



as the century about which he offered such illuminating and proven analyses draws to a close. The sheer volume and efficiency of his output in any one of his vocations, as exegete, author, translator, administrator, commentator on world trends, master planner, organizer of global undertakings, aesthete, is astounding, but it is the rarity of his inspired insight that lent a singular quality to his varied occupations and that remains as an exceptional and potent legacy.

Shoghi Effendi was born into a politically precarious environment at a time of rising global fermentation. His life encompassed the closing years of Ottoman rule, the entire span of the British Mandate, and virtually a decade of the independent State of Israel--altogether a period marked by social turmoil exacerbated by the upheavals of two world wars. The experience of his own family was as a barometer of the times. Almost half a century before his birth his great-grandfather, Bahá'u'lláh, had been officially banished from His native Persia as a consequence of charges imputed to His leadership role in a new religion; before that, Bahá'u'lláh's Forerunner, the Báb, had been put to death in dramatic circumstances. Bahá'u'lláh's exile took Him to Iraq and Turkey, where, in both countries, He was confined as a prisoner for a number of years. It was during these years that He announced His mission as the bearer of a new revelation from God. Ultimately, Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in Acre, Palestine, arriving there with His family in August 1868. He was released from strict confinement after a few years but remained under detention in that area, where He passed away in 1892. His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who had shared in His Father's exile and imprisonment, succeeded Bahá'u'lláh as head of the Faith and the appointed interpreter and exemplar of His teachings. The firstborn of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's eldest daughter, Shoghi Effendi grew up under the sheltering eye of his beloved grandfather. Except for his sojourns abroad as a student and other occasional travels, this scion of a historic family of Persian exiles lived and worked in the land of his birth.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's death in November 1921 marked the beginning of an unusual career for Shoghi Effendi. Nothing had prepared the Bahá'ís, then scattered among some 35 countries, for the preeminent part he was destined to play in the making of their community--not the fact that he was a member of a family of primary distinction, nor that he had for some time acted as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's secretary in Persian and English. Nor was there any indication of ambition on his part. Consonant with his total dedication to the service of his grandfather, Shoghi Effendi's great aspiration had been to become a perfect English translator of the Bahá'í writings. His letter of 11 June 1920, applying for admission to Oxford University, made this intention clear: "My sole aim," he wrote, "is to perfect my English, to acquire the literary ability to write it well, speak it well and translate correctly and eloquently from Persian and Arabic into English." His innocence of any expectation beyond such aspiration was shattered by the shock he sustained upon learning from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament of his appointment as interpreter and Guardian. He was then only 25 and still a student at Oxford.

His sudden awareness of this new responsibility overwhelmed him, so much so that he absented himself from the Holy Land for some time to collect his strength for the tasks ahead.

#### Shoghi Effendi as Community Builder

The young Guardian began his ministry in the unsettled aftermath of World War I. He was faced with the daunting challenge of rallying the forces and concentrating the efforts of loosely connected groups and isolated individuals who were for the most part unschooled in the details of the beliefs and practices of their new religion. If he were to succeed, he had not only to win their adherence to the fundamentals but, as well, to imbue them with a vision that would penetrate and transcend the gloom of the times. The matrix in which the Guardian must function was set by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, Who declared the oneness of humankind to be the central principle of His Revelation. If Bahá'u'lláh was the author of this world-embracing concept, His immediate successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was the architect of the System that must realize it, and Shoghi Effendi, the latter's successor, would be the builder of the structure that would enable that System to operate.

The Guardian summarizes Bahá'u'lláh's intention in these words:

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.[1]

Shoghi Effendi set about his tasks with unbounded and efficient energy. There was a divine Plan to be pursued. It required the raising up of new institutions, the execution of worldwide teaching programs, the development of local and national components of a world community, the protection of this nascent Faith from attack of its adversaries--all a part of the process of building the new World Order proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. Thus Shoghi Effendi must do more than explain the sacred texts: he must direct and guide his trust through the permutations of individual and social transformation; he must forge a Bahá'í community. His exegetic works were made to serve these essential purposes.

At the outset, Shoghi Effendi devoted paramount attention to building the local and national institutions called for in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. For a community without a clergy, these democratically elected bodies were essential to every other development. Thus in a letter to the Bahá'ís in North America, dated 23 March 1923, he wrote:

And, now that this all-important Work may suffer no neglect, but rather

function vigorously and continuously in every part of the Bahá'í world; that the unity of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh may remain secure and inviolate, it is of the utmost importance that in accordance with the explicit text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, in every locality, be it city or hamlet, where the number of adult (21 years and above) declared believers exceeds nine, a local "Spiritual Assembly" be forthwith established. To it all local matters pertaining to the Cause must be directly and immediately referred for full consultation and decision. The importance, nay the absolute necessity of these local Assemblies is manifest when we realize that in the days to come they will evolve into the local House of Justice, and at present provide the firm foundation on which the structure of the Master's Will is to be reared in future.[2]

In that same letter, he issued a similar call for the formation of National Spiritual Assemblies under which the local ones would function.

In the West, particularly in North America, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit in 1912 had stimulated great interest in the Bahá'í teachings and had drawn many to acceptance of the Faith, these words had a revolutionary effect. A course was now set for the formation of a different kind of community with its own laws and procedures--a community dependent for its existence on voluntary effort and individual initiative. Through successive elaborations of the processes initiated--calling for elections without campaigning and nominations, for consultation as a basis of decision-making, and for the establishment of a fund supported by voluntary contributions for which receipts must be issued--Shoghi Effendi urged and guided the creation of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. It was an effort that changed the character of thought and behavior in the management of the spiritual and practical affairs of a clergyless, religious community. The measures of this transformation continually evolved to levels of complexity with the growth of the community and are initiated anew with every neophyte community, local or national. It is a mark of the dynamism of Shoghi Effendi's stewardship that, despite the disruptions of the Second World War and subsequent regional catastrophes, at the time of his death in 1957, there existed 26 National Spiritual Assemblies and more than one thousand Local Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world.

