup> The Ottoman Empire.

*“every mouldering bone is quickened”*, declaring that *“whoso turneth towards Him hath turned towards God,”* and that *“they who deprive themselves of the shadow of the Branch are lost in the wilderness of error.”* To Him He, whilst still in that city, had alluded (in a Tablet addressed to Ḥájí Muḥammad Ibráhím-i-Khalíl) as the one amongst His sons *“from Whose tongue God will cause the signs of His power to stream forth”*, and as the one Whom *“God hath specially chosen for His Cause”*. On Him, at a later period, the Author of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, in a celebrated passage, subsequently elucidated in the *“Book of My Covenant,”* had bestowed the function of interpreting His Holy Writ, proclaiming Him, at the same time, to be the One *“Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root”*. To Him in a Tablet, revealed during that same period and addressed to Mírzá Muḥammad Qulíy-i-Sabzivári, He had referred as *“the Gulf that hath branched out of this Ocean that hath encompassed all created things”*, and bidden His followers to turn their faces towards it. To Him, on the occasion of His visit to Beirut, His Father had, furthermore, in a communication which He dictated to His amanuensis, paid a glowing tribute, glorifying Him as the One *“round Whom all names revolve”*, as *“the Most Mighty Branch of God”*, and as *“His ancient and immutable Mystery”*. He it was Who, in several Tablets which Bahá’u’lláh Himself had penned, had been personally addressed as *“the Apple of Mine eve”*, and been referred to as *“a shield unto all who are in heaven and on earth”*, as *“a shelter for all mankind”* and *“a stronghold for whosoever hath believed in God”*. It was on His behalf that His Father, in a prayer revealed in His honour, had suppli-

cated God to “*render Him victorious*”, and to “*ordain ... for Him, as well as for them that love Him*”, the things destined by the Almighty for His “*Messengers*” and the “*Trustees*” of His Revelation. And finally in yet another Tablet these weighty words had been recorded: “*The glory of God rest upon thee, and upon whosoever serveth Thee and circleth around Thee. Woe, great woe, betide him that opposeth and injureth Thee. Well is it with him that sweareth fealty to Thee; the fire of hell torment him who is Thy enemy.*”

And now to crown the inestimable honours, privileges, and benefits showered upon Him, in ever increasing abundance, throughout the forty years of His Father’s ministry in Baghdád, in Adrianople, and in ‘Akká, He had been elevated to the high office of Centre of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant, and been made the successor of the Manifestation of God Himself—a position that was to empower Him to impart an extraordinary impetus to the international expansion of His Father’s Faith, to amplify its doctrine, to beat down every barrier that would obstruct its march, and to call into being, and delineate the features of, its Administrative Order, the Child of the Covenant, and the Harbinger of that World Order whose establishment must needs signalize the advent of the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Dispensation.

### **Some incidents and memories**

A survey, however inadequate, of the varied and immense activities of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in His tour of Europe and America cannot leave without mentioning some of

the strange incidents that would often accompany personal contact with Him. The bold determination of a certain indomitable youth who, fearing 'Abdu'l-Bahá would not be able to visit the Western states, and unable himself to pay for a train journey to New England, had travelled all the way from Minneapolis to Maine lying on the rods between the wheels of a train; the transformation effected in the life of the son of a country rector in England, who, in his misery and poverty, had resolved, whilst walking along the banks of the Thames, to put an end to his existence, and who, at the sight of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's photograph displayed in a shop window, had inquired about Him, hurried to His residence, and been so revived by His words of cheer and comfort as to abandon all thought of self-destruction; the extraordinary experience of a woman whose little girl, as the result of a dream she had had, insisted that Jesus Christ was in the world, and who, at the sight of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's picture exposed in the window of a magazine store, had instantly identified it as that of the Jesus Christ of her dream—an act which impelled her mother, after reading that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in Paris, to take the next boat for Europe and hasten to attain His presence; the decision of the editor of a journal printed in Japan to break his journey to Tokyo at Constantinople, and travel to London for "the joy of spending one evening in His presence"; the touching scene when 'Abdu'l-Bahá, receiving from the hands of a Persian friend, recently arrived in London from 'Ishqábád, a cotton handkerchief containing a piece of dry black bread and a shrivelled apple—the offering of a poor Bahá'í workman in that city—opened it before His assembled guests, and, leaving His luncheon untouched,



broke pieces off that bread, and partaking Himself of it shared it with those who were present—these are but a few of a host of incidents that shed a revealing light on some personal aspects of His memorable journeys.

Nor can certain scenes revolving around that majestic and patriarchal Figure, as He moved through the cities of Europe and America, be ever effaced from memory. The remarkable interview at which 'Abdu'l-Bahá, while placing lovingly His hand on the head of Archdeacon Wilberforce, answered his many questions, whilst that distinguished churchman sat on a low chair by His side; the still more remarkable scene when that same Archdeacon, after having knelt with his entire congregation to receive His benediction at St John's the Divine, passed down the aisle to the vestry hand in hand with his Guest, whilst a hymn was being sung by the entire assembly standing; the sight of Jalálu'd-Dawlih, fallen prostrate at His feet, profuse in his apologies and imploring His forgiveness for his past iniquities; the enthusiastic reception accorded Him at Leland Stanford University when, before the gaze of well-nigh two thousand professors and students, He discoursed on some of the noblest truths underlying His message to the West; the touching spectacle at Bowery Mission when four hundred of the poor of New York filed past Him, each receiving a piece of silver from His blessed hands the acclamation of a Syrian woman in Boston who, pushing aside the crowd that had gathered around Him, flung herself at His feet, exclaiming, "I confess that in Thee I have recognized the Spirit of God and Jesus Christ Himself"; the no less fervent tribute paid Him by two admiring Arabs who, as He was leaving that city for Dublin,

N.H., cast themselves before Him, and, sobbing aloud, avowed that He was God's own Messenger to mankind; the vast congregation of two thousand Jews assembled in a synagogue in San Francisco, intently listening to His discourse as He demonstrated the validity of the claims advanced by both Jesus Christ and Muhammad; the gathering He addressed one night in Montreal, at which, in the course of His speech, His turban fell from His head, so carried away was He by the theme He was expounding; the boisterous crowd in a very poor quarter of Paris, who, awed by His presence, reverently and silently made way for Him as He passed through their midst, while returning from a Mission Hall whose congregation He had been addressing; the characteristic gesture of a Zoroastrian physician who, arriving in breathless haste on the morning of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's departure from London to bid Him farewell, anointed with fragrant oil first His head and His breast, and then, touching the hands of all present, placed round His neck and shoulders a garland of rosebuds and lilies; the crowd of visitors arriving soon after dawn, patiently waiting on the doorsteps of His house in Cadogan Gardens until the door would be opened for their admittance; His majestic figure as He paced with a vigorous step the platform, or stood with hands upraised to pronounce the benediction, in church and synagogue alike, and before vast audiences of reverent listeners; the unsolicited mark of respect shown Him by distinguished society women in London, who would spontaneously curtsy when ushered into His presence; the poignant sight when He stooped low to the grave of His beloved disciple, Thornton Chase, in Inglewood Cemetery, and kissed his tombstone, an example which

all those present hastened to follow; the distinguished gathering of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, men and women and representative of both the East and the West, assembled to hear His discourse on world unity in the mosque at Woking—such scenes as these, even in the cold record of the printed page, must still have much of their original impressiveness and power.

Who knows what thoughts flooded the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as He found Himself the central figure of such memorable scenes as these? Who knows what thoughts were uppermost in His mind as He sat at breakfast beside the Lord Mayor of London, or was received with extraordinary deference by the Khedive himself in his palace, or as He listened to the cries of "Alláh-u-Abhá" and to the hymns of thanksgiving and praise that would herald His approach to the numerous and brilliant assemblages of His enthusiastic followers and friends organized in so many cities of the American continent? Who knows what memories stirred within Him as He stood before the thundering waters of Niagara, breathing the free air of a far distant land, or gazed, in the course of a brief and much-needed rest, upon the green woods and countryside in Glenwood Springs, or moved with a retinue of Oriental believers along the paths of the Trocadero gardens in Paris, or walked alone in the evening beside the majestic Hudson on Riverside Drive in New York, or as He paced the terrace of the Hotel du Parc at Thonon-les-Bains, overlooking the Lake of Geneva, or as he watched from the Serpentine Bridge in London the pearly chain of lights beneath the trees stretching as far as the eye could see? Memories of the sorrows, the poverty, the overhanging doom of His earlier years;

memories of His mother who sold her gold buttons to provide Him, His brother, and His sister with sustenance, and who was forced, in her darkest hours, to place a handful of dry flour in the palm of His hand to appease His hunger; of His own childhood when pursued and derided by a mob of ruffians in the streets of Ṭihrán; of the damp and gloomy room, formerly a morgue, which He occupied in the barracks of 'Akká and of His imprisonment in the dungeon of that city—memories such as these must surely have thronged His mind. Thoughts, too, must have visited Him of the Báb's captivity in the mountain fastnesses of Ádhirbayján, when at night-time He was refused even a lamp, and of His cruel and tragic execution when hundreds of bullets riddled His youthful breast. Above all His thoughts must have centred on Bahá'u'lláh, Whom He loved so passionately and Whose trials He had witnessed and had shared from His boyhood. The vermin-infested Siyáh-Chál of Ṭihrán; the bastinado inflicted upon Him in Ámul; the humble fare which filled His kashkúl while He lived for two years the life of a dervish in the mountains of Kurdistan; the days in Baghdád when He did not even possess a change of linen, and when His followers subsisted on a handful of dates; His confinement behind the prison-walls of 'Akká, when for nine years even the sight of verdure was denied Him; and the public humiliation to which He was subjected at government headquarters in that city—pictures from the tragic past such as these must have many a time overpowered Him with feelings of mingled gratitude and sorrow, as He witnessed the many marks of respect, of esteem and honour now shown Him and the Faith which He represented. "*O Bahá'u'l-*

*láh! What hast Thou done?"* He, as reported by the chronicler of His travels, was heard to exclaim one evening as He was being swiftly driven to fulfil His third engagement of the day in Washington, *"O Bahá'u'lláh! May my life be sacrificed for Thee! O Bahá'u'lláh! May my soul be offered up for Thy sake. How full, were Thy days with trials and tribulations! How severe the ordeals Thou didst endure! How solid the foundation Thou hast finally laid, and how glorious the banner Thou didst hoist!"* "One day, as He was strolling," that same chronicler has testified, "He called to remembrance the days of the Blessed Beauty, referring with sadness to His sojourn in Sulaymáníyyih, to His loneliness, and to the wrongs inflicted upon Him. Though He had often recounted that episode, that day He was so overcome with emotion that He sobbed aloud in His grief. ... All His attendants wept with Him, and were plunged into sorrow as they heard the tale of the woeful trials endured by the Ancient Beauty, and witnessed the tenderness of heart manifested by His Son."

### **Outcome of His ministry**

Through Him the Covenant, that *"excellent and priceless Heritage"* bequeathed by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, had been proclaimed, championed, and vindicated. Through the power which that Divine Instrument had conferred upon Him the light of God's infant Faith had penetrated the West, had diffused itself as far as the Islands of the Pacific, and illumined the fringes of the Australian continent. Through His personal intervention the Message, Whose Bearer had tasted the bit-

terness of a life-long captivity, had been noised abroad, and its character and purpose disclosed, for the first time in its history, before enthusiastic and representative audiences in the chief cities of Europe and of the North American continent. Through His unrelaxing vigilance the holy remains of the Báb, brought forth at long last from their fifty-year concealment, had been safely transported to the Holy Land and permanently and befittingly enshrined in the very spot which Bahá'u'lláh Himself had designated for them and had blessed with His presence. Through His bold initiative the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the Bahá'í world had been reared in Central Asia, in Russian Turkistan, whilst through His unfailing encouragement a similar enterprise, of still vaster proportions, had been undertaken, and its land dedicated by Himself in the heart of the North American continent. Through the sustaining grace overshadowing Him since the inception of His ministry His royal adversary had been humbled to the dust, the arch-breaker of His Father's Covenant had been utterly routed, and the danger which, ever since Bahá'u'lláh had been banished to Turkish soil, had been threatening the heart of the Faith, definitely removed. In pursuance of His instructions, and in conformity with the principles enunciated and the laws ordained by His Father, the rudimentary institutions, heralding the formal inauguration of the Administrative Order to be founded after His passing, had taken shape and been established. Through His unremitting labours, as reflected in the treatises He composed, the thousands of Tablets He revealed, the discourses He delivered, the prayers, poems, and commentaries He left to posterity, mostly in Persian, some in Arabic, and a

few in Turkish, the laws and principles, constituting the warp and woof of His Father's Revelation, had been elucidated, its fundamentals restated and interpreted, its tenets given detailed application, and the validity and indispensability of its verities fully and publicly demonstrated. Through the warnings He sounded, an unheeding humanity, steeped in materialism and forgetful of its God, had been apprised of the perils threatening to disrupt its ordered life, and made, in consequence of its persistent perversity, to sustain the initial shocks of that world upheaval which continues, until the present day, to rock the foundations of human society. And lastly, through the mandate He had issued to a valiant community, the concerted achievements of whose members had shed so great a lustre on the annals of His own ministry, He had set in motion a Plan which, soon after its formal inauguration, achieved the opening of the Australian continent, which, in a later period, was to be instrumental in winning over the heart of a royal convert to His Father's Cause, and which, today, through the irresistible unfoldment of its potentialities, is so marvellously quickening the spiritual life of all the Republics of Latin America as to constitute a befitting conclusion to the records of an entire century.

Nor should a survey of the outstanding features of so blessed and fruitful a ministry omit mention of the prophecies which the unerring pen of the appointed Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant has recorded. These foreshadow the fierceness of the onslaught that the resistless march of the Faith must provoke in the West, in India, and in the Far East when it meets the time-honoured sacerdotal orders of the Christian, the Bud-

dhist, and Hindu religions. They foreshadow the turmoil which its emancipation from the fetters of religious orthodoxy will cast in the American, the European, the Asiatic, and African continents. They foreshadow the gathering of the children of Israel in their ancient homeland; the erection of the banner of Bahá'u'lláh in the Egyptian citadel of Sunnī Islám; the extinction of the powerful influence wielded by the Shí'ih ecclesiastics in Persia; the load of misery which must needs oppress the pitiful remnants of the breakers of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant at the world centre of His Faith; the splendour of the institutions which that triumphant Faith must erect on the slopes of a mountain, destined to be so linked with the city of 'Akká that a single grand metropolis will be formed to enshrine the spiritual as well as the administrative seats of the future Bahá'í Commonwealth; the conspicuous honour which the inhabitants of Bahá'u'lláh's native land in general, and its government in particular, must enjoy in a distant future; the unique and enviable position which the community of the Most Great Name in the North American continent must occupy, as a direct consequence of the execution of the world mission which He entrusted to them; finally they foreshadow, as the sum and summit of all, the *"hoisting of the standard of God among all nations"* and the unification of the entire human race, when *"all men will adhere to one religion ... will be blended into one race, and become a single people"*.



## 5

# Covenants of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh

## Covenant of the Báb

To this period of incarceration in the fortresses of Mách-Kú and Chihríq—a period of unsurpassed fecundity, yet bitter in its humiliations and ever-deepening sorrows—belong almost all the written references, whether in the form of warnings, appeals or exhortations which the Báb, in anticipation of the approaching hour of His supreme affliction, felt it necessary to make to the Author of a Revelation that was soon to supersede His own. Conscious from the very beginning of His twofold mission, as the Bearer of a wholly independent Revelation and the Herald of One still greater than His own, He could not content Himself with the vast number of commentaries, of prayers, of laws and ordinances, of dissertations and epistles, of homilies and orations that had incessantly streamed from His pen. The Greater Covenant into which, as affirmed in His writings, God had, from time immemorial, entered, through the Prophets of all ages, with the whole of mankind, regarding the new-born Revelation, had already been fulfilled. It had now to be supplemented by a Lesser Covenant which He felt bound to make with the entire body of His followers concerning the One Whose

advent He characterized as the fruit and ultimate purpose of His Dispensation. Such a Covenant had invariably been the feature of every previous religion. It had existed, under various forms, with varying degrees of emphasis, had always been couched in veiled language, and had been alluded to in cryptic prophecies, in abstruse allegories, in unauthenticated traditions, and in the fragmentary and obscure passages of the sacred Scriptures. In the Bábí Dispensation, however, it was destined to be established in clear and unequivocal language, though not embodied in a separate document. Unlike the Prophets gone before Him, Whose Covenants were shrouded in mystery, unlike Bahá'u'lláh, Whose clearly defined Covenant was incorporated in a specially written Testament, and designated by Him as *"the Book of My Covenant"*, the Báb chose to intersperse His Book of Laws, the Persian Bayán, with unnumbered passages, some designedly obscure, mostly indubitably clear and conclusive, in which He fixes the date of the promised Revelation, extols its virtues, asserts its preeminent character, assigns to it unlimited powers and prerogatives, and tears down every barrier that might be an obstacle to its recognition. *"He, verily,"* Bahá'u'lláh, referring to the Báb in His Kitáb-i-Badí', has stated, *"hath not fallen short of His duty to exhort the people of the Bayán and to deliver unto them His Message. In no age or dispensation hath any Manifestation made mention in such detail and in such explicit language, of the Manifestation destined to succeed Him."*

## **Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh**

To direct and canalize these forces let loose by this Heaven-sent process, and to insure their harmonious and continuous operation after His ascension, an instrument divinely ordained, invested with indisputable authority, organically linked with the Author of the Revelation Himself, was clearly indispensable. That instrument Bahá'u'lláh had expressly provided through the institution of the Covenant, an institution which He had firmly established prior to His ascension. This same Covenant He had anticipated in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, had alluded to it as He bade His last farewell to the members of His family, who had been summoned to His bed-side, in the days immediately preceding His ascension, and had incorporated it in a special document which He designated as "the Book of My Covenant", and which He entrusted, during His last illness, to His eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Written entirely in His own hand; unsealed, on the ninth day after His ascension in the presence of nine witnesses chosen from amongst His companions and members of His Family; read subsequently, on the afternoon of that same day, before a large company assembled in His Most Holy Tomb, including His sons, some of the Báb's kinsmen, pilgrims, and resident believers, this unique and epoch-making Document, designated by Bahá'u'lláh as His "Most Great Tablet", and alluded to by Him as the "Crimson Book" in His "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf", can find no parallel in the Scriptures of any previous Dispensation, not excluding that of the Báb Himself. For nowhere in the

books pertaining to any of the world's religious systems, not even among the writings of the Author of the Bábí Revelation, do we find any single document establishing a Covenant endowed with an authority comparable to the Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh had Himself instituted.

*"So firm and mighty is this Covenant,"* He Who is its appointed Centre has affirmed, *"that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like."* *"It is indubitably clear,"* He, furthermore, has stated, *"that the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant."* *"Know thou,"* He has written, *"that the 'Sure Handle' mentioned from the foundation of the world in the Books, the Tablets, and the Scriptures of old is naught else but the Covenant and the Testament."* And again: *"The lamp of the Covenant is the light of the world, and the words traced by the Pen of the Most High a limitless ocean."* *"The Lord, the All-Glorified,"* He has moreover declared, *"hath, beneath the shade of the Tree of Anísá [Tree of Life], made a new Covenant and established a great Testament .... Hath such a Covenant been established in any previous Dispensation, age, period or century? Hath such a Testament, set down by the Pen of the Most High, ever been witnessed? No, by God!"* And finally *"The power of the Covenant is as the heat of the sun which quickeneth and promoteth the development of all created things on earth. The light of the Covenant, in like manner, is the educator of the minds, the spirits, the hearts, and souls of men."* To this same Covenant He has in His writings referred as the *"Conclusive Testimony"*, the *"Universal Balance"*, the *"Magnet of God's grace"*, the *"Upraised Standard"*, the *"Irrefutable Testament"*, *"the all-mighty Covenant, the like of which*

*the sacred Dispensations of the past have never witnessed”, and “one of the distinctive features of this most mighty cycle.”*

Extolled by the writer of the Apocalypse as “the Ark of His [God’s] Testament”; associated with the gathering beneath the “*Tree of Anísá*” [Tree of Life] mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh in the Hidden Words; glorified by Him, in other passages of His writings, as the “*Ark of Salvation*” and as “*the Cord stretched betwixt the earth and the Abhá Kingdom*”, this Covenant has been bequeathed to posterity in a Will and Testament which, together with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and several Tablets, in which the rank and station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are unequivocally disclosed, constitute the chief buttresses designed by the Lord of the Covenant Himself to shield and support, after His ascension, the appointed Centre of His Faith and the Delineator of its future institutions.

## 6

### The Holy Family

#### The Greatest Holy Leaf

A sorrow, reminiscent in its poignancy of the devastating grief caused by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sudden removal from our midst, has stirred the Bahá'í world to its foundations. The Greatest Holy Leaf, the well-beloved and treasured Remnant of Bahá'u'lláh entrusted to our frail and unworthy hands by our departed Master, has passed to the Great Beyond, leaving a legacy that time can never dim.

The community of the Most Great Name, in its entirety and to its very core, feels the sting of this cruel loss. Inevitable though this calamitous event appeared to us all, however acute our apprehensions of its steady approach, the consciousness of its final consummation at this terrible hour leaves us, we whose souls have been impregnated by the energizing influence of her love, prostrated and disconsolate.

How can my lonely pen, so utterly inadequate to glorify so exalted a station, so impotent to portray the experiences of so sublime a life, so disqualified to recount the blessings she showered upon me since my earliest childhood—how can such a pen repay the great debt of gratitude and love that I owe her whom I regarded as my chief sustainer, my most affectionate comforter, the joy

and inspiration of my life? My grief is too immense, my remorse too profound, to be able to give full vent at this moment to the feelings that surge within me.

Only future generations and pens abler than mine can, and will, pay a worthy tribute to the towering grandeur of her spiritual life, to the unique part she played throughout the tumultuous stages of Bahá'í history, to the expressions of unqualified praise that have streamed from the pen of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of His Covenant. Though unrecorded, and in the main unsuspected by the mass of her passionate admirers in East and West, the share she has had in influencing the course of some of the chief events in the annals of the Faith, the sufferings she bore, the sacrifices she made, the rare gifts of unfailing sympathy she so strikingly displayed—these, and many others, stand so inextricably interwoven with the fabric of the Cause itself that no future historian of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh can afford to ignore or minimize them.

As far back as the concluding stages of the heroic age of the Cause, which witnessed the imprisonment of Bahá'u'lláh in the Síyáh-Chál of Tíhrán, the Greatest Holy Leaf, then still in her infancy, was privileged to taste of the cup of woe which the first believers of that apostolic age had quaffed.

How well I remember her recall, at a time when her faculties were still unimpaired, the gnawing suspense that ate into the hearts of those who watched by her side, at the threshold of her pillaged house, expectant to hear at any moment the news of Bahá'u'lláh's imminent execution! In those sinister hours, she often recounted, her parents had so suddenly lost their earthly possessions

that within the space of a single day from being the privileged member of one of the wealthiest families of Ṭihrán she had sunk to the state of a sufferer from unconcealed poverty. Deprived of the means of subsistence, her illustrious mother, the famed Navváb, was constrained to place in the palm of her daughter's hand a handful of flour and to induce her to accept it as a substitute for her daily bread.

And when at a later time this revered and precious member of the Holy Family, then in her teens, came to be entrusted by the guiding hand of her Father with missions that no girl of her age could, or would be willing to, perform, with what spontaneous joy she seized her opportunity and acquitted herself of the task with which she had been entrusted! The delicacy and extreme gravity of such functions as she, from time to time, was called upon to fulfil, when the city of Baghdád was swept by the hurricane which the heedlessness and perversity of Mírzá Yaḥyá had unchained, as well as the tender solicitude which, at so early an age, she evinced during the period of Bahá'u'lláh's enforced retirement to the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih, marked her as one who was both capable of sharing the burden, and willing to make the sacrifice, which her high birth demanded.

How staunch was her faith, how calm her demeanour, how forgiving her attitude, how severe her trials, at a time when the forces of schism had rent asunder the ties that united the little band of exiles which had settled in Adrianople and whose fortunes seemed then to have sunk to their lowest ebb! It was in this period of extreme anxiety when the rigours of a winter of exceptional severity, coupled with the privations entailed by un-



healthy housing accommodation and dire financial distress, undermined once for all her health and sapped the vitality which she had hitherto so thoroughly enjoyed. The stress and storm of that period made an abiding impression upon her mind, and she retained till the time of her death on her beauteous and angelic face evidences of its intense hardships.

Not until, however, she had been confined in the company of Bahá'u'lláh within the walls of the prison-city of 'Akká did she display, in the plenitude of her power and in the full abundance of her love for Him, more gifts that single her out, next to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, among the members of the Holy Family, as the brightest embodiment of that love which is born of God and of that human sympathy which few mortals are capable of evincing.

Banishing from her mind and heart every earthly attachment, renouncing the very idea of matrimony, she, standing resolutely by the side of a Brother whom she was to aid and serve so well, arose to dedicate her life to the service of her Father's glorious Cause. Whether in the management of the affairs of His Household in which she excelled, or in the social relationships which she so assiduously cultivated in order to shield both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, whether in the unfailing attention she paid to the everyday needs of her Father, or in the traits of generosity, of affability and kindness, which she manifested, the Greatest Holy Leaf had by that time abundantly demonstrated her worthiness to rank as one of the noblest figures intimately associated with the life-long work of Bahá'u'lláh.

How grievous was the ingratitude, how blind the fanaticism, how persistent the malignity of the officials,

their wives, and their subordinates, in return for the manifold bounties which she, in close association with her Brother, so profusely conferred upon them! Her patience, her magnanimity, her indiscriminating benevolence, far from disarming the hostility of that perverse generation, served only to inflame their rancour, to excite their jealousy, to intensify their fears. The gloom that had settled upon that little band of imprisoned believers, who languished in the Fortress of 'Akká, contrasted with the spirit of confident hope, of deep-rooted optimism that beamed upon her serene countenance. No calamity, however intense, could obscure the brightness of her saintly face, and no agitation, no matter how severe, could disturb the composure of her gracious and dignified behaviour.

That her sensitive heart instantaneously reacted to the slightest injury that befell the least significant of creatures, whether friend or foe, no one who knew her well could doubt. And yet such was the restraining power of her will—a will which her spirit of self-renunciation so often prompted her to suppress—that a superficial observer might well be led to question the intensity of her emotions or to belittle the range of her sympathies. In the school of adversity she, already endowed by Providence with the virtues of meekness and fortitude, learned through the example and exhortations of the Great Sufferer, who was her Father, the lesson she was destined to teach the great mass of His followers for so long after Him.

Armed with the powers with which an intimate and longstanding companionship with Bahá'u'lláh had already equipped her, and benefiting by the magnificent

example which the steadily widening range of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's activities afforded her, she was prepared to face the storm which the treacherous conduct of the Covenant-breakers had aroused and to withstand its most damaging onslaughts.

Great as had been her sufferings ever since her infancy, the anguish of mind and heart which the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh occasioned nerved her, as never before, to a resolve which no upheaval could bend and which her frail constitution belied. Amidst the dust and heat of the commotion which that faithless and rebellious company engendered she found herself constrained to dissolve ties of family relationship, to sever long-standing and intimate friendships, to discard lesser loyalties for the sake of her supreme allegiance to a Cause she had loved so dearly and had served so well.

The disruption that ensued found her ranged by the side of Him Whom her departed Father had appointed as the Centre of His Covenant and the authorized Expounder of His Word. Her venerated mother, as well as her distinguished paternal uncle, Áqáy-i-Kalím—the twin pillars who, all throughout the various stages of Bahá'u'lláh's exile from the Land of His Birth to the final place of His confinement, had demonstrated, unlike most of the members of His family, the tenacity of their loyalty—had already passed behind the Veil. Death, in the most tragic circumstances, had also robbed her of the Purest Branch, her only brother besides 'Abdu'l-Bahá, while still in the prime of youth. She alone of the family of Bahá'u'lláh remained to cheer the heart and reinforce the efforts of the Most Great Branch, against whom were solidly arrayed the almost entire company of

His faithless relatives. In her arduous task she was seconded by the diligent efforts of Munírih Khánum, the Holy Mother, and those of her daughters whose age allowed them to assist in the accomplishment of that stupendous achievement with which the name of 'Abdu'l-Bahá will for ever remain associated.

With the passing of Bahá'u'lláh and the fierce onslaught of the forces of disruption that followed in its wake, the Greatest Holy Leaf, now in the heyday of her life, rose to the height of her great opportunity and acquitted herself worthily of her task. It would take me beyond the compass of the tribute I am moved to pay to her memory were I to dwell upon the incessant machinations to which Muḥammad-'Alí, the arch-breaker of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, and his despicable supporters basely resorted, upon the agitation which their cleverly directed campaign of misrepresentation and calumny produced in quarters directly connected with Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd and his advisers, upon the trials and investigations to which it gave rise, upon the rigidity of the incarceration it reimposed, and upon the perils it revived. Suffice it to say that but for her sleepless vigilance, her tact, her courtesy, her extreme patience and heroic fortitude, grave complications might have ensued and the load of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's anxious care would have been considerably increased.

And when the storm-cloud that had darkened the horizon of the Holy Land had been finally dissipated and the call raised by our beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá had stirred to a new life certain cities of the American and European continents, the Most Exalted Leaf became the recipient of the unbounded affection and blessings of One Who

could best estimate her virtues and appreciate her merits.

The decline of her precious life had by that time set in and the burden of advancing age was beginning to becloud the radiance of her countenance. Forgetful of her own self, disdainful of rest and comfort, and undeterred by the obstacles that still stood in her path, she, acting as the honoured hostess to a steadily increasing number of pilgrims who thronged 'Abdu'l-Bahá's residence from both the East and the West, continued to display those same attributes that had won her, in the preceding phases of her career, so great a measure of admiration and love.

