

The Universal House of Justice

A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department
of the Universal House of Justice

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From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1.1 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 Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 181)
- 2.1 O ye Men of Justice! Be ye, in the realm of God, shepherds unto His sheep and guard them from the ravening wolves that have appeared in disguise, even as ye would guard your own sons. Thus exhorteth you the Counselor, the Faithful.
(The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 52)
- 3.1 Endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the Revealer of Signs. None hath the right to dispose of them without leave from Him Who is the Dawning-place of Revelation. After Him, this authority shall pass to the Aghsán, and after them to the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then—that they may use these endowments for the benefit of the Places which have been exalted in this Cause, and for whatsoever hath been enjoined upon them by Him Who is the God of might and power. Otherwise, the endowments shall revert to the people of Bahá who speak not except by His leave and judge not save in accordance with what God hath decreed in this Tablet—lo, they are the champions of victory betwixt heaven and earth—that they may use them in the manner that hath been laid down in the Book by God, the Mighty, the Bountiful.
(The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 42)
- 4.1 “Render thanks unto thy Lord, O Carmel. The fire of thy separation from Me was fast consuming thee, when the ocean of My presence surged before thy face, cheering thine eyes and those of all creation, and filling with delight all things visible and invisible. Rejoice, for God hath in this Day established upon thee His throne, hath made thee the dawning-place of His signs and the dayspring of the evidences of His Revelation. Well is it with him that circleth around thee, that proclaimeth the revelation of thy glory, and recounteth that which the bounty of the Lord thy God hath showered upon thee. Seize thou the Chalice of Immortality in the name of thy Lord, the All-Glorious, and give thanks unto Him, inasmuch as He, in token of His mercy unto thee, hath turned thy sorrow into gladness, and transmuted thy grief into blissful joy. He, verily, loveth the spot which hath been made the seat of His throne, which His footsteps have trodden, which hath been honoured by His presence, from which He raised His call, and upon which He shed His tears.
- 4.2 “Call out to Zion, O Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendour is revealed. Beware lest thou hesitate or halt. Hasten forth and circumambulate the City of God that hath descended from heaven, the celestial Kaaba round which have circled in adoration the favoured of God, the pure in heart, and the company of the most exalted angels. Oh, how I long to announce unto every spot on the surface of the earth, and to carry to each one of its cities, the glad-tidings of this Revelation—a Revelation to which the heart of Sinai hath been attracted, and in whose name the Burning Bush is calling: ‘Unto God, the Lord of Lords, belong the kingdoms of earth and heaven.’ Verily this is the Day in which both land and sea

rejoice at this announcement, the Day for which have been laid up those things which God, through a bounty beyond the ken of mortal mind or heart, hath destined for revelation. Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.”

(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, 2005 printing), pp. 4–5)

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

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

- 6.1 We exhort the men of the House of Justice and command them to ensure the protection and safeguarding of men, women and children. It is incumbent upon them to have the utmost regard for the interests of the people at all times and under all conditions.

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

- 7.1 It is incumbent upon the men of God's House of Justice to fix their gaze by day and by night upon that which hath shone forth from the Pen of Glory for the training of peoples, the upbuilding of nations, the protection of man and the safeguarding of his honour.

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

- 8.1 This passage, now written by the Pen of Glory, is accounted as part of the Most Holy Book: The men of God's House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries.

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

(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 128–129)

- 9.1 Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind. It behoveth the chiefs and rulers of the world, and in particular the Trustees of God's House of Justice, to endeavour to the utmost of their power to safeguard its position, promote its interests and exalt its station in the eyes of the world. In like manner it is incumbent upon them to enquire into the conditions of their subjects and to acquaint themselves with the affairs and activities of the divers communities in their dominions. We call upon the manifestations of the power of God—

the sovereigns and rulers on earth—to bestir themselves and do all in their power that haply they may banish discord from this world and illumine it with the light of concord.

(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 130)

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 10.1 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 (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God; whoso disputeth with him hath disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself and turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned aside from God. May the wrath, the fierce indignation, the vengeance of God rest upon him! The mighty stronghold shall remain impregnable and safe through obedience to him who is the Guardian of the Cause of God. It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice, upon all the Aghṣán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God to show their obedience, submissiveness and subordination unto the Guardian of the Cause of God, to turn unto him and be lowly before him.

(Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944, 2013 printing), pp. 21–22)

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

(Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 28–30)

- 12.1 This is the foundation of the belief of the people of Bahá (may my life be offered up for them): “His Holiness, the Exalted One (the Báb), is the Manifestation of the Unity and Oneness of God and the Forerunner of the Ancient Beauty. His Holiness the Abhá Beauty (may my life be a sacrifice for His steadfast friends) is the Supreme Manifestation of God and the Dayspring of

His Most Divine Essence. All others are servants unto Him and do His bidding.” Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth malice and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant. By this House is meant that Universal House of Justice which is to be elected from all countries, that is from those parts in the East and West where the loved ones are to be found, after the manner of the customary elections in Western countries such as those of England.

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

(Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pp. 39–41)

- 13.1 Beware lest anyone falsely interpret these words, and like unto them that have broken the Covenant after the Day of Ascension (of Bahá’u’lláh) advance a pretext, raise the standard of revolt, wax stubborn and open wide the door of false interpretation. To none is given the right to put forth his own opinion or express his particular conviction. All must seek guidance and turn unto the Center of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.

(Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 54)

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

(Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1997, 2009 printing), par. 33.6)

- 15.1 Know thou, O handmaid, that in the sight of Bahá, women are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favored, whether man or woman. How many a handmaid, ardent and devoted, hath, within the sheltering shade of Bahá, proved superior to the men, and surpassed the famous of the earth.

- 15.2 The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.
(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pars. 38.3–38.4)
- 16.1 Praise be to God, all such doors are closed in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh for a special authoritative Center hath been appointed—a Center that solveth all difficulties and wardeth off all differences. The Universal House of Justice, likewise, wardeth off all differences and whatever it prescribeth must be accepted and he who transgresseth is rejected. But this Universal House of Justice which is the Legislature hath not yet been instituted.
- 16.2 Thus it is seen that no means for dissension hath been left, but carnal desires are the cause of difference as it is the case with the violators. These do not doubt the validity of the Covenant but selfish motives have dragged them to this condition. It is not that they do not know what they do—they are perfectly aware and still they exhibit opposition.
(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pars. 187.2–187.3)
- 17.1 My purpose is this, that ere the expiration of a thousand years, no one hath the right to utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship. The Most Holy Book is the Book to which all peoples shall refer, and in it the Laws of God have been revealed. Laws not mentioned in the Book should be referred to the decision of the Universal House of Justice. There will be no grounds for difference.... Beware, beware lest anyone create a rift or stir up sedition. Should there be differences of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve the problems. Whatever will be its decision, by majority vote, shall be the real truth, inasmuch as that House is under the protection, unerring guidance, and care of the one true Lord. He shall guard it from error and will protect it under the wing of His sanctity and infallibility. He who opposeth it is cast out and will eventually be of the defeated.
- 17.2 The Supreme House of Justice should be elected according to the system followed in the election of the parliaments of Europe. And when the countries would be guided, the Houses of Justice of the various countries would elect the Supreme House of Justice....
- 17.3 The establishment of that House is not dependent upon the conversion of all the nations of the world. For example, if conditions were favourable and no disturbances would be caused, the friends in Persia would elect their representatives, and likewise the friends in America, in India, and other areas would also elect their representatives, and these would elect a House of Justice. That House of Justice would be the Supreme House of Justice. That is all.
(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)
- 18.1 Thou hast asked about the general criterion with regard to heresy. Heresy referreth to such matters as are not ordained in the explicit text of the Book and which the Universal House of Justice doth not endorse.
(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)
- 19.1 Those matters of major importance which constitute the foundation of the Law of God are explicitly recorded in the Text, but subsidiary laws are left to the House of Justice. The

wisdom of this is that the times never remain the same, for change is a necessary quality and an essential attribute of this world, and of time and place. Therefore the House of Justice will take action accordingly.

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

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

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

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

20.1 Such laws as are not mentioned in the Book must all be referred to the House of Justice and not to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, inasmuch as he is the interpreter of the laws that are mentioned in the Book and not the author of those that are not. However, the divinely ordained Universal House of Justice—which will, after the proclamation of the Cause of God, be universally elected by all Bahá'ís—that universal Body is empowered to enact laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book. It is binding, obligatory, and incumbent upon everyone to render obedience unto it. And whenever the House of Justice, whether unanimously or by majority vote, layeth down laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book, whoso saith why or wherefore hath indeed opposed God in the exercise of His sovereignty, disputed His proof, gainsaid His signs, and repudiated His commandments.

(From a Tablet—translated from the Persian and Arabic)

21.1 Know that infallibility is of two kinds: infallibility in essence and infallibility as an attribute. The same holds true of all other names and attributes: For example, there is the knowledge of the essence of a thing and the knowledge of its attributes. Infallibility in essence

is confined to the universal Manifestations of God; for infallibility is an essential requirement of Their reality, and the essential requirement of a thing is inseparable from the thing itself. The rays are an essential requirement of the sun and are inseparable from it; knowledge is an essential requirement of God and is inseparable from Him; power is an essential requirement of God and is likewise inseparable from Him. If it were possible to separate these from Him, He would not be God. If the rays could be separated from the sun, it would not be the sun. Therefore, were one to imagine the Most Great Infallibility being separated from the universal Manifestation of God, He would not be a universal Manifestation and would lack essential perfection.

- 21.2 But infallibility as an attribute is not an essential requirement; rather, it is a ray of the gift of infallibility which shines from the Sun of Truth upon certain hearts and grants them a share and portion thereof. Although these souls are not essentially infallible, yet they are under the care, protection, and unerring guidance of God—which is to say, God guards them from error. Thus there have been many sanctified souls who were not themselves the Daysprings of the Most Great Infallibility, but who have nevertheless been guarded and preserved from error under the shadow of divine care and protection. For they were the channels of divine grace between God and man, and if God did not preserve them from error they would have led all the faithful to fall likewise into error, which would have wholly undermined the foundations of the religion of God and which would be unbecoming and unworthy of His exalted Reality.
- 21.3 To summarize, infallibility in essence is confined to the universal Manifestations of God, and infallibility as an attribute is conferred upon sanctified souls. For instance, the Universal House of Justice, if it be established under the necessary conditions—that is, if it be elected by the entire community—that House of Justice will be under the protection and unerring guidance of God. Should that House of Justice decide, either unanimously or by a majority, upon a matter that is not explicitly recorded in the Book, that decision and command will be guarded from error. Now, the members of the House of Justice are not essentially infallible as individuals, but the body of the House of Justice is under the protection and unerring guidance of God: This is called conferred infallibility.
- 21.4 Briefly, Bahá'u'lláh says that “He Who is the Dawning-place of God’s Cause” is the manifestation of “He doeth whatsoever He willeth”, that this station is reserved to that sanctified Being, and that others receive no share of this essential perfection. That is, since the essential infallibility of the universal Manifestations of God has been established, whatsoever proceeds from Them is identical with the truth and conformable to reality. They are not under the shadow of the former religion. Whatsoever They say is the utterance of God, and whatsoever They do is a righteous deed, and to no believer is given the right to object; rather must he show forth absolute submission in this regard, for the Manifestation of God acts with consummate wisdom, and human minds may be incapable of grasping the hidden wisdom of certain matters. Therefore, whatsoever the universal Manifestation of God says and does is the very essence of wisdom and conformable to reality.
- (Some Answered Questions (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2014), ch. 45.2–5)*
- 22.1 A universal, or international, House of Justice shall also be organized. Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and that which the Universal House of Justice ordains shall be obeyed by all mankind. This international House of Justice shall be appointed and organized from the Houses of Justice of the whole world, and all the world shall come under its administration.

- 22.2 As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past: It is the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant. By this appointment and provision He has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief.

(The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 1982, 2012 printing), p. 642)

From the Writings and Letters of Shoghi Effendi

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

(God Passes By (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974, 2019 printing), pp. 338–339)

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

(From a letter dated 12 March 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages, 1922–1932 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 41)

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

(From a letter dated 19 December 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the East—translated from the Persian)

- 26.1 The purpose of so much perpetual and intensive emphasis on the support and consolidation of these Spiritual Assemblies is this—that the foundation of the Cause of God must become broader and stronger day by day, that no confusion ever enter the divine order, that new and strong ties be forged between East and West, that Bahá'í unity be safeguarded and illumine the eyes of the people of the world with its resplendent beauty, so that upon these Assemblies God's Houses of Justice may be firmly established and upon these secondary Houses of Justice the lofty edifice of the Universal House of Justice may, with complete order, perfection and glory, and with no delay, be raised up. When the Universal House of Justice

shall have stepped forth from the realm of hope into that of visible fulfilment and its fame be established in every corner and clime of the world, then that august body—solidly grounded and founded on the firm and unshakeable foundation of the entire Bahá'í community of East and West, and the recipient of the bounties of God and His inspiration—will proceed to devise and carry out important undertakings, world-wide activities and the establishment of glorious institutions. By this means the renown of the Cause of God will become world-wide and its light will illumine the whole earth.

