

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE MINISTRY OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

by
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PREAMBLE

When the beloved Guardian passed away on November 4, 1957, the news of his passing convulsed the entire Bahá'í World. A second distress soon followed when the announcement was made by the Hands of the Cause that Shoghi Effendi had left no Will and Testament, had appointed no successor as Guardian of the Faith, and that the Aghsán one and all had broken the Covenant. The "first effect" of this realization, as indicated in the message of the Hands of the Cause to the Bahá'í world, "was to plunge" them "into the very abyss of despair" (MC 36). A similar sense of dismay seized the entire Bahá'í World.

Soon after the Universal House of Justice was established it sent a message (dated 6 October 1963) to the Bahá'í World. This message states that the 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" (MUHJ 14). Reflecting on this message, the friends everywhere soon realized that they had not properly understood the contents of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Shoghi Effendi had already stated that the World Order as delineated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will "undoubtedly" contained "manifold mysteries" (BA 8), and 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" (BA 62).

The obligation of the friends was now well-defined. They had to wait for the "guidance" of the Universal House of Justice, to elucidate what certainly appeared to be "obscure questions" (WT 20). The expectations of the believers were fulfilled when, in response to questions asked, the Universal House of Justice wrote on 9 March 1965, on 27 May 1966, and on 7 December 1969, three letters (See MUHJ items # 23, 35 & 75 respectively) and explained for the friends the basic truths underlying the evolution of the Administrative Order of our Faith, and left them free to conclude that the passing of the beloved Guardian, without having appointed a Successor as Guardian and Authorized Interpreter, was a clear possibility and an understandable event.

When the English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was published in 1992, the Universal House of Justice had yet another opportunity to explain the implications of Paragraph 42 of the Most Holy Book. In relation to the Law of Succession in the Faith, this paragraph stands out as a most significant and decisive statement. In this paragraph, Bahá'u'lláh clearly envisages a time when there would be no institution to embody the functions incumbent upon the Appointed and Authorized Aghsán (that is to say, a Guardianship). Further, the Universal House of Justice would not exist at that time and it would not be propitious to elect that Body. These points are fully covered in Notes 66 and 67, (pages 196 and 197) of the English text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

1963

Regarding the timing of the election of the Universal House of Justice we see in its letter mentioned above, dated 9 March 1965, the manner in which Shoghi Effendi foreshadowed the election of the Universal House of Justice: “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”. The rightness of the time was further confirmed by references in Shoghi Effendi’s letters to the Ten Year Crusade 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 worldwide 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.” (UD 261)

There can be no doubt that the “undertakings embracing within their range all National Assemblies functioning throughout the Bahá’í World” mentioned in the above passage of the Guardian, certainly refer to the plans that Shoghi Effendi gave to each of the twelve National Assemblies which he described as the Generals of the Ten Year Plan.

With the stipulation made in Paragraph 42 of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, as well as with such statements, as quoted above, it would be, in my opinion, totally untenable to maintain that Shoghi Effendi was not aware that his passing would occur some time during the Ten Year Crusade. If, therefore he did not appoint a second Guardian as his Successor, and if he did not write a Will and Testament in the traditional way, would it not be entirely logical to conclude that lack of action in these matters was a conscious act on his part?

In his personal conversations with pilgrims Shoghi Effendi was reported to have repeatedly said that his ‘Dispensation’ was like his Will and Testament. The closest statement made by him in writing, however, hinting at such a conclusion, is a letter, written on his behalf, dated 10 January 1935 to Dr. Mühlischlegel, in which he states that his ‘Dispensation’ constitutes “an invaluable supplement” to the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as well as to the Book of the Covenant, which is Bahá’u’lláh’s Will and Testament. (LDG Vol. 1, 65)

Regarding the prophecy of Daniel as it relates to 1963, we read the following in one of the Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

“Now concerning the verse in Daniel, the interpretation whereof thou didst ask, namely “Blessed is he who cometh unto the thousand three hundred and thirty five days. ...according to this calculation a century will have elapsed from the dawn of the Sun of Truth, then will the teachings of God be firmly established upon the earth, and the Divine Light shall flood the world from the East even unto the West. Then, on this day, will the faithful rejoice.” (PA 49-50)

Indeed it was in 1963 that the Bahá'í World Community, under the galvanizing and sustaining motivation of Shoghi Effendi's Ten Year Crusade, was enabled to diffuse the Light of the Faith world-wide, and celebrate not only this victory, but also the emergence of the Universal House of Justice at the Bahá'í World Con-gress in London.