And when, in pursuance of God's inscrutable Wisdom the ban on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's confinement was lifted and the Plan which He, in the darkest hours of His confinement, had conceived materialized, He, with unhesitating confidence, invested His trusted and honoured sister with the responsibility of attending to the multitudinous details arising out of His protracted absence from the Holy Land.

No sooner had 'Abdu'l-Bahá stepped upon the shores of the European and American continents than our beloved Khánum found herself well-nigh overwhelmed with thrilling messages, each betokening the irresistible advance of the Cause in a manner which, notwithstanding the vast range of her experience, seemed to her almost incredible. The years in which she basked in the sunshine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's spiritual victories were, perhaps, among the brightest and happiest of her life. Little did she dream when, as a little girl, she was running about, in the courtyard of her Father's house in Tīhrán,

in the company of Him Whose destiny was to be one day the chosen Centre of God's indestructible Covenant, that such a Brother would be capable of achieving, in realms so distant, and among races so utterly remote, so great and memorable a victory.

The enthusiasm and joy which swelled in her breast as she greeted 'Abdu'l-Bahá on His triumphant return from the West I will not venture to describe. She was astounded at the vitality of which He had, despite His unimaginable sufferings, proved Himself capable. She was lost in admiration at the magnitude of the forces which His utterances had released. She was filled with thankfulness to Bahá'u'lláh for having enabled her to witness the evidences of such brilliant victory for His Cause no less than for His Son.

The outbreak of the Great War gave her yet another opportunity to reveal the true worth of her character and to release the latent energies of her heart. The residence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa was besieged, all throughout that dreary conflict, by a concourse of famished men, women, and children whom the maladministration, the cruelty, and neglect of the officials of the Ottoman Government had driven to seek an alleviation to their woes. From the hand of the Greatest Holy Leaf, and out of the abundance of her heart, these hapless victims of a contemptible tyranny received day after day unforgettable evidences of a love they had learned to envy and admire. Her words of cheer and comfort, the food, the money, the clothing she freely dispensed, the remedies which, by a process of her own, she herself prepared and diligently applied—all these had their share in comforting the disconsolate, in restoring sight to the blind, in

sheltering the orphan, in healing the sick, and in succouring the homeless and the wanderer.

She had reached, amidst the darkness of the war days, the high watermark of her spiritual attainments. Few, if any, among the unnumbered benefactors of society whose privilege has been to allay, in various measures, the hardships and sufferings entailed by that Fierce Conflict, gave as freely and as disinterestedly as she did; few exercised that undefinable influence upon the beneficiaries of their gifts.

Age seemed to have accentuated the tenderness of her loving heart, and to have widened still further the range of her sympathies. The sight of appalling suffering around her steeled her energies and revealed such potentialities as her most intimate associates had failed to suspect.

The ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, so tragic in its suddenness, was to her a terrific blow, from the effects of which she never completely recovered. To her He, whom she called "Áqá", had been a refuge in times of adversity. On Him she had been led to place her sole reliance. In Him she had found ample compensation for the bereavements she had suffered, the desertions she had witnessed, the ingratitude she had been shown by friends and kindred. No one could ever dream that a woman of her age, so frail in body, so sensitive of heart, so loaded with the cares of almost eighty years of incessant tribulation, could so long survive so shattering a blow. And yet history, no less than the annals of our immortal Faith, shall record for her a share in the advancement and consolidation of the world-wide community which the hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá had helped to fashion, which

no one among the remnants of His Family can rival.

Which of the blessings am I to recount which, in her unfailing solicitude, she showered upon me in the most critical and agitated hours of my life? To me, standing in so dire a need of the vitalizing grace of God, she was the living symbol of many an attribute I had learned to admire in 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She was to me a continual reminder of His inspiring personality, of His calm resignation, of His munificence and magnanimity. To me she was an incarnation of His winsome graciousness, of His all-encompassing tenderness and love.

It would take me too long to make even a brief allusion to those incidents of her life, each of which eloquently proclaims her as a daughter worthy to inherit that priceless heritage bequeathed to her by Bahá'u'lláh. A purity of life that reflected itself in even the minutest details of her daily occupations and activities; a tenderness of heart that obliterated every distinction of creed, class, and colour; a resignation and serenity that evoked to the mind the calm and heroic fortitude of the Báb; a natural fondness for flowers and children that was so characteristic of Bahá'u'lláh; an unaffected simplicity of manners; an extreme sociability which made her accessible to all; a generosity, a love, at once disinterested and indiscriminating, that reflected so clearly the attributes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's character; a sweetness of temper; a cheerfulness that no amount of sorrow could becloud; a quiet and unassuming disposition that served to enhance a thousand-fold the prestige of her exalted rank; a forgiving nature that instantly disarmed the most unyielding enemy—these rank among the outstanding attributes of a saintly life which history will acknowledge



as having been endowed with a celestial potency that few of the heroes of the past possessed.

No wonder that in Tablets, which stand as eternal testimonies to the beauty of her character, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have paid touching tributes to those things that testify to her exalted position among the members of their Family, that proclaim her as an example to their followers, and as an object worthy of the admiration of all mankind.

I need only, at this juncture, quote the following passage from a Tablet addressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Holy Mother, the tone of which reveals unmistakably the character of those ties that bound Him to so precious, so devoted a sister:

*To my honoured and distinguished sister do thou convey the expression of my heartfelt, my intense longing. Day and night she liveth in my remembrance. I dare make no mention of the feelings which separation from her has aroused in my heart, for whatever I should attempt to express in writing will assuredly be effaced by the tears which such sentiments must bring to my eyes.<sup>1</sup>*

Dearly beloved Greatest Holy Leaf! Through the mist of tears that fill my eyes I can clearly see, as I pen these lines, thy noble figure before me, and can recognize the serenity of thy kindly face. I can still gaze, though the shadow of the grave separate us, into thy blue, love-deep eyes, and can feel, in its calm intensity, the immense love thou didst bear for the Cause of thine Almighty Father, the attachment that bound thee to the most lowly and insignificant among its followers, the warm affection thou didst cherish for me in thine heart. The memory of the ineffable beauty of thy smile shall ever continue to

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<sup>1</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Bahíyyih Khánúm*, pp. 10, 48-9, & 43.

cheer and hearten me in the thorny path I am destined to pursue. The remembrance of the touch of thine hand shall spur me on to follow steadfastly in thy way. The sweet magic of thy voice shall remind me, when the hour of adversity is at its darkest, to hold fast to the rope thou didst seize so firmly all the days of thy life.

Bear thou this my message to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, thine exalted and divinely appointed Brother: If the Cause for which Bahá'u'lláh toiled and laboured, for which Thou didst suffer years of agonizing sorrow, for the sake of which streams of sacred blood have flowed, should in the days to come encounter storms more severe than those it has already weathered, do Thou continue to overshadow, with Thine all-encompassing care and wisdom, Thy frail, Thy unworthy appointed child.

Intercede, O noble and well-favoured scion of a heavenly Father, for me no less than for the toiling masses of thy ardent lovers, who have sworn undying allegiance to thy memory, whose souls have been nourished by the energies of thy love, whose conduct has been moulded by the inspiring example of thy life, and whose imaginations are fired by the imperishable evidences of thy lively faith, thy unshakable constancy, thy invincible heroism, thy great renunciation.

Whatever betide us, however distressing the vicissitudes which the nascent Faith of God may yet experience, we pledge ourselves, before the mercy-seat of thy glorious Father, to hand on, unimpaired and undivided, to generations yet unborn, the glory of that tradition of which thou hast been its most brilliant exemplar.

In the innermost recesses of our hearts, O thou exalted Leaf of the Abhá Paradise, we have reared for thee

a shining mansion that the hand of time can never undermine, a shrine which shall frame eternally the matchless beauty of thy countenance, an altar whereon the fire of thy consuming love shall burn for ever.

### **The Purest Branch and Navváb**

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 world-shaking, 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.

For such as might undertake, in the days to come, the meritorious and highly enviable pilgrimage to these blessed shrines, as well as for the benefit of the less privileged who, aware of the greatness of their virtue and the pre-eminence of their lineage, desire to commune with their spirits, and to strive to acquire an added insight into the glory of their position, and to follow in their footsteps, let these testimonies written by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá be their inspiration and guidance in their noble quest.

*“At this very moment,” Bahá'u'lláh testifies, “My son is being washed before My face, after Our having sacrificed him in the Most Great Prison. Thereat have the dwellers of the Abhá Tabernacle wept with a great weeping, and such as have suffered imprisonment with this Youth in the path of God, the Lord of the promised Day, lamented. Under such conditions My Pen hath not been prevented from remembering its Lord, the Lord of all nations. It sum-*

*moneth the people unto God, the Almighty, the Bountiful. This is the day whereon he that was created of the light of Bahá has suffered martyrdom, at a time when he lay imprisoned at the hands of his enemies."*

*"Upon thee, O Branch of God!"* He solemnly and most touchingly, in that same Tablet, bestows upon him His benediction, *"be the remembrance of God and His praise, and the praise of all that dwell in the Realms of Immortality and of all the denizens of the Kingdom of Names. Happy art thou in that thou hast been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament, until Thou didst sacrifice thyself before the face of thy Lord, the Almighty, the Unconstrained. Thou, in truth, hast been wronged, and to this testifieth the Beauty of Him, the Self-Subsisting. Thou didst, in the first days of my life, bear that which hath caused all things to groan, and made every pillar to tremble. Happy is the one that remembereth thee, and draweth nigh, through thee, unto God, the Creator of the Morn."*

*"Glorified art Thou, O Lord my God!"* He, in a prayer, astoundingly proclaims, *"Thou seest me in the hands of Mine enemies, and My son blood-stained before Thy face, O Thou in Whose hands is the kingdom of all names. I have, my Lord, offered up that which Thou hast given Me, that Thy servants may be quickened and all that dwell on earth be united."*

*"Blessed art thou,"* He, in another Tablet affirms, *"and blessed he that turneth unto thee, and visiteth thy grave, and draweth nigh, through thee, unto God, the Lord of all that was and shall be. ... I testify that thou didst return in meekness unto thine abode. Great is thy blessedness and the blessedness of them that hold fast unto the hem of thy outspread robe. ... Thou art, verily, the trust of God and His*

*treasure in this land. Ere long will God reveal through thee that which He hath desired. He, verily, is the Truth, the Knower of things unseen. When thou wast laid to rest in the earth, the earth itself trembled in its longing to meet thee. Thus hath it been decreed, and yet the people perceive not. ... Were We to recount the mysteries of thine ascension, they that are asleep would awaken, and all beings would be set ablaze with the fire of the remembrance of My Name, the Mighty, the Loving."*

Concerning the Most Exalted Leaf, the mother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh has written: "The first Spirit through which all spirits were revealed, and the first Light by which all lights shone forth, rest upon thee, O Most Exalted Leaf, thou who hast been mentioned in the Crimson Book! Thou art the one whom God created to arise and serve His own Self, and the Manifestation of His Cause, and the Dayspring of His Revelation, and the Dawning-Place of His signs, and the Source of His commandments: and Who so aided thee that thou didst turn with thy whole being unto Him, at a time when His servants and handmaidens had turned away from His Face. ... Happy art thou, O my handmaiden, and My leaf, and the one mentioned in My Book, and inscribed by My Pen of Glory in My Scrolls and Tablets. ... Rejoice thou, at this moment, in the most exalted Station and the All-highest Paradise, and the Abhá Horizon, inasmuch as He Who is the Lord of Names hath remembered thee. We bear witness that thou didst attain unto all good, and that God hath so exalted thee, that all honour and glory circled around thee."

"O Navváb!" He thus, in another Tablet, addresses her, "O Leaf that hath sprung from My Tree, and been My companion! My glory be upon thee, and My loving-kindness

*and My mercy that hath surpassed all beings. We announce unto thee that which will gladden thine eye, and assure thy soul, and rejoice thine heart. Verily, thy Lord is the Compassionate, the All-Bountiful. God hath been and will be pleased with thee, and hath singled thee out for His own Self, and chosen thee from among His hand-maidens to serve Him, and hath made thee the companion of His Person in the day-time and in the night-season."*

*"Hear thou Me once again," He reassures her, "God is well-pleased with thee, as a token of His grace and a sign of His mercy. He hath made thee to be His companion in every one of His worlds, and hath nourished thee with His meeting and presence, so long as His Name, and His Remembrance, and His Kingdom, and His Empire shall endure. Happy is the handmaid that hath mentioned thee, and sought thy good pleasure, and humbled herself before thee, and held fast unto the cord of thy love. Woe betide him that denieth thy exalted station, and things ordained for thee from God, the Lord of all names, and him that hath turned away from thee, and rejected thy station before God, the Lord of the mighty throne."*

*"O faithful ones!" Bahá'u'lláh specifically enjoins, "Should ye visit the resting place of the Most Exalted Leaf, who hath ascended unto the Glorious Companion, stand ye and say Salutation and blessing and glory upon thee, O Holy Leaf that hath sprung from the Divine Lote-Tree! I bear witness that thou hast believed in God and in His signs, and answered His Call, and turned unto Him, and held fast unto His cord, and clung to the hem of His grace, and fled thy home in His path, and chosen to live as a stranger, out of love for His presence and in thy longing to serve Him. May God have mercy upon him that draweth*

*nigh unto thee, and remembereth thee through the things which My Pen hath voiced in this, the most great station. We pray God that He may forgive us, and forgive them that have turned unto thee, and grant their desires, and bestow upon them, through His wondrous grace, whatever be their wish. He, verily, is the Bountiful, the Generous. Praise be to God, He Who is the Desire of all worlds, and the Beloved of all who recognize Him."*

And finally, 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself in one of His remarkably significant Tablets, has borne witness not only to the exalted station of one whose "*seed shall inherit the Gentiles*", whose Husband is the Lord of Hosts, but also the sufferings endured by her who was His beloved mother. "*As to thy question concerning the 54th chapter of Isaiah,*" He writes, "*This chapter refers to the Most Exalted Leaf, the mother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. As a proof to this it is said 'For more are the children of the desolate, than the children of the married wife.'* Reflect upon this statement and then upon the following: '*And thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.*' And truly the humiliation and reproach which she suffered in the path of God is a fact which no one can refute. For the calamities and afflictions mentioned in the whole chapter are such afflictions which she suffered in the path of God, all of which she endured with patience and, thanked God therefor and praised Him, because He had enabled her to endure afflictions for the sake of Bahá. During all this time, the men and women [Covenant-breakers] persecuted her in an incomparable manner, while she was patient, God-fearing, calm, humble, and contented through the favour of her Lord and by the bounty of her Creator."



## The Administrative Order

### The basis of the Administrative Order

Dearly beloved brethren in 'Abdu'l-Bahá! With the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh the Day-Star of Divine guidance which, as foretold by Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Kázim, had risen in Shíráz, and, while pursuing its westward course, had mounted its zenith in Adrianople, had finally sunk below the horizon of 'Akká, never to rise again ere the complete revolution of one thousand years. The setting of so effulgent an Orb brought to a definite termination the period of Divine Revelation—the initial and most vitalizing stage in the Bahá'í era. Inaugurated by the Báb, culminating in Bahá'u'lláh, anticipated and extolled by the entire company of the Prophets of this great prophetic cycle, this period has, except for the short interval between the Báb's martyrdom and Bahá'u'lláh's shaking experiences in the Síyáh-Chál of Ṭíhrán, been characterized by almost fifty years of continuous and progressive Revelation—a period which by its duration and fecundity must be regarded as unparalleled in the entire field of the world's spiritual history.

The passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, on the other hand, marks the closing of the Heroic and Apostolic Age of this same Dispensation—that primitive period of our Faith

the splendours of which can never be rivalled, much less be eclipsed, by the magnificence that must needs distinguish the future victories of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. For neither the achievements of the champion-builders of the present-day institutions of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, nor the tumultuous triumphs which the heroes of its Golden Age will in the coming days succeed in winning, can measure with, or be included within the same category as, the wondrous works associated with the names of those who have generated its very life and laid its pristine foundations. That first and creative age of the Bahá'í era must, by its very nature, stand above and apart from the formative period into which we have entered and the golden age destined to succeed it.

### ***Sources of the Administrative Order***

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who incarnates an institution for which we can find no parallel whatsoever in any of the world's recognized religious systems, may be said to have closed the Age to which He Himself belonged and opened the one in which we are now labouring. His Will and Testament should thus be regarded as the perpetual, the indissoluble link which the mind of Him Who is the Mystery of God has conceived in order to ensure the continuity of the three ages that constitute the component parts of the Bahá'í Dispensation. The period in which the seed of the Faith had been slowly germinating is thus intertwined both with the one which must witness its efflorescence and the subsequent age in which that seed will have finally yielded its golden fruit.

The creative energies released by the Law of Bahá'u'lláh, permeating and evolving within the mind of 'Abdu'l-

Bahá, have, by their very impact and close interaction, given birth to an Instrument which may be viewed as the Charter of the New World Order which is at once the glory and the promise of this most great Dispensation. The Will may thus be acclaimed as the inevitable offspring resulting from that mystic intercourse between Him Who communicated the generating influence of His divine Purpose and the One Who was its vehicle and chosen recipient. Being the Child of the Covenant the Heir of both the Originator and the Interpreter of the Law of God—the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá can no more be divorced from Him Who supplied the original and motivating impulse than from the One Who ultimately conceived it. Bahá’u’lláh’s inscrutable purpose, we must ever bear in mind, has been so thoroughly infused into the conduct of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and their motives have been so closely wedded together, that the mere attempt to dissociate the teachings of the former from any system which the ideal Exemplar of those same teachings has established would amount to a repudiation of one of the most sacred and basic truths of the Faith.

The Administrative Order, which ever since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ascension has evolved and is taking shape under our very eyes in no fewer than forty countries of the world,<sup>1</sup> may be considered as the framework of the Will itself, the inviolable stronghold wherein this new-born child is being nurtured and developed. This Administrative Order, as it expands and consolidates itself, will no doubt manifest the potentialities and reveal the full implications of this momentous Document—this most remarkable expression of the Will of One of the most re-

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<sup>1</sup> Written in 1934.

markable Figures of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh. It will, as its component parts, its organic institutions, begin to function with efficiency and vigour, assert its claim, and demonstrate its capacity to be regarded not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind.

It should be noted in this connection that this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances. Therein lies the secret of its strength, its fundamental distinction, and the guarantee against disintegration and schism. Nowhere in the sacred scriptures of any of the world's religious systems, nor even in the writings of the Inaugurator of the Bábí Dispensation, do we find provisions establishing a covenant or providing for an administrative order that can compare in scope and authority with those that lie at the very basis of the Bahá'í Dispensation. Has either Christianity or Islám, to take as an instance two of the most widely diffused and outstanding among the world's recognized religions, anything to offer that can measure with, or be regarded as equivalent to, either the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant or to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá? Does the text of either the Gospel or the Qur'an confer sufficient authority upon those leaders and councils that have claimed the right and assumed the function of interpreting the provisions of their sacred scriptures

and of administering the affairs of their respective communities? Could Peter, the admitted chief of the Apostles, or the Imám 'Alí, the cousin and legitimate successor of the Prophet, produce in support of the primacy with which both had been invested written and explicit affirmations from Christ and Muḥammad that could have silenced those who either among their contemporaries or in a later age have repudiated their authority and, by their action, precipitated the schisms that persist until the present day? Where, we may confidently ask, in the recorded sayings of Jesus Christ, whether in the matter of succession or in the provision of a set of specific laws and clearly defined administrative ordinances, as distinguished from purely spiritual principles, can we find anything approaching the detailed injunctions, laws, and warnings that abound in the authenticated utterances of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá? Can any passage of the Qur'an, which in respect to its legal code, its administrative and devotional ordinances, marks already a notable advance over previous and more corrupted Revelations, be construed as placing upon an unassailable basis the undoubted authority with which Muḥammad had, verbally and on several occasions, invested His successor? Can the Author of the Bábí Dispensation, however much He may have succeeded through the provisions of the Persian Bayán in averting a schism as permanent and catastrophic as those that afflicted Christianity and Islám—can He be said to have produced instruments for the safeguarding of His Faith as definite and efficacious as those which must for all time preserve the unity of the organized followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh?

Alone of all the Revelations gone before it this Faith has, through the explicit directions, the repeated warnings, the authenticated safeguards incorporated and elaborated in its teachings, succeeded in raising a structure which the bewildered followers of bankrupt and broken creeds might well approach and critically examine, and seek, ere it is too late, the invulnerable security of its world-embracing shelter.

No wonder that He Who through the operation of His Will has inaugurated so vast and unique an Order and Who is the Centre of so mighty a Covenant should have written these words: *"So firm and mighty is this Covenant that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like."* *"Whatsoever is latent in the innermost of this holy cycle,"* He wrote during the darkest and most dangerous days of His ministry, *"shall gradually appear and he made manifest, for now is but the beginning of its growth and the day-spring of the revelation of its signs."* *"Fear not,"* are His reassuring words foreshadowing the rise of the Administrative Order established by His Will, *"fear not if this Branch be severed from this material world and cast aside its leaves; nay, the leaves thereof shall flourish, for this Branch will grow after it is cut off from this world below, it shall reach the loftiest pinnacles of glory, and it shall bear such fruits as will perfume the world with their fragrance."*

To what else if not to the power and majesty which this Administrative Order—the rudiments of the future all-enfolding Bahá'í Commonwealth is destined to manifest, can these utterances of Bahá'u'lláh allude; *"The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World*

*Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed."*

The Báb Himself, in the course of His references to "*Him Whom God will make manifest*" anticipates the System and glorifies the World Order which the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is destined to unfold. "*Well is it with him,*" is His remarkable statement in the third chapter of the Persian Bayán, "*who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh and rendereth thanks unto his Lord! For He will assuredly be made manifest. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the Bayán.*"

In the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh where the 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 which the Author of our Faith and the Centre 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.

### ***The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice***

An attempt, I feel, should at the present juncture be made to explain the character and functions of the twin pillars that support this mighty Administrative Structure—the institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice. To describe in their entirety the diverse elements that function in conjunction with these institutions is beyond the scope and purpose of this general exposition of the fundamental verities of the Faith. To define with accuracy and minuteness the features, and to analyse exhaustively the nature of the relationship which, on the one hand, bind together these two fundamental organs of the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and connect, on the other, each of them to the Author of the Faith and the Centre of His Covenant is a task which future generations will no doubt adequately fulfil. My present intention is to elaborate certain salient features of this scheme which, however close we may stand to its colossal structure, are already so clearly defined that we find it inexcusable to either misconceive or ignore them.

It should be stated, at the very outset, in clear and unambiguous language, that these twin institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh should be regarded as divine in origin, essential in their functions and complementary in their aim and purpose. 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. 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.

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 birth-right."* 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 guid-

ance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn.

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 paralysed 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.

*"He is the Interpreter of the Word of God,"* 'Abdu'l-Bahá, referring to the functions of the Guardian of the Faith, asserts, using in His Will the very term which He Himself had chosen when refuting the argument of the Covenant-breakers who had challenged His right to interpret the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh. *"After him,"* He adds, *"will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants."*

*"The mighty stronghold,"* He further explains, *"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 Aghsán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God, to show their obedience, submissiveness, and subordination unto the Guardian of the Cause of God."*

*"It is incumbent upon the members of the House of justice,"* Bahá'u'lláh, on the other hand, declares in the Eighth Leaf of the Exalted Paradise, *"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."*

*"Unto the Most Holy Book"* (the Kitáb-i-Aqdas), 'Abdu'l-Bahá states in His Will, *"every one must turn, and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be re-*

*ferred 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."*

Not only does 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirm in His Will Bahá'u'lláh's above-quoted statement, but invests this body with the additional right and power to abrogate, according to the exigencies of time, its own enactments, as well as those of a preceding House of Justice. "Inasmuch as the House of justice," is His explicit statement in His Will, "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. ... This it can do because these laws form no part of the divine explicit text."

Referring to both the Guardian and the Universal House of justice we read these emphatic words: "*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 the Exalted One [the Báb] (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God.*"

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 judgment 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. He interprets what has been specifically revealed, and cannot legislate except in his capacity as member of the Universal House of Justice. He is debarred from laying down independently the constitution that must govern the organized activities of his fellow-members, and from exercising his influence in a manner that would encroach upon the liberty of those whose sacred right is to elect the body of his collaborators.

It should be borne in mind that the institution of the Guardianship has been anticipated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in an allusion He made in a Tablet addressed, long before His own ascension, to three of His friends in Persia. To their question as to whether there would be any person to whom all the Bahá'ís would be called upon to turn after His ascension He made the following reply "*As to*

*the question ye have asked me, know verily that this is a well-guarded secret. It is even as a gem concealed within its shell. That it will be revealed is predestined. The time will come when its light will appear, when its evidences will be made manifest, and its secrets unravelled."*

Dearly beloved friends! Exalted as is the position and vital as is the function of the institution of the Guardianship in the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and staggering as must be the weight of responsibility which it carries, its importance must, whatever be the language of the Will, be in no wise over-emphasized. The Guardian of the Faith must not under any circumstances, and whatever his merits or his achievements, be exalted to the rank that will make him a co-sharer with 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the unique position which the Centre of the Covenant occupies—much less to the station exclusively ordained for the Manifestation of God. So grave a departure from the established tenets of our Faith is nothing short of open blasphemy. As I have already stated, in the course of my references to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station, however great the gulf that separates Him from the Author of a Divine Revelation it can never measure with the distance that stands between Him Who is the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and the Guardians who are its chosen ministers. There is a far, far greater distance separating the Guardian from the Centre of the Covenant than there is between the Centre of the Covenant and its Author.

No Guardian of the Faith, I feel it my solemn duty to place on record, can ever claim to be the perfect exemplar of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh or the stainless mirror that reflects His light. Though overshadowed by the

unfailing, the unerring protection of Bahá'u'lláh and of the Báb, and however much he may share with 'Abdu'l-Bahá the right and obligation to interpret the Bahá'í teachings, he remains essentially human and cannot, if he wishes to remain faithful to his trust, arrogate to himself, under any pretence whatsoever, the rights, the privileges and prerogatives which Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to confer upon His Son. In the light of this truth to pray to the Guardian of the Faith, to address him as lord and master, to designate him as his holiness, to seek his benediction, to celebrate his birthday, or to commemorate any event associated with his life would be tantamount to a departure from those established truths that are enshrined within our beloved Faith. The fact that the Guardian has been specifically endowed with such power as he may need to reveal the purport and disclose the implications of the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not necessarily confer upon him a station co-equal with those Whose words he is called upon to interpret. He can exercise that right and discharge this obligation and yet remain infinitely inferior to both of them in rank and different in nature.

To the integrity of this cardinal principle of our Faith the words, the deeds of its present and future Guardians must abundantly testify. By their conduct and example they must needs establish its truth upon an unassailable foundation and transmit to future generations unimpeachable evidences of its reality.

For my own part to hesitate in recognizing so vital a truth or to vacillate in proclaiming so firm a conviction must constitute a shameless betrayal of the confidence reposed in me by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and an unpardonable

usurpation of the authority with which He Himself has been invested.

### ***The theory of the Administrative Order***

A word should now be said regarding the theory on which this Administrative Order is based and the principle that must govern the operation of its chief institutions. It would be utterly misleading to attempt a comparison between this unique, this divinely conceived Order and any of the diverse systems which the minds of men, at various periods of their history, have contrived for the government of human institutions. Such an attempt would in itself betray a lack of complete appreciation of the excellence of the handiwork of its great Author. How could it be otherwise when we remember that this Order constitutes the very pattern of that divine civilization which the almighty Law of Bahá'u'lláh is designed to establish upon earth? The divers and ever-shifting systems of human policy, whether past or present, whether originating in the East or in the West, offer no adequate criterion wherewith to estimate the potency of its hidden virtues or to appraise the solidity of its foundations.

The Bahá'í Commonwealth of the future, of which this vast Administrative Order is the sole framework, is, both in theory and practice, not only unique in the entire history of political institutions, but can find no parallel in the annals of any of the world's recognized religious systems. No form of democratic government; no system of autocracy or of dictatorship, whether monarchical or republican; no intermediary scheme of a purely aristocratic order; nor even any of the recognized types of

theocracy, whether it be the Hebrew Commonwealth, or the various Christian ecclesiastical organizations, or the Imamate or the Caliphate in Islám—none of these can be identified or be said to conform with the Administrative Order which the master-hand of its perfect Architect has fashioned.

This new-born Administrative Order incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of them, and without introducing within its machinery any of the objectionable features which they inherently possess. It blends and harmonizes, as no government fashioned by mortal hands has as yet accomplished, the salutary truths which each of these systems undoubtedly contains without vitiating the integrity of those God-given verities on which it is ultimately founded.

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. Moreover, he who symbolizes the hereditary principle in this Dispensation has been made the interpreter of the words of its Author, and ceases consequently, by virtue of the actual authority vested in him, to be the figurehead invariably associated with the prevailing systems of constitutional monarchies.

Nor can the Bahá'í Administrative Order be dismissed as a hard and rigid system of unmitigated autocracy or as an idle imitation of any form of absolutistic ecclesiastical government, whether it be the Papacy, the Imamate or any other similar institution, for the obvious reason that upon the international elected representatives of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh has been conferred the exclusive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the Bahá'í writings. Neither the Guardian of the Faith nor any institution apart from the International House of Justice can ever usurp this vital and essential power or encroach upon that sacred right. The abolition of professional priesthood with its accompanying sacraments of baptism, of communion, and of

confession of sins, the laws requiring the election by universal suffrage of all local, national, and international Houses of Justice, the total absence of episcopal authority with its attendant privileges, corruptions, and bureaucratic tendencies, are further evidences of the non-autocratic character of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and of its inclination to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs.

Nor is this Order identified with the name of Bahá'u'lláh to be confused with any system of purely aristocratic government in view of the fact that it upholds, on the one hand, the hereditary principle and entrusts the Guardian of the Faith with the obligation of interpreting its teachings, and provides, on the other, for the free and direct election from among the mass of the faithful of the body that constitutes its highest legislative organ.