With the necessary organization in place, he then focused the energies of the Bahá'ís on the systematic expansion and consolidation of their numbers. Sixteen years passed before the North American Bahá'ís, at the urging of their Guardian, embarked in 1937 on a teaching scheme known as the Seven Year Plan. This was the first organized attempt to respond to the series of fourteen letters, "Tablets of the Divine Plan," addressed to the North Americans by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Herein are guidelines for the global expansion of the Faith and also the assignment of special responsibility to the Bahá'ís of that continent for initiating such an undertaking.

The Tablets of the Divine Plan, described by Shoghi Effendi as the charter of teaching, had been penned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá over the period of a year, from March 1916 to March 1917, during the course of the First World War. Because of

conditions at that time only five had been delivered before the end of the war. In a conference known as the “Convention of the Covenant” and held at Hotel McAlpin in New York 26-30 April 1919, all fourteen tablets were displayed and discussed. This marked a historic moment for the North American Bahá’ís, but as the implications of these communications were not yet fully understood, only a few individuals responded, mostly on their own initiative, to the call to travel to other countries and teach the new Faith. It remained for Shoghi Effendi years later to set in place the instruments and to prime the processes that would guarantee a systematic and sustained response.

Through an approach that was typical of his method of evoking action, Shoghi Effendi gradually trained the Bahá’ís to recognize and accept the necessity for such a response. The instrument of his approach was his untiring pen. Through it were conveyed his aptness of timing, his grasp of opportunity, his sense of history, his vision of future possibilities, and his appeal to wellsprings of the believers’ faith and devotion; add to these the force and credibility of his logic, the candor of his argument, and his frequent, genuine commendations of the work of individuals and institutions--all expressed in a language of rhetorical excellencies that engaged the mind and enchanted the heart. He conveyed most of what he had to say in letters but found communicating by cablegram an expeditious means of dealing with the demands of a rapidly developing community. The latter medium suited his purpose in other ways, serving to accentuate the urgency of so many of his messages. He honed his prose to this abbreviated form of communication with extraordinary success, evolving a colorful, elliptical style that lent a sense of surprise, of drama, and of excitement to his announcements, as well as a depth of profundity to a vocabulary intensified by the stripping away of minor elements of speech.

It took a series of letters and cablegrams sent over a period of about two years to bring the North American Bahá’ís to the degree of action hoped for by the Guardian. The beginning and fruition of that extended effort can be gleaned from the following excerpts of some of these messages:

April 29, 1935. “APPEAL ASSEMBLED DELEGATES AND INCOMING NATIONAL ASSEMBLY EARNESTLY DELIBERATE MEASURES REQUIRED STIMULATE ALL LOCAL COMMUNITIES GROUPS TO LEND IMMEDIATE UNPRECEDENTED IMPETUS TEACHING ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT STATES CANADA. SUSTAINED CONCENTRATION THIS PARAMOUNT ISSUE CAN ALONE REVEAL POTENTIALITIES BELOVED TEMPLE AND ENABLE SUPERB SELF-SACRIFICE ASSOCIATED WITH IT YIELD ITS FAIREST FRUIT.” A vital element in the organization of the Bahá’í community is the National Convention held annually at which delegates elected by the Bahá’ís throughout a country gather for two essential purposes: to elect the National Spiritual Assembly and to offer advice and recommendations to that body through a process of consultation among the delegates and between them and the outgoing and incoming members of the Assembly. Shoghi Effendi used such occasions to guide the community. In this instance, the Bahá’ís of Canada and the United States, who functioned under a combined National Spiritual Assembly at that time, were engaged in individual teaching activities in parts of these countries and had at the same time been

struggling to build the first Bahá'í House of Worship of the Western hemisphere, near Chicago.

October 26, 1935. The Guardian reinforces his previous message to which there has not been an adequate response, by asserting: "A NEW HOUR HAS STRUCK IN HISTORY OUR BELOVED CAUSE CALLING FOR NATION-WIDE, SYSTEMATIC, SUSTAINED EFFORT IN TEACHING FIELD ENABLING THEREBY THESE FORCES TO BE DIRECTED INTO SUCH CHANNELS AS SHALL REDOUND TO GLORY OF OUR FAITH AND HONOR OF ITS INSTITUTIONS."

January 10, 1936. In an amplification of the previous messages that takes cognizance of the ominous state of world conditions, he writes: "This new stage in the gradual unfoldment of the Formative Period of our Faith into which we have just entered--the phase of concentrated teaching activity--synchronizes with a period of deepening gloom, of universal impotence, of ever-increasing destitution and widespread disillusionment in the fortunes of a declining age." Furthermore, in indicating the state of readiness of the elected Bahá'í institutions, he reasons, "Now that the administrative Organs of a firmly-established Faith are vigorously and harmoniously functioning, and now that the Symbol [i.e., the House of Worship in the United States] of its invincible might is lending unprecedented impetus to its spread, an effort unexampled in its scope and sustained vitality is urgently required so that the moving spirit of its Founder may permeate and transform the lives of the countless multitudes that hunger for its teachings."