Furthermore, the following two paragraphs might well bear upon this very theme. They contain an early hint by Shoghi Effendi on the importance of this very date of 1963, which he says would witness the "final erection" of the "Edi-fice" of God's Holy Cause:

"Ours, dearly-beloved co-workers, is the paramount duty to continue, with undimmed vision and unabated zeal, to assist in the final erection of that Edifice the foundations of which Bahá'u'lláh has laid in our hearts, to derive added hope and strength from the general trend of recent events, however dark their immediate effects, and to pray with unremitting fer-vor that He may hasten the approach of the realization of that Wondrous Vision which constitutes the brightest emanation of His Mind and the fairest fruit of the fairest civilization the world has yet seen.

Might not the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh mark the inauguration of so vast an era in human history?" (WOB 48)

COMPATIBILITY OF TEXTS

From the above summary three points clearly emerge:

1. It had been contemplated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that there would be no co-existence between the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice.
2. The date for the election of the Universal House of Justice had to be in 1963, at the end of the Ten Year Plan.
3. It would certainly be reasonable to assume that Shoghi Effendi was conscious of his impending passing.

It would be helpful at this point to consider the method adopted by Bahá'u'lláh in His Kitáb-i-'Ahd regarding the line of succession. In it He stipulates that Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí is to succeed 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Now, compare that with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's method in the first part of His Will and Testament. In it He stipulates that Shoghi Effendi is to be succeeded, generation after generation, by Appointed Aghsán serving as Guardians. To me there is a similarity of method here, one that provided a sense of continuity and concealed for a time the tests that were inevitably to fall on the friends as future events unfolded. Shoghi Effendi's men-tion of "future Guardians" in his writings could well be, in my opinion, equally understood as a further application of this same method. All would be tested in due course as to their faithful adherence to the Covenant.

Does this similarity of method not remind us of the golden key that Shoghi Ef-fendi placed in our hands with which to unlock one of the mysteries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament? He pointed out to us that a study of the authenti-cated texts of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá "will reveal the close relationship that exists between them, as well as the identity of purpose and method which they inculcate" (WOB 4).

Is this not also a reminder of the warning given by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Íqán: "from time immemorial even unto eternity the Almighty hath tried, and will continue to try, His servants, so that light may be distinguished from dark-ness" (KI 8) and furthermore we read in the same Book: "the

divine Purpose hath decreed that the true should be known from the false....He hath, therefore, in every season sent down upon mankind the showers of tests from His realm of glory” (KI 53).

WHO LIMITS THE SPHERES OF JURISDICTION?

In the ‘Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh’ Shoghi Effendi points out that one of his duties was to provide “the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its [the Faith's] elected representatives” (WOB 148). It is obvious that the reference here is to the elected members of Local Spiritual Assemblies, National Conventions, National Spiritual Assemblies, as well as of the Universal House of Justice.

This function of the Guardianship was partly discharged when, under his guidance and direction, the Constitutions of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies were formulated and put into effect during his own ministry. What remained was to determine the boundaries of the work of the Universal House of Justice. The terms of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were superlative. He wrote: “Whatsoever they [the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice] decide is of God” (WT 11). He further added: “That which this body, [the elected members of the Universal House of Justice (WT 20)] whether unanimously or by a majority, doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself” (WT 19).

To complete his duty as Interpreter of these words in relation to the work of the Universal House of Justice, Shoghi Effendi wrote in his ‘Dispensation’ the following:

“The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá’u’lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been invested”. (WOB 150)

It is highly significant that Shoghi Effendi, while defining his duty as Guardian to interpret what had been revealed, goes on to give the assurance to the Community, as well as to the world, that the Universal House of Justice, when elected, will never “infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain” of interpretation, which is the exclusive right of the Guardianship. This assurance was fully realized and permanently set in place when the Universal House of Justice, in its Constitution wrote:

“The provenance, the authority, the duties, the sphere of action of the Universal House of Justice all derive from the Revealed Word of Baha'u'l-lah which, together with the interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and 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”. (CUHJ 4)

