

equitable transformation of the social order. While Shoghi Effendi's Weltanschauung would find itself congruent with such broad social justice ideals as human rights, equality before the law, freedom of religion, equal opportunity, and a more equitable management and distribution of wealth, in his strongly theocentric vision, social justice was but one manifestation of the all-encompassing "great and transcendental ... principle of Divine justice" (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, 27).

This Divine Justice was manifested in at least three major modes: (1) as an outstanding name or attribute of the transcendental nature of God. God perceives, requires and is perceived by justice. (2) as social justice, i.e. the right ordering of a peaceful, prejudice-free, just world society that will signal "the coming of age of the entire human race," when "the tranquility of an undisturbed, a universal, and lasting peace, in which the discord and separation of the children of men will have given way to the worldwide reconciliation, and the complete unification of the divers elements that constitute human society" (Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, 117). (3) as one of the major spiritual virtues practised by the righteous individual, a constituent of what he called "rectitude of conduct" (*Advent*, 23, 26, 27, 41).

Since he was the sole authorised interpreter of the Bahá'í sacred writings appointed since 1921, and given the explicit concern expressed for justice and human rights in the Bahá'í teachings, it is not surprising that Shoghi Effendi would have directed the attention of the Bahá'í community to the understanding and establishment of social and other forms of justice. Shoghi Effendi took his clue from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh: justice is given paramount importance in the range of spiritual and social virtues advocated in his writings. We read, for example, in Bahá'u'lláh's preeminent ethical work, the aphoristic collection of Persian and Arabic sayings, *The Hidden Words*: "O Son of Spirit The best beloved all things in My sight is Justice; ..." (no. 2, Arabic). He also wrote: "Justice is, in this day, bewailing its plight, and Equity groaneth beneath the yoke of oppression. The thick clouds of tyranny have darkened the face of the earth, and enveloped its peoples" (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 84). And again: "The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny" (*Tablets*, 66-67). Bahá'u'lláh closely tied the establishment of justice to the corner-stone of all his teachings—the unity of humanity: "The purpose of justice," he wrote, "is the appearance of unity among men" (*Ibid.*, 67). Holly Hanson's comment on Bahá'u'lláh's advocacy of the unity of all nations, races, classes and religions is pertinent: "Social justice is the eventual fruit of these successive degrees of unity, since people will find it unbearable to perpetuate injustices upon others with whom they feel truly united" ("*The Process of Creating Social Justice*," 35).

Shoghi Effendi's concern for social justice was both theoretically and practically motivated: theoretically, by the universal applicability of Bahá'í belief, and practically, by the gross violation of human rights

experienced by the Bahá'í community in Iran and other countries in the Middle-East, such as Egypt. He made particular adaptations of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on social justice to modern society. For example, his writings suggest a middle ground between the view that social justice is a collectivist, institutional or legal process only, on the one hand, or a question of individual rights and freedoms to the point of social anarchy, on the other. In the balance of power, and the practice of virtue, he did not hold that the collective entirely eclipses the individual and determines his or her fate. The aggregate is only the sum of its individual parts. In his view, the just or righteous person plays as vital a role as, say, remedial legislation since every individual has the duty to practice justice, fairness and equity and may thereby positively influence others and so change the social fabric.

With respect to the individual, at least, Shoghi Effendi's view of justice differs markedly from that of John Rawls in his well-known study *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Rawls analysed justice especially as a function of social institutions and practices; he considered it only secondarily to be a virtue of particular actions or persons. Shoghi Effendi, however, viewed the practice of social justice as being incumbent upon the individual, the just person, as well as the collective. Similarly, religious thinker, Michael Novak, following the anti-collectivist, economist-philosopher and Nobel Prize Winner, Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992), considered social justice to be a virtue that could be ascribed only to reflective persons acting deliberately.

At the grassroots level, the Local Spiritual Assemblies were instructed by Shoghi Effendi to practice compassion, to preserve human dignity, and to assist the poor: "They must do their utmost to extend at all times the helping hand to the poor, the sick, the disabled, the orphan, the widow, irrespective of color, caste and creed" (Bahá'í Administration, 38). The place of minority rights loomed large in his thinking, to the extent that he recommended: "If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favor of the minority, be it racial or otherwise" (Advent, 35). This principle is observed in Bahá'í elections when a tie vote results. He expected the Bahá'í community to act as the model of a unified but racially and culturally diverse, equitable, peaceful and purposeful society, "the leaven that must leaven the lump" of the nation (Messages to America, 13).

The two texts that most prominently express Shoghi Effendi's views on social justice are *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1938) and *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (1938). His program for social justice was outlined, although not exhaustively, in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, a book-sized letter written to the North American Bahá'ís. But his advocacy, in the same volume, of the abolition of racial prejudice, and the practice of moral rectitude, remain of interest to a wider audience. The series of letters comprising *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (1929-1936), in the opinion of one favorable commentator, constitute "the very essence of world statesmanship evoked in the hour of

man's direst need" (Horace Holley, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Introduction, vi). These letters elucidate those laws and principles that Shoghi Effendi envisioned as being fundamental to the establishment of a New World Order which "is slowly and imperceptibly rising amid the welter and chaos of present-day civilization" (*World Order*, 24). He foresaw that justice would be the hallmark of the coming, slowly gestating world federation.

While *The Advent of Divine Justice* contained material especially relevant to the internal affairs of the Bahá'í community, and was intended primarily to remedy social conditions prevalent in North America, two of its major principles have universal application: (1) The Abolition of All Forms of Prejudice. In his view, social justice can never be attained unless "complete freedom from prejudice" of race, class, gender, creed or color is universally practised. The corollaries to this principle are: (a) The recognition of the oneness and wholeness of the human race. (b) The necessity of cultural diversity as a desirable asset of human society as an expression of just one of the many riches of a bountiful Creator. Racial prejudice has attacked "the whole social structure of American society" and remains "the most vital and challenging issue" (*Advent*, 33). (2) Moral Rectitude. "Rectitude of conduct" is typified by "an abiding sense of undeviating justice, unobscured by the demoralizing influences which a corruption-ridden political life so strikingly manifests" (*Advent*, 23). Its watchwords include "equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness." Moral rectitude also requires "absolute chastity" in sexual relationships to rectify the "indecentcies, the vices, the false standards, which an inherently deficient moral code tolerates, perpetuates and fosters" (*Ibid*). It was his view that it would be impossible for both women and men to assume their complete emancipation from the burdens of gender-specific, sexual stereotyping without the practice of chastity.

In sum, Shoghi Effendi envisioned social justice as being inherent to the larger principle of Divine Justice, which serves as both the standard and practicum for the individual and society. He advocated that the gradual application of all Bahá'u'lláh's revealed laws and teachings, as embodied in the institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, directed today by the Universal House of Justice, would result in the manifestation of the "Most Great Justice," which would naturally include social justice in all its forms.

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