May 1, 1936. His cabled appeal to the next National Convention, calling attention to a historic moment, sets the sights of the delegates on 1944, the centenary of their religion: "FIRST CENTURY Bahá'í ERA DRAWING TO A CLOSE. HUMANITY ENTERING OUTER FRINGES MOST PERILOUS STAGE ITS EXISTENCE. OPPORTUNITIES PRESENT HOUR UNIMAGINABLY PRECIOUS. WOULD TO GOD EVERY STATE WITHIN AMERICAN REPUBLIC AND EVERY REPUBLIC IN AMERICAN CONTINENT MIGHT ERE TERMINATION THIS GLORIOUS CENTURY EMBRACE LIGHT FAITH Bahá'u'lláh AND ESTABLISH STRUCTURAL BASIS OF HIS WORLD ORDER." At this convention, together with decisions related to the ongoing construction of the House of Worship, a campaign of teaching is definitely adopted, but its focus is primarily on the home front.

May 30, 1936. He reiterates in a letter his original call for action on a broadened scale: "A systematic, carefully conceived, and well-established plan should be devised, vigorously pursued and continuously extended.... Its supreme immediate objective should be the permanent establishment of at least one center in every state of the American Republic and in every Republic of the American continent not yet enlisted under the banner of His Faith. Its ramifications should gradually be extended to the European continent...." He is more specific and more elaborate here. Through successive messages up until now he is attempting to increase the North Americans' apprehension of the global magnitude of their spiritual obligation to spread the Bahá'í teachings. Having previously suggested a time frame for the hoped-for plan by mentioning the forthcoming Bahá'í centennial, he registers a heightened

feeling of urgency: “The field is immense, the task gigantic, the privilege immeasurably precious. Time is short, and the obligation sacred, paramount and urgent.”

November 14, 1936. ”The promulgation of the Divine Plan, unveiled by our departed Master [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] in the darkest days of one of the severest ordeals which humanity has ever experienced, is the Key which Providence has placed in the hands of the American believers whereby to unlock the doors leading them to fulfill their unimaginably glorious Destiny.” Here is a reminder that Shoghi Effendi’s repeated calls for a far-reaching teaching plan are based on the charter addressed to them by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as far back as the time of the First World War.

March 22, 1937. In yet another letter, he persists in urging on the North American Bahá’ís: “The progress of the teaching campaign is most remarkable and reassuring. The uninterrupted prosecution of this holy enterprise and its extension to the South American continent and the islands of the Pacific will no doubt attract unimaginable blessings and must entail far-reaching consequences. In the course of this year, when the American believers are commemorating the 25th anniversary of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit to America, a mighty impetus should be lent to this campaign which you have so splendidly initiated.”

May 1, 1937. It is the time for the National Convention again. Shoghi Effendi’s cablegram now brings matters to a decisive point: “ADVISE PROLONGATION CONVENTION SESSIONS ENABLE DELEGATES CONSULT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FORMULATE FEASIBLE SEVEN YEAR PLAN....” The impact of this message on the Convention is electrifying. A sense of mission galvanizes the consultations and a Plan is born.

The Guardian could and did issue directives as occasions demanded. But he preferred to see the Bahá’ís take action on the basis of initiative induced by internalized knowledge of the Bahá’í teachings and of consultation among themselves. The foregoing excerpts from his messages show how through an alternation of letters and cablegrams, Shoghi Effendi persevered patiently and persistently in instructing, appealing to, and nudging the Bahá’ís to take actions that would form a pattern of their functioning. He also had the practice of expatiating on important actions once they had been set in motion, so as to fix that pattern, and so that in the process of carrying out a task or function the believers could adequately appreciate the significance of what they were doing. And so it was in the case of the implementation of the Seven Year Plan. A year and a half after its adoption, Shoghi Effendi penned one of the lengthiest letters of his ministry, which was published as a book entitled *The Advent of Divine Justice*. In it he amplified the meaning of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets of the Divine Plan, producing a seminal work of interpretation and practical advice that galvanized efforts during the Seven Year Plan. That letter continues to be a major source of inspiration and guidance for Bahá’ís.

That first teaching plan encompassed the Western Hemisphere, operating for the most part during World War II. It was launched at a time when there were about sixty-five Local Spiritual Assemblies in the United States and Canada. Three objectives were specified: 1) opening all unopened provinces of Canada and states of the United States to the Faith by establishing at least one Local Spiritual Assembly in each of them; 2) taking the Faith to other countries in the hemisphere; and 3) completing the exterior ornamentation of the House of Worship, which at that time was being built in Wilmette, to the north of Chicago. By the end, April 1944, all objectives had been achieved, and this Plan set the pattern for more extensive teaching and consolidation programs. A second Seven Year Plan was launched by the North American Bahá'ís in April 1946, which, together with plans of shorter duration undertaken by national communities elsewhere, ensured the penetration of the Faith into countries on other continents.

This second enterprise preceded the ambitious Ten Year International Teaching Plan initiated by Shoghi Effendi in 1953, at which time there were 12 National Spiritual Assemblies and 250 Local Spiritual Assemblies in the world. He died at the midpoint of the latter Plan in 1957 when the Faith had already been established in 200 countries and dependencies and the numbers of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies had increased to 26 and more than 1,000, respectively. The execution of that Plan involved the dispatch to territories all over the globe of large numbers of Bahá'í teachers, known as pioneers, the stories of whose exploits chronicle an astonishing record of human adventure and endurance worthy of the acts of the apostles of Jesus Christ, but magnified manyfold. That Shoghi Effendi was able to inspire such a movement of scores of volunteers who were unschooled in missionary work, and whose sole qualification was their profound devotion to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, is an impressive index of the dynamism of his Guardianship. By the end of the Ten Year Plan in April 1963, the centennial anniversary of the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's mission in Baghdad, His Faith had actually become a world religion: its reach had spread to virtually every country except those under the direct influence of communism. At that time, too, a major expectation of the Bahá'ís was fulfilled: the Universal House of Justice, the international governing institution of the Faith which it was one of the main objectives of Shoghi Effendi to establish, was brought into existence at the first International Bahá'í Convention, through an election in which all members of the then 56 National Spiritual Assemblies participated. At the writing of this article, the number of these Assemblies stands at 174.

#### Shoghi Effendi as Interpreter

As indicated in the above-cited examples of his calls for the formation of Bahá'í elected institutions and for the adoption of an extensive teaching plan, Shoghi Effendi's interpretations were largely oriented to action. There was a synthesis between instruction and interpretation: in advising the community to form Spiritual Assemblies, he asserted the practical meaning of texts in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; in calling for a systematic plan of expansion, he breathed life into the Tablets

of the Divine Plan. The timing of such developments was another matter, falling within the discretion of his authority as appointed guide. To a great extent his interpretations were responses to the expressed or demonstrated need of the community. He seemed completely to avoid gratuitous random interpretations of the sacred texts; the questions and needs of the community outlined the course and output of his exegesis. In a letter written on 12 May 1925, for example, he responded to communications dated 4 and 18 April 1925 from the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada that prompted him to explain further the manner of election for National Spiritual Assemblies:

Regarding the method to be adopted for the election of the National Spiritual Assemblies, it is clear that the text of the Beloved's Testament gives us no indication as to the manner in which these Assemblies are to be elected. In one of His earliest Tablets, however, addressed to a friend in Persia, the following is expressly recorded: "At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme Baytu'l-'Adl (Universal House of Justice)."

These words clearly indicate that a three-stage election has been provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the formation of the International House of Justice, and as it is explicitly provided in His Will and Testament that the "Secondary House of Justice (i.e., National Assemblies) must elect the members of the Universal One," it is obvious that the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies will have to be indirectly elected by the body of the believers in their respective provinces. In view of these complementary instructions the principle, set forth in my letter of March 12th, 1923, has been established requiring the believers (the beloved of God) in every country to elect a certain number of delegates who, in turn, will elect their national representatives (Secondary House of Justice or National Spiritual Assembly) whose sacred obligation and privilege will be to elect in time God's Universal House of Justice.[3]

Here then is a glimpse of the progressive stages of exegesis as they relate to the growth and actions of the community. It is thus possible to trace and gauge the development of the Bahá'í community by reading Shoghi Effendi's writings chronologically. This possibility is increased by the fact that anniversaries and activity reports provided occasions for outpourings from his interpretative pen. The opening statements of two letters are illustrative of the effects of these stimuli on the Guardian's work:

April 21, 1933. "Fellow-laborers in the Divine Vineyard: On the 23rd of May of this auspicious year the Bahá'í world will celebrate the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. We, who at this hour find ourselves standing on the threshold of the last decade of the first century of the Bahá'í era, might well pause to reflect upon the mysterious dispensations of so august, so momentous a Revelation." This is the introduction to a letter addressed "To the beloved of God and the handmaids of the Merciful throughout the West," an exegetic work of a significance that

makes it indispensable to understanding the nature and purpose of the Central Figures of the Faith, the meaning of the Covenant established by Bahá'u'lláh to preserve the unity of His Faith, and the Administrative Order, which is the offspring of that Covenant. Among its unique contents is a penetrating exposition of the functions of the twin successors of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, namely the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, and their relationship to each other. This letter has been published under the title "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh." [4]

March 31, 1930. "Dearly-beloved co-workers: Amid the reports that have of late reached the Holy Land, most of which witness to the triumphant march of the Cause, a few seem to betray a certain apprehension regarding the validity of the institutions which stand inseparably associated with the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh." This develops into another indispensable statement on the philosophy of Bahá'í administration addressed to the Bahá'ís in the West and published under the title: "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Some Further Considerations." [5]

These examples of the Guardian's work serve also to underscore another significant fact. The interpretations given by him are not limited to time; they both satisfy and transcend the need of the moment and thus serve the future as well as the present. A relevant comment conveyed to an individual by Shoghi Effendi's secretary on his behalf made it clear that the interpretations of the Guardian cannot be abrogated, "as this would imply not only a lack of guidance but mistakes in making them." A "ruling laid down as a temporary necessity" could, however, be changed at a later time; and the Guardian made certain to identify such rulings. [6]

Shoghi Effendi's thirst for information was insatiable; he sought it relentlessly and classified it meticulously. "I am eagerly awaiting the news of the progress of the activities initiated to promote the teaching work within, and beyond, the confines of the American continent," said one of his cablegrams to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada in a typical request for information. [7] His eagerness in this respect is borne out by what Rúhiyyih Rabbani, his widow, has stated in her biography of him: "he did not always wait until official channels corroborated the arrival of a pioneer at his post or some other piece of good news which had been conveyed to him through a personal letter or by a pilgrim... This practice of his should not, however, mislead us into thinking that he was not extraordinarily thorough. The exactitude with which he compiled statistics, sought out historic facts, worked on every minute detail of his maps and plans was astonishing." [8] Shoghi Effendi also sought news of the world from the various newspapers and magazines to which he subscribed. Rúhiyyih Khanum writes that, "He assiduously kept abreast of the political news and trends of the world, through his Times, The Jerusalem Post and sometimes the well-known European dailies Journal de Genève and the Paris edition of the New York Herald Tribune." [9] Indeed his communications reflected an acute awareness of

world affairs. The news and reports he received were undoubtedly put to various uses, but it is evident that the springs of interpretation were often activated by the influx of information.

The interpretive powers of the Guardian were, it is important to reiterate, not self-arrogated but were conferred upon him through an act of appointment deriving from a source authorized by Bahá'u'lláh, Who Bahá'ís believe to be a Messenger of God come to establish an independent dispensation. It is rare in religious history for an individual to have been assigned such a role by the Founder of a faith. In a statement on the office of interpreter, Bahá'u'lláh had written that the hearts of those who are the “appointed interpreters” of the Word of God are the “repositories of its secrets” and are the “only ones who can comprehend its manifold wisdom.”[10] Thus, in this context, Shoghi Effendi's treatment of every issue the Bahá'ís might bring to his attention regarding their development as individuals and as members of institutions and of communities was inextricably linked to his designated role as “expounder” of the Word.

Interpretation of holy scriptures has, of course, been fundamental to the existence of religious communities throughout the ages. In the past, each community has dealt with the need according to its particular circumstances, but the outcome has been disastrously contrary to the intention of every revealed religion to create a unified community. In the absence of any explicit directives in these texts for the administration of their derivative communities and for interpretation, individuals who assumed the role of interpreter were not able to silence the protests that arose over their offerings. The schismatic consequences have bedeviled society throughout history. It is therefore of crucial importance that the Founder of a religion principally concerned with achieving the unity of the whole human race should have made specific arrangements to secure it against the divisiveness of conflicting, unauthorized interpretations of its sacred laws and ordinances. In the light of past experience, the explicit, authoritative appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and then Shoghi Effendi, as interpreter, stands as a distinguishing feature of the Bahá'í Faith.

It is important, too, to recognize that his function as interpreter was inseparable from his designation as Guardian. The absorption of the two into an indivisible whole ensured both explication of the theory and actualization of the practice of the new Faith. His interpretive work must be seen within the context of his broad responsibilities as the successor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: “For he is, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá,” the Will and Testament states, “the guardian of the Cause of God...and the beloved of the Lord must obey him and turn unto him.”[11]

The Guardian, as experience showed and the specifications in his appointment as interpreter or expounder indicated, not only interpreted specific utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá but also expounded the teachings of the Faith. However, it is noteworthy that the appointed interpreter was not required to interpret everything in Bahá'í scripture. His interpretations

obviously provided for a unity of understanding, a unity without which it would be impossible to establish and ensure the unity of the community. There must, of course, exist a wide latitude for individual understanding of scripture.

“I have no objection to your interpretations and inferences so long as they are represented as your own personal observations and reflections,” Shoghi Effendi wrote in his own hand to an individual, reasoning that, “no one has the right to impose his view or opinion and require his listeners to believe in his particular interpretation of the sacred and prophetic writings.”[12] The Universal House of Justice, in replying to an individual’s inquiry, thus clarified the difference between authoritative interpretation and individual understanding of the Bahá’í sacred writings:

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.[13]

The Guardian was as a telescope with a clear lens through which others might see Bahá’u’lláh’s purpose in bold relief. In a sense, he made himself transparent so that recipients of his explanations and guidance could fix their sight on Bahá’u’lláh as the source of their motivations and on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as their exemplar. In a critical sentence, Shoghi Effendi clarified his attitude in this respect: “The fact that the Guardian has been specifically endowed with such power as he may need to reveal the purport and disclose the implications of the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not necessarily confer upon him a station co-equal with those Whose words he is called upon to interpret.”[14] He was vigilant in avoiding an imposition of his personality that might in any way dim the pre-eminence of the Central Figures of the Faith. Although he met and talked with the many individuals who went to the world center of the Faith as pilgrims, he did not visit Bahá’í communities and did not allow photographs of himself to be circulated. His instruction to the Bahá’ís not to commemorate events associated with his life is an impressive example of the self-effacement that characterize his deferential relationship to these Figures. Besides, the styles of address he used in his letters to the Bahá’ís show clearly his desire not to be seen in a similar light to his grandfather, despite the high rank of his office as Guardian.

“Fellow-laborers in the Divine Vineyard,” “Dearly-beloved co-workers,” “Friends and fellow-promoters of the Faith of God,” “My dear fellow-worker”--all such salutations reflect the genuineness of his humility and the sincerity of his fraternal sentiments, which are even more deeply felt in his complimentary close and signature: “Your true brother, Shoghi.”

The writings of Shoghi Effendi, for the most part, comprise an estimated 36,000 letters and messages addressed to institutions, national and local communities, the world community, and individuals. He conducted a vast correspondence with individuals, who wrote to him freely about their particular concerns regarding the work of the Faith, for personal advice as to how best they might serve it, and for answers to questions about the Bahá'í teachings. This correspondence produced an immense treasury of guidance on a remarkably wide range of subjects. While he had to rely on the assistance of secretaries to convey his responses to letters, he managed almost invariably to append to each reply a postscript in his own hand, signifying that what had been written by his secretary had been reviewed by him and was therefore authentic. Some of the Guardian's letters and messages were voluminous enough to be published separately as books; others have been drawn together in published anthologies. He wrote a stupendous history of the first hundred years of the Bahá'í Faith, published under the title *God Passes By*. The versatility of his narrative style is richly displayed in this work of outstanding literary merit.

In addition to his writings, he provided translations of major works of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Gifted with a masterly grasp of the rich vocabulary and subtle nuances of English and endowed with the power of unerring perception, he turned any such translation into a thing of wonder and delight. One of his most celebrated translations is *The Dawn-Breakers*, Nabil's narrative of the heroic happenings during the days of Bahá'u'lláh's Forerunner, the Báb. It is said by those who know the original Persian text of the narrative that Shoghi Effendi did more than translate it. He performed the rare feat of creating a translation more splendid than the original yet unflinching in fidelity to its source. His English translations became the basis for the translation of Bahá'í literature into many other languages.

The Bahá'ís understand from the literature of interpretation how to believe, how to act, and how to grow spiritually. These in a broad, practical sense mean, among other things: how to manifest justice in their deeds and relationships; how to acquire the virtues of a chaste and holy life; how to eliminate racial and other forms of prejudice; how to translate the inherent equality of men and women into social practice; how to preserve the salutary essentials of politics; how to be loyal citizens without indulging in partisanship; how to cultivate a sense of civic responsibility; how to appreciate diversity in the human family, to be servants to their fellow humans of whatever background, to uplift the victims of oppression; how to develop a world-embracing vision, to appreciate the basic oneness of the revealed religions, and to acquire the virtues of world citizenship.

If, through his writings, Shoghi Effendi has made indelible impressions on minds and hearts, he also has left ineradicable marks on the ground: superb evidences of his aesthetic acuity. His close, personal attention to the physical development of the Bahá'í World Centre, which is situated in the twin cities of Acre and Haifa, actuated his creative energies. The buildings

designed and erected at his initiative, his direct involvement in their interior decoration, the extensive gardens he himself designed to provide a proper ambience for the holiest sites of the Faith, have all ensured a legacy of beauty for generations to come. These efforts, too, were avenues of his interpretation of the will of Bahá'u'lláh, Whose "Tablet of Carmel" and specific indication of the spot on Mount Carmel for the tomb of His Forerunner, the Báb, foreshadowed the establishment of the world headquarters of His Faith. In addition to completing the edifice for the Shrine of the Báb, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá had commenced at the instruction of His Father, Shoghi Effendi traced in the form of an arc the path along which the buildings for the administrative institutions of the Faith would be erected. He himself approved the design for the first of these, the International Archives Building, the construction of which he supervised. It set the style for the other buildings, which even at this writing, are being constructed on that historic mountain. Moreover, in Shoghi Effendi's meticulous attention to the design and beautification of the holy sites there was a means of educating the community; for through it he demonstrated modes by which physical arrangements can reflect reverence for the sacred.

#### The Vision of Shoghi Effendi

Shoghi Effendi's labors revolved around explicating and actualizing the pivotal Bahá'í principle, the oneness of humankind. The global community he raised up is meant to embody that all-embracing code. But this core principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh more than a century ago is not simply the motto of a religious congregation. Its implications extend toward certain ultimate realities. It puts the peoples of earth on notice that human evolution has reached a wholly new stage, the stage of consummation; and it identifies the goal towards which all meaningful effort on the planet must now be oriented.

Early on, Shoghi Effendi dismissed the notion that the unity of mankind could be regarded as a "mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism," or that it should merely be identified with a "reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood." Though its message applies to the individual, he elaborated, it is primarily concerned with the "nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family." The result it seeks, therefore, is a "world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units." [15]

But he is wary of any misgivings as to the animating purpose of this central principle, explaining that,

Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of

excessive centralization are to be avoided. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on the one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity....[16]

Commenting more than sixty-five years ago on the chaotic state of a world oblivious to the remedial possibilities of this principle, Shoghi Effendi exclaimed: "How pathetic indeed are the efforts of those leaders of human institutions who, in utter disregard of the spirit of the age, are striving to adjust national processes, suited to the ancient days of self-contained nations, to an age which must either achieve the unity of the world, as adumbrated by Bahá'u'lláh, or perish." [17] In the same vein, he observed, "No scheme which the calculations of the highest statesmanship may yet devise; no doctrine which the most distinguished exponents of economic theory may hope to advance; no principle which the most ardent of moralists may strive to inculcate, can provide, in the last resort, adequate foundations upon which the future of a distracted world can be built." [18] Elaborating further, he continued:

No appeal for mutual tolerance which the worldly-wise might raise, however compelling and insistent, can calm its passions or help restore its vigor. Nor would any general scheme of mere organized international cooperation, in whatever sphere of human activity, however ingenious in conception, or extensive in scope, succeed in removing the root cause of the evil that has so rudely upset the equilibrium of present-day society. Not even, I venture to assert, would the very act of devising the machinery required for the political and economic unification of the world--a principle that has been increasingly advocated in recent times--provide in itself the antidote against the poison that is steadily undermining the vigor of organized peoples and nations. [19]

His thought then concluded emphatically: "It is towards this goal--the goal of a new World Order, Divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, equitable in principle, challenging in its features--that a harassed humanity must strive." [20]

In the years since the Guardian penned those lines, the concept of globalization has seized the imagination and propelled the efforts of nations to deal with one another increasingly freely, at least at the level of trade and finance. Advances in communications technology have accelerated this trend. Indeed, the entire world is involved in the implied processes of the unifying principle at the very heart of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, whereas attainment to a united world seemed exceedingly remote at the time of His appearance. Ambitious nations were then occupied with competing with one another in empire building while the majority of human beings seemed fit only for the role of oppressed minorities. But since then a sudden change has

occurred in the social and political character of the world's peoples. The astonishing speed with which new nations have been born, especially since World War II, and the swiftness, indeed the sense of inevitability, with which the idea of globalization is being embraced are for the post-modern world an unconscious accession to the irresistible wisdom and timeliness of Bahá'u'lláh's foresight.

While the perilous conditions of humanity make a compelling case for world unity, the evident, new potentialities of the human race indicate that it is not only necessary but inevitable. Taken together, the unprecedented advances in science, technology, and the arts during this century alone lend substance to the burgeoning of these inherent human powers. It is a burgeoning that Bahá'u'lláh associated with the coming of age of humanity in the new Day He came to usher in. Every created thing, He averred, has been endowed with "all the potentialities it can carry." [21] The many new discoveries of intellectual and natural resources appear to affirm it; and it seems demonstrable, for example, in as basic a material as sand when one considers its use in the manufacture of the computer microchip. In this connection, too, Shoghi Effendi's enumeration of the implications of the oneness of mankind anticipates such developments as the "sharpening and refinement of the human brain" and the "prolongation of human life," [22] about both of which medical scientists have had much to report that is positive. As to communications, Shoghi Effendi in this same context wrote: "A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvelous swiftness and perfect regularity." [23] Perhaps it has yet to be achieved fully, but when he penned this expectation sixty years ago, there was no way of appreciating the prospective cyberworld of the Internet.

An outstanding effect of Shoghi Effendi's writings is the meaning they give to history and the prospect they assign to the future. The future, or, in other words, the destiny of humankind, is the dominant theme of his work, as might well be expected from the fact that the oneness of mankind is as much a goal to be achieved as a principle to be lived. From his treatment of these matters we gather a hitherto unformulated understanding of the past and the present. His vision derives from fundamental propositions in Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. These hold, for example, that God, the Creator of all existence, is an Unknowable Essence, immeasurably exalted above anything that any person can conceive, unapproachably glorious in the loftiness of His own Self. Since this Supreme Being cannot reveal Himself directly to any of His creatures, He makes Himself known to humanity through His Messengers or Manifestations. These Manifestations appear from time to time as the bearers of God's message. As all come from the same Source, Their messages are essentially the same except in certain details that vary to suit the times of Their appearance. Truth is relative to time and conditions, and as the human race evolves, its need for spiritual and social renewal is inevitable. The progress of civilization is linked to the successive appearances of these Suns of Truth, ensuring a progressive revelation of God's purpose for humanity. Human beings have been

created to “carry forward an ever-advancing civilization,”[24] of which the Revelations brought by the Manifestations are the fountainheads. For example, Moses, Zoroaster, Christ, and Muhammad are among the Manifestations of God that inaugurated dispensations during which civilizations were born and flourished.

Against such a background of basic Bahá’í teachings, Shoghi Effendi explains that the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh should not be regarded “as the culmination of a cycle, the final stage in a series of successive, of preliminary and progressive revelations. These, beginning with Adam and ending with the Báb, have paved the way and anticipated with an ever-increasing emphasis the advent of that Day of Days in which He Who is the Promise of All Ages [Bahá’u’lláh] should be made manifest.”[25]

The factor of time looms large in such explanations, taking on unusual, historic dimensions and meanings. We find in Shoghi Effendi’s messages a variety of treatments and contexts. The Bahá’í cycle, he tells us, will last for 5,000 centuries, a far, far longer period than the 6,000-year Adamic cycle. Throughout this vast stretch of time many Manifestations will appear--Bahá’u’lláh states explicitly that the next one will come after at least a thousand years. Shoghi Effendi also shows the dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh as comprising three ages: the Heroic Age, the period from the announcement of the Báb’s mission to the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; the Formative Age, the period in which the Administrative Order brought by Bahá’u’lláh will develop; and the Golden Age, the time when that Order will have been established and unity and peace will give rise to a new civilization functioning in accordance with the laws and ordinances of Bahá’u’lláh. Then again his writings present us with a concept of humanity’s spiritual history divided into ten parts, representing, as he describes it, “the majestic process, set in motion at the dawn of the Adamic cycle,” which will attain its consummation in the Golden Age of the Bahá’í era.[26]

The contemplation of such perspectives opens the mind to an entirely different appreciation of time and history. We have here access to a new paradigm that enables us to see history not simply as a sequence of haphazard events and potentially deadly conditions leading to the ultimate extinction of all civilization. We are offered instead an assurance of renewal in the continuity of an intelligent evolution of human society with all its inevitable snares and pitfalls. A future is possible. The awareness of an ever-advancing flow of history provides the basis for a fresh understanding of progress, decline, and decadence, which are inherent in the evolutionary processes of life in this world.

The relevance of such conceptions of time and history is underscored by Shoghi Effendi’s projection, as follows, of a mind-stretching exposition of the world-shaping prospects of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation:

The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of

nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of age of the entire human race. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture--all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Era--should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop.[27]

In the context of the goal of world unity, the twentieth century must be viewed as a critical part of a period of transition to a wholly new state of society, a period in which the ground is being laid for a coming Golden Age for the entire planet. The tumultuous dynamics of this transition are being played out through a twofold process, "each tending, in its own way and with an accelerated momentum," Shoghi Effendi writes, "to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of the planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive." [28] The integrating process itself comprises two parts which though basically related are outwardly separate, both leading to the same bright prospect: world peace. One is to lead to a preliminary stage, the other is to consummate the peace in which a new civilization will emerge and flourish.

Bahá'í literature refers to the two parts of this integrating process as the "Lesser Peace" and the "Most Great Peace." The former is to be achieved through the reaction of political leaders to the painful consequences of a twentieth century world shrunken into a neighborhood by the advances of science but morally and socially deranged by its spiritual disorientation. The actions of world leaders that brought about the League of Nations and subsequently the United Nations offer hints as to the nature of the course to be taken. The latter, the Most Great Peace, is to be attained through the eventual spiritualization of the planet, a much more protracted and profound undertaking involving the inner transformation of the individual inhabitants of the earth through their voluntary acceptance of the principles enunciated by the latest divine Messenger. The progress of the Bahá'ís in spreading their message to millions in all parts of the world who are committed to the way of Bahá'u'lláh is indicative of the possibilities for this ultimate goal.

For Bahá'ís this transition, with all its accompanying horrors and frustrations, is the natural consequence on a global scale of evolving to adulthood from adolescence--a period when the struggle and rebelliousness of youth must, with the onset of maturity, eventually yield to a resolution of conflicting tendencies or else the individual will suffer the recurrent crises

of a disoriented personality. The processes involved in the experience of the individual are reflected in those of a society at the threshold of its coming of age. Humanity as a whole is as yet reluctant to yield to the new situation; hence, it remains ill-prepared to extricate itself from the strife and confusion in which it is enmeshed.

Referring to the revolutionary dimensions of the transition in train, Shoghi Effendi remarked on the improbability of its being achieved through the ordinary processes of diplomacy and education. "We have but to turn our gaze to humanity's blood-stained history to realize that nothing short of intense mental as well as physical agony has been able to precipitate those epoch-making changes that constitute the greatest landmarks in the history of human civilization." [29] The second World War had yet to be fought when he made this observation. He devoted much attention to explaining the paradoxes of the "simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other"[30] --paradoxes that characterize a time of transition when the death pangs of the old order and the birth pangs of the new embrace. The concurrently destructive and constructive manifestations of this historic phenomenon have been conspicuous in the world-shaking happenings of the twentieth century. In an Age of Transition precedent to the new civilization promised by the advent of the Bahá'í dispensation, this century could be seen as the paramount century of that Age. A Bahá'í view of it may well find expression in a Dickensian description: it has been the worst of centuries and the best of centuries.

So much attention has been focused on the ills of a century regarded, in the words of Isaiah Berlin, as "the most terrible century in Western history," that it is not necessary here to enumerate them. Suffice it to acknowledge that its excesses in acts of perversity and destruction have given rise to the gravest crises in the history of the race, and to a state of cynicism, confusion, and pessimism that casts doubt as to the future of civilization. Shoghi Effendi commented extensively on what he described in 1941 as the "triple gods of Nationalism, Racialism and Communism, at whose altars governments and peoples, whether democratic or totalitarian, at peace or at war, of the East or of the West, Christian or Islamic, are, in various forms and in different degrees, now worshiping." [31] His indictment of those who followed such theories and policies was thunderous. These, he said, are "the dark, the false, and crooked doctrines for which any man or people who believes in them, or acts upon them, must, sooner or later, incur the wrath and chastisement of God." [32] He saw this "triple curse that oppresses the soul of mankind in this day" as the offspring of irreligion; he attributed "other evils and vices" to the "weakening of the pillars of religion." Even so, he unfailingly held out a vision of hope.

Search for feasible instruments of global governance is among the stirrings that excite expectations in a world rapidly approaching the end of the twentieth century. The system of World Order adumbrated by Bahá'u'lláh

and amplified by Shoghi Effendi offers a concept of governance unique to human experience. While validating salutary features of established forms of government, it at the same time excludes objectionable aspects without being a mere synthesis of these forms or becoming simply a replica of any one of them. "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order,"[33] is Bahá'u'lláh's own pronouncement on the system He has introduced. He adds in a further reference to it: "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."[34] The disequilibrium in world affairs appears in this sense, then, to be simultaneously negative and positive manifestations of a deeper truth than mere historical analysis can uncover.

### Conclusion

Historians and social scientists pondering the twentieth century might well pause to examine Shoghi Effendi's commentaries on the ills and portents of this "Age of Extremes," as one historian has called the period.[35] Thinkers interested in sorting out the questions posed by the bewildered state of so-called "post-Communist" or "post-Capitalist" society will encounter much in his writings to stimulate and challenge their outlook. They will be treated to unusual perspectives in his explanations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's thought-awakening metaphors that designate the twentieth century as the "century of the revelation of reality and, therefore, the greatest of all centuries,"[36] as the "sun of previous centuries, the effulgence of which shall last forever,"[37] and as the "century of light." [38]

They will discover, too, in his majestic and evocative prose a source of intellectual and spiritual refreshment. For he was, indeed, a master writer who succeeded in distilling the virtues of language, making it reflect the spirit and wholesomeness of truth. But he went beyond this. He achieved far more than his wish to translate from the language of Revelation into English. As appointed interpreter and guide, he also translated words into deeds. Galvanized by the energy of his messages and the vision they inspired, the Bahá'ís embarked successfully on the vast enterprise of erecting the banner of Bahá'u'lláh's Faith in countries throughout the world. This engaged people from the widest range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds in efforts by which a renewal of civilization might be effected.

This was, and continues to be so, because the effects of these efforts by Bahá'ís go beyond the internal objectives of the Bahá'í community to provide vital benefits to society as a whole. For one thing, Bahá'í principles and practices aim at strengthening the social fabric by instilling a high sense of civic responsibility. In a world inclined increasingly towards democratic ways of conducting its affairs, it is significant that the rank and file of the Bahá'ís everywhere are required to participate in the administration of their community at all levels. For instance, they are continually learning and applying the art of consultation as the means of

problem-solving and decision-making for individuals, groups and institutions; they also engage in a method of electing their institutions by secret ballot without electioneering or nominations. An outstanding fact in the latter regard is that in scores of countries Bahá'ís, lettered and unlettered, were the first among native populations to experience, through the operation of their communities, any form of election.

An emergent community has sprung up. It claims members in every country and dependent territory, drawn from some 2,000 ethnic groups; and selections from its literature have been translated into more than 800 languages. At the same time that the Bahá'ís benefited practically from the community-building instructions Shoghi Effendi's writings offered, they were enabled to see through his inspired views beyond the topsy-turvy state of society to the peace-fashioning goal of their Faith. They were invited into a realm of thought by which they could achieve a soul-satisfying transcendence while attending to the practical circumstances of life in a time of cataclysmic disturbances. The Bahá'í community is a global laboratory in which an unprecedented transformation in individual and collective behavior is progressing towards the realization of that world-shaping principle around which it revolves. In such a community can be discerned, thanks to the indispensable ministry of Shoghi Effendi, the glimmerings of a new World Order.

That such a figure as Shoghi Effendi lived in the twentieth century ensures to the annals of the period a dimension that cannot long be ignored. Two points become clear. The first is that Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship was not merely a significant transitional episode in the development of a religious community. The second is that any interpretation of contemporary events that overlooks the emergence of the world-embracing community he raised up, and which fails to appreciate the central principle that motivates and sustains its existence, lacks a guide to the future. If the claims of Bahá'u'lláh are to be understood aright, Shoghi Effendi's legacy bodes well to be increasingly regarded as a wellspring of authentic guidance from which the forces of civilization will draw renewed virtue for at least a full millennium.

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