It must be remembered that apart from its vital function as the Supreme Bahá’í Legislative Body, the Universal House of Justice is named by Bahá’u’lláh Himself in Paragraph 42 of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as the Central Institution to which the Bahá’í Community must turn after the termination of the line of the Aghsán. This is confirmed by the statement made by the Guardian that the two institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are the “chosen Successors” of Baha'u'llah and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (WOB 20). On the basis of these texts, the Universal House of Justice in its Constitution

describes its own “fundamental ob-ject” as the responsibility “to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed au-thority which flows from the Source of the Faith” (CUHJ 4), and then adds the following statement: “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” (CUHJ 4). The position of the Uni-versal House of Justice as Head of the Faith will be maintained, “until such time” in the words of this Constitution, “as Almighty God shall reveal His new Mani-festation to Whom will belong all authority and power” (CUHJ 4).

In light of the above quotations, it becomes clear that in addition to its legislative authority, the Universal House of Justice, while it is assured of divine guidance in not infringing upon the domain of interpretation, is invested with responsibili-ties which do and must include such powers and duties that are incumbent upon the Head of the Faith. Furthermore it is obvious that the two broad areas of re-sponsibility of the Universal House of Justice - namely legislation and headship of the Faith, are as inseparable and indispensable as were, in the case of Shoghi Effendi, his responsibilities as Interpreter and Head of the Faith. Thus, if anyone may venture to state that the sphere of jurisdiction of the Universal House of Jus-tice is confined to legislation, such an assumption would clearly be baseless and entirely unwarranted and unjustified.

It follows therefore that no institution or individual can correctly determine whether the Guardian or the Universal House of Justice are, at any given time, within or without their own respective limits of jurisdiction. This point is con-firmed by the Guardian in one of his letters where this truth is clearly set forth:

“...It is not for the individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guard-ian'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 evi-dently lead to confusion and to schism. The Guardian being appointed in-terpreter of the Teachings, it is his responsibility to state what matters which, affecting the interests of the Faith, demand on the part of the be-lievers complete and unqualified obedience to his instructions.” (LG 312)

The principle clearly outlined above by the Guardian applies equally to the Uni-versal House of Justice, inasmuch as matters affecting the interests of the Faith on a world-scale are best judged and determined by the House itself. As indicated above, Shoghi Effendi's formal and confident assurance in his ‘Dispensation’ to the Bahá'í s everywhere and to the world at large, to the effect that the Universal House of Justice will never transgress its own limits of jurisdiction, should pro-vide the ultimate safeguard and guarantee, to one and all, that the foundations on which the structure of the Administrative Order is resting are firmly set and stable.

IS THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE THE HEAD OF A COMPLETE AND UNMUTILATED WORLD ORDER?

Let us now consider the contents and implications of a crucial paragraph in ‘The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh’:

“Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would be mutilated and permanently deprived of that heredi-tary principle which, as ‘Abdu'l-Bahá has written, has been invariably up-held 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 prophet-hood 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 en-able it to take a long, and 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 to-tally withdrawn.” (WOB 148)

So the question is, did the ending of the Guardianship in November 1957 have the negative effects described above, or did the Cause survive this event com-plete and undamaged?

Shoghi Effendi definitely knew that the line of the Aghsán would at some time come to an end. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas openly contemplates this eventuality in the very paragraph (42) that anticipates the Institution of the Guardianship. Further, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes no provision in His Will and Testament for the continuation into the future of the Guardianship in the event that the line of the Aghsán is extinguished. So it is very clear that this passage in ‘Dispensation’ cannot be saying that the Cause will be wounded or damaged unless there is an unbroken line of living Guardians during the entirety of the Dispensation. So, how are we to un-derstand the paragraph?

When one looks at the paragraph that immediately follows it, that is, the one that refers to the paralysis that would ensue if the World Order were ‘severed’ from the House of Justice, it is clear that Shoghi Effendi is simply describing, in dra-matic language, the centrality and vital importance of these two institutions. Each, in turn, is anticipated to perform indispensable and essential functions.

We therefore need to consider and analyze the various points Shoghi Effendi has made and relate them to the period of his ministry, considering what his absence would have entailed. We set forth the points in brief, followed by comments:

1. Without the Guardianship, the World Order would be deprived of the heredi-tary principle.

COMMENT: The 36 years of the Guardianship certainly endowed the World Order with this eminent grace.

2. Without the Guardianship, the World Order would have been beset by peril and danger.

COMMENT: If ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament had not installed the Of-fice of the Guardianship as His immediate Successor, Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí would have played havoc with the community, using the Book of the Covenant to advance his case.