Whereas this Administrative Order cannot be said to have been modelled after any of these recognized systems of government, it nevertheless embodies, reconciles, and assimilates within its framework such wholesome elements as are to be found in each one of them. The hereditary authority which the Guardian is called upon to exercise, the vital and essential function which the Universal House of Justice discharges, the specific provisions requiring its democratic election by the representatives of the faithful—these combine to demonstrate the truth that this divinely revealed Order, which can never be identified with any of the standard types of government referred to by Aristotle in his works, embodies and blends with the spiritual verities on which it is based the beneficent elements which are to be found in each one of them. The admitted evils inherent in each

of these systems being rigidly and permanently excluded, this unique Order, however long it may endure and however extensive its ramifications, cannot ever degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagoguery which must sooner or later corrupt the machinery of all man-made and essentially defective political institutions.

### **Attacks on the Administrative Order**

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

Viewed in the light of past experience, the inevitable result of such futile attempts, however persistent and malicious they may be, is to contribute to a wider and deeper recognition by believers and unbelievers alike of the distinguishing features of the Faith proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. These challenging criticisms, whether or not dictated by malice, cannot but serve to galvanize the souls of its ardent supporters, and to consolidate the ranks of its faithful promoters. They will purge the Faith from those pernicious elements whose continued association with the believers tends to discredit the fair

name of the Cause, and to tarnish the purity of its spirit. We should welcome, therefore, not only the open attacks which its avowed enemies persistently launch against it, but should also view as a blessing in disguise every storm of mischief with which they who apostatize their faith or claim to be its faithful exponents assail it from time to time. Instead of undermining the Faith, such assaults, both from within and from without, reinforce its foundations, and excite the intensity of its flame. Designed to becloud its radiance, they proclaim to all the world the exalted character of its precepts, the completeness of its unity, the uniqueness of its position and pervasiveness of its influence.

## **World Order of Bahá'u'lláh**

### ***Sources of the Bahá'í World Order***

It would, however, be helpful and instructive to bear in mind certain basic principles with reference to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which together with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, constitutes the chief depository wherein are enshrined those priceless elements of that Divine Civilization, the establishment of which is the primary mission of the Bahá'í Faith. A study of the provisions of these sacred documents will reveal the close relationship that exists between them, as well as the identity of purpose and method which they inculcate. Far from regarding their specific provisions as incompatible and contradictory in spirit, every fair-minded inquirer will readily admit that they are not only complementary, but that they mutually confirm one another.

other, and are inseparable parts of one complete unit. A comparison of their contents with the rest of Bahá'í sacred Writings will similarly establish the conformity of whatever they contain with the spirit as well as the letter of the authenticated writings and sayings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In fact, he who reads the Aqdas with care and diligence will not find it hard to discover that the Most Holy Book itself anticipates in a number of passages the institutions which 'Abdu'l-Bahá ordains in His Will. By leaving certain matters unspecified and unregulated in His Book of Laws, Bahá'u'lláh seems to have deliberately left a gap in the general scheme of Bahá'í Dispensation, which the unequivocal provisions of the Master's Will have filled. To attempt to divorce the one from the other, to insinuate that the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh have not been upheld, in their entirety and with absolute integrity, by what 'Abdu'l-Bahá has revealed in His Will is an unpardonable affront to the unswerving fidelity that has characterized the life and labours of our beloved Master.

I will not attempt in the least to assert or demonstrate the authenticity of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for that in itself would betray an apprehension on my part as to the unanimous confidence of the believers in the genuineness of the last written wishes of our departed Master. I will only confine my observations to those issues which may assist them to appreciate the essential unity that underlies the spiritual, the humanitarian, and the administrative principles enunciated by the Author and the Interpreter of the Bahá'í Faith.

I am at a loss to explain that strange mentality that inclines to uphold as the sole criterion of the truth of the

Bahá'í Teachings what is admittedly only an obscure and unauthenticated translation of an oral statement made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in defiance and total disregard of the available text of all of His universally recognized writings. I truly deplore the unfortunate distortions that have resulted in days past from the incapacity of the interpreter to grasp the meaning of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and from his incompetence to render adequately such truths as have been revealed to him by the Master's statements. Much of the confusion that has obscured the understanding of the believers should be attributed to this double error involved in the inexact rendering of an only partially understood statement. Not infrequently has the interpreter even failed to convey the exact purport of the inquirer's specific questions, and, by his deficiency of understanding and expression in conveying the answer of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, has been responsible for reports wholly at variance with the true spirit and purpose of the Cause. It was chiefly in view of the misleading nature of the reports of the informal conversations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá with visiting pilgrims, that I have insistently urged the believers of the West to regard such statements as merely personal impressions of the sayings of their Master, and to quote and consider as authentic only such translations as are based upon the authenticated text of His recorded utterances in the original tongue.

It should be remembered by every follower of the Cause that the system of Bahá'í administration is not an innovation imposed arbitrarily upon the Bahá'ís of the world since the Master's passing, but derives its authority from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is specifically prescribed in unnumbered Tablets, and

rests in some of its essential features upon the explicit provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It thus unifies and correlates the principles separately laid down by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and is indissolubly bound with the essential verities of the Faith. To dissociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause, a separation that can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself.

### ***Local and National Houses of Justice***

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 on the other, 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, so 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 unfavourable circumstances prevailing under the Turkish régime, would have, in all probability, taken the preliminary steps for its establishment. It will be evident, therefore, that 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, 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.

### ***The institution of Guardianship***

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. Only future generations can comprehend

the value and the significance attached to this Divine Masterpiece, which the hand of the Master-builder of the world has designed for the unification and the triumph of the worldwide 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. They only will appreciate the significance of the vigorous language employed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá with reference to the band of Covenant-breakers that has opposed Him in His days. To them alone will be revealed the suitability of the institutions initiated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the character of the future society which is to emerge out of the chaos and confusion of the present age. In this connection, I cannot but feel amused at the preposterous and fantastic idea that Muḥammad-'Alí, the prime mover and the focal centre of unyielding hostility to the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, should have freely associated himself with the members of the family of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the forging of a will which in the words of the writer herself, is but a "recital of the plottings" in which for thirty years Muḥammad-'Alí has been busily engaged. To such a hopeless victim of confused ideas, I feel I can best reply by a genuine expression of compassion and pity, mingled with my hopes for her deliverance from so profound a delusion. It was in view of the aforesaid observations, that I have, after the unfortunate and unavoidable delay occasioned by my ill health and absence from the Holy Land during the Master's passing, hesitated to resort to the indiscriminate circulation of the Will, realizing full well that it was primarily directed to the recognized believers, and only

indirectly concerned the larger body of the friends and sympathizers of the Cause.

### ***The animating purpose of Bahá'í institutions***

And now, it behoves us to reflect on the animating purpose and the primary functions of these divinely established institutions, the sacred character and the universal efficacy of which can be demonstrated only by the spirit they diffuse and the work they actually achieve. I need not dwell upon what I have already reiterated and emphasized that the administration of the Cause is to be conceived as an instrument and not a substitute for the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, that it should be regarded as a channel through which His promised blessings may flow, that it should guard against such rigidity as would clog and fetter the liberating forces released by His Revelation. I need not enlarge at the present moment upon what I have stated in the past, that contributions to the local and national Funds are of a purely voluntary character; that no coercion or solicitation of funds is to be tolerated in the Cause; that general appeals addressed to the communities as a body should be the only form in which the financial requirements of the Faith are to be met; that the present restrictions imposed on the publication of Bahá'í literature will be definitely abolished; that the World Unity activity is being carried out as an experiment to test the efficacy of the indirect method of teaching; that the whole machinery of assemblies, of committees, and conventions is to be regarded as a means, and not an end in itself; that they will rise or fall according to their capacity to further the interests, to co-ordinate the activities, to apply the principles, to

embody the ideals, and execute the purpose of the Bahá'í Faith. Who, I may ask, when viewing the international character of the Cause, its far-flung ramifications, the increasing complexity of its affairs, the diversity of its adherents, and the state of confusion that assails on every side the infant Faith of God, can for a moment question the necessity of some sort of administrative machinery that will ensure, amid the storm and stress of a struggling civilization, the unity of the Faith, the preservation of its identity, and the protection of its interests? To repudiate the validity of the assemblies of the elected ministers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh would be to reject those countless Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, wherein they have extolled their privileges and duties, emphasized the glory of their mission, revealed the immensity of their task, and warned them of the attacks they must needs expect from the unwisdom of their friends as well as from the malice of their enemies. It is surely for those to whose hands so priceless a heritage has been committed to prayerfully watch lest the tool should supersede the Faith itself, lest undue concern for the minute details arising from the administration of the Cause obscure the vision of its promoters, lest partiality, ambition, and worldliness tend in the course of time to becloud the radiance, stain the purity, and impair the effectiveness of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

### **Contrast with ecclesiastical organizations**

Should we look back upon the past, were we to search out the Gospel and the Qur'an, we will readily recognize

that neither the Christian nor the Islamic Dispensations can offer a parallel either to the system of Divine Economy so thoroughly established by Bahá'u'lláh, or to the safeguards which He has provided for its preservation and advancement. Therein, I am profoundly convinced, lies the answer to those questions to which I have already referred.

None, I feel, will question the fact that the fundamental reason why the unity of the Church of Christ was irretrievably shattered, and its influence was in the course of time undermined, was that the Edifice which the Fathers of the Church reared after the passing of His First Apostle was an Edifice that rested in no wise upon the explicit directions of Christ Himself. The authority and features of their administration were wholly inferred, and indirectly derived, with more or less justification, from certain vague and fragmentary references which they found scattered amongst His utterances as recorded in the Gospel. Not one of the sacraments of the Church; not one of the rites and ceremonies which the Christian Fathers have elaborately devised and ostentatiously observed; not one of the elements of the severe discipline they rigorously imposed upon the primitive Christians; none of these reposed on the direct authority of Christ, or emanated from His specific utterances. Not one of these did Christ conceive, none did He specifically invest with sufficient authority to either interpret His Word, or to add to what He had not specifically enjoined.

For this reason, in later generations, voices were raised in protest against the self-appointed Authority which arrogated to itself privileges and powers which did not

emanate from the clear text of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and which constituted a grave departure from the spirit which that Gospel did inculcate. They argued with force and justification that the canons promulgated by the Councils of the Church were not divinely appointed laws, but were merely human devices which did not even rest upon the actual utterances of Jesus. Their contention centred around the fact that the vague and inconclusive words, addressed by Christ to Peter, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church", could never justify the extreme measures, the elaborate ceremonials, the fettering creeds and dogmas, with which His successors have gradually burdened and obscured His Faith. Had it been possible for the Church Fathers, whose unwarranted authority was thus fiercely assailed from every side, to refute the denunciations heaped upon them by quoting specific utterances of Christ regarding the future administration of His Church, or the nature of the authority of His Successors, they would surely have been capable of quenching the flame of controversy, and preserving the unity of Christendom. The Gospel, however, the only repository of the utterances of Christ, afforded no such shelter to these harassed leaders of the Church, who found themselves helpless in the face of the pitiless onslaught of their enemy, and who eventually had to submit to the forces of schism which invaded their ranks.

In the Muslim Revelation, however, although His Faith as compared with that of Christ was, so far as the administration of His Dispensation is concerned, more complete and more specific in its provisions, yet in the matter of succession, it gave no written, no binding

and conclusive instructions to those whose mission was to propagate His Cause. For the text of the Qur'an, the ordinances of which regarding prayer, fasting, marriage, divorce, inheritance, pilgrimage, and the like, have after the revolution of thirteen hundred years remained intact and operative, gives no definite guidance regarding the Law of Succession, the source of all the dissensions, the controversies and schisms which have dismembered and discredited Islám.

Not so with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Unlike the Dispensation of Christ, unlike the Dispensation of Muḥammad, unlike all the Dispensations of the past, the apostles of Bahá'u'lláh in every land, wherever they labour and toil, have before them in clear, in unequivocal and emphatic language, all the laws, the regulations, the principles, the institutions, the guidance, they require for the prosecution and consummation of their task. Both in the administrative provisions of the Bahá'í Dispensation, and in the matter of succession, as embodied in the twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh can summon to their aid such irrefutable evidences of Divine Guidance that none can resist, that none can belittle or ignore. Therein lies the distinguishing feature of the Bahá'í Revelation. Therein lies the strength of the unity of the Faith, of the validity of a Revelation that claims not to destroy or belittle previous Revelations, but to connect, unify, and fulfil them. This is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have both revealed and even insisted upon certain details in connection with the Divine Economy which they have bequeathed to us, their followers. This is why such an emphasis has been placed in



their Will and Testament upon the powers and prerogatives of the ministers of their Faith.

For nothing short of the explicit directions of their Book, and the surprisingly emphatic language with which they have clothed the provisions of their Will, could possibly safeguard the Faith for which they have both so gloriously laboured all their lives. Nothing short of this could protect it from the heresies and calumnies with which denominations, peoples, and governments have endeavoured, and will, with increasing vigour, endeavour to assail it in future.

We should also bear in mind that the distinguishing character of the Bahá'í Revelation does not solely consist in the completeness and unquestionable validity of the Dispensation which the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have established. Its excellence lies also in the fact that those elements which in past Dispensations have, without the least authority from their Founders, been a source of corruption and of incalculable harm to the Faith of God, have been strictly excluded by the clear text of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. Those unwarranted practices, in connection with the sacrament of baptism, of communion, of confession of sins, of asceticism, of priestly domination, of elaborate ceremonials, of holy war, and of polygamy, have one and all been rigidly suppressed by the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh; whilst the rigidity and rigour of certain observances, such as fasting, which are necessary to the devotional life of the individual, have been considerably abated.

## **The universal Bahá'í organism**

Should we build up the administrative world order to a point of absolute perfection but at the same time allow it to be hampered or disconnected from the channels within, through which channels the Holy Spirit of the Cause pours forth, we would have nothing more than a perfected body out of touch with and cut off from the finer promptings of the soul or spirit. If, on the other hand, the influxes and goings forth of the spirit are scattered, diffused, and subjected wholly to the more or less imperfect guidance and interpretation of individual believers, lacking both the wisdom secured through consultation and also the lights of real unity which shine through consultative action and obedience thereto—a disordered and disorganized activity would be witnessed which would but dimly reflect the divine purpose for this age, which is no less than the establishment of the reign of divine love, justice, and wisdom in the world, under and in conformity to the Divine Law.

In the body of man, which is the true divine example or parallel, the spirit, when in ideal control of all the lesser parts of the organism, finds the utmost harmony throughout the whole body—each part is in perfect reciprocity with the other parts. The commands and impulses of the spirit are obeyed by the body and the body in turn in its actions and functions identifies and determines the expression the spiritual impulses shall take. This is divine unity—and this law being universal and found in every created object in the universe, has full application to the universal Bahá'í organism made up of

believers everywhere, which has been established by the Manifestation of God.

## **Politics and the Bahá'í Faith**

### ***The divine polity***

Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programmes of parties and factions. In such controversies they should assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system prejudicial to the best interests of that world-wide Fellowship which it is their aim to guard and foster. Let them beware lest they allow themselves to become the tools of unscrupulous politicians or to be entrapped by the treacherous devices of the plotters and the perfidious among their countrymen. Let them so shape their lives and regulate their conduct that no charge of secrecy, of fraud, of bribery, or of intimidation may, however ill-founded, be brought against them. Let them rise above all particularism and partisanship, above the vain disputes, the petty calculations, the transient passions that agitate the face, and engage the attention, of a changing world. It is their duty to strive to distinguish, as clearly as they possibly can, and if needed with the aid of their elected representatives, such posts and functions as are either diplomatic or political from those that are purely administrative in character, and which under no circumstances are affected by the changes and chances that political activities and party government, in every land, must necessarily involve.

Let them affirm their unyielding determination to stand, firmly and unreservedly, for the way of Bahá'u'lláh, to avoid the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the politician, and to become worthy agencies of that Divine Polity which incarnates God's immutable Purpose for all men.

It should be made unmistakably clear that such an attitude implies neither the slightest indifference to the cause and interests of their own country, nor involves any insubordination on their part to the authority of recognized and established governments. Nor does it constitute a repudiation of their sacred obligation to promote, in the most effective manner, the best interests of their government and people. It indicates the desire cherished by every true and loyal follower of Bahá'u'lláh to serve, in an unselfish, unostentatious, and patriotic fashion, the highest interests of the country to which he belongs, and in a way that would entail no departure from the high standards of integrity and truthfulness associated with the teachings of his Faith.

As the number of the Bahá'í communities in various parts of the world multiplies and their power, as a social force, becomes increasingly apparent, they will no doubt find themselves increasingly subjected to the pressure which men of authority and influence, in the political domain, will exercise in the hope of obtaining the support they require for the advancement of their aims. These communities will, moreover, feel a growing need of the goodwill and the assistance of their respective governments in their efforts to widen the scope, and to consolidate the foundations, of the institutions committed to their charge. Let them beware lest, in their

eagerness to further the aims of their beloved Cause, they should be led unwittingly to bargain with their Faith, to compromise with their essential principles, or to sacrifice, in return for any material advantage which their institutions may derive, the integrity of their spiritual ideals. Let them proclaim that in whatever country they reside, and however advanced their institutions, or profound their desire to enforce the laws, and apply the principles, enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, they will, unhesitatingly, subordinate the operation of such laws and the application of such principles to the requirements and legal enactments of their respective governments. Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavouring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.

It should also be borne in mind that the very extension of the activities in which we are engaged, and the variety of the communities which labour under divers forms of government, so essentially different in their standards, policies, and methods, make it absolutely essential for all those who are the declared members of any one of these communities to avoid any action that might, by arousing the suspicion or exciting the antagonism of any one government, involve their brethren in fresh persecutions or complicate the nature of their task. How else, might I ask, could such a far-flung Faith, which transcends political and social boundaries, which includes within its pale so great a variety of races and nations, which will have to rely increasingly, as it forges ahead,

on the goodwill and support of the diversified and contending governments of the earth—how else could such a Faith succeed in preserving its unity, in safeguarding its interests, and in ensuring the steady and peaceful development of its institutions?

Such an attitude, however, is not dictated by considerations of selfish expediency, but is actuated, first and foremost, by the broad principle that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will, under no circumstances, suffer themselves to be involved, whether as individuals or in their collective capacities, in matters that would entail the slightest departure from the fundamental verities and ideals of their Faith. Neither the charges which the uninformed and the malicious may be led to bring against them, nor the allurements of honours and rewards, will ever induce them to surrender their trust or to deviate from their path. Let their words proclaim, and their conduct testify, that they who follow Bahá'u'lláh, in whatever land they reside, are actuated by no selfish ambition, that they neither thirst for power, nor mind any wave of unpopularity, of distrust or criticism, which a strict adherence to their standards might provoke.

Difficult and delicate though our task be, the sustaining power of Bahá'u'lláh and of His Divine guidance will assuredly assist us if we follow steadfastly in His way, and strive to uphold the integrity of His laws. The light of His redeeming grace, which no earthly power can obscure, will, if we persevere, illuminate our path, as we steer our course amid the snares and pitfalls of a troubled age, and will enable us to discharge our duties in a manner that would redound to the glory and the honour of His blessed Name.

## Safeguarding the Faith

Their Faith, Bahá'ís firmly believe, is moreover undenominational, non-sectarian, and wholly divorced from every ecclesiastical system, whatever its form, origin, or activities. No ecclesiastical organization, with its creeds, its traditions, its limitations, and exclusive outlook, can be said (as is the case with all existing political factions, parties, systems, and programmes) to conform, in all its aspects, to the cardinal tenets of Bahá'í belief. To some of the principles and ideals animating political and ecclesiastical institutions every conscientious follower of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh can, no doubt, readily subscribe. With none of these institutions, however, can he identify himself, nor can he unreservedly endorse the creeds, the principles and programmes on which they are based.

How can a Faith, it should moreover be borne in mind, whose divinely ordained institutions have been established within the jurisdiction of no less than forty different countries,<sup>1</sup> the policies and interests of whose governments are continually clashing and growing more complex and confused every day—how can such a Faith, by allowing its adherents, whether individually or through its organized councils, to meddle in political activities, succeed in preserving the integrity of its teachings and in safeguarding the unity of its followers? How can it ensure the vigorous, the uninterrupted and peaceful development of its expanding institutions? How can a Faith, whose ramifications have brought it into contact with mutually incompatible religious sys-

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<sup>1</sup> Written in 1936.

terns, sects, and confessions, be in a position, if it permits its adherents to subscribe to obsolescent observances and doctrines, to claim the unconditional allegiance of those whom it is striving to incorporate into its divinely appointed system? How can it avoid the constant friction, the misunderstandings and controversies which formal affiliation, as distinct from association, must inevitably engender?

These directing and regulating principles of Bahá'í belief the upholders of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh feel bound, as their Administrative Order expands and consolidates itself, to assert and vigilantly apply. The exigencies of a slowly crystallizing Faith impose upon them a duty which they cannot shirk, a responsibility they cannot evade.

Nor are they unmindful of the imperative necessity of upholding and of executing the laws, as distinguished from the principles, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, both of which constitute the warp and woof of the institutions upon which the structure of His World Order must ultimately rest. To demonstrate their usefulness and efficacy, to carry out and apply them, to safeguard their integrity, to grasp their implications, and to facilitate their propagation, Bahá'í communities in the East, and recently in the West, are displaying the utmost effort and are willing, if necessary, to make whatever sacrifices may be demanded. The day may not be far distant when in certain countries of the East, in which religious communities exercise jurisdiction in matters of personal status, Bahá'í Assemblies may be called upon to assume the duties and responsibilities devolving upon officially constituted Bahá'í courts. They will be empowered, in



such matters as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, to execute and apply, within their respective jurisdictions, and with the sanction of civil authorities, such laws and ordinances as have been expressly provided in their Most Holy Book.

## 8

# The Bahá'í Faith and other religions

## Attitude to other religions

The Faith standing identified with the name of Bahá'u'lláh disclaims any intention to belittle any of the Prophets gone before Him, to whittle down any of their teachings, to obscure, however slightly, the radiance of their Revelations, to oust them from the hearts of their followers, to abrogate the fundamentals of their doctrines, to discard any of their revealed Books, or to suppress the legitimate aspirations of their adherents. Repudiating the claim of any religion to be the final revelation of God to man, disclaiming finality for His own Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh inculcates the basic principle of the relativity of religious truth, the continuity of Divine Revelation, the progressiveness of religious experience. His aim is to widen the basis of all revealed religions and to unravel the mysteries of their scriptures. He insists on the unqualified recognition of the unity of their purpose, restates the eternal verities they enshrine, co-ordinates their functions, distinguishes the essential and the authentic from the non-essential and spurious in their teachings, separates the God-given truths from the priest-prompted superstitions, and on this as a basis proclaims the possibility, and even

prophesies the inevitability, of their unification, and the consummation of their highest hopes.

### ***Islám***

As to Muḥammad, the Apostle of God, let none among His followers who read these pages, think for a moment that either Islám, or its Prophet, or His Book, or His appointed Successors, or any of His authentic teachings, have been, or are to be in any way, or to however slight a degree, disparaged. The lineage of the Báb, the descendant of the Imám Ḥusayn; the divers and striking evidences, in Nabíl's Narrative, of the attitude of the Herald of our Faith towards the Founder, the Imams, and the Book of Islám; the glowing tributes paid by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Íqán to Muḥammad and His lawful Successors, and particularly to the *"peerless and incomparable"* Imám Ḥusayn; the arguments adduced, forcibly, fearlessly, and publicly by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in churches and synagogues, to demonstrate the validity of the Message of the Arabian Prophet; and last but not least the written testimonial of the Queen of Rumania, who, born in the Anglican faith and notwithstanding the close alliance of her government with the Greek Orthodox Church, the state religion of her adopted country, has, largely as a result of the perusal of these public discourses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, been prompted to proclaim her recognition of the prophetic function of Muḥammad all proclaim, in no uncertain terms, the true attitude of the Bahá'í Faith towards its parent religion.

"God," is her royal tribute, "is All, everything. He is the power behind all beginnings. ... His is the Voice within us that shows us good and evil. But mostly we ignore

or misunderstand this voice. Therefore, did He choose His Elect to come down amongst us upon earth to make clear His Word, His real meaning. Therefore, the Prophets; therefore, Christ, Muḥammad, Bahá'u'lláh, for man needs from time to time a voice upon earth to bring God to him, to sharpen the realization of the existence of the true God. Those voices sent to us had to become flesh, so that with our earthly ears we should be able to hear and understand."

What greater proof it may be pertinently asked, can the divines of either Persia or Turkey require wherewith to demonstrate the recognition by the followers of Bahá'u'lláh of the exalted position occupied by the Prophet Muḥammad among the entire company of the Messengers of God? What greater service do these divines expect us to render the Cause of Islám? What greater evidence of our competence can they demand than that we should kindle, in quarters so far beyond their reach, the spark of an ardent and sincere conversion to the truth voiced by the Apostle of God, and obtain from the pen of royalty this public, and indeed historic, confession of His God-given Mission?

### ***Christianity***

As to the position of Christianity, let it be stated without any hesitation or equivocation that its divine origin is unconditionally acknowledged, that the Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ are fearlessly asserted, that the divine inspiration of the Gospel is fully recognized, that the reality of the mystery of the Immaculacy of the Virgin Mary is confessed, and the primacy of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, is upheld and defended. The

Founder of the Christian Faith is designated by Bahá'u'lláh as the *"Spirit of God"*, is proclaimed as the One Who *"appeared out of the breath of the Holy Ghost"*, and is even extolled as the *"Essence of the Spirit"*. His mother is described as *"that veiled and immortal, that most beautiful, countenance"*, and the station of her Son eulogized as a *"station which hath been exalted above the imaginings of all that dwell on earth"*, whilst Peter is recognized as one whom God has caused *"the mysteries of wisdom and of utterance to flow out of his mouth"*. *"Know thou,"* Bahá'u'lláh has moreover testified, *"that when the Son of Man yielded up His breath to God, the whole creation wept with a great weeping. By sacrificing Himself, however, a fresh capacity was infused into all created things. Its evidences, as witnessed in all the peoples of the earth, are now manifest before thee. The deepest wisdom which the sages have uttered, the profoundest learning which any mind hath unfolded, the arts which the ablest hands have produced, the influence exerted by the most potent of rulers, are but manifestations of the quickening power released by His transcendent, His all-pervasive and resplendent Spirit. We testify that when He came into the world, He shed the splendour of His glory upon all created things. Through Him the leper recovered from the leprosy of perversity and ignorance. Through Him the unchaste and wayward were healed. Through His power, born of Almighty God, the eyes of the blind were opened and the soul of the sinner sanctified. ... He it is Who purified the world. Blessed is the man who, with a face beaming with light, hath turned towards Him."*

Indeed, the essential prerequisites of admittance into the Bahá'í fold of Jews, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists,

and the followers of other ancient faiths, as well as of agnostics and even atheists, is the whole-hearted and unqualified acceptance by them all of the Divine origin of both Islám and Christianity, of the Prophetic functions of both Muḥammad and Jesus Christ, of the legitimacy of the institution of the Imamate, and of the primacy of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles. Such are the central, the solid, the incontrovertible principles that constitute the bedrock of Bahá'í belief which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is proud to acknowledge, which its teachers proclaim, which its apologists defend, which its literature disseminates, which its summer schools expound, and which the rank and file of its followers attest by both word and deed.

### ***Religious leaders***

Nor should it be thought for a moment that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh either seek to degrade or even belittle the rank of the world's religious leaders, whether Christian, Muslim, or of any other denomination, should their conduct conform to their professions, and be worthy of the position they occupy. *"Those divines,"* Bahá'u'lláh has affirmed, *"... who are truly adorned with the ornament of knowledge and of a goodly character are, verily, as a head to the body of the world, and as eyes to the nations. The guidance of men hath, at all times, been and is dependent upon these blessed souls."* And again: *"The divine whose conduct is upright, and the sage who is just, are as the spirit unto the body of the world. Well is it with that divine whose head is attired with the crown of justice, and whose temple is adorned with the ornament of equity."* And yet again: *"The divine who hath seized and quaffed*

*the most holy Wine, in the name of the sovereign Ordainer is as an eye unto the world. Well is it with them who obey him, and call him to remembrance.” “Great is the blessedness of that divine,”* He, in another connection, has written, *“that hath not allowed knowledge to become a veil between him and the One Who is the Object of all knowledge and who, when the Self-Subsisting appeared, hath turned with a beaming face towards Him. He, in truth, is numbered with the learned. The inmates of Paradise seek the blessing of his breath, and his lamp sheddeth its radiance over all who are in heaven and on earth. He, verily, is numbered with the inheritors of the Prophets. He that beholdeth him hath, verily, beheld the True One, and he that turneth towards him hath, verily, turned towards God, the Almighty, the All-Wise.” “Respect ye the divines amongst you,”* is His exhortation, *“they whose acts conform to the knowledge they possess, who observe the statutes of God, and decree the things God hath decreed in the Book. Know ye that they are the lamps of guidance betwixt earth and heaven. They that have no consideration for the position and merit of the divines amongst them have, verily, altered the bounty of God vouchsafed unto them.”*

## **Evolution of world unity**

Just as the organic evolution of mankind has been slow and gradual, and involved successively the unification of the family, the tribe, the city-state, and the nation, so has the light vouchsafed by the Revelation of God, at various stages in the evolution of religion and reflected in the successive Dispensations of the past, been slow and pro-

gressive. Indeed the measure of Divine Revelation, in every age, has been adapted to, and commensurate with, the degree of social progress achieved in that age by a constantly evolving humanity.

The Revelation associated with the Faith of Jesus Christ focused attention primarily on the redemption of the individual and the moulding of his conduct, and stressed, as its central theme, the necessity of inculcating a high standard of morality and discipline into man, as the fundamental unit in human society. Nowhere in the Gospels do we find any reference to the unity of nations or the unification of mankind as a whole. When Jesus spoke to those around Him, He addressed them primarily as individuals rather than as component parts of one universal, indivisible entity. The whole surface of the earth was as yet unexplored, and the organization of all its peoples and nations as one unit could, consequently, not be envisaged, how much less proclaimed or established. What other interpretation can be given to these words, addressed specifically by Bahá'u'lláh to the followers of the Gospel, in which the fundamental distinction between the Mission of Jesus Christ, concerning primarily the individual, and His own Message, directed more particularly to mankind as a whole, has been definitely established: *"Verily, He [Jesus] said: 'Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.' In this day, however, We say: 'Come ye after Me, that We may make you to become the quickeners of mankind.'"*

The Faith of Islám, the succeeding link in the chain of Divine Revelation, introduced, as Bahá'u'lláh Himself testifies, the conception of the nation as a unit and a vital stage in the organization of human society, and embodied



it in its teaching. This indeed is what is meant by this brief yet highly significant and illuminating pronouncement of Bahá'u'lláh: *"Of old [Islamic Dispensation] it hath been revealed: 'Love of one's country is an element of the Faith of God.'" This principle was established and stressed by the Apostle of God, inasmuch as the evolution of human society required it at that time. Nor could any stage above and beyond it have been envisaged, as world conditions preliminary to the establishment of a superior form of organization were as yet unobtainable. The conception of nationality, the attainment to the state of nationhood, may, therefore, be said to be the distinguishing characteristics of the Muslim Dispensation, in the course of which the nations and races of the world, and particularly in Europe and America, were unified and achieved political independence.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself elucidates this truth in one of His Tablets: *"In cycles gone by, though harmony was established, yet, owing to the absence of means, the unity of all mankind could not have been achieved. Continents remained widely divided, nay even among the peoples of one and the same continent association and interchange of thought were well-nigh impossible. Consequently intercourse, understanding, and unity amongst all the peoples and kindreds of the earth were unattainable. In this day, however, means of communication have multiplied, and the five continents of the earth have virtually merged into one. ... in like manner all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent. For none is self-sufficiency any longer possible, inasmuch as political ties unite all peoples and nations, and the bends of trade and industry, of agriculture*

*and education are being strengthened every day. Hence the unity of all mankind can in this day be achieved. Verily this is none other but one of the wonders of this wondrous age, this glorious century. Of this, past ages have been deprived, for this century—the century of light—has been endowed with unique and unprecedented glory, power, and illumination. Hence the miraculous unfolding of afresh marvel every day. Eventually it will be seen how bright its candles will burn in the assemblage of man.”*

*“Behold,” He further explains, “how its light is now dawning upon the world’s darkened horizon. The first candle is unity in the political realm, the early glimmerings of which can now be discerned. The second candle is unity of thought in world undertakings, the consummation of which will ere long be witnessed. The third candle is unity in freedom which will surely come to pass. The fourth candle is unity in religion which is the corner-stone of the foundation itself, and which, by the power of God, will be revealed in all its splendour. The fifth candle is the unity of nations—a unity which, in this century, will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland. The sixth candle is unity of races, making of all that dwell on earth peoples and kindreds of one race. The seventh candle is unity of language, i.e. the choice of a universal tongue in which all peoples will be instructed and converse. Each and every one of these will inevitably come to pass, inasmuch as the power of the Kingdom of God will aid and assist in their realization.”*

*“One of the great events,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Some Answered Questions affirmed, “which is to occur in the Day of the manifestation of that Incomparable Branch [Bahá’u’lláh] is the hoisting of the Standard of God among*

*all nations. By this is meant that all nations and kindreds will be gathered together under the shadow of this Divine Banner, which is no other than the Lordly Branch itself, and will become a single nation. Religious and sectarian antagonism, the hostility of races and peoples, and differences among nations, will be eliminated. All men will adhere to one religion, will have one common faith, will be blended into one race, and become a single people. All will dwell in one common fatherland, which is the planet itself."*

This is the stage which the world is now approaching, the stage of world unity, which, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá assures us, will, in this century, be securely established. *"The Tongue of Grandeur,"* Bahá'u'lláh Himself affirms, *"hath ... in the Day of His Manifestation proclaimed: 'It is not his to boast who loveth his country, but it is his who loveth the world.'"* *"Through the power,"* He adds, *"released by these exalted words He hath lent a fresh impulse, and set a new direction, to the birds of men's hearts, and hath obliterated every trace of restriction and limitation from God's Holy Book."*

## **The need for a fresh Revelation**

Who, contemplating the helplessness, the fears and miseries of humanity in this day, can any longer question the necessity for a fresh revelation of the quickening power of God's redemptive love and guidance? Who, witnessing on one hand the stupendous advance achieved in the realm of human knowledge, of power, of skill and inventiveness, and viewing on the other the unprecedented character of the sufferings that afflict,

and the dangers that beset, present-day society, can be so blind as to doubt that the hour has at last struck for the advent of a new Revelation, for a re-statement of the Divine Purpose, and for the consequent revival of those spiritual forces that have, at fixed intervals, rehabilitated the fortunes of human society? Does not the very operation of the world-unifying forces that are at work in this age necessitate that He Who is the Bearer of the Message of God in this day should not only reaffirm that self-same exalted standard of individual conduct inculcated by the Prophets gone before Him, but embody in His appeal, to all governments and peoples, the essentials of that social code, that Divine Economy, which must guide humanity's concerted efforts in establishing that all-embracing federation which is to signalize the advent of the Kingdom of God on this earth?

May we not, therefore, recognizing as we do the necessity for such a revelation of God's redeeming power, meditate upon the supreme grandeur of the System unfolded by the hand of Bahá'u'lláh in this day?

May we not pause, pressed though we be by the daily preoccupations which the ever-widening range of the administrative activities of His Faith must involve, to reflect upon the sanctity of the responsibilities it is our privilege to shoulder?

## **Progressive Revelation**

### ***The rebirth of Religions***

That Bahá'u'lláh should, notwithstanding the overwhelming intensity of His Revelation, be regarded as essentially one of these Manifestations of God, never to

be identified with that invisible Reality, the Essence of Divinity itself, is one of the major beliefs of our Faith—a belief which should never be obscured and the integrity of which no one of its followers should allow to be compromised.

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

“are doomed not to die, but to be reborn. ... ‘Does not the child succumb in the youth and the youth in the man; yet neither child nor youth perishes?’”

*“They Who are the Luminaries of Truth and the Mirrors reflecting the light of Divine Unity,” Bahá’u’lláh explains in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, “in whatever age and cycle they are sent down from their invisible habitations of ancient glory unto this world to educate the souls of men and endue with grace all created things, are invariably endowed with an all-compelling power and invested with invincible sovereignty. ... These sanctified Mirrors, these Day-springs of ancient glory are one and all the exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its essence and ultimate purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory. ... Through them is transmitted a grace that is infinite, and by them is revealed the light that can never fade. ... Human tongue can never befittingly sing their praise, and human speech can never unfold their mystery.” “Inasmuch as these Birds of the celestial Throne,” He adds, “are all sent down from the heaven of the Will of God, and as they all arise to proclaim His irresistible Faith, they therefore are regarded as one soul and the same person. ... They all abide in the same tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech, and proclaim the same Faith. ... They only differ in the intensity of their revelation and the comparative potency of their light. ... That a certain attribute of God hath not been outwardly manifested by these Essences of Detachment doth in no wise imply that they Who are the Day-springs of God’s attributes and the*

*Treasures of His holy names did not actually possess it."*

### ***Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation not final***

It should also be borne in mind that, great as is the power manifested by this Revelation and however vast the range of the Dispensation its Author has inaugurated, it emphatically repudiates the claim to be regarded as the final revelation of God's will and purpose for mankind. To hold such a conception of its character and functions would be tantamount to a betrayal of its cause and a denial of its truth. It must necessarily conflict with the fundamental principle which constitutes the bedrock of Bahá'í belief, the principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is orderly, continuous, and progressive, and not spasmodic or final. Indeed, the categorical rejection by the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh of the claim to finality which any religious system inaugurated by the Prophets of the past may advance is as clear and emphatic as their own refusal to claim that same finality for the Revelation with which they stand identified. *"To believe that all revelation is ended, that the portals of Divine mercy are closed, that from the day-springs of eternal holiness no sun shall rise again, that the ocean of everlasting bounty is for ever stilled, and that out of the tabernacle of ancient glory the Messengers of God have ceased to be made manifest"* must constitute in the eyes of every follower of the Faith a grave, an inexcusable departure from one of its most cherished and fundamental principles.

A reference to some of the already quoted utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá will surely suffice to establish, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the truth of this

cardinal principle. Might not the following passage of the Hidden Words be, likewise, construed as an allegorical allusion to the progressiveness of Divine Revelation and an admission by its Author that the Message with which He has been entrusted is not the final and ultimate expression of the will and guidance of the Almighty? *“O Son of justice! In the night-season the beauty of the immortal Being hath repaired from the emerald height of fidelity unto the Sadratu’l-Muntahá, and wept with such a weeping that the concourse on high and the dwellers of the realms above wailed at His lamenting. Whereupon there was asked, Why the wailing and weeping? He made reply: As bidden I waited expectant upon the hill of faithfulness, yet inhaled not from them that dwell on earth of the fragrance of fidelity. Then summoned to return I beheld, and lo! certain doves of holiness were sore tried within the claws of the dogs of earth. Thereupon the Maid of heaven hastened forth unveiled and resplendent from Her mystic mansion, and asked of their names, and all were told but one. And when urged, the first letter thereof was uttered, whereupon the dwellers of the celestial chambers rushed forth out of their habitation of glory. And whilst the second letter was pronounced they fell down, one and all, upon the dust. At that moment a voice was heard from the inmost shrine: ‘Thus far and no farther.’ Verily We bear witness to that which they have done and now are doing.”*

In a more explicit language Bahá’u’lláh testifies to this truth in one of His Tablets revealed in Adrianople: *“Know verily that the veil hiding Our countenance hath not been completely lifted. We have revealed Our Self to a degree corresponding to the capacity of the people of Our age. Should the Ancient Beauty be unveiled to the fullness of*



*His glory mortal eyes would be blinded by the dazzling intensity of His revelation."*

In the *Súriy-i-Şabr*, revealed as far back as the year 1863, on the very first day of His arrival in the garden of *Riḍván*, He thus affirms: "God hath sent down His Messengers to succeed to Moses and Jesus, and He will continue to do so till 'the end that hath no end'; so that His grace may, from the heaven of Divine bounty, be continually vouchsafed to mankind."

"I am not apprehensive for My own self," Bahá'u'lláh still more explicitly declares, "My fears are for Him Who will be sent down unto you after Me—*Hirai* Who will be invested with great sovereignty and mighty dominion." And again He writes in the *Súratu'l-Haykal*: "By those words which I have revealed, Myself is not intended, but rather He Who will come after Me. To it is witness God, the All-Knowing." "Deal not with Him," He adds, "as ye have dealt with Me."

In a more circumstantial passage the Báb upholds the same truth in His writings. "It is clear and evident," He writes in the Persian *Bayán*, "that the object of all preceding Dispensation hath been to pave the way for the advent of *Muḥammad*, the Apostle of God. These, including the Muslim Dispensation, have had, in their turn, as their objective the Revelation proclaimed by the *Qá'im*. The purpose underlying this Revelation, as well as those that preceded it, has, in like manner, been to announce the advent of the Faith of Him Whom God will make manifest. And this Faith—the Faith of Him Whom God will make manifest—in its turn, together with all the Revelations gone before it, have as their object the Manifestation destined to succeed it. And the latter, no less than all the

*Revelations preceding it, prepare the way for the Revelation which is yet to follow. The process of the rise and setting of the Sun of Truth will thus indefinitely continue—a process that hath had no beginning and will have no end.”*

*“Know of a certainty,” Bahá'u'lláh explains in this connection, “that in every Dispensation the light of Divine Revelation has been vouchsafed to men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity. Consider the sun. How feeble its rays the moment it appeareth above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approacheth its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light. How steadily it declines until it reacheth its setting point. Were it all of a sudden to manifest the energies latent within it, it would no doubt cause injury to all created things. ... In like manner, if the Sun of Truth were suddenly to reveal, at the earliest stages of its manifestation, the full measure of the potencies which the providence of the Almighty hath bestowed upon it, the earth of human understanding would waste away and be consumed; for men's hearts would neither sustain the intensity of its revelation, nor be able to mirror forth the radiance of its light. Dismayed and overpowered, they would cease to exist.”*

In the light of these clear and conclusive statements it is our clear duty to make it indubitably evident to every seeker after truth that from “the beginning that hath no beginning” the Prophets of the one, the unknowable God, including Bahá'u'lláh Himself, have all, as the channels of God's grace, as the exponents of His unity, as the mirrors of His light and the revealers of His purpose, been commissioned to unfold to mankind an ever-increasing measure of His truth, of His inscrutable will

and Divine guidance, and will continue to “the end that hath no end” to vouchsafe still fuller and mightier revelations of His limitless power and glory.

### **Purity of the Faith maintained**

I need not recall, in this connection, the unfortunate episodes that have, admittedly, and to a very great extent, marred the early history of both Judaism and Islám. Nor is it necessary to stress the damaging effect of the excesses, the rivalries and divisions, the fanatical outbursts and acts of ingratitude that are associated with the early development of the people of Israel and with the militant career of the ruthless pioneers of the Faith of Muḥammad.

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

How great was the obstinacy with which the Jewish converts among the early Christians adhered to the cere-

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

How striking the contrast when we remember, in the light of the aforementioned facts, the number of those followers of Bahá'u'lláh who, in Persia and the adjoining countries, had enlisted at the time of His Ascension as the convinced supporters of His Faith! How encouraging to observe the undeviating loyalty with which His valiant followers are guarding the purity and integrity of His clear and unequivocal teachings! How edifying the spectacle of those who are battling with the forces of a firmly entrenched orthodoxy in their struggle to emancipate themselves from the fetters of an outworn creed! How inspiring the conduct of those Muslim followers of Bahá'u'lláh who view, not with regret or apathy, but with feelings of unconcealed satisfaction, the deserved chastisement which the Almighty has inflicted upon those twin institutions of the Sultanate and the Caliphate, those engines of despotism and sworn enemies of the Cause of God!

## **Estimating the virtue of the Faith**

Not by the material resources which the members of this infant community can now summon to their aid; not by the numerical strength of its present-day supporters; nor by any direct tangible benefits its votaries can as yet confer upon the multitude of the needy and the disconsolate among their countrymen, should its potentialities be tested or its worth determined. Nowhere but in the purity of its precepts, the sublimity of its standards, the integrity of its laws, the reasonableness of its claims, the comprehensiveness of its scope, the universality of its programme, the flexibility of its institutions, the lives of its founders, the heroism of its martyrs, and the transforming power of its influence, should the unprejudiced observer seek to obtain the true criterion that can enable him to fathom its mysteries or to estimate its virtue.

How unfair, how irrelevant, to venture any comparison between the slow and gradual consolidation of the Faith proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh and those man-created movements which, having their origin in human desires and with their hopes centred on mortal dominion, must inevitably decline and perish! Springing from a finite mind, begotten of human fancy, and oftentimes the product of ill-conceived designs, such movements succeed, by reason of their novelty, their appeal to man's baser instincts, and their dependence upon the resources of a sordid world, in dazzling for a time the eyes of men, only to plunge finally from the heights of their meteoric career into the darkness of oblivion, dissolved by the very forces that had assisted in their creation.

## 9

### The present day

#### A twofold process

The contrast between the accumulating evidences of steady consolidation that accompany the rise of the Administrative Order of the Faith of God, and the forces of disintegration which batter at the fabric of a travailing society, is as clear as it is arresting. Both within and outside the Bahá'í world the signs and tokens which, in a mysterious manner, are heralding the birth of that World Order, the establishment of which must signalize the Golden Age of the Cause of God, are growing and multiplying day by day. No fair-minded observer can any longer fail to discern them. He cannot be misled by the painful slowness characterizing the unfoldment of the civilization which the followers of Bahá'u'lláh are labouring to establish. Nor can he be deluded by the ephemeral manifestations of returning prosperity which at times appear to be capable of checking the disruptive influence of the chronic ills afflicting the institutions of a decaying age. The signs of the times are too numerous and compelling to allow him to mistake their character or to belittle their significance. He can, if he be fair in his judgment, recognize in the chain of events which proclaim on the one hand the irresistible march of the institutions directly associated with the Revelation of

Bahá'u'lláh and foreshadow on the other the downfall of those powers and principalities that have either ignored or opposed it—he can recognize in them all evidences of the operation of God's all-pervasive Will, the shaping of His perfectly ordered and world-embracing Plan.

*“Soon,” Bahá'u'lláh's own words proclaim it, “will the present-day Order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead. Verily, thy Lord speaketh the truth and is the Knower of things unseen.” “By Myself,” He solemnly asserts, “the day is approaching when We will have rolled up the world and all that is therein, and spread out a new Order in its stead. He, verily, is powerful over all things.” “The world's equilibrium,” He explains, “hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this Most Great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System, the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.” “The signs of impending convulsions and chaos,” He warns the peoples of the world, “can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing Order appeareth to be lamentably defective.”*

Dearly-beloved friends! This New World Order, whose promise is enshrined in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whose fundamental principles have been enunciated in the writings of the Centre of His Covenant, involves no less than the complete unification of the entire human race. This unification should conform to such principles as would directly harmonize with the spirit that animates, and the laws that govern the operation of, the institutions that already constitute the structural basis of the Administrative Order of His Faith.

No machinery falling short of the standard inculcated

by the Bahá'í Revelation, and at variance with the sublime pattern ordained in His teachings, which the collective efforts of mankind may yet devise can ever hope to achieve anything above or beyond that *"Lesser Peace"* to which the Author of our Faith has Himself alluded in His writings. *"Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace,"* He, admonishing the kings and rulers of the earth, has written, *"hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents."* Expatiating on this Lesser Peace, He thus addresses in that same Tablet the rulers of the earth: *"Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safe-guard your territories and dominions. ... Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice."*

The Most Great Peace, on the other hand, as conceived by Bahá'u'lláh—a peace that must inevitably follow as the practical consequence of the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes, and nations—can rest on no other basis, and can be preserved through no other agency, except the divinely appointed ordinances that are implicit in the World Order that stands associated with His holy name. In His Tablet, revealed almost seventy years ago to Queen Victoria, Bahá'u'lláh, alluding to this Most Great Peace, has declared: *"That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one univer-*



*sal Cause, one common Faith. This can in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-powerful and inspired Physician. This, verily, is the truth, and all else naught but error. ... Consider these days in which the Ancient Beauty, He Who is the Most Great Name, hath been sent down to regenerate and unify mankind. Behold how with drawn swords they rose against him, and committed that which caused the Faithful Spirit to tremble. And whenever We said unto them: 'Lo, the World Reformer is come,' they made reply: 'He, in truth, is one of the stirrers of mischief.'" "It beseemeth all men in this Day," He, in another Tablet, asserts, "to take firm hold on the Most Great Name, and to establish the unity of all mankind. There is no place to flee to, no refuge that any one can seek, except him."*

### ***Humanity's coming of age***

The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the *coming of age of tip entire human race*. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture—all of which must synchronize with the

initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Era—should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop.

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

In one of the most characteristic passages He Himself has revealed, He testifies in a language that none can mistake to the truth of this distinguishing principle of Bahá'í belief: *"It hath been decreed by Us that the Word of God and all the potentialities thereof shall be manifested unto men in strict conformity with such conditions as have been fore-ordained by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. ... Should the Word be allowed to release sud-*

*denly all the energies latent within it, no man could sustain the weight of so mighty a revelation. ... Consider that which hath been sent down unto Muḥammad, the Apostle of God. The measure of the Revelation of which He was the Bearer had been clearly fore-ordained by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Powerful. They that heard Him, however, could apprehend His purpose only to the extent of their station and spiritual capacity. He, in like manner, uncovered the Face of Wisdom in proportion to their ability to sustain the burden of His Message. No sooner had mankind attained the stage of maturity, than the Word revealed to men's eyes the latent energies with which it had been endowed—energies which manifested themselves in the plenitude of their glory when the Ancient Beauty appeared, in the year sixty, in the person of 'Alí-Muḥammad, the Báb."*

'Abdu'l-Bahá, elucidating this fundamental verity, has written: "All created things have their degree or stage of maturity. The period of maturity in the life of a tree is the time of its fruit-bearing. ... The animal attains a stage of full growth and completeness, and in the human kingdom man reaches his maturity when the light of his intelligence attains its greatest power and development. ... Similarly there are periods and stages in the collective life of humanity. At one time it was passing through its stage of childhood, at another its period of youth, but now it has entered its long-predicted phase of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere apparent. ... That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race can neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day, this period of newness and consummation. Humanity has emerged from its former state of limitation and preliminary training. Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new

*moral standards, new capacities. New bounties, perfect bestowals, are awaiting and already descending upon him. The gifts and blessings of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity."*

### ***The process of integration***

Such a unique and momentous crisis in the life of organized mankind may, moreover, be likened to the culminating stage in the political evolution of the great American Republic—the stage which marked the emergence of a unified community of federated states. The stirring of a new national consciousness, and the birth of a new type of civilization, infinitely richer and nobler than any which its component parts could have severally hoped to achieve, may be said to have proclaimed the coming of age of the American people. Within the territorial limits of this nation, this consummation may be viewed as the culmination of the process of human government. The diversified and loosely related elements of a divided community were brought together, unified and incorporated into one coherent system. Though this entity may continue gaining in cohesive power, though the unity already achieved may be further consolidated, though the civilization to which that unity could alone have given birth may expand and flourish, yet the machinery essential to such an unfoldment may be said to have been, in its essential structure, erected, and the impulse required to guide and sustain it may be regarded as having been fundamentally imparted. No stage above and beyond this consummation of national unity can, within the geographical limits of that nation,

be imagined, though the highest destiny of its people, as a constituent element in a still larger entity that will embrace the whole of mankind, may still remain unfulfilled. Considered as an isolated unit, however, this process of integration may be said to have reached its highest and final consummation.

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

The successive Founders of all past Religions Who, from time immemorial, have shed, with ever-increasing intensity, the splendour of one common Revelation at the various stages which have marked the advance of mankind towards maturity may thus, in a sense, be regarded as preliminary Manifestations, anticipating and paving the way for the advent of that Day of Days when the whole earth will have fructified and the tree of humanity will have yielded its destined fruit.

Incontrovertible as is this truth, its challenging character should never be allowed to obscure the purpose, or distort the principle, underlying the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh—utterances that have established for all time the absolute oneness of all the Prophets, Himself included, whether belonging to the past or to the future. Though the mission of the Prophets preceding Bahá'u'lláh may be viewed in that light, though the measure of Divine Revelation with which each has been entrusted must, as a result of this process of evolution, necessarily

differ, their common origin, their essential unity, their identity of purpose, should at no time and under no circumstances be misapprehended or denied. That all the Messengers of God should be regarded as *"abiding in the same Tabernacle, soaring in the same Heaven, seated upon the same Throne, uttering the same Speech, and proclaiming the same Faith"* must, however much we may extol the measure of Divine Revelation vouchsafed to mankind at this crowning stage of its evolution, remain the unalterable foundation and central tenet of Bahá'í belief. Any variations in the splendour which each of these Manifestations of the Light of God has shed upon the world should be ascribed not to any inherent superiority involved in the essential character of any one of them, but rather to the progressive capacity, the ever-increasing spiritual receptiveness, which mankind, in its progress towards maturity, has invariably manifested.

### ***The final consummation***

Only those who are willing to associate the Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh with the consummation of so stupendous an evolution in the collective life of the whole human race can grasp the significance of the words which He, while alluding to the glories of this promised Day and to the duration of the Bahá'í Era, has deemed fit to utter. *"This is the King of Days,"* He exclaims, *"the Day that hath seen the coming of the Best-Beloved, Him Who, through all eternity, hath been acclaimed the Desire of the World."* *"The Scriptures of past Dispensations,"* He further asserts, *"celebrate the great jubilee that must needs greet this most great Day of God. Well is it with him that hath lived to see this Day and hath recognized its station."*

*"It is evident,"* He, in another passage, explains, *"that every age in which a Manifestation of God hath lived is divinely ordained, and may, in a sense, be characterized as God's appointed Day. This Day, however, is unique, and is to be distinguished from those that have preceded it. The designation 'Seal of the Prophets' fully revealeth its high station. The Prophetic Cycle hath verily ended. The Eternal Truth is now come. He hath lifted up the ensign of power, and is now shedding upon the world the unclouded splendour of His Revelation."* *"In this most mighty Revelation,"* He, in categorical language, declares, *"all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation. That which hath been made manifest in this pre-eminent, this most exalted Revelation, standeth unparalleled in the annals of the past, nor will future ages witness its like."*

'Abdu'l-Bahá's authentic pronouncements should, likewise, be recalled as confirming, in no less emphatic manner, the unexampled vastness of the Bahá'í Dispensation. *"Centuries,"* He affirms in one of His Tablets, *"nay, countless ages, must pass away ere the Day-Star of Truth shineth again in its midsummer splendour, or appeareth once more in the radiance of its vernal glory. ... The mere contemplation of the Dispensation inaugurated by the Blessed Beauty would have sufficed to overwhelm the saints of bygone ages—saints who longed to partake, for one moment, of its great glory."* *"Concerning the Manifestations that will come down in the future 'in the shadows of the clouds,'"* He, in still more definite language, affirms, *"know, verily, that in so far as their relation to the Source of their inspiration is concerned, they are under the shadow of the Ancient Beauty. In their relation, however, to the age*

*in which they appear, each and every one of them 'doeth whatsoever He willeth'." "This holy Dispensation," He, alluding to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, explains, "is illumined with the light of the Sun of Truth shining from its most exalted station, and in the plenitude of its resplendency, its heat and glory."*

### ***Pangs of death and birth***

Dearly-beloved friends: Though the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has been delivered, the World Order which such a Revelation must needs beget is as yet unborn. Though the Heroic Age of His Faith is passed, the creative energies which that Age has released have not as yet crystallized into that world society which, in the fullness of time, is to mirror forth the brightness of His glory. Though the framework of His Administrative Order has been erected, and the Formative Period of the Bahá'í Era has begun, yet the promised Kingdom into which the seed of His institutions must ripen remains as yet uninaugurated. Though His Voice has been raised, and the ensigns of His Faith have been lifted up in no less than forty<sup>1</sup> countries of both the East and the West, yet the wholeness of the human race is as yet unrecognized, its unity unproclaimed, and the standard of its Most Great Peace unhoisted

*"The heights," Bahá'u'lláh Himself testifies, "which, through the most gracious favour of God, mortal man can attain in this Day are as yet unrevealed to his sight. The world of being hath never had, nor doth it yet possess, the capacity for such a revelation. The day, however, is approaching when the potentialities of so great a favour*

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<sup>1</sup> Written in 1936.



*will, by virtue of His behest, be manifested unto men."*

For the revelation of so great a favour a period of intense turmoil and widespread suffering would seem to be indispensable. Resplendent as has been the Age that has witnessed the inception of the Mission with which Bahá'u'lláh has been entrusted, the interval which must elapse ere that Age yields its choicest fruit must, it is becoming increasingly apparent, be overshadowed by such moral and social gloom as can alone prepare an unrepentant humanity for the prize she is destined to inherit.

Into such a period we are now steadily and irresistibly moving. Amidst the shadows which are increasingly gathering about us we can faintly discern the glimmerings of Bahá'u'lláh's unearthly sovereignty appearing fitfully on the horizon of history. To us, the "generation of the half-light", living at a time which may be designated as the period of the incubation of the World Commonwealth envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, has been assigned a task whose high privilege we can never sufficiently appreciate, and the arduousness of which we can as yet but dimly recognize. We may well believe, we who are called upon to experience the operation of the dark forces destined to unloose a flood of agonizing afflictions, that the darkest hour that must precede the dawn of the Golden Age of our Faith has not yet struck. Deep as is the gloom that already encircles the world, the afflictive ordeals which that world is to suffer are still in preparation, nor can their blackness be as yet imagined. We stand on the threshold of an age whose convulsions proclaim alike the death-pangs of the old order and the birth-pangs of the new. Through the generating influence of the Faith an-

nounced by Bahá'u'lláh this New World Order may be said to have been conceived. We can, at the present moment, experience its stirrings in the womb of a travailing age—an age waiting for the appointed hour at which it can cast its burden and yield its fairest fruit.

*“The whole earth,” writes Bahá'u'lláh, “is now in a state of pregnancy. The day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings. Immeasurably exalted is the breeze that wafteth from the garment of thy Lord, the Glorified! For lo, it hath breathed its fragrance and made all things new! Well is it with them that comprehend.” “The onrushing winds of the grace of God,” He, in the Súriy-i-Haykal, proclaims, “have passed over all things. Every creature hath been endowed with all the potentialities it can carry. And yet the peoples of the world have denied this grace! Every tree hath been endowed with the choicest fruits, every ocean enriched with the most luminous gems. Man, himself, hath been invested with the gifts of understanding and knowledge. The whole creation hath been made the recipient of the revelation of the All-Merciful, and the earth the repository of things inscrutable to all except God, the Truth, the Knower of things unseen. The time is approaching when every created thing will have cast its burden. Glorified be God Who hath vouchsafed this grace that encompasseth all things, whether seen or unseen!”*

*“The Call of God,” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá has written, “when raised, breathed a new life into the body of mankind, and infused a new spirit into the whole creation. It is for this reason that the world hath been moved to its depths, and the hearts and consciences of men been quickened. Ere long*

*the evidences of this regeneration will be revealed, and the fast asleep will be awakened."*

### ***Universal fermentation***

As we view the world around us, we are compelled to observe the manifold evidences of that universal fermentation which, in every continent of the globe and in every department of human life, be it religious, social, economic or political, is purging and reshaping humanity in anticipation of the Day when the wholeness of the human race will have been recognized and its unity established. A twofold process, however, can be distinguished, each tending, in its own way and with an accelerated momentum, to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive. The former, as it steadily evolves, unfolds a System which may well serve as a pattern for that world polity towards which a strangely disordered world is continually advancing; while the latter, as its disintegrating influence deepens, tends to tear down, with increasing violence, the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity's progress towards its destined goal. The constructive process stands associated with the nascent Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and is the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must ere long establish. The destructive forces that characterize the other should be identified with a civilization that has refused to answer to the expectation of a new age, and is consequently falling into chaos and decline.

A titanic, a spiritual struggle, unparalleled in its magnitude yet unspeakably glorious in its ultimate conse-

quences, is being waged as a result of these opposing tendencies, in this age of transition through which the organized community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh and mankind as a whole are passing.

The Spirit that has incarnated itself in the institutions of a rising Faith has, in the course of its onward march for the redemption of the world, encountered and is now battling with such forces as are, in most instances, the very negation of that Spirit, and whose continued existence must inevitably hinder it from achieving its purpose. The hollow and outworn institutions, the obsolescent doctrines and beliefs, the effete and discredited traditions which these forces represent, it should be observed, have, in certain instances, been undermined by virtue of their senility, the loss of their cohesive power, and their own inherent corruption. A few have been swept away by the onrushing forces which the Bahá'í Faith has, at the hour of its birth, so mysteriously released. Others, as a direct result of a vain and feeble resistance to its rise in the initial stages of its development, have died out and been utterly discredited. Still others, fearful of the pervasive influence of the institutions in which that same Spirit had, at a later stage, been embodied, had mobilized their forces and launched their attack, destined to sustain, in their turn, after a brief and illusory success, an ignominious defeat.

## **Fusion of the nations**

The process of disintegration must inexorably continue, and its corrosive influence must penetrate deeper

and deeper into the very core of a crumbling age. Much suffering will still be required ere the contending nations, creeds, classes, and races of mankind are fused in the crucible of universal affliction, and are forged by the fires of a fierce ordeal into one organic commonwealth, one vast, unified, and harmoniously functioning system. Adversities unimaginably appalling, undreamed of crises and upheavals, war, famine, and pestilence, might well combine to engrave in the soul of an unheeding generation those truths and principles which it has disdained to recognize and follow. A paralysis more painful than any it has yet experienced must creep over and further afflict the fabric of a broken society ere it can be rebuilt and regenerated.

*"The civilization," writes Bahá'u'lláh, "so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men. ... If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation. ... The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities, when the Tongue of Grandeur will proclaim: 'The Kingdom is God's, the Almighty, the All-Praised!'" "From the moment the Súriy-i-Ra'ís [Tablet to Ra'ís] was revealed," He further explains, "until the present day, neither hath the world been tranquillized, nor have the hearts of its people been at rest. ... Its sickness is approaching the stage of utter hopelessness, inasmuch as the true Physician is debarred from administering the remedy, whilst unskilled practitioners are regarded with favour, and are accorded full freedom to act. The dust of sedition hath clouded the hearts of men, and blinded their eyes. Ere long they will perceive the consequences of what*

*their hands have wrought in the Day of God.” “This is the Day,” He again has written, “whereon the earth shall tell out her tidings. The workers of iniquity are her burdens. ... The Crier hath cried out, and men have been torn away, so great hath been the fury of His wrath. The people of the left hand sigh and bemoan. The people of the right abide in noble habitations: they quaff the Wine that is life indeed from the hands of the All-Merciful, and are, verily, the blissful.”*

## **A judgment of God**

This judgment of God, as viewed by those who have recognized Bahá'u'lláh as His Mouthpiece and His greatest Messenger on earth, is both a retributory calamity and an act of holy and supreme discipline. It is at once a visitation from God and a cleansing process for all mankind. Its fires punish the perversity of the human race, and weld its component parts into one organic, indivisible, world-embracing community. Mankind, in these fateful years, which at once signalize the passing of the first century of the Bahá'í Era and proclaim the opening of a new one, is, as ordained by Him Who is both the Judge and the Redeemer of the human race, being simultaneously called upon to give account of its past actions, and being purged and prepared for its future mission. It can neither escape the responsibilities of the past, nor shirk those of the future. God, the Vigilant, the Just, the Loving, the All-Wise Ordainer, can, in this supreme Dispensation, neither allow the sins of an unregenerate humanity, whether of omission or of commission, to go unpunished, nor will He be willing to

abandon His children to their fate, and refuse them that culminating and blissful stage in their long, their slow and painful evolution throughout the ages, which is at once their inalienable right and their true destiny.

*"Bestir yourselves, O people,"* is, on the one hand, the ominous warning sounded by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, *"in anticipation of the days of Divine Justice, for the promised hour is now come."* *"Abandon that which ye possess, and seize that which God, Who layeth low the necks of men, hath brought. Know ye of a certainty that if ye turn not back from that which ye have committed, chastisement will overtake you on every side, and ye shall behold things more grievous than that which ye beheld aforetime."* And again: *"We have fixed a time for you, O people! If ye fail, at the appointed hour, to turn towards God, He, verily, will lay violent hold on you, and will cause grievous afflictions to assail you from every direction. How severe indeed is the chastisement with which your Lord will then chastise you!"* And again: *"God assuredly dominateth the lives of them that wronged Us, and is well aware of their doings. He will most certainly lay hold on them for their sins. He, verily, is the fiercest of Avengers."* And finally, *"O ye peoples of the world! Know verily that an unforeseen calamity is following you and that grievous retribution awaiteth you. Think not the deeds ye have committed have been blotted from My sight. By My Beauty! All your doings hath My pen graven with open characters upon tablets of chrysolite."*

*"The whole earth,"* Bahá'u'lláh, on the other hand, forecasting the bright future in store for a world now wrapt in darkness, emphatically asserts, *"is now in a state of pregnancy. The day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung*

*forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings.” “The time is approaching when every created thing will have cast its burden. Glorified be God Who hath vouchsafed this grace that encompasseth all things, whether seen or unseen!” “These great oppressions,”* He, moreover, foreshadowing humanity’s golden age, has written, *“are preparing it for the advent of the Most Great Justice.”* This Most Great Justice is indeed the Justice upon which the structure of the Most Great Peace can alone, and must eventually, rest, while the Most Great Peace will, in turn, usher in that Most Great, that World Civilization which shall remain for ever associated with Him Who beareth the Most Great Name.

Beloved friends! Well-nigh a hundred years have elapsed since the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh dawned upon the world—a Revelation, the nature of which, as affirmed by Himself, *“none among the Manifestations of old, except to a prescribed degree, hath ever completely apprehended”*. For a whole century God has respited mankind, that it might acknowledge the Founder of such a Revelation, espouse His Cause, proclaim His greatness, and establish His Order. In a hundred volumes, the repositories of priceless precepts, mighty laws, unique principles, impassioned exhortations, reiterated warnings, amazing prophecies, sublime invocations, and weighty commentaries, the Bearer of such a Message has proclaimed, as no Prophet before Him has done, the Mission with which God had entrusted Him. To emperors, kings, princes, and potentates, to rulers, governments, clergy, and peoples, whether of the East or of the West, whether Christian, Jew, Muslim, or Zoroastrian,



He addressed, for well-nigh fifty years, and in the most tragic circumstances, these priceless pearls of knowledge and wisdom that lay hid within the ocean of His matchless utterance. Forsaking fame and fortune, accepting imprisonment and exile, careless of ostracism and obloquy, submitting to physical indignities and cruel deprivations, He, the Vice-gerent of God on earth, suffered Himself to be banished from place to place and from country to country, till at length He, in the Most Great Prison, offered up His martyred son as a ransom for the redemption and unification of all mankind. "We verily," He Himself has testified, *"have not fallen short of Our duty to exhort men, and to deliver that whereunto I was bidden by God, the Almighty, the All-Praised. Had they hearkened unto Me, they would have beheld the earth another earth."* And again: *"Is there any excuse left for any one in this Revelation? No, by God, the Lord of the Mighty Throne! My signs have encompassed the earth, and My power enveloped all mankind, and yet the people are wrapped in a strange sleep!"*

### **The desecrated temple of mankind**

This great retributive calamity, for which the world's supreme leaders, both secular and religious, are to be regarded as primarily answerable, as testified by Bahá'u'lláh, should not, if we would correctly appraise it, be regarded solely as a punishment meted out by God to a world that has, for a hundred years, persisted in its refusal to embrace the truth of the redemptive Message proffered to it by the supreme Messenger of God in this

day. It should be viewed also, though to a lesser degree, in the light of a divine retribution for the perversity of the human race in general, in casting itself adrift from those elementary principles which must, at all times, govern, and can alone safeguard, the life and progress of mankind. Humanity has, alas, with increasing insistence, preferred, instead of acknowledging and adoring the Spirit of God as embodied in His religion in this day, to worship those false idols, untruths and half-truths, which are obscuring its religions, corrupting its spiritual life, convulsing its political institutions, corroding its social fabric, and shattering its economic structure.

Not only have the peoples of the earth ignored, and some of them even assailed, a Faith which is at once the essence, the promise, the reconciler, and the unifier of all religions, but they have drifted away from their own religions, and set up on their subverted altars other gods wholly alien not only to the spirit but to the traditional forms of their ancient faiths.

*"The face of the world," Bahá'u'lláh laments, "hath altered. The way of God and the religion of God have ceased to be of any worth in the eyes of men." "The vitality of men's belief in God," He also has written, "is dying out in every land. ... The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society." "Religion," He affirms, "is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world, and of tranquillity amongst its peoples. ... The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion." And again: "Religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world." "As the body of man,"*

He, in another connection, has written, "*needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle of justice and wisdom. Its robe is the Revelation vouchsafed unto it by God.*"

This vital force is dying out, this mighty agency has been scorned, this radiant light is obscured, this impregnable stronghold abandoned, this beauteous robe discarded. God Himself has indeed been dethroned from the hearts of men, and an idolatrous world passionately and clamorously hails and worships the false gods which its own idle fancies have fatuously created, and its misguided hands so impiously exalted. The chief idols in the desecrated temple of mankind are none other than the triple gods of Nationalism, Racism, and Communism, at whose altars governments and peoples, whether democratic or totalitarian, at peace or at war, of the East or of the West, Christian or Islamic, are, in various forms and in different degrees, now worshipping. Their high priests are the politicians and the worldly-wise, the so-called sages of the age; their sacrifice, the flesh and blood of the slaughtered multitudes; their incantations, outworn shibboleths and insidious and irreverent formulas; their incense, the smoke of anguish that ascends from the lacerated hearts of the bereaved, the maimed, and the homeless.

The theories and policies, so unsound, so pernicious, which deify the state and exalt the nation above mankind, which seek to subordinate the sister races of the world to one single race, which discriminate between the black and the white, and which tolerate the dominance of one privileged class over all others—these are the dark, the false, and crooked doctrines for which any man or

people who believes in them, or acts upon them, must, sooner or later, incur the wrath and chastisement of God.

*"Movements," is the warning sounded by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "newly-born and world-wide in their range, will exert their utmost effort for the advancement of their designs. The Movement of the Left will acquire great importance. Its influence will spread."*

Contrasting with, and irreconcilably opposed to, these war-engendering, world-convulsing doctrines, are the healing, the saving, the pregnant truths proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Divine Organizer and Saviour of the whole human race—truths which should be regarded as the animating force and the hallmark of His Revelation: *"The world is but one country, and mankind its citizens."* *"Let not a man glory in that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind."* And again: *"Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch."* *"Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth, that haply ... all mankind may become the upholders of one order, and the inhabitants of one city. ... Ye dwell in one world, and have been created through the operation of one Will."* *"Beware lest the desires of the flesh and of a corrupt inclination provoke divisions among you. Be ye as the fingers of one hand, the members of one body."* And yet again: *"All the saplings of the world have appeared from one Tree, and all the drops from one Ocean, and all beings owe their existence to one Being."* And furthermore: *"That one indeed is a man who today dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race."*

## Signs of moral downfall

The signs of moral downfall, as distinct from the evidences of decay in religious institutions, would appear to be no less noticeable and significant. The decline that has set in in the fortunes of Islamic and Christian institutions may be said to have had its counterpart in the life and conduct of the individuals that compose them. In whichever direction we turn our gaze, no matter how cursory our observation of the doings and sayings of the present generation, we cannot fail to be struck by the evidences of moral decadence which, in their individual lives no less than in their collective capacity, men and women around us exhibit.

There can be no doubt that the decline of religion as a social force, of which the deterioration of religious institutions is but an external phenomenon, is chiefly responsible for so grave, so conspicuous an evil. *"Religion,"* writes Bahá'u'lláh, *"is the greatest of all means for the establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein. The weakening of the pillars of religion hath strengthened the hands of the ignorant and made them bold and arrogant. Verily I say, whatsoever hath lowered the lofty station of religion hath increased the waywardness of the wicked, and the result cannot be but anarchy."* *"Religion,"* He, in another Tablet, has stated, *"is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world, for the fear of God impelleth man to hold fast to that which is good, and shun all evil. Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquillity and peace*

*cease to shine." "Know thou," He, in yet another connection, has written, "that they who are truly wise have likened the world unto the human temple. As the body of man needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle of justice and wisdom. Its robe is the Revelation vouchsafed unto it by God."*

No wonder, therefore, that when, as a result of human perversity, the light of religion is quenched in men's hearts, and the divinely appointed Robe, designed to adorn the human temple, is deliberately discarded, a deplorable decline in the fortunes of humanity immediately sets in, bringing in its wake all the evils which a wayward soul is capable of revealing. The perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves, under such circumstances, in their worst and most revolting aspects. Human character is debased, confidence is shaken, the nerves of discipline are relaxed, the voice of human conscience is stilled, the sense of decency and shame is obscured, conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of reciprocity and loyalty are distorted, and the very feeling of peacefulness, of joy, and of hope is gradually extinguished.

Such, we might well admit, is the state which individuals and institutions alike are approaching. *"No two men,"* Bahá'u'lláh, lamenting the plight of an erring humanity, has written, *"can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united. The evidences of discord and malice are apparent everywhere, though all were made for harmony and union."* *"How long,"* He, in the same Tablet, exclaims, *"will humanity persist in its waywardness? How long will injustice continue? How long is*

*chaos and confusion to reign amongst men? How long will discord agitate the face of society? The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divideth and afflicteth the human race is daily increasing."*

The recrudescence of religious intolerance, of racial animosity, and of patriotic arrogance; the increasing evidences of selfishness, of suspicion, of fear, and of fraud; the spread of terrorism, of lawlessness, of drunkenness, and of crime; the unquenchable thirst for, and the feverish pursuit after, earthly vanities, riches, and pleasures; the weakening of family solidarity; the laxity in parental control; the lapse into luxurious indulgence; the irresponsible attitude towards marriage and the consequent rising tide of divorce; the degeneracy of art and music, the infection of literature, and the corruption of the press; the extension of the influence and activities of those "prophets of decadence" who advocate companionate marriage, who preach the philosophy of nudism, who call modesty an intellectual fiction, who refuse to regard the procreation of children as the sacred and primary purpose of marriage, who denounce religion as an opiate of the people, who would, if given free rein, lead back the human race to barbarism, chaos, and ultimate extinction—these appear as the outstanding characteristics of a decadent society, a society that must either be reborn or perish.

### **The impotence of statesmanship**

Dearly-beloved friends! Humanity, whether viewed in the light of man's individual conduct or in the existing relationships between organized communities and na-

tions, has, alas, strayed too far and suffered too great a decline to be redeemed through the unaided efforts of the best among its recognized rulers and statesmen however disinterested their motives, however concerted their action, however unsparring in their zeal and devotion to its cause. No scheme which the calculations of the highest statesmanship may yet devise; no doctrine which the most distinguished exponents of economic theory may hope to advance; no principle which the most ardent of moralists may strive to inculcate, can provide, in the last resort, adequate foundations upon which the future of a distracted world can be built.

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

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

What else, might we not confidently affirm, but the unreserved acceptance of the Divine Programme enunciated, with such simplicity and force as far back as sixty<sup>1</sup> years ago, by Bahá'u'lláh, embodying in its essentials

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<sup>1</sup> Written in 1931.



God's divinely appointed scheme for the unification of mankind in this age, coupled with an indomitable conviction in the unfailing efficacy of each and all of its provisions, is eventually capable of withstanding the forces of internal disintegration which, if unchecked, must needs continue to eat into the vitals of a despairing society. It is towards this goal—the goal of a new World Order, Divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, equitable in principle, challenging in its features—that a harassed humanity must strive.

## 10 World unity

### The goal

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hallmark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.

*"A new life," Bahá'u'lláh proclaims, "is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause, or perceived its motive." "O ye children of men," He thus addresses His generation, "the fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race. ... This is the straight path, the fixed and immovable foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolution of countless centuries undermine its structure." "The well-being of man-*

*kind," He declares, "its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." "So powerful is the light of unity," is His further testimony, "that it can illuminate the whole earth. The one true God, He Who knoweth all things, Himself testifieth to the truth of these words. ... This goal excelleth every other goal, and this aspiration is the monarch of all aspirations." "He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful," He, moreover, has written, "cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body. Haste ye to win your share of God's good grace and mercy in this Day that eclipseth all other created days."*

The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds, and classes are closely and permanently united and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs, and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. A mechan-

ism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve centre of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate. A world language will either be invented or chosen from among the existing languages and will be taught in the schools of all the federated nations as an auxiliary to their mother tongue. A world script, a world literature, a uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and races of mankind.

In such a world society, science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will co-operate, and will harmoniously develop. The press will, under such a system, while giving full scope to the expression of the diversified views and convictions of mankind, cease to be mischievously manipulated by vested interests, whether private or public, and will be liberated from the influence of contending governments and peoples. The economic resources of the world will be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be co-ordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated.

National rivalries, hatreds, and intrigues will cease, and racial animosity and prejudice will be replaced by racial amity, understanding, and co-operation. The causes of religious strife will be permanently removed, economic barriers and restrictions will be completely

abolished, and the inordinate distinction between classes will be obliterated. Destitution on the one hand, and gross accumulation of ownership on the other, will disappear. The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation—such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.

*“One of the great events,”* affirms ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *“which is to occur in the Day of the manifestation of that incomparable Branch is the hoisting of the Standard of God among all nations. By this is meant that all nations and kindreds will be gathered together under the shadow of this Divine Banner, which is no other than the Lordly Branch*

*itself, and will become a single nation. Religious and sectarian antagonism, the hostility of races and peoples, and differences among nations, will be eliminated. All men will adhere to one religion, will have one common faith, will be blended into one race and become a single people. All will dwell in one common fatherland, which is the planet itself."*

*"Now, in the world of being," He has moreover explained, "the Hand of Divine power hath firmly laid the foundations of this all-highest bounty, and this wondrous gift. Whatsoever is latent in the innermost of this holy Cycle shall gradually appear and be made manifest, for now is but the beginning of its growth, and the day-spring of the revelation of its signs. Ere the close of this century and of this age, it shall be made clear and evident how wondrous was that spring-tide, and how heavenly was that gift."*

No less enthralling is the vision of Isaiah, the greatest of the Hebrew Prophets, predicting, as far back as twenty five hundred years ago, the destiny which mankind must, at its stage of maturity, achieve: *"And He (the Lord) shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. ... And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. ... And he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together. ... And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall*

*put his hand on the cockatrice's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."*

The writer of the Apocalypse, prefiguring the millennial glory which are deemed, a jubilant humanity must witness, has similarly testified: *"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."*

Who can doubt that such a consummation—the coming of age of the human race—must signalize, in its turn, the inauguration of a world civilization such as no mortal eye hath ever beheld or human mind conceived? Who is it that can imagine the lofty standard which such a civilization, as it unfolds itself, is destined to attain? Who can measure the heights to which human intelligence, liberated from its shackles, will soar? Who can visualize the realms which the human spirit, vitalized by the outpouring light of Bahá'u'lláh, shining in the plenitude of its glory, will discover?

What more fitting conclusion to this theme than these words of Bahá'u'lláh, written in anticipation of the golden age of His Faith the age in which the face of the earth

from pole to pole, will mirror the ineffable splendours of the Abha Paradise? *“This is the Day whereon naught can be seen except the splendours of the Light that shineth from the face of thy Lord, the Gracious, the Most Bountiful. Verily, We have caused every soul to expire by virtue of Our irresistible and all-subduing sovereignty. We have then called into being a new creation, as a token of Our grace unto men. I am, verily, the All-Bountiful, the Ancient of Days. This is the Day whereon the unseen world crieth out: ‘Great is thy blessedness, O earth, for thou hast been made the, foot-stool of thy God, and been chosen as the seat of His mighty throne!’ The realm of glory exclaimeth: ‘Would that my life could be sacrificed for thee, for He Who is the Beloved of the All-Merciful hath established His sovereignty upon thee, through the power of His name that hath been promised unto all things, whether of the past or of the future.”*

## **The oneness of mankind**

### ***Unity in Diversity***

Let there be no misgivings as to the animating purpose of the world-wide Law of Bahá'u'lláh. Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks to broaden its basis, to re-mould its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided. It does not ignore, nor does it



attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity such as 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself has explained:

*“Consider the flowers of a garden. Though differing in kind, colour, form, and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm and addeth unto their beauty. How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruit, the branches, and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and colour! Diversity of hues, form, and shape enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof. In like manner, when divers shades of thought, temperament, and character are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men.”*

The call of Bahá'u'lláh is primarily directed against all forms of provincialism, all insularities and prejudices. If long-cherished ideals and time-honoured institutions, if

certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine.

### ***The principles of Oneness***

Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a re-awakening of the spirit of brotherhood and goodwill among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious co-operation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of

present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds—creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived. It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.

It represents the consummation of human evolution an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations.

The principle of the Oneness of Mankind, as proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, carries with it no more and no less than a solemn assertion that attainment to this final stage in this stupendous evolution is not only necessary but inevitable, that its realization is fast approaching, and that nothing short of a power that is born of God can succeed in establishing it.

## 11

# Kings and leaders of religion

## Wielders of absolute authority

It should not be forgotten that it was the kings of the earth and the world's religious leaders who, above all other categories of men, were made the direct recipients of the Message proclaimed by both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. It was they who were deliberately addressed in numerous and historic Tablets, who were summoned to respond to the Call of God, and to whom were directed, in clear and forcible language, the appeals, the admonitions and warnings of His persecuted Messengers. It was they who, when the Faith was born, and later when its mission was proclaimed, were still, for the most part, wielding unquestioned and absolute civil and ecclesiastical authority over their subjects and followers. It was they who, whether glorying in the pomp and pageantry of a kingship as yet scarcely restricted by constitutional limitations, or entrenched within the strongholds of a seemingly inviolable ecclesiastical power, assumed ultimate responsibility for any wrongs inflicted by those whose immediate destinies they controlled. It would be no exaggeration to say that in most of the countries of the European and Asiatic continents absolutism, on the one hand, and complete subservience to ecclesiastical hierarchies, on the other, were still the

outstanding features of the political and religious life of the masses. These, dominated and shackled, were robbed of the necessary freedom that would enable them to either appraise the claims and merits of the Message proffered to them, or to embrace unreservedly its truth.

Small wonder, then, that the Author of the Bahá'í Faith, and to a lesser degree its Herald, should have directed at the world's supreme rulers and religious leaders the full force of Their Messages, and made them the recipients of some of Their most sublime Tablets, and invited them, in a language at once clear and insistent, to heed Their call. Small wonder that They should have taken the pains to unroll before their eyes the truths of Their respective Revelations, and should have expatiated on Their woes and sufferings. Small wonder that They should have stressed the preciousness of the opportunities which it was in the power of these rulers and leaders to seize, and should have warned them in ominous tones of the grave responsibilities which the rejection of God's Message would entail, and should have predicted, when rebuffed and refused, the dire consequences which such a rejection involved. Small wonder that He Who is the King of Kings and the Vicegerent of God Himself should, when abandoned, condemned and persecuted, have uttered this epigrammatic, and momentous prophecy: *"From two ranks amongst men power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics."*

## The vengeance of God

To the fate that has overtaken those kings, ministers, and ecclesiastics, in the East as well as in the West, who have, at various stages of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry, either deliberately persecuted His Cause, or have neglected to heed the warnings He had uttered, or have failed in their manifest duty to respond to His summons or to accord Him and His message the treatment they deserved, particular attention, I feel, should at this juncture be directed. Bahá'u'lláh Himself, referring to those who had actively arisen to destroy or harm His Faith, had declared that *"God hath not blinked, nor will He ever blink His eyes at the tyranny of the oppressor. More particularly in this Revelation hath He visited each and every tyrant with His vengeance."* Vast and awful is, indeed, the spectacle which meets our eyes, as we survey the field over which the retributory winds of God have, since the inception of the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh, furiously swept, dethroning monarchs, extinguishing dynasties, uprooting ecclesiastical hierarchies, precipitating wars and revolutions, driving from office princes and ministers, dispossessing the usurper, casting down the tyrant, and chastising the wicked and the rebellious.

### *Kings*

Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz, who with Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh was the author of the calamities heaped upon Bahá'u'lláh, and was himself responsible for three decrees of banishment against the Prophet; who had been stigmatized, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, as occupying the *"throne of tyranny"*, and whose fall had been prophesied in the

Lawḥ-i-Fu'ád, was deposed in consequence of a palace revolution, was condemned by a fatvá (sentence) of the Muftí in his own capital, was four days later assassinated (1876), and was succeeded by a nephew who was declared to be imbecile. The war of 1877-1878 emancipated eleven million people from the Turkish yoke; Adrianople was occupied by the Russian forces; the empire itself was dissolved as a result of the war of 1914-1918; the sultanate was abolished; a republic was proclaimed; and a rulership that had endured above six centuries was ended.

The vain and despotic Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, denounced by Bahá'u'lláh as the "*Prince of Oppressors*"; of whom He had written that he would soon be made "*an object-lesson for the world*"; whose reign was stained by the execution of the Báb and the imprisonment of Bahá'u'lláh; who had persistently instigated his subsequent banishments to Constantinople, Adrianople, and 'Akká; who, in collusion with a vicious sacerdotal order, had vowed to strangle the Faith in its cradle, was dramatically assassinated, in the shrine of Sháh 'Abdu'l-'Azím, on the very eve of his jubilee, which, as ushering in a new era, was to have been celebrated with the most elaborate magnificence, and was to go down in history as the greatest day in the annals of the Persian nation. The fortunes of his house thereafter steadily declined, and finally, through the scandalous misconduct of the dissipated and irresponsible Aḥmad Sháh, led to the eclipse and disappearance of the Qájár dynasty.

Napoleon III, the foremost monarch of his day in the West, excessively ambitious, inordinately proud, tricky and superficial, who is reported to have contemptuously

flung down the Tablet sent to him by Bahá'u'lláh, who was tested by Him and found wanting, and whose downfall was explicitly predicted in a subsequent Tablet, was ignominiously defeated in the Battle of Sedan (1870), marking the greatest military capitulation recorded in modern history; lost his kingdom and spent the remaining years of his life in exile. His hopes were utterly blasted, his only son, the Prince Imperial, was killed in the Zulu War, his much vaunted empire collapsed, a civil war ensued more ferocious than the Franco-German war itself, and William I, the Prussian king, was hailed emperor of a unified Germany in the Palace of Versailles.

William I, the pride-intoxicated newly acclaimed conqueror of Napoleon III, admonished in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and bidden to ponder the fate that had overtaken *"one whose power transcended"* his own, warned in that same Book, that the *"lamentations of Berlin"* would be raised and that the banks of the Rhine would be *"covered with gore"*, sustained two attempts on his life, and was succeeded by a son who died of a mortal disease, three months after his accession to the throne, bequeathing the throne to the arrogant, the headstrong and short-sighted William II. The pride of the new monarch precipitated his downfall. Revolution, swiftly and suddenly, broke out in his capital, communism reared its head in a number of cities; the princes of the German states abdicated, and he himself, fleeing ignominiously to Holland, was compelled to relinquish his right to the throne. The constitution of Weimar sealed the fate of the empire, whose birth had been so loudly proclaimed by his grandfather, and the terms of an oppressively



severe treaty provoked "*the lamentations*" which, half a century before, had been ominously prophesied.

The arbitrary and unyielding Francis Joseph, emperor of Austria and king of Hungary, who had been reproved in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, for having neglected his manifest duty to inquire about Bahá'u'lláh during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, was so engulfed by misfortunes and tragedies that his reign came to be regarded as one unsurpassed by any other reign in the calamities it inflicted upon the nation. His brother, Maximilian, was put to death in Mexico; the Crown Prince Rudolph perished in ignominious circumstances; the Empress was assassinated; Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife were murdered in Sarajevo; the "ramshackle empire" itself disintegrated, was carved up, and a shrunken republic was set up on the ruins of a vanished Holy Roman Empire—a republic which, after a brief and precarious existence, was blotted out from the political map of Europe.

Nikolayevich Alexander II, the all-powerful Czar of Russia, who, in a Tablet addressed to him by name had been thrice warned by Bahá'u'lláh, had been bidden to "*summon the nations unto God*", and had been cautioned not to allow his sovereignty to prevent him from recognizing "*the Supreme Sovereign*", suffered several attempts on his life, and at last died at the hand of an assassin. A harsh policy of repression, initiated by himself and followed by his successor, Alexander III, paved the way for a revolution which, in the reign of Nicholas II, swept away on a bloody tide the empire of the Czars, brought in its wake war, disease, and famine, and established a militant proletariat which massacred the nobility,

persecuted the clergy, drove away the intellectuals, disendowed the state religion, executed the Czar with his consort and his family, and extinguished the dynasty of the Romanoffs.

Pope Pius IX, the undisputed head of the most powerful Church in Christendom, who had been commanded in an Epistle addressed to him by Bahá'u'lláh, to leave his *"palaces unto such as desire them"*, to *"sell all the embellished ornaments"* in his possession, to *"expend them in the path of God"*, and hasten towards *"the Kingdom"*, was compelled to surrender, in distressing circumstances, to the besieging forces of King Victor Emmanuel, and to submit himself to be dispossessed of the Papal States and of Rome itself. The loss of "the Eternal City", over which the Papal flag had flown for one thousand years, and the humiliation of the religious orders under his jurisdiction, added mental anguish to his physical infirmities and embittered the last years of his life. The formal recognition of the Kingdom of Italy, subsequently exacted from one of his successors in the Vatican, confirmed the virtual extinction of the Pope's temporal sovereignty.

### ***Religious hierarchies***

But the rapid dissolution of the Ottoman, the Napoleonic, the German, the Austrian, and the Russian empires, the demise of the Qájár dynasty and the virtual extinction of the temporal sovereignty of the Roman Pontiff do not exhaust the story of the catastrophes that befell the monarchies of the world through the neglect of Bahá'u'lláh's warnings conveyed in the opening passages of His Súriy-i-Mulúk. The conversion of the

Portuguese and Spanish monarchies, as well as the Chinese empire, into republics; the strange fate that has, more recently, been pursuing the sovereigns of Holland, of Norway, of Greece, of Yugoslavia, and of Albania now living in exile; the virtual abdication of the authority exercised by the kings of Denmark, of Belgium, of Bulgaria, of Rumania, and of Italy; the apprehension with which their fellow sovereigns must be viewing the convulsions that have seized so many thrones; the shame and acts of violence which, in some instances, have darkened the annals of the reigns of certain monarchs in both the East and the West, and still more recently the sudden downfall of the Founder of the newly established dynasty in Persia—these are yet further instances of the infliction of the “Divine Chastisement” foreshadowed by Bahá’u’lláh in that immortal Súrih, and show forth the divine reality of the arraignment pronounced by Him against the rulers of the earth in His Most Holy Book.

No less arresting has been the extinction of the all-pervasive influence exerted by the Muslim ecclesiastical leaders, both Sunní and Shí’ah, in the two countries in which the mightiest institutions of Islám had been reared, and which have been directly associated with the tribulations heaped upon the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh.

The Caliph, the self-styled vicar of the Prophet of Islám, known also as the “Commander of the Faithful”, the protector of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, whose spiritual jurisdiction extended over more than two hundred million Muslims, was by the abolition of the Sultanate in Turkey,<sup>1</sup> divested of his temporal authority, hitherto regarded as inseparable from his high office. The Caliph himself, after having occupied for a

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<sup>1</sup> Ottoman Empire.

brief period an anomalous and precarious position, fled to Europe; the Caliphate, the most august and powerful institution of Islám, was, without consultation with any community in the Sunní world, summarily abolished; the unity of the most powerful branch of the Islamic Faith was thereby shattered; a formal, a complete and permanent separation of the Turkish state from the Sunní faith was proclaimed; the Shari'ah canonical Law was annulled; ecclesiastical institutions were disendowed; a civil code was promulgated; religious orders were suppressed; the Sunní hierarchy was dissolved; the Arabic tongue, the language of the Prophet of Islám, fell into disuse, and its script was superseded by the Latin alphabet; the Qur'an itself was translated into Turkish; Constantinople, the "Dome of Islám", sank to the level of a provincial city, and its peerless jewel, the Mosque of St. Sophia, was converted into a museum—a series of degradations recalling the fate which, in the first century of the Christian Era, befell the Jewish people, the city of Jerusalem, the Temple of Solomon, the Holy of Holies, and an ecclesiastical hierarchy, whose members were the avowed persecutors of the religion of Jesus Christ.

A similar convulsion shook the foundations of the entire sacerdotal order in Persia, though its formal divorce from the Persian state is as yet unproclaimed. A "church-state", that had been firmly rooted in the life of the nation and had extended its ramifications to every sphere of life in that country, was virtually disrupted. A sacerdotal order, the rock wall of Shi'ih Islám in that land, was paralysed and discredited; its mujtahids, the favourite ministers of the hidden Imám, were reduced

to an insignificant number; all its beturbaned officers, except for a handful, were ruthlessly forced to exchange their traditional head-dress and robes for the European clothes they themselves anathematized; the pomp and pageantry that marked their ceremonials vanished; their fatvas (sentences) were nullified; their endowments were handed over to a civil administration; their mosques and seminaries were deserted; the right of sanctuary accorded to their shrines ceased to be recognized; their religious plays were banned; their takyihs were closed and even their pilgrimages to Najaf and Karbilá were discouraged and curtailed, The disuse of the veil; the recognition of the equality of sexes; the establishment of civil tribunals; the abolition of concubinage; the disparagement of the use of the Arabic tongue, the language of Islám and of the Qur'an, and the efforts exerted to divorce it from Persian—all these further proclaim the degradation, and foreshadow the final extinction, of that infamous crew, whose leaders had dared style themselves "servants of the Lord of Saintship" (Imám 'Alí), who had so often received the homage of the pious kings of the Şafaví dynasty, and whose anathemas, ever since the birth of the Faith of the Báb, had been chiefly responsible for the torrents of blood which had been shed, and whose acts have blackened the annals of both their religion and nation.

A crisis, not indeed as severe as that which shook the Islamic sacerdotal orders—the inveterate adversaries of the Faith—has, moreover, afflicted the ecclesiastical institutions of Christendom, whose influence, ever since Bahá'u'lláh's summons was issued and His warning was sounded, has visibly deteriorated, whose prestige has

been gravely damaged, whose authority has steadily declined, and whose power, rights, and prerogatives have been increasingly circumscribed. The virtual extinction of the temporal sovereignty of the Roman Pontiff, to which reference has already been made; the wave of anti-clericalism that brought in its wake the separation of the Catholic Church from the French Republic; the organized assault launched by a triumphant Communist state upon the Greek Orthodox Church in Russia, and the consequent disestablishment, disendowment, and persecution of the state religion; the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy which owed its allegiance to the Church of Rome and powerfully supported its institutions; the ordeal to which that same Church has been subjected in Spain and in Mexico; the wave of secularization which, at present, is engulfing the Catholic, the Anglican, and the Presbyterian Missions in non-Christian lands; the forces of an aggressive paganism which are assailing the ancient citadels of the Catholic, the Greek Orthodox, and the Lutheran Churches in Western, in Central and Eastern Europe, in the Balkans, and in the Baltic and Scandinavian states—these stand out as the most conspicuous manifestations of the decline in the fortunes of the ecclesiastical leaders of Christendom, leaders who, heedless of the voice of Bahá'u'lláh, have interposed themselves between the Christ returned in the glory of the Father and their respective congregations.

Nor can we fail to note the progressive deterioration in the authority, wielded by the ecclesiastical leaders of the Jewish and Zoroastrian Faiths, ever since the voice of Bahá'u'lláh was raised, announcing, in no uncertain

terms, that the *"Most Great Law is come"*, that the Ancient Beauty *"ruleth upon the throne of David"*, and that *"whatsoever hath been announced in the Books (Zoroastrian Holy Writ) hath been revealed and made clear."*

The evidences of increasing revolt against clerical authority; the disrespect and indifference shown to time-honoured observances, rituals, and ceremonials; the repeated inroads made by the forces of an aggressive and often hostile nationalism into the spheres of clerical jurisdiction; and the general apathy with which, particularly in the case of the professed adherents of the Zoroastrian Faith, these encroachments are regarded—all provide, beyond the shadow of a doubt, further justification of the warnings and predictions uttered by Bahá'u'lláh in His historic addresses to the world's ecclesiastical leaders.

Such in sum are the awful evidences of God's retributive justice that have afflicted kings as well as ecclesiastics, in both the East and the West, as a direct consequence of either their active opposition to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, or of their lamentable failure to respond to His call, to inquire into His Message, to avert the sufferings He endured, or to heed the marvellous signs and prodigies which, during a hundred years, have accompanied the birth and rise of His Revelation.

*"From two ranks amongst men,"* is His terse and prophetic utterance, *"power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics."* *"If ye pay no heed,"* He thus warned the kings of the earth, *"unto the counsels which ... We have revealed in this Tablet, Divine chastisement will assail you from every direction. ... On that day ye shall ... recognize your own impotence."* And again: *"Though aware of most*

*of Our afflictions, ye, nevertheless, have failed to stay the hand of the aggressor." And, furthermore, this arraignment: "... We ... will be patient, as We have been patient in that which hath befallen Us at your hands, O concourse of kings!"*

Condemning specifically the world's ecclesiastical leaders, He has written: *"The source and origin of tyranny have been the divines. ... God, verily, is clear of them, and We, too, are clear of them." "When We observed carefully,"* He openly affirms, *"We discovered that Our enemies are, for the most part, the divines." "O concourse of divines!"* He thus addresses them, *"Ye shall not henceforth behold yourselves possessed of any power, inasmuch as We have seized it from you. ...." "Had ye believed in God when He revealed Himself,"* He explains, *"the people would not have turned aside from Him, nor would the things ye witness today have befallen Us." "They,"* referring more specifically to Muslim ecclesiastics, He asserts, *"rose up against Us with such cruelty as hath sapped the strength of Islám..." "The divines of Persia,"* He affirms, *"committed that which no people amongst the peoples of the world hath committed." And again: "... The divines of Persia ... have perpetrated what the Yews have not perpetrated during the Revelation of Him Who is the Spirit (Jesus)." And finally, these portentous prophecies: "Because of you the people were abased, and the banner of Islám was hauled down, and its mighty throne subverted." "Ere long will all that ye possess perish, and your glory be turned into the most wretched abasement, and ye shall behold the punishment for what ye have wrought. ...." "Ere long,"* the Báb Himself, even more openly prophesies, *"We will, in very truth, torment such as waged war against*



Husayn (Imám Ḥusayn) ... *with the most afflictive torment. ....*  
*“Ere long will God wreak His vengeance upon them, at the time of  
 Our return, and He hath, in very truth, prepared for them, in the  
 world to come, a severe torment.”*

## **The station of kingship**

Let none, however, mistake or unwittingly misrepresent the purpose of Bahá'u'lláh. Severe as has been His condemnation pronounced against those sovereigns who persecuted Him, and however strict the censure expressed collectively against those who failed signally in their clear duty to investigate the truth of His Faith and to restrain the hand of the wrong-doer, His teachings embody no principle that can, in any way, be construed as a repudiation, or even a disparagement, however veiled, of the institution of kingship. The catastrophic fall, and the extinction of the dynasties and empires of those monarchs whose disastrous end He particularly prophesied, and the declining fortunes of the sovereigns of His Own generation, whom He generally reprovved both constituting a passing phase of the evolution of the Faith—should, in no wise, be confounded with the future position of that institution. Indeed, if we delve into the writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Faith, we cannot fail to discover unnumbered passages in which, in terms that none can misrepresent, the principle of kingship is eulogized, the rank and conduct of just and fair-minded kings is extolled, the rise of monarchs, ruling with justice and even professing His Faith, is envisaged, and the solemn duty to arise and ensure the

triumph of Bahá'í sovereigns is inculcated. To conclude from the above quoted words, addressed by Bahá'u'lláh to the monarchs of the earth, to infer from the recital of the woeful disasters that have overtaken so many of them, that His followers either advocate or anticipate the definite extinction of the institution of kingship, would indeed be tantamount to a distortion of His teaching.

I can do no better than quote some of Bahá'u'lláh's Own testimonies, leaving the reader to shape his own judgment as to the falsity of such a deduction. In His "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf" He indicates the true source of kingship: *"Regard for the rank of sovereigns is divinely ordained, as is clearly attested by the words of the Prophets of God and His chosen ones. He Who is the Spirit (Jesus) may peace be upon Him—was asked: O Spirit of God! Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" And He made reply: 'Yea, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' He forbade it not. These two sayings are, in the estimation of men of insight, one and the same, for if that which belonged to Caesar had not come from God He would have forbidden it.*

*And likewise in the sacred verse: 'Obey God and obey the Apostle, and those among you invested with authority.' By 'those invested with authority' is meant primarily and more specially the Imams the blessings of God rest upon them. They verily are the manifestations of the power of God and the sources of His authority, and the repositories of His knowledge, and the day-springs of His commandments. Secondly these words refer unto the kings and rulers—those through the brightness of whose justice the horizons of the world are resplendent and luminous."*

And again: *"In the Epistle to the Romans Saint Paul*

*hath written: 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.' And further: 'For he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.' He saith that the appearance of the kings, and their majesty and power, are of God."*

And again: "A just king enjoyeth nearer access unto God than anyone. Unto this testifieth He Who speaketh in His Most Great Prison."

Likewise in the Bishárát (Glad-Tidings) Bahá'u'lláh asserts that "the majesty of kingship is one of the signs of God." "We do not wish," He adds, "that the countries of the world should be deprived thereof."

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas He sets forth His purpose, and eulogizes the king who will profess His Faith: "By the righteousness of God! It is not our wish to lay hands on your kingdoms. Our mission is to seize and possess the hearts of men. Upon them the eyes of Bahá are fastened. To this testifieth the Kingdom of Names, could ye but comprehend it. Whoso followeth his Lord, will renounce the world and all that is therein; how much greater, then, must be the detachment of Him Who holdeth so august a station!" "How great the blessedness that awaiteth the king who will arise to aid my Cause in My Kingdom, who will detach himself from all else but Me! Such a king is numbered with the Companions of the Crimson Ark—the Ark which God hath prepared for the people of Bahá. All must glorify his name, must reverence his station, and aid him to unlock the cities with the keys of My Name, the Omnipotent Protector of all that inhabit the visible and invisible kingdoms. Such a king is the very eye of mankind, the luminous ornament on

*the brow of creation, the fountain-head of blessings unto the whole world. Offer up, O people of Bahá, your substance, nay your very lives, for his assistance."*

In the Lawḥ-i-Sulṭán, Bahá'u'lláh further reveals the significance of kingship: *"A just king is the shadow of God on earth. All should seek shelter under the shadow of his justice, and rest in the shade of his favour. This is not a matter which is either specific or limited in its scope, that it might be restricted to one or another person, inasmuch as the shadow telleth of the One Who casteth it. God, glorified be His remembrance, hath called Himself the Lord of the worlds, for He hath nurtured and still nurtureth everyone. Glorified be, then, His grace that hath preceded all created things, and His mercy that hath surpassed the worlds."*

In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh has also written: *"The one true God, exalted be His glory, hath bestowed the government of the earth upon the kings. To none is given the right to act in any manner that would run counter to the considered views of them who are in authority. That which He hath reserved for Himself are the cities of men's hearts; and of these the loved ones of Him Who is the Sovereign Truth are, in this Day, as the keys."*

In the following passage He expresses this wish: *"We cherish our hope that one of the kings of the earth will, for the sake of God, arise for the triumph of this wronged, this oppressed people. Such a king will be eternally extolled and glorified. God hath prescribed unto this people the duty of aiding whosoever will aid them, of serving his best interests, and of demonstrating to him their abiding loyalty."*

In the Lawḥ-i-Ra'ís He actually and categorically prophesies the rise of such a king: *"Ere long will God raise up from among the kings one who will aid His loved*

ones. *He, verily, encompasseth all things. He will instil in the hearts the love of His loved ones. This, indeed, is irrevocably decreed by One Who is the Almighty, the Beneficent.*" In the Riḍvānu'l-'Adl, wherein the virtue of justice is exalted, He makes a parallel prediction:

*"Ere long will God make manifest on earth kings who will recline on the couches of justice, and will rule amongst men even as they rule their own selves. They, indeed, are among the choicest of My creatures in the entire creation."*

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas He visualizes in these words the elevation to the throne of His native city, *"the Mother of the World"* and *"the Day-spring of Light"*, of a king who will be adorned with the twin ornaments of justice and of devotion to His Faith: *"Let nothing grieve thee, O Land of Ta, for God hath chosen thee to be the source of the joy of all mankind. He shall, if it be His will, bless thy throne with one who will rule with justice, who will gather together the flock of God which the wolves have scattered. Such a ruler will, with joy and gladness, turn his face towards and extend his favours unto, the people of Bahá. He indeed is accounted in the sight of God as a jewel among men. Upon him rest forever the glory of God, and the glory of all that dwell in the kingdom of His Revelation."*

## 12

# Teaching the Bahá'í Faith

## The means of triumph

Not by the force of numbers, not by the mere exposition of a set of new and noble principles, not by an organized campaign of teaching—no matter how world-wide and elaborate in its character not even by the staunchness of our faith or the exaltation of our enthusiasm, can we ultimately hope to vindicate in the eyes of a critical and sceptical age the supreme claim of the Bahá Revelation. One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendour of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.

## Spiritual prerequisites of success

Of these spiritual prerequisites of success, which constitute the bedrock on which the security of all teaching plans, Temple projects, and financial schemes, must ultimately rest, the following stand out as pre-eminent and vital, which the members of the American Bahá'í community will do well to ponder. Upon the extent to which these basic requirements are met, and the manner

in which the American believers fulfil them in their individual lives, administrative activities, and social relationships, must depend the measure of the manifold blessings which the All-Bountiful Possessor can vouchsafe to them all. These requirements are none other than a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or colour.

The first 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 ensure the security of, and establish the reign of law and order in, a strangely disordered world. The second is mainly and directly concerned with the Bahá'í youth, who can contribute so decisively to the virility, the purity, and the driving force of the life of the Bahá'í community, and upon whom must depend the future orientation of its destiny, and the complete unfoldment of the potentialities with which God has endowed it. The third should be the immediate, the universal, and the chief concern of all and sundry members of the Bahá'í community, of whatever age, rank, experience, class, or colour, as all, with no exception, must face its challenging implications, and none can claim, however much he may have progressed along this line, to have completely

discharged the stern responsibilities which it inculcates.

### ***Rectitude of conduct***

A rectitude of conduct, an abiding sense of undeviating justice, unobscured by the demoralizing influences which a corruption-ridden political life so strikingly manifests; a chaste, pure, and holy life, unsullied and unclouded by the indecencies, the vices, the false standards, which an inherently deficient moral code tolerates, perpetuates, and fosters; a fraternity freed from that cancerous growth of racial prejudice, which is eating into the vitals of an already debilitated society—these are the ideals which the American believers must, from now on, individually and through concerted action, strive to promote, in both their private and public lives, ideals which are the chief propelling forces that can most effectively accelerate the march of their institutions, plans, and enterprises, that can guard the honour and integrity of their Faith, and subdue any obstacles that may confront it in the future.

This rectitude of conduct, with its implications of justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness, must distinguish every phase of the life of the Bahá'í community. *"The companions of God,"* Bahá'u'lláh Himself has declared, *"are, in this day, the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world. They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character that all mankind may profit by their example."* *"I swear by Him Who is the Most Great Ocean!"* He again affirms, *"Within the very breath of such souls as are pure and sanctified far-reaching potentialities are hidden. So great are*



*these potentialities that they exercise their influence upon all created things.” “He is the true servant of God,”* He, in another passage has written, *“who, in this day, were he to pass through cities of silver and gold, would not deign to look upon them, and whose heart would remain pure and undefiled from whatever things can be seen in this world, be they its goods or its treasures. I swear by the Sun of Truth! The breath of such a man is endowed with potency, and his words with attraction.” “By Him Who shineth above the Day-Spring of sanctity!”* He, still more emphatically, has revealed, *“If the whole earth were to be converted into silver and gold, no man who can be said to have truly ascended into the heaven of faith and certitude would deign to regard it, much less to seize and keep it. ... They who dwell within the Tabernacle of God, and are established upon the seats of everlasting glory, will refuse, though they be dying of hunger, to stretch their hands, and seize unlawfully the property of their neighbour, however vile and worthless he may be. The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds.” “We have admonished all the loved ones of God,”* He insists, *“to take heed lest the hem of Our sacred vesture be smirched with the mire of unlawful deeds, or be stained with the dust of reprehensible conduct.” “Cleave unto righteousness, O people of Bahá,”* He thus exhorts them, *“This, verily, is the commandment which this wronged One hath given unto you, and the first choice*

*of His unrestrained will for every one of you." "A good character," He explains, "is, verily, the best mantle for men from God. With it he adorneth the temples of His loved ones. By My life! The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof." "One righteous act," He, again, has written, "is endowed with a potency that can so elevate the dust as to cause it to pass beyond the heaven of heavens. It can tear every bond asunder, and hath the power to restore the force that hath spent itself and vanished. ... Be pure, O people of God, be pure; be righteous, be righteous. ... Say: O people of God! That which can ensure the victory of Him Who is the eternal Truth, His hosts and helpers on earth, have been set down in the sacred Books and Scriptures, and are as clear and manifest as the sun. These hosts are such righteous deeds, such conduct and character, as are acceptable in His sight. Whoso ariseth, in this Day, to aid Our Cause, and summoneth to his assistance the hosts of a praiseworthy character and upright conduct, the influence from such an action will, most certainly, be diffused throughout the whole world." "The betterment of the world," is yet another statement, "can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct." "Be fair to yourselves and to others," He thus counselleth them, "that the evidences of justice may be revealed through your deeds among Our faithful servants." "Equity," He also has written, "is the most fundamental among human virtues. The evaluation of all things must needs depend upon it." And again, "Observe equity in your judgment, ye men of understanding heart! He that is unjust in his judgment is destitute of the characteristics that distinguish man's station." "Beautify your tongues, O people," He further*

admonishes them, *“with truthfulness, and adorn your souls with the ornament of honesty. Beware, O people, that ye deal not treacherously with any one. Be ye the trustees of God amongst His creatures, and the emblems of His generosity amidst His people.”* *“Let your eye be chaste,”* is yet another counsel, *“your hand faithful, your tongue truthful, and your heart enlightened.”* *“Be an ornament to the countenance of truth,”* is yet another admonition, *“a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue.”* *“Let truthfulness and courtesy be your adorning,”* is still another admonition, *“suffer not yourselves to be deprived of the robe of forbearance and justice, that the sweet savours of holiness may be wafted from your hearts upon all created things. Say Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds. Strive that ye may be enabled to manifest to the peoples of the earth the signs of God, and to mirror forth His commandments. Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind, for the professions of most men, be they high or low, differ from their conduct. It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth. Happy is the man that heedeth My counsel, and keepeth the precepts prescribed by Him who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.”*

*“O army of God!”* writes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *“Through the protection and help vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty—may my life be a sacrifice to His loved ones—ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls.*

*Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a centre of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say. "This man is unquestionably a Bahá'í, for his manner, his behaviour, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá'ís." Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God.* "The most vital duty, in this day," He, moreover, has written, "is to purify your characters to correct your manners, and improve your conduct. The beloved of the Merciful must show forth such character and conduct among His creatures, that the fragrance of their holiness may be shed upon the whole world, and may quicken the dead, inasmuch as the purpose of the Manifestation of God and the dawning of the limitless lights of the Invisible is to educate the souls of men, and refine the character of every living man. ...." "Truthfulness," He asserts, "is the foundation of all human virtues. Without truthfulness progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also be acquired."

Such a rectitude of conduct must manifest itself, with ever-increasing potency, in every verdict which the elected representatives of the Bahá'í community, in whatever capacity they may find themselves, may be called upon to pronounce. It must be constantly reflected in the business dealings of all its members, in their domestic lives, in all manner of employment, and in any service they may, in the future, render their

government or people. It must be exemplified in the conduct of all Bahá'í electors, when exercising their sacred rights and functions. It must characterize the attitude of every loyal believer towards non-acceptance of political posts, non-identification with political parties, non-participation in political controversies, and non-membership in political organizations and ecclesiastical institutions. It must reveal itself in the uncompromising adherence of all, whether young or old, to the clearly enunciated and fundamental principles laid down by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His addresses, and to the laws and ordinances revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in His Most Holy Book. It must be demonstrated in the impartiality of every defender of the Faith against its enemies, in his fair-mindedness in recognizing any merits that enemy may possess, and in his honesty in discharging any obligations he may have towards him. It must constitute the brightest ornament of the life, the pursuits, the exertions, and the utterances of every Bahá'í teacher, whether labouring at home or abroad, whether in the front ranks of the teaching force, or occupying a less active and responsible position. It must be made the hallmark of that numerically small, yet intensely dynamic and highly responsible body of the elected national representatives of every Bahá'í community, which constitutes the sustaining pillar, and the sole instrument for the election, in every community, of that Universal House whose very name and title, as ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, symbolizes that rectitude of conduct which it is its highest mission to safeguard and enforce.

So great and transcendental is this principle of Divine Justice, a principle that must be regarded as the crown-

ing distinction of all Local and National Assemblies, in their capacity as forerunners of the Universal House of Justice, that Bahá'u'lláh Himself subordinates His personal inclination and wish to the all-compelling force of its demands and implications. *"God is My witness!"* He thus explains, *"were it not contrary to the Law of God, I would have kissed the hand of My would-be murderer, and would cause him to inherit My earthly goods. I am restrained, however, by the binding Law laid down in the Book, and am Myself bereft of all worldly possessions."* *"Know thou, of a truth,"* He significantly affirms, *"these great oppressions that have befallen the world are preparing it for the advent of the Most Great Justice."* *"Say,"* He again asserts, *"He hath appeared with that Justice wherewith mankind hath been adorned, and yet the people are, for the most part, asleep."* *"The light of men is Justice,"* He moreover states, *"Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men."* *"No radiance,"* He declares, *"can compare with that of justice. The organization of the world and the tranquillity of mankind depend upon it."* *"O people of God!"* He exclaims, *"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."* *"Justice and equity,"* is yet another assertion, *"are two guardians for the protection of man. They have appeared arrayed in their mighty and sacred names to maintain the world in uprightness and protect the nations."* *"Bestir yourselves, O people,"* is His emphatic warning, *"in anticipation of the days of Divine justice, for the promised hour is now come. Beware lest ye fail to apprehend its import, and be accounted among the erring."*

*"The day is approaching,"* He similarly has written, *"when the faithful will behold the day-star of justice shining in its full splendour from the day-spring of glory."* *"The shame I was made to bear,"* He significantly remarks, *"hath uncovered the glory with which the whole of creation had been invested, and through the cruelties I have endured, the day-star of justice hath manifested itself, and shed its splendour upon men."* *"The world,"* He again has written, *"is in great turmoil, and the minds of its people are in a state of utter confusion. We entreat the Almighty that He may graciously illuminate them with the glory of His Justice, and enable them to discover that which will be profitable unto them at all times and under all conditions."* And again, *"There can be no doubt whatever that if the day-star of justice, which the clouds of tyranny have obscured, were to shed its light upon men, the face of the earth would be completely transformed."*

*"God be praised!"* 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in His turn, exclaims, *"The sun of justice hath risen above the horizon of Bahá'u'lláh. For in His Tablets the foundations of such a justice have been laid as no mind hath, from the beginning of creation, conceived."* *"The canopy of existence,"* He further explains, *"resteth upon the pole of justice, and not of forgiveness, and the life of mankind dependeth on justice and not on forgiveness."*

Small wonder, therefore, that the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation should have chosen to associate the name and title of that House, which is to be the crowning glory of His administrative institutions, not with forgiveness but with justice, to have made justice the only basis and the permanent foundation of His Most Great Peace, and to have proclaimed it in His Hidden Words as *"the best*

*beloved of all things*" in His sight. It is to the American believers, particularly, that I feel urged to direct this fervent plea to ponder in their hearts the implications of this moral rectitude, and to uphold, with heart and soul and uncompromisingly, both individually and collectively, this sublime standard—a standard of which justice is so essential and potent an element.

### ***A chaste and holy life***

As to a chaste and holy life it should be regarded as no less essential a factor that must contribute its proper share to the strengthening and vitalization of the Bahá'í community, upon which must in turn depend the success of any Bahá'í plan or enterprise. In these days when the forces of irreligion are weakening the moral fibre, and undermining the foundations of individual morality, the obligation of chastity and holiness must claim an increasing share of the attention of the American believers, both in their individual capacities and as the responsible custodians of the interests of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. In the discharge of such an obligation, to which the special circumstances resulting from an excessive and enervating materialism now prevailing in their country lend particular significance, they must play a conspicuous and predominant role. All of them, be they men or women, must, at this threatening hour when the lights of religion are fading out, and its restraints are one by one being abolished, pause to examine themselves, scrutinize their conduct, and with characteristic resolution arise to purge the life of their community of every trace of moral laxity that might stain the name, or impair the integrity, of so holy and precious a Faith.



A chaste and holy life must be made the controlling principle in the behaviour and conduct of all Bahá'ís, both in their social relations with the members of their own community, and in their contact with the world at large. It must adorn and reinforce the ceaseless labours and meritorious exertions of those whose enviable position is to propagate the Message, and to administer the affairs, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. It must be upheld, in all its integrity and implications, in every phase of the life of those who fill the ranks of that Faith, whether in their homes, their travels, their clubs, their societies, their entertainments, their schools, and their universities. It must be accorded special consideration in the conduct of the social activities of every Bahá'í summer school and any other occasions on which Bahá'í community life is organized and fostered. It must be closely and continually identified with the mission of the Bahá'í Youth, both as an element in the life of the Bahá'í community, and as a factor in the future progress and orientation of the youth of their own country.

Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. It requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of

nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices. It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age. Nay, rather it seeks to demonstrate, through the dynamic force of its example, the pernicious character of such theories, the falsity of such standards, the hollowness of such claims, the perversity of such habits, and the sacrilegious character of such excesses.

*“By the righteousness of God!”* writes Bahá’u’lláh, *“The world, its vanities and its glory, and whatever delights it can offer, are all, in the sight of God, as worthless as, nay even more contemptible than, dust and ashes. Would that the hearts of men could comprehend it. Wash yourselves thoroughly, O people of Bahá, from the defilement of the world, and of all that pertaineth unto it. God Himself beareth Me witness! The things of the earth ill beseem you. Cast them away unto such as may desire them, and fasten your eyes upon this most holy and effulgent Vision.”* *“O ye My loved ones!”* He thus exhorts His followers, *“Suffer not the hem of My sacred vesture to be smirched and mired with the things of this world, and follow not the promptings of your evil and corrupt desires.”* And again, *“O ye the beloved of the one true God! Pass beyond the narrow retreats of your evil and corrupt desires, and advance into the vast immensity of the realm of God, and abide ye in the meads of sanctity and of detachment, that the fragrance of your deeds may lead the whole of mankind to the ocean of God’s unfading glory.”* *“Disencumber yourselves,”* He thus commands them, *“of all attachment to this world and the vanities thereof. Beware that ye approach them*

*not, inasmuch as they prompt you to walk after your own lusts and covetous desires, and hinder you from entering the straight and glorious Path." "Eschew all manner of wickedness," is His commandment, "for such things are forbidden unto you in the Book which none touch except such as God hath cleansed from every taint of guilt, and numbered among the purified." "A race of men," is His written promise, "incomparable in character, shall be raised up which, with the feet of detachment, will tread under all who are in heaven and on earth, and will cast the sleeve of holiness over all that hath been created, from water and clay." "The civilization," is His grave warning, "so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men. ... If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation." "He hath chosen out of the whole world the hearts of His servants," He explains, "and made them each a seat for the revelation of His glory. Wherefore, sanctify them from every defilement, that the things for which they were created may be engraven upon them. This indeed is a token of God's bountiful favour." "Say," He proclaims, "He is not to be numbered with the people of Bahá who followeth his mundane desires, or fixeth his heart on things of the earth. He is my true follower who, if he come to a valley of pure gold, will pass straight through it aloof as a cloud, and will neither turn back, nor pause. Such a man is assuredly of Me. From his garment the Concurrence on high can inhale the fragrance of sanctity. ... And if he meet the, fairest and most comely of women, he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty. Such an one indeed is the*

*creation of spotless chastity. Thus instructeth you the Pen of the Ancient of Days, as bidden by your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful." "They that follow their lusts and corrupt inclinations," is yet another warning, "have erred and dissipated their efforts. They indeed are of the lost." "It behoveth the people of Bahá," He also has written, "to die to the world and all that is therein, to be so detached from all earthly things that the inmates of Paradise may inhale from their garment the sweet-smelling savour of sanctity. ... They that have tarnished the fair name of the Cause of God by following the things of the flesh—these are in palpable error!" "Purity and chastity," He particularly admonishes, "have been, and still are, the most great ornaments for the handmaidens of God. God is My Witness! The brightness of the light of chastity sheddeth its illumination upon the worlds of the spirit, and its fragrance is wafted even unto the Most Exalted Paradise." "God," He again affirms, "hath verily made chastity to be a crown for the heads of His handmaidens. Great is the blessedness of that handmaiden that hath attained unto this great station." "We, verily, have decreed in Our Book," is His assurance, "a goodly and bountiful reward to whosoever will turn away from wickedness, and lead a chaste and godly life. He, in truth, is the Great Giver, the All-Bountiful." "We have sustained the weight of all calamities," He testifies, "to sanctify you from all earthly corruption and ye are yet indifferent. ... We, verily, behold your actions. If We perceive from them the sweet-smelling savour of purity and holiness, We will most certainly bless you. Then will the tongues of the inmates of Paradise utter your praise and magnify your names amidst them who have drawn nigh unto God."*

*"The drinking of wine,"* writes 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "is, according to the text of the Most Holy Book, forbidden, for it is the cause of chronic diseases, weakeneth the nerves, and consumeth the mind." "Drink ye, O handmaidens of God," Bahá'u'lláh Himself has affirmed, "the Mystic Wine from the cup of My words. Cast away, then, from you that which your minds abhor, for it hath been forbidden unto you in His Tablets and His Scriptures. Beware lest ye barter away the River that is life indeed for that which the souls of the pure-hearted detest. Become ye intoxicated with the wine of the love of God, and not with that which deadeneth your minds, O ye that adore Him! Verily, it hath been forbidden unto every believer, whether man or woman. Thus hath the sun of My commandment shone forth above the horizon of My utterance, that the handmaidens who believe in Me may be illumined."

It must be remembered, however, that the maintenance of such a high standard of moral conduct is not to be associated or confused with any form of asceticism, or of excessive and bigoted puritanism. The standard inculcated by Bahá'u'lláh, seeks, under no circumstances, to deny any one the legitimate right and privilege to derive the fullest advantage and benefit from the manifold joys, beauties, and pleasures with which the world has been so plentifully enriched by an All-Loving Creator. "Should a man," Bahá'u'lláh Himself reassures us, "wish to adorn himself with the ornaments of the earth, to wear its apparels, or partake of the benefits it can bestow, no harm can befall him, if he alloweth nothing whatever to intervene between him and God, for God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him. Eat

*ye, O people, of the good things which God hath allowed you, and deprive not yourselves from His wondrous bounties. Render thanks and praise unto Him, and be of them that are truly thankful."*

### ***Racial prejudice***

As to racial prejudice, the corrosion of which, for well-nigh a century, has bitten into the fibre, and attacked the whole social structure of American society, it should be regarded as constituting the most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá'í community at the present stage of its evolution. The ceaseless exertions which this issue of paramount importance calls for, the sacrifices it must impose, the care and vigilance it demands, the moral courage and fortitude it requires, the tact and sympathy it necessitates, invest this problem, which the American believers are still far from having satisfactorily resolved, with an urgency and importance that cannot be over-estimated. White and negro, high and low, young and old, whether newly converted to the Faith or not, all who stand identified with it must participate in, and lend their assistance, each according to his or her capacity, experience, and opportunities, to the common task of fulfilling the instructions, realizing the hopes, and following the example, of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Whether coloured or non-coloured, neither race has the right, or can conscientiously claim, to be regarded as absolved from such an obligation, as having realized such hopes, or having faithfully followed such an example. A long and thorny road, beset with pitfalls, still remains untravelled, both by the white and the negro exponents of the redeeming Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. On the distance they

cover, and the manner in which they travel that road, must depend, to an extent which few among them can imagine, the operation of those intangible influences which are indispensable to the spiritual triumph of the American believers and the material success of their newly launched enterprise.

Let them call to mind, fearlessly and determinedly, the example and conduct of 'Abdu'l-Bahá while in their midst. Let them remember His courage, His genuine love, His informal and indiscriminating fellowship, His contempt for and impatience of criticism, tempered by His tact and wisdom. Let them revive and perpetuate the memory of those unforgettable and historic episodes and occasions on which He so strikingly demonstrated His keen sense of justice, His spontaneous sympathy for the down-trodden, His ever-abiding sense of the oneness of the human race, His overflowing love for its members, and His displeasure with those who dared to flout His wishes, to deride His methods, to challenge His principles, or to nullify His acts.

To discriminate against any race, on the ground of its being socially backward, politically immature, and numerically in a minority, is a flagrant violation of the spirit that animates the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. The consciousness of any division or cleavage in its ranks is alien to its very purpose, principles, and ideals. Once its members have fully recognized the claim of its Author, and, by identifying themselves with its Administrative Order, accepted unreservedly the principles and laws embodied in its teachings, every differentiation of class, creed, or colour must automatically be obliterated, and never be allowed, under any pretext, and however great the pres-

sure of events or of public opinion, to reassert itself. If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favour of the minority, be it racial or otherwise. Unlike the nations and peoples of the earth, be they of the East or of the West, democratic or authoritarian, communist or capitalist, whether belonging to the Old World or the New, who either ignore, trample upon, or extirpate the racial, religious, or political minorities within the sphere of their jurisdiction, every organized community, enlisted under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it. So great and vital is this principle that in such circumstances, as when an equal number of ballots has been cast in an election, or where the qualifications for any office are balanced as between the various races, faiths or nationalities within the community, priority should unhesitatingly be accorded the party representing the minority, and this for no other reason except to stimulate and encourage it, and afford it an opportunity to further the interests of the community. In the light of this principle, and bearing in mind the extreme desirability of having the minority elements participate and share responsibility in the conduct of Bahá'í activity, it should be the duty of every Bahá'í community so to arrange its affairs that in cases where individuals belonging to the divers minority elements within it are already qualified and fulfil the necessary requirements, Bahá'í representative institutions, be they Assemblies, conventions, conferences, or committees, may have represented on them as many of these



divers elements, racial or otherwise, as possible. The adoption of such a course, and faithful adherence to it, would not only be a source of inspiration and encouragement to those elements that are numerically small and inadequately represented, but would demonstrate to the world at large the universality and representative character of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and the freedom of His followers from the taint of those prejudices which have already wrought such havoc in the domestic affairs, as well as the foreign relationships, of the nations.

Freedom from racial prejudice, in any of its forms, should, at such a time as this when an increasingly large section of the human race is falling a victim to its devastating ferocity, be adopted as the watchword of the entire body of the American believers, in whichever state they reside, in whatever circles they move, whatever their age, traditions, tastes, and habits. It should be consistently demonstrated in every phase of their activity and life, whether in the Bahá'í community or outside it, in public or in private, formally as well as informally, individually as well as in their official capacity as organized groups, committees, and Assemblies. It should be deliberately cultivated through the various and every-day opportunities, no matter how insignificant, that present themselves, whether in their homes, their business offices, their schools and colleges, their social parties and recreation grounds, their Bahá'í meetings, conferences, conventions, summer schools, and Assemblies. It should, above all else, become the keynote of the policy of that august body which, in its capacity as the national representative, and the director and co-ordinator of the affairs of the community, must set

the example, and facilitate the application of such a vital principle to the lives and activities of those whose interests it safeguards and represents.

*“O ye discerning ones!” Bahá’u’lláh has written, “Verily, the words which have descended from the heaven of the Will of God are the source of unity and harmony for the world. Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness.” “We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations,” He proclaims, “... that all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled.” “Bahá’u’lláh hath said,” writes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “that the various races of human kind lend a composite harmony and beauty of colour to the whole. Let all associate, therefore, in this great human garden even as flowers grow and blend together side by side without discord or disagreement between them.” “Bahá’u’lláh,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá moreover has said, “once compared the coloured people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black pupil is seen the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the spirit shineth forth.”*

*“God,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself declares, “maketh no distinction between the white and the black. If the hearts are pure both are acceptable unto Him. God is no respecter of persons on account of either colour or race. All colours are acceptable unto Him, be they white, black or yellow. Inasmuch as all were created in the image of God, we must bring ourselves to realize that all embody divine possibilities.” “In the estimation of God,” He states, “all men are equal. There is no distinction or preference for any soul, in the*

*realm of His justice and equity." "God did not make these divisions," He affirms, "these divisions have had their origin in man himself. Therefore, as they are against the plan and purpose of God they are false and imaginary." "In the estimation of God," He again affirms, "there is no distinction of colour; all are one in the colour and beauty of servitude to Him. Colour is not important; the heart is all-important. It mattereth not what the exterior may be if the heart is pure and white within. God doth not behold differences of hue and complexion. He looketh at the hearts. He whose morals and virtues are praiseworthy is preferred in the presence of God; he who is devoted to the Kingdom is most beloved. In the realm of genesis and creation the question of colour is of least importance." "Throughout the animal kingdom," He explains, "we do not find the creatures separated because of colour. They recognize unity of species and oneness of kind. If we do not find colour distinction drawn in a kingdom of lower intelligence and reason how can it be justified among human beings, especially when we know that all have come from the same source and belong to the same household? In origin and intention of creation mankind is one. Distinctions of race and colour have arisen afterward." "Man is endowed with superior reasoning power and the faculty of perception" He further explains, "he is the manifestation of divine bestowals. Shall racial ideas prevail and obscure the creative purpose of unity in his kingdom?" "One of the important questions," He significantly remarks, "which affects the unity and solidarity of mankind is the fellowship and equality of the white and coloured races. Between these two races certain points of agreement and points of distinction exist which warrant just and mutual consideration. The points of contact are many*

.... In this country, the United States of America, patriotism is common to both races; all have equal rights to citizenship, speak one language, receive the blessings of the same civilization, and follow the precepts of the same religion. In fact, numerous points of partnership and agreement exist between the two races; whereas the one point of distinction is that of colour. Shall this, the least of all distinctions, be allowed to separate you as races and individuals?" "This variety in forms and colouring," He stresses, "which is manifest in all the kingdoms is according to creative Wisdom and hath a divine purpose." "The diversity in the human family," He claims, "should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord." "If you meet," is His admonition, "those of a different race and colour from yourself, do not mistrust them, and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness." "In the world of being," He testifies, "the meeting is blessed when the white and coloured races meet together with infinite spiritual love and heavenly harmony. When such meetings are established, and the participants associate with each other with perfect love, unity, and kindness, the angels of the Kingdom praise them, and the Beauty of Bahá'u'lláh addresseth them, 'Blessed are ye! Blessed are ye!'" "When a gathering of these two races is brought about," He likewise asserts, "that assemblage will become the magnet of the Concourse on high, and the confirmation of the Blessed Beauty will surround it." "Strive earnestly," He again exhorts both races, "and put forth your greatest endeavour toward the accomplishment of this fellowship and the cementing of this bond of brotherhood between you. Such an attainment is not possible without will and effort

*on the part of each; from one, expressions of gratitude and appreciation; from the other, kindness and recognition of equality. Each one should endeavour to develop and assist the other towards mutual advancement. ... Love and unity will be fostered between you, thereby bringing about the oneness of mankind. For the accomplishment of unity between the coloured and white will be an assurance of the world's peace." "I hope," He thus addresses members of the white race, "that ye may cause that down-trodden race to become glorious, and to be joined with the white race, to serve the world of man with the utmost sincerity, faithfulness, love, and purity. This opposition, enmity, and prejudice among the white race and the coloured cannot be effaced except through faith, assurance, and the teachings of the Blessed Beauty." "This question of the union of the white and the black is very important," He warns, "for if it is not realized, ere long great difficulties will arise, and harmful results will follow." "If this matter remaineth without change," is yet another warning, "enmity will be increased day by day, and the final result will be hardship and may end in bloodshed."*

A tremendous effort is required by both races if their outlook, their manners, and conduct are to reflect, in this darkened age, the spirit and teachings of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Casting away once and for all the fallacious doctrine of racial superiority, with all its attendant evils, confusion, and miseries, and welcoming and encouraging the intermixture of races, and tearing down the barriers that now divide them, they should each endeavour, day and night, to fulfil their particular responsibilities in the common task which so urgently faces them. Let them, while each is attempting to contribute its share to

the solution of this perplexing problem, call to mind the warnings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and visualize, while there is yet time, the dire consequences that must follow if this challenging and unhappy situation that faces the entire American nation is not definitely remedied.

Let the white make a supreme effort in their resolve to contribute their share to the solution of this problem, to abandon once for all their usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority, to correct their tendency towards revealing a patronizing attitude towards the members of the other race, to persuade them through their intimate, spontaneous, and informal association with them of the genuineness of their friendship and the sincerity of their intentions, and to master their impatience of any lack of responsiveness on the part of a people who have received, for so long a period, such grievous and slow-healing wounds. Let the negroes, through a corresponding effort on their part, show by every means in their power the warmth of their response, their readiness to forget the past, and their ability to wipe out every trace of suspicion that may still linger in their hearts and minds. Let neither think that the solution of so vast a problem is a matter that exclusively concerns the other. Let neither think that such a problem can either easily or immediately be resolved. Let neither think that they can wait confidently for the solution of this problem until the initiative has been taken, and the favourable circumstances created, by agencies that stand outside the orbit of their Faith. Let neither think that anything short of genuine love, extreme patience, true humility, consummate tact, sound initiative, mature wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and prayerful effort

can succeed in blotting out the stain which this patent evil has left on the fair name of their common country. Let them rather believe, and be firmly convinced, that on their mutual understanding, their amity, and sustained co-operation must depend, more than on any other force or organization operating outside the circle of their Faith, the deflection of that dangerous course so greatly feared by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the materialization of the hopes He cherished for their joint contribution to the fulfilment of that country's glorious destiny.

### **The duty of teaching**

With this vision clearly set before us, and fortified by the knowledge of the gracious aid of Bahá'u'lláh and the repeated assurances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, let us first strive to live the life and then arise with one heart, one mind, one voice, to reinforce our numbers and achieve our end. Let us recall, and seek on this sad occasion the comfort of, the last wishes of our departed yet ever-watchful Master:

*"It behoveth them not to rest for a moment, neither to seek repose. They must disperse themselves in every land, pass by every clime, and travel throughout all regions. Bestirred, without rest, and steadfast to the end, they must raise in every land the triumphant cry Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!"* (O thou the Glory of Glories). ... *The disciples of Christ forgot themselves and all earthly things, forsook all their cares and belongings, purged themselves of self and passion, and with absolute detachment scattered far and wide and engaged in calling the peoples of the world to the divine*

*guidance; till at last they made the world another world, illumined the surface of the earth, and even to their last hour proved self-sacrificing in the pathway of that beloved One of God. Finally in various lands they suffered glorious martyrdom. Let them that are men of action follow in their footsteps!"*

Having grasped the significance of these words, having obtained a clear understanding of the true character of our mission, the methods to adopt, the course to pursue, and having attained sufficiently the individual regeneration—the essential requisite of teaching—let us arise to teach His Cause with righteousness, conviction, understanding, and vigour. Let this be the paramount and most urgent duty of every Bahá'í. Let us make it the dominating passion of our life. Let us scatter to the uttermost corners of the earth; sacrifice our personal interests, comforts, tastes, and pleasures; mingle with the divers kindreds and peoples of the world; familiarize ourselves with their manners, traditions, thoughts, and customs; arouse, stimulate, and maintain universal interest in the Movement, and at the same time endeavour by all the means in our power, by concentrated and persistent attention, to enlist the unreserved allegiance and the active support of the more hopeful and receptive among our hearers. Let us too bear in mind the example which our beloved Master has clearly set before us. Wise and tactful in His approach, wakeful and attentive in His early intercourse, broad and liberal in all His public utterances, cautious and gradual in the unfolding of the essential verities of the Cause, passionate in His appeal yet sober in argument, confident in tone, unswerving in conviction, dignified in His manners—such were the



distinguishing features of our Beloved's noble presentation of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

## **The art of teaching**

### ***All must teach***

To teach the Cause of God, to proclaim its truths, to defend its interests, to demonstrate, by words as well as by deeds, its indispensability, its potency, and universality, should at no time be regarded as the exclusive concern or sole privilege of Bahá'í administrative institutions, be they Assemblies or committees. All must participate, however humble their origin, however limited their experience, however restricted their means, however deficient their education, however pressing their cares and preoccupations, however unfavourable the environment in which they live. "God," Bahá'u'lláh, Himself, has unmistakably revealed, *"hath prescribed unto every one the duty of teaching His Cause."* "Say," He further has written, *"Teach ye the Cause of God, O people of Bahá, for God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of proclaiming His Message, and regardeth it as the most meritorious of all deeds."*

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

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

*“Peter,”* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has testified, *“according to the history of the Church, was also incapable of keeping count of the days of the week. Whenever he decided to go fishing, he would tie up his weekly food into seven parcels, and every day he would eat one of them, and when he had reached the seventh, he would know that the Sabbath had arrived, and thereupon would observe it.”* If the Son of Man was capable of infusing into apparently so crude and helpless an instrument such potency as to cause, in the words of Bahá’u’lláh, *“the mysteries of wisdom and of utterance to flow out of his mouth”*, and to exalt him above the rest of His disciples, and render him fit to become His successor and the founder of His Church, how much more can the Father, Who is Bahá’u’lláh, empower the most puny and insignificant among His followers to achieve, for the execution of His purpose, such wonders as would dwarf the mightiest achievements of even the first apostle of Jesus Christ!

*“The Báb,”* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, moreover, has written, *“hath said: ‘Should a tiny ant desire, in this day, to be possessed of such power as to be able to unravel the abtrusest and*

*most bewildering passages of the Qur'an, its wish will no doubt be fulfilled, inasmuch as the mystery of eternal might vibrates within the innermost being of all created things.' If so helpless a creature can be endowed with so subtle a capacity, how much more efficacious must be the power released through the liberal effusions of the grace of Bahá'u'lláh!"*

### ***Opportunities of the present age***

The field is indeed so immense, the period so critical, the Cause so great, the workers so few, the time so short, the privilege so priceless, that no follower of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, worthy to bear His name, can afford a moment's hesitation. That God-born Force, irresistible in its sweeping power, incalculable in its potency, unpredictable in its course, mysterious in its workings, and awe-inspiring in its manifestations—a Force which, as the Báb has written, "*vibrates within the innermost being of all created things*", and which, according to Bahá'u'lláh, has through its "*vibrating influence*", "*upset the equilibrium of the world and revolutionized its ordered life*"—such a Force, acting even as a two-edged sword, is, under our very eyes, sundering, on the one hand, the age-old ties which for centuries have held together the fabric of civilized society, and is unloosing, on the other, the bonds that still fetter the infant and as yet unemancipated Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. The undreamt-of opportunities offered through the operation of this Force the American believers must now rise, and fully and courageously exploit them. "*The holy realities of the Concourse on high,*" writes 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*yearn, in this day, in the Most Exalted Paradise, to return unto this*

*world, so that they may be aided to render some service to the threshold of the Abhá Beauty, and arise to demonstrate their servitude to His sacred Threshold."*

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

So sad and moving a spectacle, bewildering as it must be to every observer unaware of the purposes, the prophecies, and promises of Bahá'u'lláh, far from casting dismay into the hearts of His followers, or paralysing their efforts, cannot but deepen their faith, and excite their enthusiastic eagerness to arise and display, in the vast field traced for them by the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, their capacity to play their part in the work of universal redemption proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. Every instrument in the administrative machinery which, in the course of several years, they have so laboriously erected, must be fully utilized, and subordinated to the end for which it was created. The Temple, that proud embodiment of so rare a spirit of self-sacrifice, must likewise be made to play its part, and contribute its share to the

teaching campaign designed to embrace the entire Western Hemisphere.

The opportunities which the turmoil of the present age presents, with all the sorrows which it evokes, the fears which it excites, the disillusionment which it produces, the perplexities which it creates, the indignation which it arouses, the revolt which it provokes, the grievances it engenders, the spirit of restless search which it awakens, must, in like manner, be exploited for the purpose of spreading far and wide the knowledge of the redemptive power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and for enlisting fresh recruits in the ever-swelling army of His followers. So precious an opportunity, so rare a conjunction of favourable circumstances, may never again recur. Now is the time, the appointed time, for the American believers, the vanguard of the hosts of the Most Great Name, to proclaim, through the agencies and channels of a specially designed Administrative Order, their capacity and readiness to rescue a fallen and sore-tried generation, that has rebelled against its God and ignored His warnings, and to offer it that complete security which only the strongholds of their Faith can provide.

The teaching campaign, inaugurated throughout the states of the North American Republic and the Dominion of Canada,<sup>1</sup> acquires, therefore, an importance, and is invested with an urgency, that cannot be over-estimated. Launched on its course through the creative energies released by the will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and sweeping across the Western Hemisphere through the propelling force which it is generating, it must, I feel, be

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. during the first American Seven-Year Plan.

carried out in conformity with certain principles, designed to insure its efficient conduct, and to hasten the attainment of its objective.

### ***Preparation for teaching***

Those who participate in such a campaign, whether in an organizing capacity, or as workers to whose care the execution of the task itself has been committed, must, as an essential preliminary to the discharge of their duties, thoroughly familiarize themselves with the various aspects of the history and teachings of their Faith. In their efforts to achieve this purpose they must study for themselves, conscientiously and painstakingly, the literature of their Faith, delve into its teachings, assimilate its laws and principles, ponder its admonitions, tenets, and purposes, commit to memory certain of its exhortations and prayers, master the essentials of its administration, and keep abreast of its current affairs and latest developments. They must strive to obtain, from sources that are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islám—the source and background of their Faith—and approach reverently and with a mind purged from pre-conceived ideas the study of the Qur'an which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá'í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God. They must devote special attention to the investigation of those institutions and circumstances that are directly connected with the origin and birth of their Faith, with the station claimed by its Forerunner, and with the laws revealed by its Author.

Having acquired, in their essentials, these prerequisites of success in the teaching field, they must, whenever they contemplate undertaking any specific mission in the countries of Latin America, endeavour, whenever feasible, to acquire a certain proficiency in the languages spoken by the inhabitants of those countries, and a knowledge of their customs, habits, and outlook. "The *teachers going to those parts*," 'Abdu'l-Bahá, referring in one of the Tablets of the Divine Plan to the Central American Republics, has written, "*must also be familiar with the Spanish language.*" "*A party speaking their languages. ....*" He, in another Tablet, has written, "*must turn their faces to and travel through the three great Island groups of the Pacific Ocean.*" "*The teachers travelling in different directions,*" He further states, "*must know the language of the country in which they will enter. For example, a person being proficient in the Japanese language may travel to Japan, or a person knowing the Chinese language may hasten to China, and so forth.*"

No participator in this inter-American campaign of teaching must feel that the initiative for any particular activity connected with this work must rest solely with those agencies, whether Assemblies or committees, whose special concern is to promote and facilitate the attainment of this vital objective of the Seven Year Plan. It is the bounden duty of every American believer, as the faithful trustee of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, to initiate, promote, and consolidate, within the limits fixed by the administrative principles of the Faith, any activity he or she deems fit to undertake for the furtherance of the Plan. Neither the threatening world situation, nor any consideration of lack of material resources, of mental

equipment, of knowledge, or of experience desirable as they are—should deter any prospective pioneer teacher from arising independently, and from setting in motion the forces which, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has repeatedly assured us, will, once released, attract even as a magnet the promised and infallible aid of Bahá'u'lláh. Let him not wait for any directions, or expect any special encouragement, from the elected representatives of his community, nor be deterred by any obstacles which his relatives, or fellow-citizens may be inclined to place in his path, nor mind the censure of his critics or enemies. *“Be unrestrained as the wind,”* is Bahá'u'lláh's counsel to every would-be teacher of His Cause, *“while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the dawn of Divine Guidance to break. Consider how the wind, faithful to that which God hath ordained, bloweth upon all regions of the earth, be they inhabited or desolate. Neither the sight of desolation, nor the evidences of prosperity, can either pain or please it. It bloweth in every direction, as bidden by its Creator.”* *“And when he determineth to leave his home, for the sake of the Cause of his Lord,”* Bahá'u'lláh, in another passage, referring to such a teacher, has revealed, *“let him put his whole trust in God, as the best provision for his journey, and array himself with the robe of virtue. ... If he be kindled with the fire of His love, if he forgoeth all created things, the words he uttereth shall set on fire them that hear him.”*

Having on his own initiative, and undaunted by any hindrances with which either friend or foe may, unwittingly or deliberately, obstruct his path, resolved to arise and respond to the call of teaching, let him carefully consider every avenue of approach which he might



utilize in his personal attempts to capture the attention, maintain the interest, and deepen the faith, of those whom he seeks to bring into the fold of his Faith. Let him survey the possibilities which the particular circumstances in which he lives offer him, evaluate their advantages, and proceed intelligently and systematically to utilize them for the achievement of the object he has in mind. Let him also attempt to devise such methods as association with clubs, exhibitions, and societies, lectures on subjects akin to the teachings and ideals of his Cause such as temperance, morality, social welfare, religious and racial tolerance, economic co-operation, Islám, and Comparative Religion, or participation in social, cultural, humanitarian, charitable, and education organizations and enterprises which, while safeguarding the integrity of his Faith, will open up to him a multitude of ways and means whereby he can enlist successively the sympathy, the support, and ultimately the allegiance of those with whom he comes in contact. Let him, while such contacts are being made, bear in mind the claims which his Faith is constantly making upon him to preserve its dignity and station, to safeguard the integrity of its laws and principles, to demonstrate its comprehensiveness and universality, and to defend fearlessly its manifold and vital interests. Let him consider the degree of his hearer's receptivity, and decide for himself the suitability of either the direct or indirect method of teaching, whereby he can impress upon the seeker the vital importance of the Divine Message, and persuade him to throw in his lot with those who have already embraced it. Let him remember the example set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and His constant admonition to shower

such kindness upon the seeker, and exemplify to such a degree the spirit of the teachings he hopes to instil into him, that the recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself with the Cause embodying such teachings. Let him refrain, at the outset, from insisting on such laws and observances as might impose too severe a strain on the seeker's newly awakened faith, and endeavour to nurse him, patiently, tactfully, and yet determinedly, into full maturity, and aid him to proclaim his unqualified acceptance of whatever has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. Let him, as soon as that stage has been attained, introduce him to the body of his fellow-believers, and seek, through constant fellowship and active participation in the local activities of his community, to enable him to contribute his share to the enrichment of its life, the furtherance of its tasks, the consolidation of its interests, and the co-ordination of its activities with those of its sister communities. Let him not be content until he has infused into his spiritual child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise independently, in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of other souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his newly adopted Faith.

Let every participator in the continent-wide campaign initiated by the American believers, and particularly those engaged in pioneer work in virgin territories, bear in mind the necessity of keeping in close and constant touch with those responsible agencies designed to direct, co-ordinate, and facilitate the teaching activities of the entire community. Whether it be the body of their elected national representatives, or its chief auxiliary institution, the National Teaching Committee, or its sub-

sidiary organs, the regional teaching committees, or the local Spiritual Assemblies and their respective teaching committees, they who labour for the spread of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh should, through constant interchange of ideas, through letters, circulars, reports, bulletins, and other means of communication with these established instruments designed for the propagation of the Faith, ensure the smooth and speedy functioning of the teaching machinery of their Administrative Order. Confusion, delay, duplication of efforts, dissipation of energy will, thereby, be completely avoided, and the mighty flood of the grace of Bahá'u'lláh, flowing abundantly and without the least obstruction through these essential channels will so inundate the hearts and souls of men as to enable them to bring forth the harvest repeatedly predicted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Upon every participator in this concerted effort, unprecedented in the annals of the American Bahá'í community, rests the spiritual obligation to make of the mandate of teaching so vitally binding upon all, the all-pervading concern of his life. In his daily activities and contacts, in all his journeys, whether for business or otherwise, on his holidays and outings, and on any mission he may be called upon to undertake, every bearer of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh should consider it not only an obligation but a privilege to scatter far and wide the seeds of His Faith, and to rest content in the abiding knowledge that whatever be the immediate response to that Message, and however inadequate the vehicle that conveyed it, the power of its Author will, as He sees fit, enable those seeds to germinate, and in circumstances which no one can foresee enrich the harvest which the

labour of His followers will gather. If he be a member of any Spiritual Assembly let him encourage his Assembly to consecrate a certain part of its time, at each of its sessions, to the earnest and prayerful consideration of such ways and means as may foster the campaign of teaching, or may furnish whatever resources are available for its progress, extension, and consolidation. If he attends his summer school—and every one without exception is urged to take advantage of attending it—let him consider such an occasion as a welcome and precious opportunity so to enrich, through lectures, study, and discussion, his knowledge of the fundamentals of his Faith as to be able to transmit, with greater confidence and effectiveness, the Message that has been entrusted to his care. Let him, moreover, seek, whenever feasible, through inter-community visits to stimulate the zeal for teaching, and to demonstrate to outsiders the zest and alertness of the promoters of his Cause and the organic unity of its institutions.

### **Need to vary approach**

These pioneers, in their contact with the members of divers creeds, races, and nations, covering a range which offers no parallel in either the North or South continents,<sup>1</sup> must neither antagonize them nor compromise with their own essential principles. They must be neither provocative nor supine, neither fanatical nor excessively liberal, in their exposition of the fundamental and distinguishing features of their Faith. They must be either wary or bold, they must act swiftly or mark time, they

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<sup>1</sup> Of America.

must use the direct or indirect method, they must be challenging or conciliatory, in strict accordance with the spiritual receptivity of the soul with whom they come in contact, whether he be a nobleman or a commoner, a northerner or a southerner, a layman or a priest, a capitalist or a socialist, a statesman of a prince, an artisan or a beggar. In their presentation of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh they must neither hesitate nor falter. They must be neither contemptuous of the poor nor timid before the great. In their exposition of its verities they must neither overstress nor whittle down the truth which they champion, whether their hearer belong to royalty, or be a prince of the church, or a politician, or a tradesman, or a man in the street. To all alike, high or low, rich or poor, they must proffer, with open hands, with a radiant heart, with an eloquent tongue, with infinite patience, with uncompromising loyalty, with great wisdom, with unshakable courage, the Cup of Salvation at so critical an hour, to the confused, the hungry, the distraught and fear-stricken multitudes, in the north, in the west, in the south and in the heart, of that sorely tried continent.

### **Twofold method of teaching**

As to the policy that should be adopted with regard to these Conferences and other Bahá'í activities in general, it appears increasingly evident that as the Movement grows in strength and power the National Spiritual Assemblies should be encouraged, if circumstances permit and the means at their disposal justify, to resort to the twofold method of directly and indirectly winning

the enlightened public to the unqualified acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith. The one method would assume an open decisive, and challenging tone. The other, without implying in any manner the slightest departure from strict loyalty to the Cause of God, would be progressive and cautious. Experience will reveal the fact that each of the methods in its own special way might suit a particular temperament and class of people, and that each, in the present state of a constantly fluctuating society, should be judiciously attempted and utilized.

It is, I feel, for the National representatives of the believers in every land to utilize and combine both methods, the outspoken as well as the gradual, in such a manner as to secure the greatest benefits and the fullest advantage for this steadily growing Cause. Every staunch and high-minded believer is thoroughly convinced of the unfailing efficacy of every humanitarian undertaking which boldly and unreservedly proclaims the source of its motive power to be the consciousness of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Yet, if we but call to mind the practice generally adopted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we cannot fail to perceive the wisdom, nay the necessity, of gradually and cautiously disclosing to the eyes of an unbelieving world the implications of a Truth which, by its own challenging nature, it is so difficult for it to comprehend and embrace.

It was He, our beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá, our true and shining Exemplar, who with infinite tact and patience, whether in His public utterances or in private converse, adapted the presentation of the fundamentals of the Cause to the varying capacities and the spiritual receptivities of His hearers. He never hesitated, however,

to tear the veil asunder and reveal to the spiritually ripened those challenging verities that set forth in its true light the relationship of this Supreme Revelation with the Dispensations of the past. Unashamed and unafraid when challenged to assert in its entirety the stupendous claim of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'ís, whether labouring as individuals or functioning as an organized community, feel certain that in the face of the apathy, the gross materialism, and the superficiality of society today, a progressive disclosure of the magnitude of the claim of Bahá'u'lláh would constitute the most effective means for the attainment of the end so greatly desired by even the staunchest and most zealous advocate of the Faith.

Fully aware of the repeated statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that universality is of God, Bahá'ís in every land are ready, nay anxious, to associate themselves by word and deed with any association of men, which, after careful scrutiny, they feel satisfied is free from every tinge of partisanship and politics and is wholly devoted to the interests of all mankind. In their collaboration with such associations they would extend any moral and material assistance they can afford, after having fulfilled their share of support to those institutions that affect directly the interests of the Cause. They should always bear in mind, however, the dominating purpose of such a collaboration which is to secure in time the recognition by those with whom they are associated of the paramount necessity and the true significance of the Bahá'í Revelation in this day.

As the Movement extends the bounds of its influence and its opportunities for fuller recognition multiply, the twofold character of the obligations imposed on its

National elected representatives should, I feel, be increasingly emphasized. Whilst chiefly engaged in the pursuit of their major task, consisting chiefly in the formation and the consolidation of Bahá'í administrative institutions, they should endeavour to participate, within recognized limits, in the work of institutions which though unaware of the claim of the Bahá'í Cause are prompted by a sincere desire to promote the spirit that animates the Faith. In the pursuit of their major task their function is to preserve the identity of the Cause and the purity of the mission of Bahá'u'lláh. In their minor undertaking their purpose should be to imbue with the spirit of power and strength such movements as in their restricted scope are endeavouring to achieve what is near and dear to the heart of every true Bahá'í. It would even appear at times to be advisable and helpful as a supplement to their work for the Bahá'ís to initiate any undertaking, not specifically designated as Bahá'í, provided they have ascertained that such an undertaking would constitute the best way of approach to those whose minds and hearts are as yet unprepared for a full acceptance of the claim of Bahá'u'lláh. These twofold obligations devolving upon organized Bahá'í communities, far from neutralizing the effects of one another or of appearing antagonistic in their aims, should be regarded as complementary and fulfilling, each in its way, a vital and necessary function.

It is for the National representatives of the Bahá'í Cause to observe the conditions under which they labour, to estimate the forces that are at work in their own surroundings, to weigh carefully and prayerfully the merits of either procedure, and to form a correct judgement as



to the degree of emphasis that should be placed upon these twofold methods. Then and only then will they be enabled to protect and stimulate on the one hand the independent growth of the Bahá'í Faith, and on the other vindicate the claim of its universal principles to the doubtful and unbelieving.

### **The spirit of enterprise**

It is the duty and privilege of the National and Local Assemblies, if they find that the pressing requirements of their local and national budgets have been adequately met, to encourage individuals and groups to initiate and conduct, with their knowledge and consent, any undertaking that would serve to enhance the work which they have set themselves to achieve. Not content with appeals addressed to each and every believer to offer any constructive suggestions or plan that would remedy an existing grievance, they should, by every means in their power, stimulate the spirit of enterprise among the believers in order to further the teaching as well as the administrative work of the Cause. They should endeavour by personal contact and written appeals to imbue the body of the faithful with a deep sense of personal responsibility, and urge every believer, whether high or low, poor or wealthy, to conceive, formulate, and execute such measures and projects as would redound, in the eyes of their representatives, to the power and the fair name of this sacred Cause.

## **The need for consultation**

Much as I rejoice in witnessing the abundant signs of unfaltering energy that characterize in various fields and distant lands the mission of the valiant warriors of the Cause, I cannot help observing that, driven by their impetuous eagerness to establish the undisputed reign of Bahá'u'lláh on this earth, they may by an undue multiplication of their activities, and the consequent dissipation of their forces, defeat the very purpose which animates them in the pursuit of their glorious task. Particularly do I feel that this necessity for a careful estimation of the present resources at our disposal and of cautious restraint in handling them applies in a peculiar manner to the swiftly expanding activities of the American believers, whose mission increasingly appears to be to give the lead and set the example to their brethren across the seas in laying a secure foundation for the permanent institutions of the Bahá'í Faith. That I feel is chiefly the reason why such stress has been laid in the past upon the necessity for consultation on the part of individual believers with their elected national representatives in the matter of initiating plans of action above and beyond the plans which the deliberations of the National Spiritual Assembly have already evolved. In the matter of affiliation with bodies and organizations that advocate ideals and principles that are in sympathy with the Bahá'í Revelation; in establishing magazines beyond those that already are designed to advance openly and indirectly the interests of the Bahá'í Teachings; in the financial support we may sooner or later be called upon to extend to philanthropic institutions and the like; in advancing

the cause of any particular activity to which we may feel sentimentally inclined—these, as well as all similar undertakings, we should only approach after having definitely ascertained, through careful deliberation with those who are in a responsible position, that the institutions representing the paramount interests of the Cause are already assured of adequate and continuous assistance. Nothing short of the spirit of earnest and sustained consultation with those whom we have prayerfully and of our own accord placed in the forefront of those who are the custodians of the priceless heritage bequeathed by Bahá'u'lláh; nothing less than persistent and strenuous warfare against our own instincts and natural inclinations, and heroic self-sacrifice in subordinating our own likings to the imperative requirements of the Cause of God, can insure our undivided loyalty to so sacred a principle—a principle that will for all time safeguard our beloved Cause from the allurements and the trivialities of the world without, and of the pitfalls of the self within. I entreat you, well-beloved brethren, to resolve as you have never resolved before to pledge undying loyalty and sleepless vigilance in upholding so essential a principle in the course of your manifold activities, that yours may be the abiding satisfaction of having done nothing that may tend in the least to impede the flow or obscure the radiance of the rejuvenating spirit of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

## 13

### The station of America

As far back as the year which witnessed the birth of the Faith in Shíráz the Báb had, in the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá', after having warned in a memorable passage the peoples of both the Orient and the Occident, directly addressed the "*peoples of the West*"; and significantly bidden them "*issue forth*" from their "*cities*" to aid God, and "*become as brethren*" in His "*one and indivisible religion*". "In the East," Bahá'u'lláh Himself had, in anticipation of this development, written, "*the light of His Revelation hath broken; in the West the signs of His dominion have appeared.*" "Should they attempt," He, moreover, had predicted, "*to conceal its light on the continent, it will assuredly rear its head in the midmost heart of the ocean, and, raising its voice, proclaim: 'I am the life-giver of the world!'*" "Had this Cause been revealed in the West," He, shortly before His ascension, is reported by Nabíl in his narrative to have stated, "*had Our verses been sent from the West to Persia and other countries of the East, it would have become evident how the people of the Occident would have embraced Our Cause. The people of Persia, however, have failed to appreciate it.*" "From the beginning of time until the present day," is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own testimony, "*the light of Divine Revelation hath risen in the East and shed its radiance upon the West. The illumination thus shed hath, however, acquired in the*

*West an extraordinary brilliance. Consider the Faith proclaimed by Jesus. Though it first appeared in the East, yet not until its light had been shed upon the West did the full measure of its potentialities become manifest.* "The day is approaching," He has affirmed, "when ye shall witness how, through the splendour of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, the West will have replaced the East, radiating the light of Divine guidance." And again: "The West hath acquired illumination from the East, but in some respects, the reflection of the light hath been greater in the Occident." Furthermore, "The East hath, verily, been illumined with the light of the Kingdom. Ere long will this same light sized a still greater illumination upon the West."

More specifically has the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation Himself chosen to confer upon the rulers of the American continent the unique honour of addressing them collectively in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, His most Holy Book, significantly exhorting them to "adorn the temple of dominion with the ornament of justice and of the fear of God, and its head with the crown of the remembrance" of their Lord, and bidding them "bind with the hands of justice the broken", and "crush the oppressor" with the "rod of the commandments" of their "Lord, the Ordainer, the All-Wise" "The continent of America," wrote 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "is, in the eyes of the one true God, the land wherein the splendours of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled, where the righteous will abide and the free assemble." "The American continent," He has furthermore predicted, "giveth signs and evidences of very great advancement. Its future is even more promising, for its influence and illumination are far reaching. It will lead all nations spiritually."

*"The American people," 'Abdu'l-Bahá, even more distinctly, singling out for His special favour the Great Republic of the West, the leading nation of the American continent, has revealed, "are indeed worthy of being the first to build the Tabernacle of the Most Great Peace, and proclaim the oneness of mankind." And again: "This American nation is equipped and empowered to accomplish that which will adorn the pages of history, to become the envy of the world, and be blest in both the East and the West for the triumph of its people." Furthermore: "May this American democracy be the first nation to establish the foundation of international agreement. May it be the first nation to proclaim the unity of mankind. May it be the first to unfurl the standard of the Most Great Peace." "May the inhabitants of this country," He moreover has written, "... rise from their present material attainment to such heights that heavenly illumination may stream from this centre to all the peoples of the world."*

*"O ye apostles of Bahá'u'lláh!" 'Abdu'l-Bahá has thus addressed the believers of the North American continent, "... consider how exalted and lofty is the station you are destined to attain. ... The full measure of your success is as yet unrevealed, its significance still unapprehended." And again: "Your mission is unspeakably glorious. Should success crown your enterprise, America will assuredly evolve into a centre from which waves of spiritual power will emanate, and the throne of the Kingdom of God, will in the plenitude of its majesty and glory, be firmly established." And finally, this stirring affirmation: "The moment this Divine Message is carried forward by the American believers from the shores of America, and is propagated through the continents of Europe, of Asia, of Africa, and*

*of Australasia, and as far as the islands of the Pacific, this community will find itself securely established upon the throne of an everlasting dominion. ... Then will the whole earth resound with the praises of its majesty and greatness."*

Little wonder that a community belonging to a nation so abundantly blessed, a nation occupying so eminent a position in a continent so richly endowed, should have been able to add, during the fifty years of its existence, many a page rich with victories to the annals of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. This is the community, it should be remembered, which, ever since it was called into being through the creative energies released by the proclamation of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, was nursed in the lap of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's unflinching solicitude, and was trained by Him to discharge its unique mission through the revelation of innumerable Tablets, through the instructions issued to returning pilgrims, through the despatch of special messengers, through His own travels at a later date across the North American continent, through the emphasis laid by Him on the institution of the Covenant in the course of those travels, and finally through His mandate embodied in the Tablets of the Divine Plan. This is the community which, from its earliest infancy until the present day, has unremittingly laboured and succeeded, through its own unaided efforts, in implanting the banner of Bahá'u'lláh in the vast majority of the sixty countries<sup>1</sup> which, in both the East and the West, can now claim the honour of being included within the pale of His Faith. To this community belongs the distinction of having evolved the pattern, and of having been the first to erect the frame-

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<sup>1</sup> Written in 1944.

work, of the administrative institutions that herald the advent of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Through the efforts of its members the Mother Temple of the West, the Harbinger of that Order, one of the noblest institutions ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and the most stately edifice reared in the entire Bahá'í world, has been erected in the very heart of the North American continent. Through the assiduous labours of its pioneers, its teachers, and its administrators, the literature of the Faith has been enormously expanded, its aims and purposes fearlessly defended, and its nascent institutions solidly established. In direct consequence of the unsupported and indefatigable endeavours of the most distinguished of its itinerant teachers the spontaneous allegiance of royalty to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh has been secured and unmistakably proclaimed in several testimonies transmitted to posterity by the pen of the royal convert herself. And finally, to the members of this community, the spiritual descendants of the dawn-breakers of the Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation, must be ascribed the eternal honour of having arisen, on numerous occasions, with marvellous alacrity, zeal, and determination, to champion the cause of the oppressed, to relieve the needy, and to defend the interests of the edifices and institutions reared by their brethren in countries such as Persia, Russia, Egypt, 'Iráq, and Germany, countries where the adherents of the Faith have had to sustain, in varying measure, the rigours of racial and religious persecution.



## 14

### Retrospect and prospect

#### Universal and transcending love

The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh has assimilated, by virtue of its creative, its regulative and ennobling energies, the varied races, nationalities, creeds, and classes that have sought its shadow, and have pledged unswerving fealty to its cause. It has changed the hearts of its adherents, burned away their prejudices, stilled their passions, exalted their conceptions, ennobled their motives, co-ordinated their efforts, and transformed their outlook. While preserving their patriotism and safeguarding their lesser loyalties, it has made them lovers of mankind, and the determined upholders of its best and truest interests. While maintaining intact their belief in the Divine origin of their respective religions, it has enabled them to visualize the underlying purpose of these religions, to discover their merits, to recognize their sequence, their interdependence, their wholeness and unity, and to acknowledge the bond that vitally links them to itself. This universal, this transcending love which the followers of the Bahá'í Faith feel for their fellow-men, of whatever race, creed, class, or nation, is neither mysterious nor can it be said to have been artificially stimulated. It is both spontaneous and genuine. They whose hearts are warmed by the energizing influ-

ence of God's creative love cherish His creatures for His sake, and recognize in every human face a sign of His reflected glory.

Of such men and women it may be truly said that to them "every foreign land is a fatherland, and every fatherland a foreign land." For their citizenship, it must be remembered, is in the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh. Though willing to share to the utmost the temporal benefits and the fleeting joys which this earthly life can confer, though eager to participate in whatever activity conduces to the richness, the happiness and peace of that life, they can, at no time, forget that it constitutes no more than a transient, a very brief stage of their existence, that they who live it are but pilgrims and wayfarers whose goal is the Celestial City, and whose home the Country of never-failing joy and brightness.

### **The first century of the Bahá'í Era**

In its broadest outline the first century of the Bahá'í Era may be said to comprise the Heroic, the Primitive, the Apostolic Age of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and also the initial stages of the Formative, the Transitional, the Iron Age which is to witness the crystallization and shaping of the creative energies released by His Revelation. The first eighty years of this century may roughly be said to have covered the entire period of the first age, while the last two decades may be regarded as having witnessed the beginnings of the second. The former commences with the Declaration of the Báb, includes

the mission of Bahá'u'lláh, and terminates with the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The latter is ushered in by His Will and Testament, which defines its character and establishes its foundation.

The century under our review may therefore be considered as falling into four distinct periods, of unequal duration, each of specific import and of tremendous and indeed unappraisable significance. These four periods are closely interrelated, and constitute successive acts of one, indivisible, stupendous, and sublime drama, whose mystery no intellect can fathom, whose climax no eye can even dimly perceive, whose conclusion no mind can adequately foreshadow. Each of these acts revolves around its own theme, boasts of its own heroes, registers its own tragedies, records its own triumphs, and contributes its own share to the execution of one common, immutable Purpose. To isolate any one of them from the others, to dissociate the later manifestations of one universal, all-embracing Revelation from the pristine purpose that animated it in its earliest days, would be tantamount to a mutilation of the structure on which it rests, and to a lamentable perversion of its truth and of its history.

The first period (1844-1853) centres around the gentle, the youthful and irresistible person of the Báb, matchless in His meekness, imperturbable in His serenity, magnetic in His utterance, unrivalled in the dramatic episodes of His swift and tragic ministry. It begins with the Declaration of His Mission, culminates in His martyrdom, and ends in a veritable orgy of religious massacre revolting in its hideousness. It is characterized by nine years of fierce and relentless contest, whose theatre was the whole of Persia, in which above ten thousand heroes

laid down their lives, in which two sovereigns of the Qajar dynasty and their wicked ministers participated, and which was supported by the entire Shí'ih ecclesiastical hierarchy, by the military resources of the state, and by the implacable hostility of the masses. The second period (1853–1892) derives its inspiration from the august figure of Bahá'u'lláh, pre-eminent in holiness, awesome in the majesty of His strength and power, unapproachable in the transcendent brightness of His glory. It opens with the first stirrings, in the soul of Bahá'u'lláh while in the Síyáh-Chál of Tíhrán, of the Revelation anticipated by the Báb, attains its plenitude in the proclamation of that Revelation to the kings and ecclesiastical leaders of the earth, and terminates in the ascension of its Author in the vicinity of the prison-town of 'Akká. It extends over thirty-nine years of continuous, of unprecedented and overpowering Revelation, is marked by the propagation of the Faith to the neighbouring territories of Turkey,<sup>1</sup> of Russia, of 'Iráq, of Syria, of Egypt, and of India, and is distinguished by a corresponding aggravation of hostility, represented by the united attacks launched by the Sháh of Persia and the Sulţán of Turkey,<sup>2</sup> the two admittedly most powerful potentates of the East, as well as by the opposition of the twin sacerdotal orders of Shí'ih and Sunní Islám. The third period (1892–1921) revolves around the vibrant personality of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, mysterious in His essence, unique in His station, astoundingly potent in both the charm and strength of His character. It commences with the announcement of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, a document without parallel in the history of any earlier Dispensation, attains its climax in the emphatic assertion by the Centre

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<sup>1</sup> Anatolia, part of the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>2</sup> The Sulţán of the Ottoman Empire.

of that Covenant, in the City of the Covenant, of the unique character and far-reaching implications of that Document, and closes with His passing and the interment of His remains on Mt. Carmel. It will go down in history as a period of almost thirty years' duration, in which tragedies and triumphs have been so intertwined as to eclipse at one time the Orb of the Covenant, and at another time to pour forth its light over the continent of Europe, and as far as Australasia, the Far East, and the North American continent. The fourth period (1921-1944) is motivated by the forces radiating from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that Charter of Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order, the offspring resulting from the mystic intercourse between Him Who is the Source of the Law of God and the mind of the One Who is the vehicle and interpreter of that Law. The inception of this fourth, this last period of the first Bahá'í century synchronizes with the birth of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Era, with the founding of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh—a system which is at once the harbinger, the nucleus and pattern of His World Order. This period, covering the first twenty-three years of this Formative Age, has already been distinguished by an outburst of further hostility, of a different character, accelerating on the one hand the diffusion of the Faith over a still wider area in each of the five continents of the globe, and resulting on the other in the emancipation and the recognition of the independent status of several communities within its pale.

These four periods are to be regarded not only as the component, the inseparable parts of one stupendous whole, but as progressive stages in a single evolutionary

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

Viewing these periods of Bahá'í history as the constituents of a single entity, we note the chain of events proclaiming successfully the rise of a Forerunner, the Mission of One Whose advent that Forerunner had promised, the establishment of a Covenant generated through the direct authority of the Promised One Himself, and lastly the birth of a System which is the child sprung from both the Author of the Covenant and its appointed Centre. We observe how the Báb, the Forerunner, announced the impending inception of a divinely conceived Order, how Bahá'u'lláh, the Promised One, formulated its laws and ordinances, how 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the appointed Centre, delineated its features, and how the present generation of their followers have commenced to erect the framework of its institutions. We watch, through these periods, the infant light of the Faith diffuse itself from its cradle, eastward to India and the Far East, westward to the neighbouring territories of 'Iráq, of Turkey, of Russia, and of Egypt, travel as far as the North American continent, illuminate subsequently the major countries of Europe, envelop with its radiance, at a later stage, the Antipodes, bright-

en the fringes of the Arctic, and finally set aglow the Central and South American horizons. We witness a corresponding increase in the diversity of the elements within its fellowship, which from being confined, in the first period of its history, to an obscure body of followers chiefly recruited from the ranks of the masses in Shi'ih Persia, has expanded into a fraternity representative of the leading religious systems of the world, of almost every caste and colour, from the humblest worker and peasant to royalty itself. We notice a similar development in the extent of its literature—a literature which, restricted at first to the narrow range of hurriedly transcribed, often corrupted, secretly circulated manuscripts, so furtively perused, so frequently effaced, and at times even eaten by the terrorized members of a proscribed sect, has, within the space of a century, swelled into innumerable editions, comprising tens of thousands of printed volumes, in diverse scripts, and in no less than forty languages,<sup>1</sup> some elaborately reproduced, others profusely illustrated, all methodically and vigorously disseminated through the agency of world-wide, properly constituted, and specially organized committees and Assemblies. We perceive a no less apparent evolution in the scope of its teachings, at first designedly rigid, complex, and severe, subsequently recast, expanded, and liberalized under the succeeding Dispensation, later expounded, reaffirmed, and amplified by an appointed Interpreter, and lastly systematized and universally applied to both individuals and institutions. We can discover a no less distinct gradation in the character of the opposition it has had to encounter—an opposition,

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<sup>1</sup> Written in 1944.

at first kindled in the bosom of Shí'ih Islám, at a later stage gathering momentum with the banishment of Bahá'u'lláh to the domains of the Turkish Sultan and the consequent hostility of the more powerful Sunní hierarchy and its Caliph, the head of the vast majority of the followers of Muḥammad—an opposition which, now, through the rise of a divinely appointed Order in the Christian West, and its initial impact on civil and ecclesiastical institutions, bids fair to include among its supporters established governments and systems associated with the most ancient, the most deeply entrenched, sacerdotal hierarchies in Christendom. We can, at the same time, recognize, through the haze of an ever-widening hostility, the progress, painful yet persistent, of certain communities within its pale through the stages of obscurity, of proscription, of emancipation, and of recognition—stages that must needs culminate, in the course of succeeding centuries, in the establishment of the Faith, and the founding, in the plenitude of its power and authority, of the world-embracing Bahá'í Commonwealth. We can likewise discern a no less appreciable advance in the rise of its institutions, whether as administrative centres or places of worship—institutions, clandestine and subterrene in their earliest beginnings, emerging imperceptibly into the broad daylight of public recognition, legally protected, enriched by pious endowments, ennobled at first by the erection of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of Ishqábád, the first Bahá'í House of Worship, and more recently immortalized, through the rise in the heart of the North American continent of the Mother Temple of the West, the forerunner of a divine, a slowly maturing civilization. And



finally, we can even bear witness to the marked improvement in the conditions surrounding the pilgrimages performed by its devoted adherents to its consecrated shrines at its world centre—pilgrimages originally arduous, perilous, tediously long, often made on foot, at times ending in disappointment, and confined to a handful of harassed Oriental followers, gradually attracting, under steadily improving circumstances of security and comfort, an ever-swelling number of new converts converging from the four corners of the globe, and culminating in the widely publicized yet sadly frustrated visit of a noble Queen, who, at the very threshold of the city of her heart's desire, was compelled, according to her own written testimony, to divert her steps, and forego the privilege of so priceless a benefit.

### **Future tasks**

Mighty indeed have been the tasks accomplished and the victories achieved by this sorely tried yet undefeatable Faith within the space of a century! Its unfinished tasks, its future victories, as it stands on the threshold of the second Bahá'í century, are greater still. In the brief space of the first hundred years of its existence it has succeeded in diffusing its light over five continents, in erecting its outposts in the furthestmost corners of the earth, in establishing on an impregnable basis its Covenant with all mankind, in rearing the fabric of its world-encompassing Administrative Order, in casting off many of the shackles hindering its total emancipation and world-wide recognition, in registering its initial victor-

ies over royal, political, and ecclesiastical adversaries, and in launching the first of its systematic crusades for the spiritual conquest of the whole planet.

The institution, however, which is to constitute the last stage in the erection of the framework of its world Administrative Order, functioning in close proximity to its world spiritual centre, is as yet unestablished. The full emancipation of the Faith itself from the fetters of religious orthodoxy, the essential prerequisite of its universal recognition and of the emergence of its World Order, is still unachieved. The successive campaigns, designed to extend the beneficent influence of its System, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Plan, to every country and island where the structural basis of its Administrative Order has not been erected, still remain to be launched. The banner of Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá which, as foretold by Him, must float from the pinnacles of the foremost seat of learning in the Islamic world is still unhoisted. The Most Great House, ordained as a centre of pilgrimage by Bahá'u'lláh in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, is as yet unliberated. The third Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to be raised to His glory, the site of which has recently been acquired, as well as the Dependencies of the two Houses of Worship already erected in East and West, are as yet unbuilt. The dome, the final unit which, as anticipated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is to crown the Sepulchre of the Báb is as yet unreared. The codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Mother-Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, and the systematic promulgation of its laws and ordinances, are as yet unbegun. The preliminary measures for the institution of Bahá'í courts, invested with the legal right to apply and execute those laws and ordinances, still remain

to be undertaken. The restitution of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the Bahá'í world and the recreation of the community that so devotedly reared it, have yet to be accomplished. The sovereign who, as foreshadowed in Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book, must adorn the throne of His native land, and cast the shadow of royal protection over His long-persecuted followers, is as yet undiscovered. The contest that must ensue as a result of the concerted onslaughts which, as prophesied by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, are to be delivered by the leaders of religions as yet indifferent to the advance of the Faith, is as yet unfought. The Golden Age of the Faith itself that must witness the unification of all the peoples and nations of the world, the establishment of the Most Great Peace, the inauguration of the Kingdom of the Father upon earth, the coming of age of the entire human race, and the birth of a world civilization, inspired and directed by the creative energies released by Bahá'u'lláh's World Order, shining in its meridian splendour, is still unborn and its glories unsuspected.

Whatever may befall this infant Faith of God in future decades or in succeeding centuries, whatever the sorrows, dangers, and tribulations which the next stage in its world-wide development may engender, from whatever quarter the assaults to be launched by its present or future adversaries may be unleashed against it, however great the reverses and setbacks it may suffer, we, who have been privileged to apprehend, to the degree our finite minds can fathom, the significance of these marvellous phenomena associated with its rise and establishment, can harbour no doubt that what it has already achieved in the first hundred years of its life provides

sufficient guarantee that it will continue to forge ahead, capturing loftier heights, tearing down every obstacle, opening up new horizons, and winning still mightier victories until its glorious mission, stretching into the dim ranges of time that lie ahead, is totally fulfilled.

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