(From a letter dated 1924 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the World throughout the East and the West—translated from the Persian)

27.1 Humanity, torn with dissension and burning with hate, is crying at this hour for a fuller measure of that love which is born of God, that love which in the last resort will prove the one solvent of its incalculable difficulties and problems. Is it not incumbent upon us, whose hearts are aglow with love for Him, to make still greater effort, to manifest that love in all its purity and power in our dealings with our fellow-men? May our love for our beloved Master, so ardent, so disinterested in all its aspects, find its true expression in love for our fellow-brethren and sisters in the Faith as well as for all mankind. I assure you, dear friends, that progress in such matters as these is limitless and infinite, and that upon the extent of our achievements along this line, will ultimately depend the success of our mission in life.

27.2 And as we make an effort to demonstrate that love to the world may we also clear our minds of any lingering trace of unhappy misunderstandings that might obscure our clear conception of the exact purpose and methods of this new world order, so challenging and complex, yet so consummate and wise. We are called upon by our beloved Master in His Will and Testament not only to adopt it unreservedly, but to unveil its merit to all the world. To attempt to estimate its full value, and grasp its exact significance after so short a time since its inception would be premature and presumptuous on our part. We must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications.

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

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

(From a letter dated 30 October 1924 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tíhrán—translated from the Persian)

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

- 29.2 “At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme Baytu’l-‘Adl (Universal House of Justice)”.
- 29.3 These words clearly indicate that a three-stage election has been provided by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for the formation of the International House of Justice, and as it is explicitly provided in His Will and Testament that the “Secondary Houses of Justice (i.e. National Assemblies) must elect the members the Universal One”, it is obvious that the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies will have to be indirectly elected by the body of the believers in their respective provinces. In view of these complementary instructions the principle, set forth in my letter of March 12th, 1923, has been established requiring the believers (the beloved of God) in every country to elect a certain number of delegates who in turn will elect their national representatives (Secondary House of Justice or National Spiritual Assembly), whose sacred obligation and privilege will be to elect in time God’s Universal House of Justice.
(From a letter dated 12 May 1925 written by Shoghi Effendi, in *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 84)
- 30.1 Erelong, by the leave of our Lord, the Most Glorious, the veil shall be lifted from the face of His most mighty Law, and the balance of His wondrous constitution—the foundation of His most noble, lofty, and mighty House of Justice—shall be set in this holy, blessed, and snow-white Spot, the Centre round which circle all created things. Blessed be God, the Author of this wondrous Cause! Blessed be God, the Originator of this brilliant and refulgent Light! Blessed be God, the Founder of this lofty Edifice¹ in that distant region²—a land wherein shall be reflected the effulgences of the gathering-places of Heaven and the lights of the sanctuaries of the Kingdom! Magnified, then, be our Lord, the Succourer, the All-Powerful, the Most Glorious!
(From a letter dated November 1927 to the Bahá’ís of the East—translated from the Persian)
- 31.1 Your questions as regards those spiritual ordinances which should characterize a Bahá’í life individually and collectively: Shoghi Effendi says that for an answer to these we must await the formation of the International House of Justice. They are matters of importance in some ways and we must not bind them by establishing definite precedents from now.
(From a letter dated 26 April 1928 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)
- 32.1 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

¹ The Bahá’í Administrative Order.

² The continent of America.

Bahá'ís of the Orient, but their importance and necessity have been repeatedly emphasized by Him in His utterances and writings. The concentration of authority in the hands of the elected representatives of the believers; the necessity of the submission of every adherent of the Faith to the considered judgment of Bahá'í Assemblies; His preference for unanimity in decision; the decisive character of the majority vote; and even the desirability for the exercise of close supervision over all Bahá'í publications, have been sedulously instilled by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as evidenced by His authenticated and widely-scattered Tablets. To accept His broad and humanitarian Teachings on one hand, and to reject and dismiss with neglectful indifference His more challenging and distinguishing precepts, would be an act of manifest disloyalty to that which He has cherished most in His life.

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

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

sacred task, and provide the spiritual basis for the constitution of so august a body in the Bahá'í world.

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

(From a letter dated 27 February 1929 written by Shoghi Effendi, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1938, 1991 printing), pp. 5–8)

33.1 The National Spiritual Assemblies, like unto pillars, will be gradually and firmly established in every country on the strong and fortified foundations of the Local Assemblies. On these pillars, the mighty edifice, the Universal House of Justice, will be erected, raising high its noble frame above the world of existence. The unity of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will thus be realized and fulfilled from one end of the earth to the other. The explicit ordinances of His Most Holy Book will be promulgated, applied and carried out most befittingly in the world of creation, and the living waters of everlasting life will stream forth from that fountain-head of God's World Order upon all the warring nations and peoples of the world, to wash away the evils and iniquities of the realm of dust, heal man's age-old ills and ailments....

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

33.3 ... Thus, after the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the sacred land of Iran—which, in the Will and Testament, is designated a “secondary House of Justice”—general instructions regarding the ultimate international Bahá'í election, which will result in the formation of the Universal House of Justice, would, according to the principles and teachings embodied in His Tablets and His Will and Testament, be sent directly from this land to all Bahá'í centres, in every country and territory in the East and West of the Bahá'í world. Thereupon will the hopes of the people of Bahá be realized, and that which our Master commanded and enjoined upon us in His Writings and His Will and Testament be fulfilled. Then will the Throne of Bahá'u'lláh's sovereignty be founded in the promised land and the scales of justice be raised on high. Then will the banner of the independence of the Faith be unfurled, and His Most Great Law be unveiled and rivers of laws and ordinances stream forth

from this snow-white spot with all-conquering power and awe-inspiring majesty, the like of which past ages have never seen. Then will appear the truth of what was revealed by the Tongue of Grandeur: “Call out to Zion, O Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendour is revealed.” “... O Carmel... Well is it with him that circleth around thee, that proclaimeth the revelation of thy glory, and recounteth that which the bounty of the Lord thy God hath showered upon thee.... Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.” O beloved of God! The appointment of the Hands of the Cause of God, the enforcement of the sacred laws of His Faith, the enactment of legislation deriving from the explicit text of His Book, the convocation of the international convention of the followers of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh, and the formation of ties between the Bahá’í community and divers scientific, literary, religious and social agencies are, one and all, dependent and conditioned upon the formation and establishment of the Universal House of Justice in the Holy Land in the vicinity of those lofty, resplendent and most exalted precincts. For this Supreme Institution is the wellspring of the actions and undertakings of all the Bahá’ís, and the source of help and assistance for this feeble servant. Through that body will the hopes of the people of Bahá be fulfilled. Through it the pillars of the Faith on this earth will be firmly established and its hidden powers be revealed, its signs shine forth, its banners be unfurled and its light be shed upon all peoples.

(From a letter dated 27 November 1929 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá’ís of the East—translated from the Arabic and Persian)

34.1 For Bahá’u’lláh, we should readily recognize, has not only imbued mankind with a new and regenerating Spirit. He has not merely enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy, however potent, sound and universal these may be. In addition to these He, as well as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth. Not only have they revealed all the directions required for the practical realization of those ideals which the Prophets of God have visualized, and which from time immemorial have inflamed the imagination of seers and poets in every age. They have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world....

34.2 In the Muḥammadan 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’án, 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.

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

34.4 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 labored all their lives. Nothing short of this could protect it from the heresies and calumnies with which denominations, peoples, and governments have endeavored, and will, with increasing vigor, endeavor to assail it in future.

34.5 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 rigor of certain observances, such as fasting, which are necessary to the devotional life of the individual, have been considerably abated.

(From a letter dated 21 March 1930 written by Shoghi Effendi, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 19–22)

35.1 Our present generation, mainly due to the corruptions that have been identified with organizations, seem to stand against any institution. Religion as an institution is denounced. Government as an institution is denounced. Even marriage as an institution is denounced. We Bahá'ís should not be blinded by such prevalent notions. If such were the case, all the divine Manifestations would not have invariably appointed someone to succeed Them. Undoubtedly corruptions did enter those institutions, but these corruptions were not due to the very nature of the institutions but to the lack of proper directions as to their powers and nature of their perpetuation. What Bahá'u'lláh has done is not to eliminate all institutions in the Cause but to provide the necessary safeguards that would eliminate corruptions that caused the fall of previous institutions. What those safeguards are is most interesting to study and find out and also most essential to know. In a letter that Shoghi Effendi has lately written to the friends in the West, he mentions the distinguishing features of the institution that Bahá'u'lláh has left as well as some of the safeguards that He has provided against its corruption. One of the main

things we boast about is that whereas previous religions were more or less static in their nature the Bahá'í teachings are progressive. Now, how could this progressive tendency be maintained without an institution such as the Guardianship and the House of Justice, who are empowered to legislate upon matters not referred to by Bahá'u'lláh?

(From a letter dated 25 March 1930 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

36.1 You asked regarding the status of the different governments when the House of Justice will be established: this is not fully explained in the teachings, and what is not definitely provided for, it is for the House of Justice to legislate upon once that body is formed.

(From a letter dated 12 January 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

37.1 The House of Justice, according to the explicit text of the Aqdas, has no right to change any law, regulation or ordinance that has been revealed either in the Aqdas or in any other Tablet from the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh. It can alter its own regulations and laws but never those revealed by the Founder of the Faith.

(From a letter dated 17 June 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

38.1 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 with which the Author of our Faith and the Center of His Covenant have in their Tablets chosen to confer upon them; in the institution of the Local Fund which operated according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's specific injunctions addressed to certain Assemblies in Persia; in the verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas the implications of which clearly anticipate the institution of the Guardianship; in the explanation which 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in one of His Tablets, has given to, and the emphasis He has placed upon, the hereditary principle and the law of primogeniture as having been upheld by the Prophets of the past—in these we can discern the faint glimmerings and discover the earliest intimation of the nature and working of the Administrative Order which the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was at a later time destined to proclaim and formally establish.

38.2 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 analyze exhaustively the nature of the relationships 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 Center of His Covenant is a task which future generations will no doubt adequately fulfill. 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.

38.3 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 insure 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, coördinate 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.

38.4 Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would be mutilated and permanently deprived of that hereditary principle which, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, has been invariably upheld by the Law of God. "In all the Divine Dispensations," He states, in a Tablet addressed to a follower of the Faith in Persia, "the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright." Without such an institution the integrity of the Faith would be imperiled, 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, uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking, and the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn.

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

(From a letter dated 8 February 1934 written by Shoghi Effendi, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 147–148)

39.1 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.

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

- 40.1 But, at present—and to this the Guardian wishes to draw your careful attention—no Assembly nor even he himself can have the right of enacting any law supplementing those of the Aqdas except in exceptional circumstances when the Authorities require it. And even in such a case the enactment is purely temporary. The only body which is empowered to legislate in such matters is the International House of Justice, and the Guardian can take part in such legislation only in his capacity as a member of that body. Just as the power of interpreting the Writings is the sole right and prerogative of the Guardian, so also the power of legislation has been invested by Bahá'u'lláh solely in the International House of Justice. Thus there is a clear distinction between the powers of legislation and interpretation, though the two are closely related.

(From a letter dated 6 July 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

- 41.1 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 preeminent and vital.... These requirements are none other than a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color.

- 41.2 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 insure the security of, and establish the reign of law and order in, a strangely disordered world.

(From a letter dated 25 December 1938 written by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006, 2018 printing), pp. 32–33)

- 42.1 In the plain of 'Akká is the blessed and hallowed Sanctuary of the Most Holy Abhá Beauty, the Centre round which circle the Concourse on high, the Qiblih of the people of Bahá and dwellers of the Crimson Ark, the Heart of the world, and the Kaaba of all nations. And on Mount Carmel are the twin sacred and exalted Shrines, the sanctified throne of His Holiness the Primal Point, and the illumined remains of Him round Whom all names revolve—the Dayspring of Lights, the Retreat of Mysteries, the Source of abounding Grace upon mankind. Around these three sacred resting-places—the tombs of the Scion of Bahá and His Remnant,³ and of the twin Divine trusts, the glorious Purest Branch and the Mother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá—the administrative centre of the community of the people of Bahá will, hereafter, gradually be instituted. Close by those Shrines the pillars of the Tribunal of Divine Justice will be erected,

³ Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf.

the Universal House of Justice will be established, and the edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the Holy Land will be upraised, while in the sheltering shadow of these twin spiritual Centres of the people of God⁴ the august undertakings and international administrative, scientific, and social institutions of the Bahá'í Faith will take form, the throne of the Kingdom of God will be established, the standard "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá" will be planted upon the loftiest peaks, and the thunderous peal of the oneness of humanity will be sounded. Then shall be fulfilled that which was revealed in the Tablet of Carmel by the all-glorious and resplendent Pen: "Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names."

(From a letter dated 25 December 1939 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the East—translated from the Persian)

- 43.1 The membership of the Universal House of Justice is confined to men. Fixing the number of the members, the procedures for election and the term of membership will be known later, as these are not explicitly revealed in the Holy Text.

(From a letter dated 27 May 1940 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

- 44.1 No body can add to the laws of the Bahá'í Dispensation except the International House of Justice. The National Assemblies merely formulate at present methods of procedure to facilitate the functioning of the Administrative Order and ensure efficient conduct of the affairs of the Cause within their jurisdiction. These can always be revoked or modified whenever they have outworn their usefulness or another method would be more effective.

(From a letter dated 19 December 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers)

- 45.1 There are only two institutions which are infallible, one is the Guardianship, the other the International House of Justice.

(From a letter dated 19 October 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

- 46.1 First, let me say that one of the reasons God has given us the Institution of Guardianship is to prevent men from crystallizing the Cause of God into a rigid system. Your questions are mostly along the line of trying to lay down a fixed pattern for future society, long before the time for such a pattern is ripe. Remember that Bahá'u'lláh says what is not already revealed, the International House of Justice must in the future legislate, and it can make, and abrogate if necessary, its own laws. This means not fixity in guiding society, but fluidity!

(From a letter dated 31 March 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

- 47.1 Fervently praying the participation of British, American, Persian, and Egyptian National Assemblies in unique, epoch-making enterprise in African continent may prove prelude to convocation of first African Teaching Conference leading eventually to initiation of

⁴ The Twin Holy Shrines in 'Akká and Haifa.

undertakings involving collaboration among all national assemblies of Bahá'í world, thereby paving way to ultimate organic union of these assemblies through formation of International House of Justice destined to launch enterprises embracing whole Bahá'í world. Acclaim simultaneous inauguration of crusade linking administrative machinery of four national assemblies of East and West within four continents and birth of first International Council at World Center of Faith, twin evidences of resistless unfoldment of embryonic, divinely appointed World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

(From a cable dated 17 January 1951 written by Shoghi Effendi, in *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947–1957* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1965, 2014 printing), p. 90)

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

(From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi appended to a letter dated 25 February 1951 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles)

49.1 In this great Tablet [of Carmel] which unveils divine mysteries and heralds the establishment of two mighty, majestic and momentous undertakings—one of which is spiritual and the other administrative, both at the World Centre of the Faith—Bahá'u'lláh refers to an “Ark”, whose dwellers are the men of the Supreme House of Justice, which, in conformity with the exact provisions of the Will and Testament of the Centre of the Mighty Covenant, is the body which should lay down laws not explicitly revealed in the Text. In this Dispensation, these laws are destined to flow from this Holy Mountain, even as in the Mosaic Dispensation the law of God was promulgated from Zion. The “sailing of the Ark” of His laws is a reference to the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, which is indeed the Seat of Legislation, one of the branches of the World Administrative Centre of the Bahá'ís on this Holy Mountain.

(From a letter dated 21 March 1954 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the East—translated from the Persian)

50.1 O ye loved ones of Bahá! This day is your day and this hour is indeed your hour. That which is imperative in this day and which will, like unto a magnet, attract the confirmations of God is this, that a large number of believers, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, learned and unlettered, white and black alike, bestir themselves for the triumph of His exalted Faith. Galvanized by a spirit of love and courage, they must, one and all, arise even as a single legion, and in the course of the remaining nine years scatter far and wide over the surface of the globe. “With the feet of detachment,” as the Ancient Beauty admonishes, must they “tread under all who are in heaven and on earth” and “cast the sleeve of holiness over all that have been created from water and clay.” With hearts detached, spirits unencumbered, souls enkindled, resolve unflinching and steps unwavering, they must strive day and night to extend the reach of the Cause of God, to diffuse its sweet savours, to consolidate its foundations, to noise abroad its fame and to multiply the ranks of its adherents. Raising the call of “Yá

Bahá'u'l-Abhá!" they must rush forth to the virgin territories and newly opened localities and, putting their whole trust in God, establish isolated centres, which may be likened to "points". They must, through their efforts to teach and guide the people by words and deeds, transform these isolated centres, as soon as feasible, into groups, which are like unto "letters". They must then develop these groups into Local Spiritual Assemblies, which are like unto complete "words", and continually endeavour to increase the number of these Assemblies in various countries so that the means for the befitting convocation of National Conventions can be gradually prepared, National Spiritual Assemblies, which are like unto manifest "verses", the pillars of the Throne of Divine Justice, can be systematically erected, and upon these pillars can be raised the dome of the divine Edifice, the Universal House of Justice, which is like unto the lucid "book", established in its designated seat on the slopes of the Vineyard of the Lord upon His holy Mountain, adorning the institutions of His New World Order with the crown of supreme distinction.

(From a letter dated 21 March 1954 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the East—translated from the Persian)

From the Constitution and Letters of the Universal House of Justice

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

(*The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1972), pp. 3–4)

52.1 The provenance, the authority, the duties, the sphere of action of the Universal House of Justice all derive from the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh which, together with the interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and of the Guardian of the Cause—who, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is the sole authority in the interpretation of Bahá'í Scripture—constitute the binding terms of reference of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation. The authority of these Texts is absolute and immutable until such time as Almighty God shall reveal His new Manifestation to Whom will belong all authority and power.

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

(*The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*, p. 4)

53.1 Among the powers and duties with which the Universal House of Justice has been invested are:

To ensure the preservation of the Sacred Texts and to safeguard their inviolability; to analyse, classify, and coordinate the Writings; and to defend and protect the Cause of God and emancipate it from the fetters of repression and persecution;

To advance the interests of the Faith of God; to proclaim, propagate and teach its Message; to expand and consolidate the institutions of its Administrative Order; to usher in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh; to promote the attainment of those spiritual qualities which should characterize Bahá'í life individually and collectively; to do its utmost for the realization of greater cordiality and comity amongst the nations and for the attainment of universal peace; and to foster that which is conducive to the enlightenment and illumination of the souls of men and the advancement and betterment of the world;

To enact laws and ordinances not expressly recorded in the Sacred Texts; to abrogate, according to the changes and requirements of the time, its own enactments; to deliberate and decide upon all problems which have caused difference; to elucidate questions that are obscure; to safeguard the personal rights, freedom and initiative of individuals; and to give attention to the preservation of human honour, to the development of countries and the stability of states;

To promulgate and apply the laws and principles of the Faith; to safeguard and enforce that rectitude of conduct which the Law of God enjoins; to preserve and develop the Spiritual and Administrative Centre of the Bahá'í Faith, permanently fixed in the twin cities of 'Akká and Haifa; to administer the affairs of the Bahá'í community throughout the world; to guide, organize, coordinate and unify its activities; to found institutions; to be responsible for ensuring that no body or institution within the Cause abuse its privileges or decline in the exercise of its rights and prerogatives; and to provide for the receipt, disposition, administration and safeguarding of the funds, endowments and other properties that are entrusted to its care;

To adjudicate disputes falling within its purview; to give judgement in cases of violation of the laws of the Faith and to pronounce sanctions for such violations; to provide for the enforcement of its decisions; to provide for the arbitration and settlement of disputes arising between peoples; and 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, the world.

(The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, pp. 5–6)

54.1 The Universal House of Justice was first elected on the first day of the Festival of Ridván in the one hundred and twentieth year of the Bahá'í Era⁵, when the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies, in accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and in response to the summons of the Hands of the Cause of God, the Chief Stewards of

⁵ 21 April 1963 A.D.

Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth, brought into being this "crowning glory" of the administrative institutions of Bahá'u'lláh, the very "nucleus and forerunner" of His World Order. Now, therefore, in obedience to the Command of God and with entire reliance upon Him, we, the members of the Universal House of Justice, set our hands and its seal to this Declaration of Trust which, together with the By-Laws hereto appended, form the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice.

(The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, pp. 6-7)

- 55.1 The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is unbroken, its all-encompassing power inviolate. The two unique features which distinguish it from all religious covenants of the past are unchanged and operative. The revealed Word, in its original purity, amplified by the divinely guided interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, remains immutable, unadulterated by any man-made creeds or dogmas, unwarrantable inferences or unauthorized interpretations. The channel of divine guidance, providing flexibility in all the affairs of mankind, remains open through that Institution which was founded by Bahá'u'lláh and endowed by Him with supreme authority and unfailing guidance, and of which the Master wrote: "Unto this body all things must be referred." How clearly we can see the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's assertion: "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure."

(From a message dated October 1963 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World)

- 56.1 After prayerful and careful study of the Holy Texts bearing upon the question of the appointment of the successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, and after prolonged consultation which included consideration of the views of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, the Universal House of Justice finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi.

(From a message dated 6 October 1963 written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies)

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

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

- 57.3 At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi's death it was evident, from the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy Texts, that it had been impossible for him to

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

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

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

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

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

57.7 Having been in charge of the Cause of God for six years, the Hands, with absolute faith in the Holy Writings, called upon the believers to elect the Universal House of Justice, and even went so far as to ask that they themselves be not voted for. The sole, sad instance of anyone

succumbing to the allurements of power was the pitiful attempt of Charles Mason Remey to usurp the Guardianship.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(“Makátib-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, vol. III, pp. 500–501)

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

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

Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh would be mutilated and permanently deprived of that hereditary principle which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written, has been invariably upheld by the Law of God. “In all the Divine Dispensations,” He states, in a Tablet addressed to a follower of the Faith in Persia, “the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright.” Without such an institution the integrity of the Faith would be imperilled, and the stability of the entire fabric would be gravely endangered. Its prestige would suffer, the means required to enable it to take a long, uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking, and the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn.

(“The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh”, “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh”, p. 148)

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

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

(Letter dated 21 March 1930, “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh”, pp. 19–20)

It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to the Universal House of Justice by Bahá’u’lláh in the “Kitábu’l-Aqdas”, and repeatedly and solemnly confirmed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will. It does not constitute in any manner a contradiction to the Will and Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, nor does it nullify any of His revealed

instructions. It enhances the prestige of that exalted assembly, stabilizes its supreme position, safeguards its unity, assures the continuity of its labours, without presuming in the slightest to infringe upon the inviolability of its clearly-defined sphere of jurisdiction. We stand indeed too close to so monumental a document to claim for ourselves a complete understanding of all its implications, or to presume to have grasped the manifold mysteries it undoubtedly contains....

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and these of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

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

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

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

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

“Such”, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, “is the immutability of His revealed Word. Such is the elasticity which characterizes the functions of His appointed ministers. The first preserves the identity of His Faith, and guards the integrity of His law. The second enables it, even as a living organism, to expand and adapt itself to the needs and requirements of an ever-changing society.”

(Letter dated 21 March 1930, “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh”, p. 25)

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

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

(Letter dated 21 March 1930, “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh”, p. 24)

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

Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications....

(Letter dated 23 February 1924, published in “Bahá’í Administration”, p. 62)

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

(Letter dated 19 December 1923—translated from the Persian)

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

57.16 The third group of queries raised by the friends concerns details of functioning of the Universal House of Justice in the absence of the Guardian, particularly the matter of expulsion of members of the House of Justice. Such questions will be clarified in the Constitution of the House of Justice, the formulation of which is a goal of the Nine Year Plan. Meanwhile the friends are informed that any member committing a “sin injurious to the common weal”, may be expelled from membership of the House of Justice by a majority vote of the House itself. Should any member, God forbid, be guilty of breaking the Covenant, the matter would be investigated by the Hands of the Cause of God, and the Covenant-breaker would be expelled by decision of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, subject to the approval of the House of Justice, as in the case of any other believer. The decision of the Hands in such a case would be announced to the Bahá’í world by the Universal House of Justice.

(From a letter dated 9 March 1965 written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

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

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

58.3 The fact that Shoghi Effendi did not leave a will cannot be adduced as evidence of his failure to obey Bahá’u’lláh—rather should we acknowledge that in his very silence there is a wisdom and a sign of his infallible guidance. We should ponder deeply the writings that we have, and seek to understand the multitudinous significances that they contain. Do not forget that Shoghi Effendi said two things were necessary for a growing understanding of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: the passage of time and the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

58.4 The infallibility of the Universal House of Justice, operating within its ordained sphere, has not been made dependent upon the presence in its membership of the Guardian of the Cause. Although in the realm of interpretation the Guardian’s pronouncements are always binding, in the area of the Guardian’s participation in legislation it is always the decision of the House itself which must prevail. This is supported by the words of the Guardian: “The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Bahá’u’lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.

58.5 “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.”

58.6 However, quite apart from his function as a member and sacred head for life of the Universal House of Justice, the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, had the right and duty “to define the sphere of the legislative action” of the Universal House of Justice. In other words, he had the authority to state whether a matter was or was not already covered by the Sacred Texts and therefore whether it was within the authority of the Universal House of Justice to legislate upon it. No other person, apart from the Guardian, has the right or authority to make such definitions. The question therefore arises: In the absence of the Guardian, is the Universal House of Justice in danger of straying outside its proper sphere and thus falling into error? Here we must remember three things: First, Shoghi Effendi, during the thirty-six years

of his Guardianship, has already made innumerable such definitions, supplementing those made by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and by Bahá’u’lláh Himself. As already announced to the friends, a careful study of the Writings and interpretations on any subject on which the House of Justice proposes to legislate always precedes its act of legislation. Second, the Universal House of Justice, itself assured of divine guidance, is well aware of the absence of the Guardian and will approach all matters of legislation only when certain of its sphere of jurisdiction, a sphere which the Guardian has confidently described as “clearly defined”. Third, we must not forget the Guardian’s written statement about these two Institutions: “Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other.”

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

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

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

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

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

58.8 In the Order of Bahá'u'lláh there are certain functions which are reserved to certain institutions, and others which are shared in common, even though they may be more in the special province of one or the other. For example, although the Hands of the Cause of God have the specific functions of protection and propagation, and are specialized for these functions, it is also the duty of the Universal House of Justice and the Spiritual Assemblies to protect and teach the Cause—indeed teaching is a sacred obligation placed upon every believer by Bahá'u'lláh. Similarly, although after the Master authoritative interpretation was exclusively vested in the Guardian, and although legislation is exclusively the function of the Universal House of Justice, these two Institutions are, in Shoghi Effendi's words, "complementary in their aim and purpose." "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." Whereas the Universal House of Justice cannot undertake any function which exclusively appertained to the Guardian, it must continue to pursue the object which it shares in common with the Guardianship.

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

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

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

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

embedded in the teachings themselves, unadulterated and unobscured by unwarranted inferences, or unauthorized interpretations of His Word.”

58.13 A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself from his study of its teachings. While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter, according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should by no means be suppressed. In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man’s rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings. As Shoghi Effendi explained: “To deepen in the Cause means to read the writings of Bahá’u’lláh and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form. There are many who have some superficial idea of what the Cause stands for. They, therefore, present it together with all sorts of ideas that are their own. As the Cause is still in its early days we must be most careful lest we fall under this error and injure the Movement we so much adore. There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the writings the more truths we can find in them and the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous.”⁶ So, although individual insights can be enlightening and helpful, they can also be misleading. The friends must therefore learn to listen to the views of others without being overawed or allowing their faith to be shaken, and to express their own views without pressing them on their fellow Bahá’ís.

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

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

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

58.16 The Universal House of Justice, which the Guardian said would be regarded by posterity as “the last refuge of a tottering civilization,” is now, in the absence of the Guardian, the sole infallibly guided institution in the world to which all must turn, and on it rests the responsibility for ensuring the unity and progress of the Cause of God in accordance with the revealed Word. There are statements from the Master and the Guardian indicating that the Universal House of Justice, in addition to being the Highest Legislative Body of the Faith, is also the body to which all must turn, and is the “apex” of the Bahá’í Administrative Order, as well as the “supreme

⁶ Written by the Guardian’s secretary to an individual believer, on 25 August 1926.

organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth". The Guardian has in his writings specified for the House of Justice such fundamental functions as the formulation of future world-wide teaching plans, the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, and the guidance, organisation and unification of the affairs of the Cause throughout the world. Furthermore in "God Passes By" the Guardian makes the following statement: "the Kitáb-i-Aqdas ... not only preserves for posterity the basic laws and ordinances on which the fabric of His future World Order must rest, but ordains, in addition to the function of interpretation which it confers upon His Successor, the necessary institutions through which the integrity and unity of His Faith can alone be safeguarded." He has also, in "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh", written that the members of the Universal House of Justice "and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation."

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

(From a letter dated 27 May 1966 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

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

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

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

59.4 Just as the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not in any way contradict the Kitáb-i-Aqdas but, in the Guardian’s words, “confirms, supplements, and correlates the provisions of the ‘Aqdas’”, so the writings of the Guardian contradict neither the revealed Word nor the interpretations of the Master. In attempting to understand the Writings, therefore, one must first realize that there is and can be no real contradiction in them, and in the light of this we can confidently seek the unity of meaning which they contain.

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

59.6 The Universal House of Justice, beyond its function as the enactor of legislation, has been invested with the more general functions of protecting and administering the Cause, solving obscure questions and deciding upon matters that have caused difference. Nowhere is it stated that the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice is by virtue of the Guardian’s membership or presence on that body. Indeed, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Shoghi Effendi in his “Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” have both explicitly stated that the elected members of the Universal House of Justice in consultation are recipients of unfailing Divine Guidance. Furthermore the Guardian himself in “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh” asserted that “It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to the Universal House of Justice by Bahá’u’lláh in the “Kitábu’l-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.”

59.7 While the specific responsibility of the Guardian is the interpretation of the Word, he is also invested with all the powers and prerogatives necessary to discharge his function as Guardian of the Cause, its Head and supreme protector. He is, furthermore, made the irremovable head and member for life of the supreme legislative body of the Faith. It is as the head of the Universal House of Justice, and as a member of that body, that the Guardian takes part in the process of legislation. If the following passage, which gave rise to your query, is considered as referring to this last relationship, you will see that there is no contradiction between it and the other texts:

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

bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning and to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed utterances.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 59.14 The passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957 precipitated the very situation provided for in this passage, in that the line of Aghsán ended before the House of Justice had been elected. Although, as is seen, the ending of the line of Aghsán at some stage was provided for, we must never underestimate the grievous loss that the Faith has suffered. God's purpose for mankind remains unchanged, however, and the mighty Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh remains impregnable. Has not Bahá'u'lláh stated categorically, "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation." While 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms: "Verily, God effecteth that which He pleaseth; naught can annul His Covenant; naught can obstruct His favour nor oppose His Cause!" "Everything is subject to corruption; but the Covenant of thy Lord shall continue to pervade all regions." "The tests of every dispensation are in direct proportion to the greatness of the Cause, and as heretofore such a manifest Covenant, written by the Supreme Pen, hath not been entered upon, the tests are proportionately severe.... These agitations of the violators are no more than the foam of the ocean,... This foam of the ocean shall not endure and shall soon disperse and vanish, while the ocean of the Covenant shall eternally surge and roar." And Shoghi Effendi has clearly stated: "The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God's immutable Purpose for mankind in this day." "... this priceless gem of Divine Revelation, now still in its embryonic state, shall evolve within the shell of His law, and shall forge ahead, undivided and unimpaired, till it embraces the whole of mankind."
- 59.15 In the Bahá'í Faith there are two authoritative centres appointed to which the believers must turn, for in reality the Interpreter of the Word is an extension of that centre which is the Word itself. The Book is the record of the utterance of Bahá'u'lláh, while the divinely inspired Interpreter is the living Mouth of that Book—it is he and he alone who can authoritatively state what the Book means. Thus one centre is the Book with its Interpreter, and the other is the Universal House of Justice guided by God to decide on whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Book. This pattern of centres and their relationships is apparent at every stage in the unfoldment of the Cause. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh tells the believers to refer after His passing to the Book, and to "Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root." In the Kitáb-i-'Ahdí (the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant), He makes it clear that this reference is to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh also ordains the institution of the Universal House of Justice, and confers upon it the powers necessary for it to discharge its ordained functions. The Master in His Will and Testament explicitly institutes the Guardianship, which Shoghi Effendi states was clearly anticipated in the verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, reaffirms and elucidates the authority of the Universal House of Justice, and refers the believers once again to the Book: "Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice," and at the very end of the Will He says: "All must seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error."
- 59.16 As the sphere of jurisdiction of the Universal House of Justice in matters of legislation extends to whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Sacred Text, it is clear that the Book itself is the highest authority and delimits the sphere of action of the House of Justice. Likewise, the Interpreter of the Book must also have the authority to define the sphere of the legislative action of the elected representatives of the Cause. The writings of the Guardian and the advice given by him over the thirty-six years of his Guardianship show the way in which he exercised this function in relation to the Universal House of Justice as well as to National and Local Spiritual Assemblies.

59.17 The fact that the Guardian has the authority to define the sphere of the legislative action of the Universal House of Justice does not carry with it the corollary that without such guidance the Universal House of Justice might stray beyond the limits of its proper authority; such a deduction would conflict with all the other texts referring to its infallibility, and specifically with the Guardian's own clear assertion that the Universal House of Justice never can or will infringe on the sacred and prescribed domain of the Guardianship. It should be remembered, however, that although National and Local Spiritual Assemblies can receive divine guidance if they consult in the manner and spirit described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, they do not share in the explicit guarantees of infallibility conferred upon the Universal House of Justice. Any careful student of the Cause can see with what care the Guardian, after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, guided these elected representatives of the believers in the painstaking erection of the Administrative Order and in the formulation of Local and National Bahá'í Constitutions.

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

(From a letter dated 7 December 1969 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

60.1 Although the Universal House of Justice has to apply and supplement the laws of the Aqdas it has no right at all to change any law that Bahá'u'lláh has specifically revealed. As clearly stated by the Guardian, the provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas "remain inviolate" during the entire Dispensation.

(From a letter dated 28 April 1974 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

61.1 A Covenant in the religious sense is a binding agreement between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behaviour in return for which He guarantees certain blessings, or whereby He gives man certain bounties in return for which He takes from those who accept them an undertaking to behave in a certain way. There is, for example, the Greater Covenant which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fulness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs. There is also the Lesser Covenant that a Manifestation of God makes with His followers that they will accept His appointed successor after Him. If they do so, the Faith can remain united and pure. If not, the Faith becomes divided and its force spent. It is a Covenant of this kind that Bahá'u'lláh made with His followers regarding 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and that 'Abdu'l-Bahá perpetuated through the Administrative Order that Bahá'u'lláh had already created.

(From a letter dated 23 March 1975 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

62.1 Regarding your first question, it is important that when considering the references to the Guardianship in the writings of the Faith, and especially when striving to understand how these

references apply at the present time, you should realize that the word “guardianship” is used with various meanings in different contexts. In certain contexts it indicates the office and function of the Guardian himself, in others it refers to the line of Guardians, in still others it bears a more extended meaning embracing the Guardian and his attendant institutions. Nevertheless, it would be quite incorrect to state, at the present time when there is no Guardian, that the Hands of the Cause are members of the Institution of Guardianship. Nor would it be correct to so designate the International Teaching Centre, the Counsellors, the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants.

- 62.2 In the specific sense of referring to the office and function of the Guardian himself, the House of Justice finds that the prerogatives and duties vested in him are of three kinds. First, as was explained in a letter to an individual believer which was published in “Wellspring of Guidance”,⁷ there are a number of functions and objects which the Guardianship shares with the Universal House of Justice and which the House of Justice must continue to pursue. Secondly, there are other functions of the Guardianship which, in the absence of a Guardian, devolve upon the Universal House of Justice, for example, the Headship of the Faith, the responsibility for directing the work of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God and of ensuring the continuing discharge of the functions or protection and propagation vested in that Institution, and the right to administer the Ḥuqúqu’lláh. Thirdly, there are those prerogatives and duties which lie exclusively within the sphere of the Guardian himself and, therefore, in the absence of a Guardian, are inoperative except insofar as the monumental work already performed by Shoghi Effendi continues to be of enduring benefit to the Faith. Such a function is that of authoritative interpretation of the Teachings.

(From a letter dated 5 May 1977 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

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

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

- 63.2 It must always be remembered that authoritative interpretation of the Teachings was, after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the exclusive right of the Guardian, and fell within the “sacred and prescribed domain” of the Guardianship, and therefore the Universal House of Justice cannot and will not infringe upon that domain. The exclusive sphere of the Universal House of Justice is to “pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá’u’lláh

⁷ See extract 58.

has not expressly revealed". Apart from this fundamental difference in the functions of the twin pillars of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, insofar as the other duties of the Head of the Faith are concerned, the Universal House of Justice shares with the Guardian the responsibility for the application of the revealed word, the protection of the Faith, as well as the duty "to insure 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". However, the Universal House of Justice is not omniscient; like the Guardian, it wants to be provided with facts when called upon to render a decision, and like him, it may well change its decision when new facts emerge.

(From a letter dated 22 August 1977 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

- 64.1 ... the Tablets of the Divine Plan, which were revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during the First World War, are the Charter for the teaching of the Faith. All the teaching plans launched by the beloved Guardian, as well as those subsequently directed by the Universal House of Justice, are stages in the implementation of this master plan conceived by the Centre of the Covenant for the diffusion of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh.
- 64.2 When it is working out the goals of a plan, such as the Five Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice, in collaboration with the International Teaching Centre, collates information on the current status of the Faith throughout the world, considers the condition of mankind as a whole and the direction in which political and economic events throughout the world are moving, gives thought to the specific needs of the evolving pattern of the Bahá'í community in each country, and sets goals which, in the light of the information before it, it judges to be both essential of achievement and also within the capacity of the Bahá'í communities to reach. All the goals thus set are minimum goals; that is to say, the needs of humanity are far greater than anything the Bahá'í community can plan to meet at the present time, and therefore, although the goals are set as high as the Universal House of Justice considers it possible for the Bahá'ís to reach within the time provided, the friends should always strive to exceed them if they can.
- 64.3 In setting the goals the House of Justice cannot take into account the unpredictable operations of God's Supreme Plan. At times it may seem that the operation of the Major Plan causes a disruption in the work of the Minor Plan, but the friends should not let this distress them. In 1955 a sudden recrudescence of the persecution of the Faith in the land of its birth intervened dramatically in the progress of the Ten Year Crusade. Referring to this, the Guardian wrote, as recorded on page 140 of "Citadel of Faith":

For though the newly launched World Spiritual Crusade, constituting at best only the Minor Plan in the execution of the Almighty's design for the redemption of mankind—has, as a result of this turmoil, paralyzing temporarily the vast majority of the organized followers of Bahá'u'lláh within His birthplace, suffered a severe setback—yet the over-all Plan of God, moving mysteriously and in contrast to the orderly and well-known processes of a clearly devised Plan, has received an impetus the force of which only posterity can adequately assess.

(From a letter dated 29 September 1977 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

65.1 You express the fear that the authority conferred upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice could lead to a progressive reduction in the “available scope for personal interpretation”, and that “the actual writings of the Manifestation will have less and less import”, and you instance what has happened in previous Dispensations. The House of Justice suggests that, in thinking about this, you contemplate the way the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh has actually worked and you will be able to see how very different its processes are from those of, say, the development of the law in Rabbinical Judaism or the functioning of the Papacy in Christianity. The practice in the past in these two religions, and also to a great extent in Islám, has been to assume that the Revelation given by the Founder was the final, perfect revelation of God’s Will to mankind, and all subsequent elucidation and legislation has been interpretative in the sense that it aimed at applying this basic Revelation to the new problems and situations that have arisen. The Bahá’í premises are quite different. Although the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh is accepted as the Word of God and His Law as the Law of God, it is understood from the outset that Revelation is progressive, and that the Law, although the Will of God for this Age, will undoubtedly be changed by the next Manifestation of God. Secondly, only the written text of the Revelation is regarded as authoritative. There is no Oral Law as in Judaism, no Tradition of the Church as in Christianity, no Hadíth as in Islám. Thirdly, a clear distinction is drawn between interpretation and legislation. Authoritative interpretation is the exclusive prerogative of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian, while infallible legislation is the function of the Universal House of Justice.

65.2 If you study the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and of the Guardian, you will see how tremendously they differ from the interpretations of the Rabbis and the Church. They are not a progressive fossilization of the Revelation, they are for the most part expositions which throw a clear light upon passages which may have been considered obscure, they point up the intimate interrelationship between various teachings, they expound the implications of scriptural allusions, and they educate the Bahá’ís in the tremendous significances of the Words of Bahá’u’lláh. Rather than in any way supplanting the Words of the Manifestation, they lead us back to them time and again.

65.3 There is also an important distinction made in the Faith between authoritative interpretation, as described above, and the interpretation which every believer is fully entitled to voice. Believers are free, indeed are encouraged, to study the Writings for themselves and to express their understanding of them. Such personal interpretations can be most illuminating, but all Bahá’ís, including the one expressing the view, however learned he may be, should realize that it is only a personal view and can never be upheld as a standard for others to accept, nor should disputes ever be permitted to arise over differences in such opinions.

65.4 The legislation enacted by the Universal House of Justice is different from interpretation. Authoritative interpretation, as uttered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian, is a divinely guided statement of what the Word of God means. The divinely inspired legislation of the Universal House of Justice does not attempt to say what the revealed Word means—it states what must be done in cases where the revealed Text or its authoritative interpretation is not explicit. It is, therefore, on quite a different level from the Sacred Text, and the Universal House of Justice is empowered to abrogate or amend its own legislation whenever it judges the conditions make this desirable. Moreover, the attitude to legislation is different in the Bahá’í Faith. The human tendency in past Dispensations has been to want every question answered and to arrive at a binding decision affecting every small detail of belief or practice. The tendency in the Bahá’í Dispensation, from the time of Bahá’u’lláh Himself, has been to clarify the governing principles, to make binding pronouncements on details which are considered essential, but to

leave a wide area to the conscience of the individual. The same tendency appears also in administrative matters. The Guardian used to state that the working of National Spiritual Assemblies should be uniform in essentials but that diversity in secondary matters was not only permissible but desirable. For this reason a number of points are not expressed in the National Bahá'í Constitution (the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of National Assemblies); these are left to each National Spiritual Assembly to decide for itself.

(From a letter dated 3 January 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

66.1 While ultimately the major function of the Universal House of Justice will be that of legislation, it has continuing responsibility for executive and judicial functions of the institution.

(From a letter dated 19 May 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

67.1 Your letter touches upon a subject which, as time passes, will increasingly engage the attention of the House of Justice in accordance with its responsibilities as explicitly assigned in the Holy Texts. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh states:

According to the fundamental laws which We have formerly revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and other Tablets, all affairs are committed to the care of just kings and presidents and of the Trustees of the House of Justice.

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

Elsewhere He states:

It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. This matter is imperative and absolutely essential, inasmuch as hostilities and conflict lie at the root of affliction and calamity.

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

And yet again He asserts:

All matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book.

(“Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, p. 27)

Furthermore, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have said in a talk:

He [Bahá'u'lláh] has ordained and established the House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and blending of church and state. This institution is under the protecting power of Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

(“The Promulgation of Universal Peace”, 1982 ed., p. 455)

67.2 As can be seen from the current situation in the world and the current state in the development of the Bahá'í community, statements such as these indicate a future stage in the

functioning of the House of Justice and of the operation of our world community; but in the meantime, the House of Justice will determine, as particular circumstances warrant, how the Bahá'ís and their national and local institutions will relate to their respective governments.

(From a letter dated 23 June 1987 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

68.1 ... it should be noted that in most areas of human behaviour there are acts which are clearly contrary to the law of God and others which are clearly approved or permissible; between these there is often a grey area where it is not immediately apparent what should be done. It has been a human tendency to wish to eliminate these grey areas so that every aspect of life is clearly prescribed. A result of this tendency has been the tremendous accretion of interpretation and subsidiary legislation which has smothered the spirit of certain of the older religions. In the Bahá'í Faith moderation, which is so strongly upheld by Bahá'u'lláh, is applied here also. Provision is made for supplementary legislation by the Universal House of Justice—legislation which it can itself abrogate and amend as conditions change. There is also a clear pattern already established in the Sacred Scriptures, in the interpretations made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and in the decisions so far made by the Universal House of Justice, whereby an area of the application of the laws is intentionally left to the conscience of each individual believer. This is the age in which mankind must attain maturity, and one aspect of this is the assumption by individuals of the responsibility for deciding, with the assistance of consultation, their own course of action in areas which are left open by the law of God.

68.2 It should also be noted that it is neither possible nor desirable for the Universal House of Justice to set forth a set of rules covering every situation. Rather is it the task of the individual believer to determine, according to his own prayerful understanding of the Writings, precisely what his course of conduct should be in relation to situations which he encounters in his daily life. If he is to fulfil his true mission in life as a follower of the Blessed Perfection, he will pattern his life according to the Teachings. The believer cannot attain this objective merely by living according to a set of rigid regulations. When his life is oriented towards service to Bahá'u'lláh, and when every conscious act is performed within this frame of reference, he will not fail to achieve the true purpose of his life.

68.3 Therefore, every believer must continually study the Sacred Writings and the instructions of the beloved Guardian, striving always to attain a new and better understanding of their import to him and to his society. He should pray fervently for divine guidance, wisdom and strength to do what is pleasing to God, and to serve Him at all times and to the best of his ability.

(From a letter dated 5 June 1988 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

69.1 One of the major concerns of the Universal House of Justice, as the Bahá'í Administrative Order unfolds, will be to ensure that it evolves in consonance with the spirit of the Bahá'í Revelation. While many beneficial aspects of human society at large can be safely incorporated into Bahá'í Administration, the House of Justice will guard against the corrupting influence of those non-Bahá'í political and social concepts and practices which are not in harmony with the divine standard.

(From a letter dated 27 April 1995 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

- 70.1 The House of Justice notes that you have been disturbed by some of the postings made to the email discussion group of which you have recently been a member. Email discussion groups are a new phenomenon; they can provide immense benefits for communication between people and for the teaching of the Faith, but, as you have seen, they can also give rise to far-reaching problems. The use of email requires an adjustment of perception. In the past, discussions among Bahá'ís would take place orally among groups of friends in private, or at summer schools and other Bahá'í events, or in letters between individuals. Inevitably, many erroneous statements were made; not all comments were as temperate as they should have been; many statements were misunderstood by those who heard them. After all, not all Bahá'ís have a profound knowledge of the teachings, and it is clear that even academic eminence is no guarantee of a correct understanding of the Revelation of God. Before email such extravagances had a limited range and were of an ephemeral nature. Now, the same kind of discussion is spread among a hundred or more people, who often do not know one another, in a form more durable than speech, and can be disseminated to a vast readership at the touch of a button. A new level of self-discipline, therefore, is needed by those who take part. Such discussions among Bahá'ís call for self-restraint and purity of motive as well as cordiality, frankness and openness.
- 70.2 The central, unifying element of the Faith is the Covenant. This is the institution which guarantees that the Faith and its teachings will remain true to the Revelation brought by Bahá'u'lláh and expounded by His divinely guided Interpreters. It is the one agency which can protect the Faith against the distortion and disruption to which all previous Revelations have been subjected by the efforts—whether well-intentioned or not—of the self-opinionated and ambitious among their followers to force the Cause of God into patterns which they personally favoured.
- 70.3 Thus, if any participant in an email discussion feels that a view put forward appears to contradict or undermine the provisions of the Covenant, he should be free to say so, explaining candidly and courteously why he feels as he does. The person who made the initial statement will then be able to re-evaluate his opinion and, if he still believes it to be valid, he should be able to explain why it is not contrary to either the letter or the spirit of the Covenant. The participants in such a discussion should avoid disputation and, if they are unable to resolve an issue, they should refer the point to the Universal House of Justice since, in accordance with the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved..." and it has the authority to decide upon "all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book." In this way the Covenant can illuminate and temper the discourse and make it fruitful....
- 70.4 The Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh is in the process of growth and unfoldment. In its structure and functioning there are aspects which, the Guardian explained, should be uniform throughout the world. There are also secondary aspects which can be varied from country to country as decided by the responsible National Spiritual Assembly in accordance with the needs and conditions in the area under its jurisdiction. The aspects which must be uniform are set out in the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice and the Constitutions of the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies.
- 70.5 As the Bahá'í communities grow, the Universal House of Justice will ensure that this divinely-founded system will unfold in accordance with the unerring guidance of which it is the recipient.

70.6 Those who from time to time express their dissatisfaction with the current structure of the Administrative Order would be better advised to turn their attention to a thorough study of the principles upon which it is based, as expounded by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and to concentrate their efforts on putting into practice the spirit and letter of these texts. Virtually every problem which is blamed on a deficiency of structure is, in fact, traceable to a defect in the manner in which the individual believers understand and implement the administrative principles of the Faith.

70.7 In “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh”, Shoghi Effendi states:

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.

70.8 The three forms of secular government to which the Guardian refers are autocracy (rule by one person), aristocracy (rule by the best people) and democracy (rule by all the people). Referring again to these three forms of secular government, the Guardian writes, later in that same document:

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 functions 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.

70.9 In “God Passes By” the Guardian comments further on the same theme of the characteristics of the Bahá’í Administrative Order:

It incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, is devoid of the defects which each of them inherently possesses, and blends the salutary truths which each undoubtedly contains without vitiating in any way the integrity of the Divine verities on which it is essentially founded. The hereditary authority which the Guardian of the Administrative Order is called upon to exercise, and the right of the interpretation of the Holy Writ solely conferred upon him; the powers and prerogatives of the Universal House of Justice, possessing the exclusive right to legislate on matters not explicitly revealed in the Most Holy Book; the ordinance exempting its members from any responsibility to those whom they represent, and

from the obligation to conform to their views, convictions or sentiments; the specific provisions requiring the free and democratic election by the mass of the faithful of the Body that constitutes the sole legislative organ in the world-wide Bahá'í community—these are among the features which combine to set apart the Order identified with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh from any of the existing systems of human government.

- 70.10 Although the Administrative Order must now function without a living Guardian, and thus without a continuing source of divinely guided authoritative interpretation, beneficial elements of all three types of government are still embodied in this Order: in the continuing authority of the Sacred Texts and the binding effect of the interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian; in the obligation resting on the members of the House of Justice "to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience" ungoverned by "the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful..."; in the election (direct or indirect) of the members of all governing bodies by the unfettered vote of the mass of the believers, uninfluenced by either nominations or electioneering and untroubled by the spirit of factionalism and of concern for power which are such common features of current society. Above all, it is firmly rooted in the "spiritual verities" revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.
- 70.11 In the years following the writing of the words quoted above, moreover, Shoghi Effendi not only accelerated the process of bringing the Universal House of Justice into being by appointing the International Bahá'í Council, but also, in accordance with the provisions of the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, appointed the Hands of the Cause of God and began the development of the series of institutions comprising "eminent and devoted believers appointed for the specific purposes of protecting and propagating the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh under the guidance of the Head of that Faith",⁸ the vital importance of which can now be clearly seen in the functioning of the International Teaching Centre, the Continental Boards of Counsellors, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants.
- 70.12 From certain quarters, for a number of decades, there have been repeated attempts to import into the Bahá'í Administration the concept that it is desirable and proper to bring about change in the community by forming a constituency of like-minded believers to bring pressure to bear on the elected Assemblies. Such a concept is very similar to the formation of parties and factions which is an accepted and familiar feature of many representative democracies. It is, however, wholly antithetical to the spirit of Bahá'í Administration, and would distort its nature and undermine that unity which the Covenant is designed to preserve.
- 70.13 The elected institutions do, indeed, have the responsibility to "acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community" and "must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration", but this process is not helped by a prevalence of negative criticism and disunity among the friends.
(From a letter dated 16 February 1996 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)
- 71.1 You express disquiet that attempts being made to introduce a distinction between "Bahá'í laymen" and "Bahá'í scholars" with respect to the study of the Faith tend to generate a spirit of disunity among the friends. Your concern is fully justified. Such an approach to the study of

⁸ *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*, preamble to the By-Laws.

the Cause would betray a fundamental misunderstanding of the pattern of Bahá'í society as set out in the Teachings of the Faith.

- 71.2 As you know, Bahá'u'lláh says that the pursuit of knowledge has been enjoined upon everyone, and knowledge itself is described by Him as “wings to man’s life” and “a ladder for his ascent”. Those whose high attainments in this respect make it possible for them to contribute in important ways to the advancement of civilization are deserving of society’s recognition and gratitude.
- 71.3 In the study of the Revelation of God, an individual’s proficiency in one of the physical or social sciences, in law, philology, or other fields of specialization will often throw valuable light on issues being examined, and such contributions are greatly to be appreciated. The field of Near East studies, mentioned in your letter, is one that can assist in this way. However, no one specialization among the many branches of scholarly research can confer upon its practitioners an authoritative role in the common effort of exploring the implications of so staggering and all-encompassing a body of truth.
- 71.4 Collateral with His summons to the pursuit of knowledge, Bahá'u'lláh has abolished entirely that feature of all past religions by which a special caste of persons such as the Christian priesthood or the Islamic ‘ulamá came to exercise authority over the religious understanding and practice of their fellow believers. In a letter written in Persian on his behalf to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Istanbul, the Guardian is at some pains to underline the importance of this marked departure from past religious history:
- But praise be to God that the Pen of Glory has done away with the unyielding and dictatorial views of the learned and the wise, dismissed the assertions of individuals as an authoritative criterion, even though they were recognized as the most accomplished and learned among men, and ordained that all matters be referred to authorized centres and specified assemblies.
- 71.5 The Bahá'í Dispensation is described in the words of its Founder as “a day that shall not be followed by night”. Through His Covenant, Bahá'u'lláh has provided an unfailing source of divine guidance that will endure throughout the Dispensation. Authority to administer the affairs of the community and to ensure both the integrity of the Word of God and the promotion of the Faith’s message is conferred upon the Administrative Order to which the Covenant has given birth. It is solely by the process of free election or by unsought appointment that the members of the institutions of this Order are assigned to their positions in it. There is no profession in either the teaching of the Faith or its administration for which one can train or to which a believer can properly aspire. Cautionary words of Bahá'u'lláh are particularly relevant:
- Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play, the world hath been laid waste. It hath become desolate....
- Indeed, man is noble, inasmuch as each one is a repository of the sign of God. Nevertheless, to regard oneself as superior in knowledge, learning or virtue, or to exalt oneself or seek preference, is a grievous transgression.
- 71.6 The promotion of learning of every kind among the Faith’s members is an activity fundamental to the achievement of the community’s wide-ranging goals. Consequently, the

encouragement of individual believers to acquire knowledge, the operation of Bahá'í schools, universities, and training institutes, the organization of study groups, and the work of task forces dedicated to relating the principles of the Revelation to the challenges facing humankind all represent activities with which both the Counsellors and their auxiliaries, on the one hand, and National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, on the other, must concern themselves. In shouldering these demanding responsibilities, Bahá'í institutions everywhere find their efforts greatly enhanced by the assistance of believers whose intellectual pursuits, qualities of character, and devotion to the Cause particularly fit them to contribute their services.

71.7 A special responsibility in the matter rests on the Counsellors because of the duty assigned to them to assist in releasing the potential of the individual believer. The members of this institution, appointed for specific terms, have been given the task of carrying forward into the future the functions of the protection and propagation of the Faith conferred in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the Hands of the Cause. Thus, the Counsellors are called on to "diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things." Like the Hands, the Counsellors have no interpretive authority, an authority conferred by the Covenant only on 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian of the Faith. While some Counsellors, like some of the Hands, will have pursued various academic or professional disciplines in their individual careers, their discharge of their duties is not dependent on proficiencies of this kind. All of them share fully in the vital task of encouraging believers everywhere in the acquisition of knowledge, in all its dimensions. All share, too, in the responsibility assigned to the institution of which they are members to protect the Faith against its enemies, both external and internal, a concern to which both the Master and the Guardian attached pre-eminent importance.

71.8 An understanding of the principles by which we explore the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh depends, too, on an appreciation of the broad nature of the authority conferred on the Universal House of Justice. Speaking of the relevant responsibilities of its elected membership, the Will and Testament states:

It is incumbent upon these members (of the Universal House of Justice) to gather in a certain place and deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book. Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself.

71.9 Emphasizing, in this same Charter of the Administrative Order, the importance of believers' wholehearted adherence to the guidance given by both the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God....

(From a letter dated 14 March 1996 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

72.1 It is the exclusive sphere of the Universal House of Justice to "pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly

revealed.” It carries responsibility for the application of the revealed Word, the protection of the Faith, as well as the duty “to insure 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.” However, the Universal House of Justice is not omniscient, and the friends should understand that there is a difference between infallibility and omniscience. Like the Guardian, the House of Justice wants to be provided with facts when called upon to render a decision, and like him it may well change its decision when new facts emerge, or in light of changed conditions at some point in the future. We have found nothing in the writings of Shoghi Effendi which suggests that the House of Justice would on any occasion reach a “wrong decision”.

(From a letter dated 14 June 1996 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

- 73.1 The institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh, rooted in the provisions of His Revelation, have emerged gradually and organically, as the Bahá'í community has grown through the power of the divine impulse imparted to humankind in this age. The characteristics and functions of each of these institutions have evolved, and are still evolving, as are the relationships between them. The writings of the beloved Guardian expound the fundamental elements of this mighty System and make it clear that the Administrative Order, although different in many ways from the World Order which it is the destiny of the Bahá'í Revelation to call into being, is both the “nucleus” and “pattern” of that World Order. Thus, the evolution of the institutions of the Administrative Order, while following many variants to meet changing conditions in different times and places, should strictly follow the essential principles of Bahá'í administration which have been laid down in the Sacred Text and in the interpretations provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian.

(From a message dated 30 May 1997 written by the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assemblies)

- 74.1 Already in “The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh” Shoghi Effendi has shown, beyond any doubt, that the function of making authoritative interpretations of the Teachings is confined solely and exclusively to the Guardian. Neither the Universal House of Justice, nor any other institution, person or group of persons can assume that function. That the Universal House of Justice will never infringe on the functions reserved to the Guardian is shown, not only by its own words and actions, but by Shoghi Effendi's statement in that same document: “Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other.” It is guaranteed by the fact that the Universal House of Justice as well as the Guardian are both “under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One”.

(From a letter dated 3 June 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

- 75.1 The meanings of the terms “elucidation” and “interpretation”, as they are used with regard to the functions of Bahá'í institutions, should not of course be confused with each other. The elucidations of the Universal House of Justice stem from its legislative function, and as such differ from interpretation. The divinely inspired legislation of the House of Justice does not attempt to say what the revealed Word means—it states what must be done in cases where the revealed Text or its authoritative interpretation is not explicit; and in this context it offers

explanations. It is, therefore, on quite a different level from the sacred Text, and the Universal House of Justice is empowered to abrogate or amend its own legislation whenever it judges the conditions make this desirable. The major distinction between the two functions of elucidation and interpretation, to repeat the point differently, is that legislation with its resultant outcome of elucidation is susceptible of amendment by the House of Justice itself, whereas the Guardian's interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied.

(From a letter dated 27 August 1998 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

- 76.1 We have received a letter from a believer in Iran with questions about the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. We appreciate that firmness in the Covenant is among the distinctive characteristics of the believers in that land, who are informed of the principles and essential facts pertaining to the succession of authority in the Cause. Nevertheless, none among them should hesitate to seek clarification of matters about which they have questions, for the enemies of the Faith are tireless in their attempts to sow seeds of confusion and doubt. Moreover, it is beneficial, in view of the beloved Master's exhortations to us all to be ever-vigilant concerning matters of protection, for the friends to review the relevant essentials from time to time. We have therefore decided to provide you with the following comments....
- 76.2 Questions concerning the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice can be resolved through careful study of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and the elucidations of the House of Justice, which, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, will "deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book. Whatsoever they decide," He assures the friends, "has the same effect as the Text itself."
- 76.3 Prior to the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921, the provisions He had put in place in His Will and Testament to safeguard the Faith and ensure its steady advancement into the future were generally unknown. The believers anticipated a day when the Universal House of Justice would be established since it had been specifically mentioned in the Sacred Texts. There was, however, no definite understanding that there would be a Guardian. Indeed, Shoghi Effendi later indicated that he had no foreknowledge of the position to which he would be called. At most, he had reportedly thought the Will and Testament might charge him, as the eldest grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, with responsibility for arranging for the election of the House of Justice. Only after the reading of the Will did the institution of the Guardianship become widely known, and the Bahá'í community worldwide acknowledged Shoghi Effendi as the Head of the Faith to whom all must turn.
- 76.4 An attentive reading of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will makes it clear that He did not indicate a predestined outcome but did provide for a number of circumstances which, depending on future conditions, might eventually confront the Faith. The second section of the Will, for instance, which refers only to the Universal House of Justice, with no mention of the Guardianship, was written at a time when His own life was in imminent danger and Shoghi Effendi was but a small boy. During that same period, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had made arrangements for the election of the Universal House of Justice to take place immediately, should the threat on His life materialize. Through the grace of God, the crisis passed, and it was ultimately left to Shoghi Effendi many years later, as Guardian and Head of the Faith, to determine the timing of the formation of the House of Justice. Early on he considered the possibility of holding the election soon after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in which case the House of Justice and the Guardian would have

functioned simultaneously. He determined, of course, that the foundations of the Administrative Order needed first to be firmly laid at the local and national levels, and it eventually transpired that the House of Justice was established several years after his own passing. That the transition from the ministry of the Guardian to the election of the Universal House of Justice occurred with such relative ease can, itself, be attributed to the way certain provisions in the Will were formulated.

76.5 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament clearly allows for the possibility of a successor to Shoghi Effendi, and in this light, we find statements written by him or on his behalf over the course of his thirty-six-year ministry that envision future Guardians. However, there are no assurances in the Writings that the line of Guardians would continue throughout the Dispensation; rather, the possibility is envisaged that such a line would come to an end. In this respect, Bahá'u'lláh states in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

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

The passing of Shoghi Effendi precipitated the situation described, in which the authority vested in the Aghṣán—first in 'Abdu'l-Bahá and then in Shoghi Effendi—ended before the House of Justice was established.

76.6 In His Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá specifies in the clearest terms the conditions according to which Shoghi Effendi was to have named his successor as Guardian:

O ye beloved of the Lord! It is incumbent upon the guardian of the Cause of God to appoint in his own life-time him that shall become his successor, that differences may not arise after his passing. He that is appointed must manifest in himself detachment from all worldly things, must be the essence of purity, must show in himself the fear of God, knowledge, wisdom and learning. Thus, should the first-born of the guardian of the Cause of God not manifest in himself the truth of the words:—"The child is the secret essence of its sire," that is, should he not inherit of the spiritual within him (the guardian of the Cause of God) and his glorious lineage not be matched with a goodly character, then must he, (the guardian of the Cause of God) choose another branch to succeed him.

The Hands of the Cause of God must elect from their own number nine persons that shall at all times be occupied in the important services in the work of the guardian of the Cause of God. The election of these nine must be carried either unanimously or by majority from the company of the Hands of the Cause of God and these, whether unanimously or by a majority vote, must give their assent to the choice of the one whom the guardian of the Cause of God hath chosen as his

successor. This assent must be given in such wise as the assenting and dissenting voices may not be distinguished (i.e., secret ballot).

76.7 The personal views of any individual regarding the above statement, no matter how learned, cannot compare with the Guardian's infallible understanding of the passage. Shoghi Effendi, who faithfully adhered to the wishes of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá throughout his ministry, would never have been careless in a matter so essential to the integrity of the Faith as the question of the appointment of his successor. It is unthinkable that he would appoint someone to succeed him who did not possess the qualifications laid down by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will. It is equally untenable to suggest that he would do so in a manner which deviated from the explicit requirements in that same document, which included the affirmation of his choice by nine designated Hands of the Cause of God, so that "differences" would "not arise after his passing." How perverse the suggestion of the violators of the Covenant that Shoghi Effendi would ignore the Master's instructions and make a veiled and indirect appointment of his successor! Rather should the fact that Shoghi Effendi did not name a successor be seen as a sign of his meticulous adherence to every word of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and an indication of his conclusion that there was no qualified individual whom he could appoint.

76.8 Therefore, it should be clear to every steadfast follower of Bahá'u'lláh that the end of the line of Guardians was not the result of any decision or action taken by the Hands of the Cause of God following the sudden passing of Shoghi Effendi. The line was brought to a close when, compelled by existing circumstances and the strict provisions of the Will, Shoghi Effendi did not name a successor. To entertain the possibility that it may one day be re-established is futile. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that "ere the expiration of a thousand years, no one has the right to utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship." And in the same passage He exhorted the friends, "Should there be differences of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve the problems." The Universal House of Justice, soon after its formation, stated that it "finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi."

76.9 While the line of Guardians has ended, the Covenant is preserved. The vast body of interpretations of Shoghi Effendi informs the decisions of the Universal House of Justice as the Faith continues its onward march. The unity of the Faith is safeguarded, and the realization of Bahá'u'lláh's great purpose for humanity assured. "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation," Bahá'u'lláh has stated. "Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure."

* * *

76.10 With reference to the specific questions raised in the letter we have received, one concerns the meaning of the designation "Aghsán", as found in the Writings. While in some cases, as affirmed by the Guardian, the term applies specifically to Bahá'u'lláh's sons, at other times it is used more broadly to include His male descendants. For example, in His Will and Testament 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to Shoghi Effendi as "the chosen branch". The reference to Shoghi Effendi as Ghuṣn here—the singular form of Aghsán—follows the usage of Bahá'u'lláh in relation to the titles He gave His sons, that is, the Most Great Branch, the Greater Branch, and the Purest Branch. A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi explains that the word Aghsán "refers to Bahá'u'lláh's descendants"; another describes Hussein Rabbani, the Guardian's brother, as "the grandchild of the Master, an Afnán and Aghsán mentioned in the

Will and Testament of the Master.” It is evident, then, that the designation Aghsán, or Ghuṣn, includes Shoghi Effendi and the other male descendants of Bahá’u’lláh.

76.11 If, at any time, male descendants of Bahá’u’lláh appear who are faithful to the Covenant, it would nevertheless not be possible for any of them to occupy the office of Guardian, for, as already explained, in the absence of appointment by Shoghi Effendi, they cannot claim the station of Guardianship and there is no way for one to be named to it by an act of the House of Justice.

* * *

76.12 Another query concerns the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. Specifically, the question has been asked whether the functioning of an “officially recognized” International Bahá’í Court in the Holy Land, mentioned by Shoghi Effendi, was an essential preliminary step in the evolution of the Universal House of Justice.

76.13 As you are no doubt aware, Shoghi Effendi explained that “‘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.” The Master described the requirements necessary for its formation, which did not include the establishment of a religious court:

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

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

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

76.14 Over the thirty-six years of his ministry, as he guided the Bahá’í world, striving to lay the foundations of the Administrative Order, Shoghi Effendi outlined specific developmental steps to be taken, which were intended to lead to the eventual establishment of the Universal House of Justice. The accomplishment of some depended largely on the exertions of the believers themselves—an increase in the number of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, the appointment of the International Bahá’í Council and its evolution into an elected body. Others, however, were subject to the forces operating in society and, no matter what the efforts made by the Bahá’í community, could not be accomplished.

76.15 In 1929, for instance, the Guardian stated, “given favorable circumstances, under which the Bahá’ís of Persia and of the adjoining countries under Soviet rule may be enabled to elect their national representatives ... the only remaining obstacle in the way of the definite formation of the International House of Justice will have been removed.” Later, following the

expulsion of Bahá'ís from Russia by the authorities, a letter written on his behalf explained, "At the time he referred to Russia there were Bahá'ís there, now the Community has practically ceased to exist; therefore the formation of the International House of Justice cannot depend on a Russian National Spiritual Assembly."

76.16 In the same way, goals were specified by Shoghi Effendi for the establishment of Bahá'í courts, including national courts in certain countries in Asia and, as a step in the development of the International Bahá'í Council, the precursor to the Universal House of Justice, a court in the Holy Land. Recognition by the Egyptian government of the National Spiritual Assembly as an independent Bahá'í court was sought as far back as 1929. Over time, changing conditions rendered the formation of such religious courts impossible. As the Hands of the Cause of God commented in 1959 in calling for the election of the International Bahá'í Council and the eventual establishment of the House of Justice,

We wish to assure the believers that every effort will be made to establish a Bahá'í Court in the Holy Land prior to the date set for this election. We should however bear in mind that the Guardian himself clearly indicated this goal, due to the strong trend towards the secularization of Religious Courts in this part of the world, might not be achieved.

* * *

76.17 Yet another question that has been raised concerns the discharge by the Universal House of Justice of certain functions previously performed by the Guardian. With regard to Ḥuqúqu'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that "Disposition of the Ḥuqúq, wholly or partly, is permissible, but this should be done by permission of the authority in the Cause to whom all must turn." Likewise, the expulsion of Covenant-breakers is an obligation exercised by the Head of the Faith in the context of the duty to protect the Cause from those who would seek to undermine its unity. Shoghi Effendi, it is well known, was obliged to expel Covenant-breakers from the Faith at different points throughout his ministry, both before and after the appointment of the Hands of the Cause of God. This responsibility now falls on the Universal House of Justice, as the centre of authority to whom all must turn. The current procedures followed in this respect are outlined in the statement "The Institution of the Counsellors".

76.18 In this connection it should be noted that after the passing of Shoghi Effendi, although overwhelmed with grief, the Bahá'í world maintained its unity during the tenuous period between his ministry and the election of the Universal House of Justice. The sole challenge to its integrity appeared some two years after his death when Charles Mason Remey, who was at that time one of the Hands of the Cause, laid claim to the Guardianship. As you are aware, Remey asserted that his appointment in 1951 as president of the nascent International Bahá'í Council meant that he should automatically assume the position of head of the Universal House of Justice and was, therefore, the second Guardian.

76.19 The absurdity of Remey's claim is obvious and requires little elaboration. In 1957, he was among the Hands of the Cause who gathered in the Holy Land to consider what course of action should be taken following the unexpected passing of the Guardian. He personally affirmed that Shoghi Effendi had appointed no successor, signing a document issued unanimously by the Hands to this effect. As signatory to yet another such document, he agreed that the entire body of the Hands of the Cause would determine when and how the evolution of the International Bahá'í Council would culminate in the election of the House of Justice. For

two years, as one of the nine Hands designated to serve in the Holy Land, he participated in the consultations that guided the development of the Bahá'í community. Then, without notice or discussion with his fellow Hands, he claimed the station of Guardianship, lacking explicit appointment by Shoghi Effendi as specified in the Will and Testament and in direct violation of the command of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that no one could make such a claim. Exercising the authority conferred on them in accordance with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will, the Hands of the Cause expelled him from the Faith as a Covenant-breaker.

* * *

76.20 In matters related to the Covenant, the friends must be firm and steadfast; they should be wary, lest the arguments put forward by those who sow seeds of doubt become the cause for confusion or lead to disputation and disunity. Should questions arise that cannot be resolved, they should be placed immediately before the Universal House of Justice. The friends must be especially careful to avoid being enticed by the whisperings of the remnants of the Covenant-breakers and their supporters, who seek to shake the believers' faith. Whereas in the past the violators of the Covenant sought to undermine the authority of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, today they challenge the Universal House of Justice. Of particular concern are those who, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá warns, "assert their firmness and steadfastness in the Covenant but when they come across responsive ears they secretly sow the seeds of suspicion."

76.21 Remey's small band of associates, bedevilled by half a century of infighting among competing factions, have had negligible effect on the progress of the Faith. The flurry caused by their actions does nothing more than shake a few lifeless twigs and leaves from the tree of the Cause. Those who are naïve, those who are not deepened in the Teachings or not firm in the Covenant, those who are controlled by their egos and lust for leadership can be misled and fall away. The friends are urged to protect themselves and their community by adhering strictly to the emphatic exhortations repeated throughout the Sacred Texts. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá states,

Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth malice and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant. By this House is meant that Universal House of Justice which is to be elected from all countries, that is from those parts in the East and West where the loved ones are to be found, after the manner of the customary elections in Western countries such as those of England....

And now, one of the greatest and most fundamental principles of the Cause of God is to shun and avoid entirely the Covenant-breakers, for they will utterly destroy the Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past. O friends! It behooveth you to call to mind with tenderness the trials of His Holiness, the Exalted One, and show your fidelity to the Ever-Blest Beauty. The utmost endeavour must be exerted lest all these woes, trials and afflictions, all this pure and sacred blood that hath been shed so profusely in the Path of God, may prove to be in vain....

O ye beloved of the Lord! Strive with all your heart to shield the Cause of God from the onslaught of the insincere, for souls such as these cause the straight to become crooked and all benevolent efforts to produce contrary results.

76.22 The believers in the Cradle of the Faith, who have withstood for more than a century the onslaught of government and clergy, who triumphed over the perils posed by the rebellions of Azal and Muḥammad-‘Alí, who severed themselves from those who opposed Shoghi Effendi, will easily discount the spurious and ridiculous arguments of those few individuals who vie among themselves to exploit Remy’s deviation as a pretext for attracting a handful of personal followers. Be assured of our supplications at the Holy Threshold on behalf of the beloved friends everywhere in that sacred land.

(From a message dated 18 February 2008 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Friends in Iran)

77.1 In general, the House of Justice wishes to preserve the widest possible latitude for the friends to explore the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh and to share their individual understanding of the Teachings. Yet it must be remembered that, with regard to deductions drawn from the Texts, the Master clearly states:

... the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the conclusions and endorsements of the body of the House of Justice whose members are elected by and known to the worldwide Bahá’í community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of individual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and result in schism, division, and dispersion. The oneness of the Word would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken.

77.2 The Universal House of Justice does not intend at this time to elaborate further on previous explanations given of its duties and powers. That the House of Justice itself does not find it necessary to do so should alert the friends as to the unwisdom of their attempting to define so precisely its sphere of action. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that, while there are explicit passages in the authoritative texts that make reference to the infallibility of the House of Justice in the enactment of legislation, the argument that it is free from error only in this respect is untenable. Surely, the many emphatic statements found in the Writings, such as the following excerpt from the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, should suffice to dismiss any claims of this kind:

The sacred and youthful branch, the guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God....

77.3 Apart from the question of infallibility, there is the matter of authority. A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states: “It is not for individual believers to limit the sphere of the

Guardian's authority, or to judge when they have to obey the Guardian and when they are free to reject his judgement. Such an attitude would evidently lead to confusion and to schism." In regard to the Universal House of Justice, the same understanding applies.

77.4 Infallibility is a profound spiritual concept inherent in the Bahá'í Writings. In meditating upon the relevant passages, the believers will naturally reach their own understanding of the subject. Individual opinions, however, should not be imposed on others, nor so promoted as to crystallize into doctrines not found in the explicit Text. When exchanging views about the Universal House of Justice—the body to which all things must be referred—the friends should exercise care lest they go to extremes, by either diminishing its station or assigning to it exaggerated attributes. What better admonition to heed in a matter of this nature than that given by the beloved Master, when some believers fell into disagreement about His own station:

These discussions will yield no result or benefit: we must set all such debates and controversies entirely aside—nay, we must consign them to oblivion and arise to accomplish that which is enjoined and required in this Day. These debates are mere words bereft of inner meaning; they are mere illusions and not reality.

That which is true and real is this: that we become united and agreed in our purpose and arise to flood this darksome world with light, to banish enmity and foreignness from among the children of men, to perfume and revive the world with the sanctified breezes of the character and conduct of the Abhá Beauty, to cast the light of divine guidance upon East and West, to raise the tabernacle of the love of God and gather all people under its sheltering shadow, to confer peace and composure upon every soul beneath the shade of the blessed Tree, to show forth such love as to astonish the enemy, to turn ravenous and bloodthirsty wolves into the gazelles of the meadows of the love of God, to cause the oppressor to taste the sweet savour of meekness, to teach them that kill the submission and acquiescence of those that suffer themselves to be killed, to spread abroad the verses of the one true God, to extol the virtues and perfections of the all-glorious Lord, to raise to the highest heaven the cry of "O Thou the Glory of Glories!", and to cause the call of "The earth will shine with the light of her Lord!"⁹ to reach the ears of the denizens of His Kingdom.

77.5 The House of Justice appeals to the friends not to become embroiled in the kind of fruitless theological discussions that caused conflict and contention in past dispensations, lest they lose sight of their responsibility to promulgate the oneness of humanity and of the role of the Covenant established by Bahá'u'lláh in uniting minds, hearts, and souls.

(From a letter dated 7 April 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the Friends in Iran)

78.1 It is heartening to note that the friends are approaching the study of the messages of the Universal House of Justice related to the Plan with such diligence. The level of discussion generated as they strive to put into practice the guidance received, and to learn from experience, is impressive. We cannot help noticing, however, that achievements tend to be more enduring in those regions where the friends strive to understand the totality of the vision conveyed in the messages, while difficulties often arise when phrases and sentences are taken out of context and

⁹ Qur'án 39:69.

viewed as isolated fragments. The institutions and agencies of the Faith should help the believers to analyse but not reduce, to ponder meaning but not dwell on words, to identify distinct areas of action but not compartmentalize. We realize that this is no small task. Society speaks more and more in slogans. We hope that the habits the friends are forming in study circles to work with full and complex thoughts and to achieve understanding will be extended to various spheres of activity.

(From a message dated 28 December 2010 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

79.1 As has become progressively apparent, the organic process of growth outlined by the House of Justice in recent Plans is reaching higher levels of complexity, especially in those clusters where the number of active participants has increased significantly. The transformation of communities under way across the globe in cluster after cluster, while still in its early stages, touches upon the most fundamental of social and cultural forces, currents, and aspirations. This growth process involves a coherent and systematic pattern of activity focused upon community building and includes the multiplication of study circles and institute campaigns, the education of children, the spiritual empowerment of junior youth, individual and collective teaching efforts, visits to the homes of believers and their friends, a cultivation of collective devotional life, social action, greater involvement in the discourses of society, as well as many other elements that enhance the capacity of individuals, institutions, and the community—the three protagonists of the Plan. Pivotal to this pattern of activity is the development of human resources through the training institute, with a sequence of courses that reinforce in the participants a posture of learning by which understanding continues to expand as they carry out acts of service of increasing complexity. This educational process nurtures a thirst for the Word of God, not only fostering an enduring habit of study and reflection on that wellspring of all progress but also enabling the friends to apply the Teachings in their own lives and in the burgeoning life of the community. In its communications with the Bahá'í world, the House of Justice has described and elucidated these unfolding developments, and the Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, as well as regional and local institutions, have laboured shoulder to shoulder with the believers who are striving to understand and respond to this guidance. As the friends, including those who do not wish to study the courses of the institute, embrace the guidance of the House of Justice in its entirety and, with love and a true Bahá'í spirit, rally around their institutions, they find that questions they may have are resolved.

(From a letter dated 18 January 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

80.1 As you are no doubt aware, the Bahá'í teachings stress both the immutability of Bahá'u'lláh's laws and the flexibility associated with their application. Bahá'u'lláh has given the House of Justice the responsibility to supplement and apply His laws, and He states that its Ministers "may act according to the needs and requirements of the time."

(From a letter dated 1 December 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

81.1 In striving to overcome their difficulties and create new patterns of action, the friends must, whether as individuals or members of institutions, be mindful of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's admonition about the importance of love and fellowship and His assurance that "it is in unity

the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right". The system that Bahá'u'lláh has brought into the world will take decades and centuries to unfold, attaining ever-increasing levels of complexity, effectiveness, and influence. Shoghi Effendi explained that "we must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications." He also warned that "the promised glories of the Sovereignty which the Bahá'í teachings foreshadow, can be revealed only in the fullness of time".

(From a letter dated 17 February 2014 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

- 82.1 Bahá'í administration is, of course, an integral part of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Accordingly, then, it is the continuing task of His loved ones to deepen their appreciation of the principles on which it is founded and faithfully observe them in their actions. The institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, the Guardian asserts, act as channels through which the promised blessings of Bahá'u'lláh may flow. They serve "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" and function "not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order".

(From a letter dated 9 July 2015 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

- 83.1 The House of Justice has asked us to assure you that it appreciates the deep concern you have about its membership being confined to men as well as your commitment to the principle of the equality of the sexes. However, as the House of Justice has previously explained, "the important point for Bahá'ís to remember is that in the face of the categorical pronouncements in Bahá'í Scripture establishing the equality of men and women, the ineligibility of women for membership of the Universal House of Justice does not constitute evidence of the superiority of men over women." Regarding the membership of the Universal House of Justice, the beloved Guardian explained in a letter dated 14 December 1940 written on his behalf: "From the fact that there is no equality of functions between the sexes one should not, however, infer that either sex is inherently superior or inferior to the other, or that they are unequal in their rights." That we cannot currently understand the wisdom of this limitation—a wisdom that 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphatically promised would eventually become clear—does not mean that the wisdom does not exist or will not eventually become known.

- 83.2 Having accepted the claim of Bahá'u'lláh to be a Manifestation of God and His Teachings to be statements of divine truth, believers may rest assured that the stipulation in the Writings regarding the membership of the Universal House of Justice is not at variance with the principle of the equality of men and women that those same Writings proclaim. As Shoghi Effendi has stated in this connection..., "The Bahá'ís should accept this statement of the Master in a spirit of deep faith, confident that there is a divine guidance and wisdom behind it which will be gradually unfolded to the eyes of the world."¹⁰

(From a letter dated 16 February 2016 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

¹⁰ See extract 15.

84.1 A careful reading of the Bahá'í writings and the guidance of the House of Justice can clarify how two matters that appear to be in tension with one another are coherent once the concepts and principles that connect them are understood. Particular circumstances in a locality, timeliness, and the periodic need for focus also have a bearing on such issues.

(From a letter dated 27 April 2017 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

85.1 Just as the Guardian has received the assurance of divine guidance and protection in fulfilling his responsibilities, so too the Universal House of Justice is provided this assurance in the Sacred Text for the discharge of its responsibilities. It is this guidance, rather than any capacity for authoritative interpretation, that ensures the conformity of its decisions with the meaning of the Sacred Text....

85.2 ... to fulfil such divinely appointed responsibilities and to reach its divinely guided conclusions on what Bahá'ís must do when the meaning of the Book is not explicit, the Universal House of Justice studies carefully and exhaustively both the Sacred Texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi on a subject and then comes to a determination.

(From a letter dated 19 March 2018 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

86.1 Your letter inquiring about certain issues being discussed among the friends pertaining to the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice was received....

86.2 As you are surely aware, there are many statements in the Bahá'í writings that set out in broad and emphatic terms the assurance of divine guidance and protection provided to the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice and describe conferred infallibility in these terms. Among these statements are the following from 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

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 (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God....

* * *

Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself.

* * *

Should that House of Justice decide, either unanimously or by a majority, upon a matter that is not explicitly recorded in the Book, that decision and command will

be guarded from error. Now, the members of the House of Justice are not essentially infallible as individuals, but the body of the House of Justice is under the protection and unerring guidance of God: This is called conferred infallibility.

* * *

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

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

Moreover, Shoghi Effendi states:

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.

86.3 Beyond these and other such quotations, a number of passages from the writings describe the range of responsibilities invested in the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. First, it is evident that each has a separate and distinct sphere. As Shoghi Effendi explains in "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh", "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." Thus, the Universal House of Justice does not engage in interpretation of the Text, and the Guardian did not enact legislation, although in some instances, as Head of the Faith, he made certain decisions to guide the actions of the friends until such time as the Universal House of Justice would be established.

86.4 While interpretation and legislation are the exclusive spheres, respectively, of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, these functions in no way represent the full extent of their powers and responsibilities as set forth in the writings. For example, about these two institutions Shoghi Effendi writes: “Their common, their fundamental object is to insure 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, coördinate its activities, promote its interests, execute its laws and defend its subsidiary institutions.” Further, concerning the Universal House of Justice, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states in His Will and Testament, “By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved....” And He explains that it is incumbent upon the Universal House of Justice to deliberate upon “all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book.”

86.5 In response to questions about the scope of the Guardian’s infallibility, a letter written on his behalf explains: “The infallibility of the Guardian is confined to matters which are related strictly to the Cause and interpretation of the teachings; he is not an infallible authority on other subjects, such as economics, science, etc.” Another such letter states: “The Guardian’s infallibility covers interpretation of the revealed word, and its application. Likewise any instructions he may issue having to do with the protection of the Faith, or its well-being, must be closely obeyed, as he is infallible in the protection of the Faith. He is assured the guidance of both Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb, as the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá clearly reveals.” Thus, while there were indeed limits to his conferred infallibility, it was not confined merely to authoritative interpretation of the Bahá’í Writings but extended to the range of his responsibilities as Guardian and Head of the Faith. “It is not for individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guardian’s authority, or to judge when they have to obey the Guardian and when they are free to reject his judgement. Such an attitude would evidently lead to confusion and to schism”, yet another letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states. These passages about the Guardian’s conferred infallibility and authority can also serve to assist believers in understanding the scope of the conferred infallibility and authority of the Universal House of Justice.

86.6 Finally, you ask whether it is possible to enact laws within the framework of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh without a thorough and accurate understanding of the meaning of each one of the Writings. In the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, there is no reference to the nature and extent of the information to which the Universal House of Justice should have access when making its decisions. The House of Justice itself determines what information it needs to reach a decision. Before legislating or deciding upon any vital matter, it studies carefully and exhaustively both the Sacred Texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi on the subject. It also consults the views of experts as needed. The concept of conferred infallibility of the Universal House of Justice does not rest upon the power of authoritative interpretation nor access to perfect knowledge and understanding—it is an unqualified assurance of divine guidance and protection from error as described in the Bahá’í writings.

86.7 A discussion on the concept of conferred infallibility that centers on the abundant guidance set forth in the Bahá’í writings and from the Universal House of Justice can contribute to firmness and faith. But the friends cannot be naïve or vacillate when it comes to a matter so fundamental to the protection of the Cause and the integrity of the teachings as the provisions of the Covenant. Those who oppose the Faith and regrettably, in a few instances, believers who wish to advance their own personal views may use such discussions as an opportunity to

weaken the confidence of Bahá'ís in the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. During the ministry of the Guardian, would his lack of omniscience have been grounds for the friends to question his protective action to expel someone from the Faith? Were the provisions of the Ten Year Crusade subject to the preferences of the generality of the friends? Were the temporary administrative measures he enacted, pending the formation of the Universal House of Justice, open to debate among individuals or institutions? Without the assurances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to rely upon a designated and authoritative center, any individual could have insisted upon the correctness of his or her views on any matter, and the Faith would have been mired in endless quarrelling, chaos, and division.

86.8 Thus, perhaps more important for Bahá'ís than a common understanding of the meaning of conferred infallibility is a common understanding of its purpose and the implications for how they should conduct themselves. The Covenant establishes a center to which all Bahá'ís turn, a center which is assured divine guidance and protection, and which ensures the continuity of the divinely-appointed authority that flows from the Source of the Faith, safeguards the unity of its followers, and maintains the integrity and flexibility of its teachings. Shoghi Effendi explains that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have “in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.” This is the guarantee that the purpose of Bahá'u'lláh will ultimately be realized. “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,” Shoghi Effendi explains, “could possibly safeguard the Faith for which they have both so gloriously labored all their lives. Nothing short of this could protect it from the heresies and calumnies with which denominations, peoples, and governments have endeavored, and will, with increasing vigor, endeavor to assail it in future.” In a statement in defence of the Covenant, 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicates:

Hath the Blessed Beauty instituted this Covenant and Testament in order to exact obedience from all, or to bring about disobedience? If the latter is intended, then we have nothing to say; but if obedience and compliance are the goal, then wavering will lead to utter loss, and disobedience and waywardness are grievous error.

Again He states:

Now one must either say that the Blessed Beauty erred and led the people astray, for He directed them to obey someone who ought not to have been obeyed, or else say that the least deviation from the Covenant and the Testament entaileth deprivation from the bounties of Him Who is the Luminary of the world. Of these two alternatives, one must be true; there is no third.

86.9 It is evident that the purpose of the Covenant, the purpose of the divine guidance and protection vouchsafed to the Universal House of Justice, the purpose of the clear and emphatic language in which the assurance of this guidance is given, are all to establish and preserve the unity of the Faith. Without such a Covenant, as in past dispensations, everyone would insist upon the correctness of their own view, the Faith of God would be splintered, and the divine purpose—the unity of humanity—would be impossible to achieve.

86.10 The friends would do well to ponder “this unique, this wondrous System” Bahá’u’lláh has bequeathed to the world. Shoghi Effendi explains: “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”; yet, he assures us: “We can, however, and it is our bounden duty to seek to derive fresh inspiration and added sustenance as we labor for the propagation of His Faith through a clearer apprehension of the truths it enshrines and the principles on which it is based.” To attempt to precisely define the workings of conferred infallibility, to attribute exaggerated powers to the Universal House of Justice such as omniscience or even authoritative interpretation, or to insist that fallible human beings can use their own limited powers of reason to test the validity of divinely guided decisions and determine whether to challenge them would be futile and, ultimately, harmful. Rather, the friends are to strive to understand the guidance provided by the Universal House of Justice and thoughtfully apply it. They are free to share observations, information, or questions with the Universal House of Justice. But they should not allow themselves to be caught up in the divisive practices and intractable disputes that consumed religion in past dispensations. The collective interests of the Faith are fostered through consultation and cooperation, not conflict and contention.

(From a letter dated 18 May 2018 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

87.1 The House of Justice acknowledges your thoughtful and heartfelt comments on the relationship between the principle of the equality of the sexes and the ineligibility of women to serve on the House of Justice. As you are aware, Bahá’u’lláh Himself established the principle of the equality of men and women. Just as He set forth this principle, He also instructed, as confirmed in the authoritative statements of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, that the membership of the House of Justice be confined to men. In your letter, you explore various factors and conclude you cannot accept “the reasons thus far offered”. However, no reason has been offered in the Bahá’í writings, and the House of Justice has not provided one. In the Bahá’í writings, there is only reference to a “wisdom” that “will be gradually unfolded to the eyes of the world”. Of course, that we cannot currently understand the wisdom of the limitation does not mean that the wisdom does not exist or will not eventually become known. Until then, because we as Bahá’ís recognize Bahá’u’lláh as the Manifestation of God for this Day and place our faith in Him as the Divine Physician who will remedy the problem of the inequality of the sexes, we acknowledge the principle that “He doeth whatsoever He willeth”.

(From a letter dated 18 June 2019 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

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