3. Without the Guardianship the prestige of the World Order would have suf-fered.

COMMENT: By making the Guardian the “sacred head” (WT 14) of the House of Justice, and because of the provision that the Guardian “cannot override the decisions” of the Universal House of Justice (WOB 150), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá enhanced the prestige of the Supreme Body (WOB 8).

4. Without the Guardianship the World Order would not have benefited from Shoghi Effendi’s breadth of vision.

COMMENT: The Guardian’s book ‘God Passes By’ provides an historical pano-rama covering the first one hundred years of Bahá’í history. Shoghi Effendi gives us an invaluable interpretation of this history and correlates it with the major events of the century. Thanks also to the Guardian's World Order letters, his en-trancing vision of the future, and the steps which would lead to its realization, have been fully laid out for us.

5. Without the Guardianship the elected institutions of the Faith, locally, nation-ally and internationally, would have been deprived of the Guardian's guidance.

COMMENT: As already indicated above, Shoghi Effendi gave his guidance for the formulation of National and Local Bahá'í Constitutions. As to the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, in view of the provision that he "is de-barred from laying down independently the constitution that must govern the organized activities of his fellow-members" (WOB 150), Shoghi Effendi made it clear in his 'Dispensation' that the two areas of authorized interpretation and binding legislation had been exclusively reserved to each of the two successive Successors of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, namely the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice respectively.

HOW CAN THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE DETERMINE THAT ITS ENACTMENTS DO NOT DEPART FROM THE SPIRIT OF THE TEACH-INGS?

The statement in the 'Dispensation' which gives rise to this issue is the following:

"the Guardian...cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them [members of the Universal House of Justice] of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning or to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed utterances." (WOB 150)

To understand adequately the implications of this statement, we must first consider the meaning or meanings of the word "enactment" or the word of which it is a derivative, namely "enact". According to the Webster dictionary the verb "enact" is used when a "legal and authoritative act" is performed. It also implies the act of passing a "bill" or a legal draft into a law. It is obvious that in the sentence from the "Dispensation" quoted above, the first meaning is meant, because of the categorical statement, also in the same sentence, clearly affirming that when a final decision is taken, the Guardian "cannot override" or veto such a decision. Thus the issue of reconsideration is a step to be taken in the process of arriving at the final decision.

This issue has been dealt with in the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice. In the absence of the Guardian, the Universal House of Justice has formally stated that among its "binding terms of reference" and the elements which constitute "its bedrock foundation", are the "interpretations and expositions" of the Guardian. (CUHJ 4)

Furthermore in a letter dated 27 May 1966 the Universal House of Justice assures us that "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." In the same letter the Universal House of Justice makes this further clear affirmation: "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 confidently described as 'clearly defined'". (MUHJ 85)

In the light of the above quotations, in my view, it should not be difficult to arrive at the conclusion that Shoghi Effendi's statement in the 'Dispensation' could well be understood as a reminder of, and indeed an emphasis on, the imperative obligation to refer to his interpretations and expositions prior to any act of legislation. This assurance has been explicitly given to the Bahá'í World in the statements quoted above from the writings of the Universal House of Justice.

WIDE RANGE OF RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OFFICE OF HEADSHIP, AS INVESTED IN THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Based on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's and Shoghi Effendi's writings these responsibilities include the following duties and powers:

1. to safeguard the unity of the community (WOB 148);
2. to resolve all problems which have caused differences (WT 20);
3. to maintain the integrity of the Bahá'í teachings (WOB 148);
4. to elucidate questions that are obscure (WT 20);
5. to maintain the flexibility of the teachings of the Faith (WOB 148);
6. to promulgate and apply its laws (WOB 20 & 145);
7. to protect its institutions (WOB 20);
8. to adapt it loyally and intelligently to the requirements of progressive society (WOB 20);
9. to conduct all Bahá'í administrative affairs (WOB 153);
10. to resolve difficult problems and all important and fundamental questions (WT 14 & BA 47);
11. to create new institutions (CC Vol. 1, 329);
12. to make deductions from the sacred and authorized writings (CC Vol. 1, 323);
13. to launch and direct teaching plans (CC Vol. 1, 340);
14. to be the last refuge of a tottering civilization (WOB 89);
15. to consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world (WOB 20).

As the Universal House of Justice is, after the Guardian, the Central Authority in the Cause, the body unto which "all things must be referred" (WT 14), it was able to create institutions to ensure the "discharge of the functions of protection and propagation" and to provide "for the receipt and disbursement of the Hu-qúqu'lláh" (CUHJ 4).

The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice outlines in five paragraphs what it considers to be "among the powers and duties with which the Universal House of Justice has been invested" (CUHJ 5). The contents of these paragraphs, without any exception, are based on, and have their roots in, Tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as letters of Shoghi Effendi. They deal with the responsibilities of the Supreme Institution in such matters as preserving the sacred Texts, defending and protecting the Cause, proclaiming and propagating its Message, advancing its interests, promoting universal peace, ushering in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, safeguarding the personal rights, freedom and initiative of individuals, and promoting the advancement and betterment of the world. The last three paragraphs also enumerate the legislative, executive and judicial powers vested in the institution of the House of Justice.

WHAT DOES UNCONDITIONAL OBEDIENCE IMPLY?

Bahá'u'lláh in the thirteenth Glad-Tidings (Bishárát) wrote:

"The men of God's House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people....Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the Ministers of the House of Justice that they may act according to the needs and requirements of the time. They that, for the sake of God, arise to serve His Cause, are the recipients of divine inspiration from the un-seen Kingdom. It is incumbent upon all to be obedient unto them." (TAB 26-27) (This self-same passage is repeated in the Eighth Ishráq.)

Furthermore in the Eighth Leaf of Paradise we read: “It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together....God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily is the Provider, the Omnis-cient.” (TAB 68)

We note in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament His insistent call to the friends to turn to the Universal House of Justice, and obey its directives. We read the following: “the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, [is] under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One [the Báb]....Whoso rebelleth ...against them hath rebelled against God...., whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God” (WT 11). “That which this body....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.” (WT 19-20)

In one of His Tablets ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has furthermore written the following:

“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.” (MUHJ 85)

To confirm the sense of the above passages we read in Shoghi Effendi’s ‘Dispensation’, the following affirmation which corroborates Bahá’u’lláh’s and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements on the inspiration and divine guidance which surround and overshadow the decisions of the Universal House of Justice. He writes: “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.” (WOB 153)

From these explicit and authoritative statements we should know of a certainty that when divine inspiration is well-assured, obedience becomes a spiritual obligation. This theme is fully discussed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His ‘Some Answered Questions’:

“Know that infallibility is of two kinds: essential infallibility and acquired infallibility.... Essential infallibility is peculiar to the supreme Manifestation, for it is His essential requirement.... But acquired infallibility is not a natural necessity; on the contrary, it is a ray of the bounty of infallibility which shines from the Sun of Reality....Thus many of the holy beings....were the mediators of grace between God and men. If God did not protect them from error, their error would cause believing souls to fall into error, and thus the foundations of the Religion of God would be overturned, which would not be fitting nor worthy of God....

“.... For instance, the Universal House of Justice will be under the protection and the unerring guidance of God....Now the members of the House of Justice have not, individually, essential infallibility, but the body of the House of Justice is under the protection and unerring guidance of God; this is called conferred infallibility.” (SAQ 173)

This statement made by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explicitly and certainly gives us the assurance that when an individual or institution, authorized in revealed sacred texts as freed from error, renders a decision or issues a directive requiring the friends to obey, the community of the faithful should be confident that such a decision or directive has been prompted and motivated by divine inspiration. Should this be otherwise, it would not only be unbecoming and unbefitting of a just God, but the result would

certainly be the subversion of the very foundations of God's Holy Faith.

The friends of course realize that the objectives specified in the plans and messages of the Universal House of Justice are designed to help us in our direct teaching work. To the extent that we adhere to the wishes of the Supreme Body will we be the recipients of added confirmations and blessings.

REFERENCES

BA Bahá'í Administration
CC Vol. 1 Compilation of Compilations Vol. 1
CUHJ Constitution of the Universal House of Justice
LDG Vol. 1 Light of Divine Guidance, Vol. 1
LG Lights of Guidance
KI Kitáb-i-Íqán
MC Ministry of the Custodians
MUHJ Messages from the Universal House of Justice-1963-1986
PA The Passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha
SAQ Some Answered Questions
TAB Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas
UD Unfolding Destiny
WOB World Order of Bahá'u'lláh
WT Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá