

Remembering Shoghi Effendi as Interpreter

Exported from Holy-Writings.com on 2026-07-05 — 1 clipping

Transcript of a talk given by Glenford Mitchell, July 27, 1997, at the Foundation Hall of the House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois. Taken from a series of two cassette tapes, © 1997 National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the U.S.

Contents:

Audio Tape #1

Audio Tape #2

"1997 marks the centenary of the Birth of Shoghi Effendi. There are no celebrations of the occasion official or otherwise, because Shoghi Effendi did not wish his birthday to be celebrated. He made this clear in writing to commemorate any event associated with his life would be tantamount to a departure from those established truths that are enshrined within our beloved Faith. However there is nothing to stop us from remembering him, indeed how can we forget so unique and indispensable a figure of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Since I have been offered an opportunity[a] very welcome [one] I should say, and a pleasant opportunity of being with you today, I invite you to join me in remembering Shoghi Effendi as interpreter.

It is only fair, I think, to tell you that the talk I am about to give will be lengthy. It comprises [of] three parts. The first part is the Word as Genesis, second interpreting the Word and third the literature of interpretation. Now, perhaps you have heard that phrasing before because I have been involved in some form of resurrection... and ..not as spectacular as that involved Lazarus but it was some form of resurrection because some years ago I wrote an article by this title which was published in the World Order magazine so since I assume most of you have not heard about this article I take a chance and bring a large of it chunk to your attention. So then let's begin.

Contents:

Audio Tape #1

Audio Tape #2

[+CHAPTER1]

PART - I

THE WORD AS GENESIS

"The Word is the beginning and the end of all things." You know the Word Capital W. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God". So begins the gospel

according to St. John. "Thou didst wish to make thyself known unto men, therefore thou didst through a Word of Thy mouth bring creation unto being and fashion the universe". So goes one of the statements in one of the well known prayers of Bahá'u'lláh. Creation is sustained and advances by the power of the Word. The manifestation comes in a human form and although we have in Him a physical presence, a tangible sign of God's love, yet this is temporary. When He leaves what we have is the Word because His most important act is to deliver the Word. Bahá'u'lláh describes it, that is the Word in a prayer as "Thy most sublime Word, through whose potency Thou didst call creation into being and didst reveal Thy Cause".

The Word then is the abiding evidence of the reality of the Manifestation. It becomes the generating force of civilized life. Bahá'u'lláh says, "The Word is the master-key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked." And the Word is extended or renewed in successive appearances of the Divine Messenger. In this very terminology - Divine Messenger - Word is implied. As the initiator, the dynamo the sustainer of existence the Word exercises an influence that pervades all things and all conditions. "It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being", Bahá'u'lláh says. The Word is at the center of the realm of thought, through which consciousness expresses itself. Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, that "the reality of man is his thought." It stands to reason then that it is at this point of reality that the Word produces a powerful impact. In a large sense, thought is the product of the Word, and reflects its effects and even some of its characteristics. Thought is revealed through the employment of language. Language being you might say, a coherency of words. So the Word in a certain sense is a progenitor of words. Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the "Word of God as the Cause of the entire creation while all else besides His Word are but the creatures and effects thereof." Thought also manifests itself through varieties of actions and patterns of behavior. In this regard the Master informs us that the thought without action is useless. "The power of thought is dependent in its manifestation in deeds", He asserts. Of course, we know what Bahá'u'lláh has to say about words exceeding deeds. Good intentions you know but no action. You know what kind of road is paved by such.

Informal or Spontaneous Interpretation:

A vital occupation of thought is its search for meaning. The why and wherefore of things tangible and intangible. The reason for this or that constantly exercises our thought. Without a sense of meaning human life is impossible. Perhaps this is why so many people when they do not understand the meaning of or the reason for something they fill in the void with products of the[ir] imagination. One of these of course is

superstition. Meaning comes through a variety of modes and means such as experience, observation, instruction, conversation. But common to any effort in arriving at a meaning is the capacity to interpret. That is, the ability to understand or to make sense of signs, language, behavior, relationships, actions, impressions, dreams and all other kinds of phenomenon, etc. etc. In fact human beings are forever engaged in the act of interpreting, as you are now. Webster's third international dictionary offers the following as one definition of the word interpret: to understand and appreciate in the light of individual belief, judgment, interest or circumstances. In other words to construe, so you interpret a law, you interpret a contract, you interpret the signs of a coming storm and so on and so on. There are of course other definitions of [the word] interpret, and we shall come to them later. What this definition, taken together with the points already made, conclusively indicates is this: Interpretation is an essential activity or function of intelligence. We do it all the time, and indeed, cannot do without doing it. Right now you are doing that. How else can you understand in any shape or form what I am saying to you. And you are doing other things besides listening to my words, you are watching my gestures, you are trying to decide whether I slept enough last night, you are interpreting all kind of things while I talk. (laughter from the audience). You are registering, you are interpreting you are understanding things that I do, in ways that I would not understand. But that's fine. It is constant, this exercise of the human the mind, it is spontaneous, it is irrepressible [and] involuntary. As the Universal House of Justice said in one of its letter to an individual with regards to the interpretation of the Bahá'í teachings "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 the teachings. While the former is confined to the Guardian", that is the authoritative interpretation "that later according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should be by no means suppressed. In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power". This brings us to the second consideration of the talk namely interpreting the Word.

PART -II

INTERPRETING THE WORD

We might start here by attempting to provide a context, by establishing categories of interpretation, and exploring briefly additional dictionary definitions of interpret and interpretation. It seems to me that interpretation falls into three main categories. Now these I invented, and I hope you will have mercy on me if I am totally wrong. So the three are: informal or spontaneous, formal, and authoritative.

Those are my categories. Informal or spontaneous, formal,

authoritative. The first that is the informal, as already described, refers to the habit of mind which obliges one to derive meaning or understanding from the normal ongoing occurrences and conditions of life. The second, that is formal is concerned with a disciplined or a systematic approach to interpreting phenomenon, including Sacred Scripture. The third, Authoritative, is unique to the Bahá'í Faith, and is related specifically to the interpretations of Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. We will come back to the second and the third categories, since the first has already been touched upon. Here I need the further aid of definitions. Interpret: Webster says, to explain or tell the meaning of, in other words to expound, elucidate, translate. Translate into intelligible or familiar language or terms. Again Webster says, to apprehend, and represent by means of art.- There you go by means of art-, show by illustrative representations, bring perhaps a score or a script to active realization by performance. So interpret means all of that, and interpretation of course is the act or result of interpreting, and you, I won't go any further into defining it because you understand all of that.

Formal Interpretation:

Now regarding the formal category of interpretation, let me introduce the formal terminologies as used in academic circles, and by Biblical scholars and by such establishments as the Roman Catholic Church. Hermeneutics. This derives from the Greek word Hermenuin, to interpret. This is the intellectual discipline concerned with the nature and presuppositions of the interpretation of the human expression. This word is associated etymologically with the name of the Greek God Hermes. He was considered the messenger of the Gods and Deity of boundaries. Hermes took messages from the Gods to others, i.e. to an audience, and therefore was a mediator or an interpreter. Thus the associations of the term Hermeneutics with Hermes reflect the inherently what they call the triadic structure of the act of interpretation. A sign, I drew a chart for it. I had to do it for myself. A sign or a message or a text of some sort requires a mediator or interpreter to convey to some audience. So the triadic structure implicitly contains major conceptual issues concerning Hermeneutics. The nature of a text, what it means to understand a text. How understanding and interpretation are determined by the presuppositions and beliefs of the audience to which the text is being interpreted. I want also to call your attention, before I go on with this, to other words that will pop up. Exegetics which is at the bottom of my chart there is another term for Hermeneutics. It is the science of interpretation especially of Scripture, and then what you get from that is exegesis, that is exposition, explanation, especially critical interpretation of a text or a portion of Scripture. And then the one who does it is called an exegete. I'll be using these terminologies on and off throughout my talk. Now, even though interpretation is fundamental to all the intellectual disciplines, Hermeneutics is relatively new to Western culture. Friedrich Schleiermacher, who lived between 1768 and 1834 is

generally regarded as the founder of modern Hermeneutics. Then there was a man named Wilhelm Dilthey, who lived between 1833 and 1911. He hoped to develop a foundational discipline for the cultural sciences that would render their conclusions as objective and as valid as those of the natural sciences. Collateral with this newly born interest in Hermeneutics was a rapid emergence of specialized disciplines as recognized and preserved by the organizational structure of the modern university. Art-History, Anthropology, Economics, History, the various literatures, Political Science, Psychology, Philosophy etc. By the way, I picked up all this materials from encyclopedias. Encyclopedia of Religion and what not. So that's where I got my materials. At first it appeared these disciplines were more concerned with methodologies than with hermeneutics. But powerful intellectual currents have forced hermeneutics forward. Interest in it has therefore burgeoned among literary critics, sociologists, historians anthropologists, theologians philosophers and students of religion. What has brought about these currents? I am told by the things I have read. 1) New theories of human behavior in the psychological and social sciences, that's one 2) Developments in epistemology and philosophy of language, these have encouraged claims that what counts as reality for a given culture is a function of the linguistic structures superimposed upon experience. 3) Arguments advanced by philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger that all human experiences basically are interpreted and all judgments take place within a context of interpretation mediated by culture and language behind which it is impossible to go. A general assumption seems to have emerged from all this namely, that human consciousness is situated in history and cannot transcend it. This assumption thus raises important questions concerning the cultural conditioning in any understanding. The effort at laying down the foundational principles for hermeneutics has however not realized its goal. The encyclopedia of religion states that even a superficial glance at the contemporary intellectual scene reveals little agreement concerning how hermeneutics is conceived or how the discipline should proceed. The encyclopedia also calls attention to the fact that the intellectual disciplines constituting the modern university, have themselves been fractured into parties each of which has its own methods and mode of interpretation. In psychology for example, there are behaviorists, cognitive psychologists, Freudians, Jungian and Gestaltists, just as in social sciences there are functionalists, structuralists, ethno-methodologists, and Marxists. Nonetheless interest in hermeneutics surges. They say that diversity and conflict of interpretation have increasingly have provided the stimulus and the urgency for acquiring understanding and agreement. The study of religion, where we come in, produces more problems for hermeneutics than any other academic discipline. We can thank God that our Faith found a way of resolving that. The Encyclopedia of Religion comments that, conceptually religions themselves may be regarded as communities of interpretation. So the scholarly study of them takes the form of an interpretation of an

interpretation. OK. Now I fiddled around and read a little bit about Buddhism, and I discovered this. This is an illustration. The fundamental problems of Buddhist hermeneutics are the co-existence of conflicting sources and concepts of authority. According to tradition, the Buddha was not the sole preacher of Dharma. Even during Buddha's life, His disciples acted as missionaries and their words were considered as part of the original message of Buddhism. The texts affirm that at the Buddha's own behest the disciples began each sermon with the words meaning "thus have I heard on one occasion". This formula presumably served as a guarantee of authenticity or rather of faithfulness to the teachings of the Master, yet the same introductory formula was used indistinctly for sermons attributed to the Master, to his disciples or to mythical sages and deities. Scholarly study of religion and modern hermeneutics very often are based on assumptions that are different from religious interpretation, therefore the religious participant frequently views scholars' interpretation as reductionistic and alien. The consequence is the endless debate among scholars of religion as to whether and to what degree scholarly interpretation of religion does justice to the believers own point of view. Western scholarship in religion is commonly allied with the religious tradition of liberal Protestantism. This tradition is itself a product of a series of bitter hermeneutical debates concerning the application of historical critical methods to the Christian Bible. These debates showed that orthodox Christians regarded the application of these methods as "alien mode of interpretation". You see what has happened to a religion that does not have interpreters. The issues involved were resolved by liberal Protestantism which defined the essence of religious faith as "experience rather than doctrine, or historical belief". Just think about that for a minute. Schleiermacher, the founder of modern hermeneutics, was himself a liberal Protestant. He exerted such influence on the arrival at this compromise, much influence I should say. His opinion was that the various religions were the culturally conditioned forms of an underlying universal religious sensibility. The locus of Faith thus shifted from belief to experience. Very important point now bear in mind. The problem here essentially rests with the text and the inability to establish its authoritative meaning. This proposed shift, in my view, of Faith from belief to experience seems no less than a dodge. The way then to determine the intent of the Author of a Sacred text, according to Schleiermacher is to develop the basic grammatical and psychological conditions necessary for the understanding of any text whatever. He felt that the nature of language was the crucial theoretical issue. An elaboration of this point goes like this, and I quote "A correct interpretation requires, not only an understanding of the cultural and historical context of an author, but a grasp of the latter unique subjectivity. This can be accomplished only by an act," they say " of divination and intuitive leap by which the interpreter re-lives the consciousness of the author. By seeing this consciousness in the larger cultural context the interpreter comes to understand the author better

than the author understands himself or herself". Interesting. It seems normal to think that understanding of the authors intent is essential to interpretation. and Schleiermacher had regard for this point of view of course. However for some decades now the prevailing attitudes of scholars has been to ignore the authorial intent altogether. For example. the Encyclopedia states that most literary criticisms has been built on the assumption that a literary text has its own afterlife independent of the author and that to understand it has little or no relationship to the understanding the authors intentions when writing it. I don't mind that. It's nice to play around with fiction. It's fun. Anyway, I want to get us out of this entanglement with Academia. That's not really what I want to do. I was having fun playing with you. Probably I don't understand half of what I am saying to you.

One theorist holds that there is no one right or wrong way to interpret anything, including texts, hence the quest for agreement is not a desideratum. In other words, it's not desired, it's not essential. It's not needed. Imagine that. Wittgenstein advanced the notion that explanations and interpretations make sense only within a horizon of pre-suppositions, practices and assumptions that our culture mediates to us or tradition so to speak. When all is said and done, these philosophers and theorists have not been able to lay down singly or collectively a general theory of understanding on which there is agreement, but the conflicting fragments of thoughts they have brought to the continuing debate regarding hermeneutics have seized upon the minds of the less thoughtful folks than they and produced pretexts for a license of expression and criticisms that not only shatters religious faith, but also threatens all good sense. Now I wanted to give an example of Roman Catholic Churches reaction to all of this. In 1993, you can see I was having fun, I have read these documents. I don't understand it but anyway. In 1993 the Pontifical Biblical Commission issued a document on the interpretation of the Bible in the Church. It is a fascinating document for a Bahá'í to read, really honestly, I have read them. Its issuance in 23 April 1993, to commemorate the centenary of the encyclical of Leo the XIII. This thing he called *Providenticimus Deus* and the 50th anniversary of the encyclical of Pius XII which he called *Divino Efflante Spirito*. Both concerning Biblical Studies. Pope John Paul II in his address on that occasion, that is 1993 said that " on the one hand *Providenticimus Deus* wanted especially to protect Catholic interpretation of the Bible from the attacks of rationalistic science, on the other hand *Divino Effante Spirito* was primarily concerned with defending the Catholic interpretation from attacks that opposed the use of science by exegetes, that wanted to impose a non-scientific so called spiritual interpretation of the sacred scriptures." These things are two opposing things you see. He furthermore quotes an assertion made at the second Vatican Council " All that has been said about the manner of interpreting the Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church, which exercises the

Divinely conferred Commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God". Now I would like to know the Scriptures that underlie this. Now, so, I have dealt with formal interpretation so to speak. So let's deal a little bit with authoritative, which brings us home.

Authoritative Interpretation:

I have suggested three categories of interpretation: 1) Informal or Spontaneous, that is the habit of mind which obliges one to derive meaning or understanding from the normal ongoing occurrences and conditions of life. 2) Formal, a disciplined or systematic approach to understanding or interpreting a phenomenon including Sacred Scriptures, one which even though it aspires towards a scientific method does not adhere to a general theory of understanding on which there is an agreement. 3) Authoritative. I have adopted the description authoritative for the third category which is related to the Bahá'í Faith and is unique to it. This uniqueness derives from a distinctive fact. Namely that Bahá'u'lláh himself in two major documents, explicitly, designated an interpreter of His Writings. No Revelator before Him has so clearly done this. A lack which has been largely responsible for the disunity and schism within other major religions. In both the Kitab-i-Aqdas and the Kitab-i-Ahd, which is the book of Covenant, Bahá'u'lláh designated Abdu'l-Bahá as the interpreter of God's Word. You know that. This unequivocal statement appears in the most Holy Book. "When the Ocean of My presence hath ebbed, and the Book of My revelation is ended, turn your faces towards him whom God hath purposed who hath branched from this Ancient Root." Again Bahá'u'lláh states "when the mystic dove will have winged its flight from its sanctuary of praise and sought its far off goal, its hidden habitation, refer ye whatsoever ye understand not in the Book, to him who hath branched from this Mighty stock". Abdu'l-Bahá commenting on the authority conferred on him, stated the following "in accordance with the explicit texts of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh has made the Center of the Covenant, the interpreter of His Word. A Covenant so firm and mighty that from the beginning of time until the present day, no religious dispensation has produced its like". Again Abdu'l-Bahá says, "I am according to the explicit texts of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, and the Kitab-i-Ahd the manifest interpreter of the Word of God, whoso deviates from my interpretation is a victim of his own fancy." Bahá'u'lláh makes a highly illuminating statement about appointed interpreters. Listen. "Know assuredly", he said. "Just as thou firmly believest that Word of God, exalted be His Glory, endureth for ever, thou must likewise believe with undoubting faith that its meaning can never be exhausted." Then this, "They who are its appointed interpreters, they whose hearts are the repositories of its secrets, are however the only ones who can comprehend its manifold wisdom." Fascinating and instructive to contemplate the phrase "they whose hearts are the repositories of its secrets. secrets of the Word. The

indication is that there is something here which transcends the competencies of academic training. Obviously, the function of authoritative interpretation is in its very nature and purpose different from any arrangement we have known before. Its purpose extends beyond the need to know the meaning of the Scripture as they apply to the interactive behavior of the individuals, of peoples, of societies. It is to make possible the achievement of the primary aim of the Bahá'í Revelation, namely, the unity of the entire human race. As you know the Bahá'í Faith has had the benefit of two appointed interpreters - Abdu'l-Baha and his successor Shoghi Effendi.

Let me now quote from a text of antiquity. Since it provides a bridge to the third and final part of the talk that is the Literature of Interpretation. This text is taken from [literature] on Christian doctrine, a treatise by St. Augustine, which deals with Christian exegesis. "It is the duty of the interpreter and teacher of Holy Scripture, the defender of the true Faith, and the opponent of error both to teach what is right and to refute what is wrong, and in the performance of this task, to conciliate the hostile, to rouse the careless, and to tell the ignorant both what is occurring at present and what is probable in the future. But once that his hearers are friendly, attentive, and ready to learn, whether he has found them so or has himself made them so, the remaining objects are to be carried out in whatever way the case requires. If the hearers need teaching, the matter treated of must be made fully known by means of narrative. On the hand to clear points that are doubtful requires reasoning and the exhibition of proof. If however, the hearers require to be roused, rather than instructed, in order that they may be diligent to do what they already know, and to bring their feelings into harmony with the truths they admit, greater vigor of speech is needed." Isn't that fascinating? St. Augustine.

Shoghi Effendi, the great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh was an interpreter of holy Scripture for 36 years from 1921 to 1957 he labored at his divine task producing in the end a wealth of interpretive literature, whose implications for our times and for the far future demands serious study. In a field, that had only been speculated about in the past, Shoghi Effendi by the very nature of his calling, perfected a new literary form. His is a kind of an achievement of which St. Augustine, one of the outstanding ancient Christian thinkers, might have dreamed, in writing his treatise on Christian doctrine. While it is not being suggested that we go back to the 5th century universe of St. Augustine, to find meaning in the works of this 20th century Interpreter; it is instructive and not merely a matter of curiosity, that the Augustinian idea was never truly realized until the passing of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892 and the subsequent assumption of the office of Interpreter by Abdu'l-Bahá who in turn acting in accordance with the divine authority explicitly conferred upon him by Bahá'u'lláh, appointed Shoghi Effendi to succeed him. It is largely the fact of appointment that lends a hitherto unknown dimension to the matter of interpretation in the Bahá'í dispensation and places a unique stamp on Abdu'l-Bahá's and Shoghi

Effendi's works as Interpreters of Scripture. That the prevailing Christian concept and practice of interpretation which St. Augustine had to shape, differs in essential details from the Bahá'í experience since the passing of Bahá'u'lláh also deserves notice but ...[I lost my way here. but it is not

the purpose of this talk to do this] The intention here is to discuss the writings of Shoghi Effendi and as it serves the purpose of literary review to ascertain the motivation of the author some attention to Shoghi Effendi's major function as an interpreter is unavoidable. If therefore Augustine is invoked, it is principally because, retrospection may offer dimension where comparisons are impossible. The question of authenticity and the method of interpretation with which he wrestled, has only now been conclusively answered in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, fifteen centuries later, and in a way that the facts of Christ's ministry and the realities of Augustine's time could not have prepared his vision to perceive. Yet we can appreciate how significant was his yearning, and with what remarkable resourcefulness he discerned and defined the need for authentication of scriptural meaning.

Bahá'u'lláh who declared, Himself to be the Spokesman of God for our time, identifies unity as the central purpose of His Revelation and relates this to the consummate purpose of God for man. Unity of mankind envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh calls for the establishment of a World Order, based on the laws and principles, which He Himself has left enshrined in His recorded Writings, produced over a period of forty years. The Bab Himself the author of an independent revelation, and the forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh alludes to the glorious prospects of the system to be conceived by His Successor. He states in the third chapter of the Persian Bayan, "Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the order of Bahá'u'lláh rendereth thanks unto his Lord for he will assuredly be made manifest. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the Bayan." Of this central purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, Shoghi Effendi writes, " .. 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." The Houses of Justice, institutions of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order, which he summons the people of every city, hamlet or village, of every country to elect according to principles enunciated by him are to function under the direction and protection of a Supreme legislative institution the Universal House of

Justice. This Supreme institution, no less than the Local and National Houses of Justice, now known as the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, is to reach its decisions through a process of consultation in which divine guidance is vouchsafed by God. Although all these institutions are assured of divine guidance, the Universal House of Justice is especially freed from all error. The establishment and evolution of these unique institutions are part of a grand design, which is made possible through a unique provision namely, the establishment of the Institution of the Center of the Covenant, in the person of Abdu'l-Bahá, the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh. You know what the Scriptures are that designated him such, as the Center of the Covenant, and we know how much Bahá'u'lláh wrote about His son, how He loved him, how he praised him, how he conveyed in His various Writings, the nature, the character of His successor. For instance, in one of his Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh says, "Render thanks unto God O People! for his appearance," that is Abdu'l-Bahá's appearance, "for verily he is the most great favor unto you, the most perfect bounty upon you, and through him every moldering bone is quickened, whosoever turneth towards him hath turned towards God, and whosoever turneth away from him, hath turneth away from My Beauty, hath repudiated My Proof and transgressed against Me. He is the Trust of God amongst you, His Charge within you, His manifestation unto you, and His appearance amongst His favored servants. We have sent him down in the form of a human temple, Blessed and sanctified be God who created whatsoever He willeth through His inviolable, His infallible Decree. They who deprive themselves of the shadow of the Branch, are lost in the wilderness of error, are consumed by the heat of worldly desires, and are of those who will assuredly perish". You know in that passage where Bahá'u'lláh says he is His charge within you, His manifestation unto you. Do you remember in the Old Testament when Moses was being assigned His mission as a Manifestation, and He was parrying with God and wanted to slip out of it, and He made all kinds of excuses, and one of His excuses was that He was a stammerer and could not speak, and God said, all right, you are still the one, Aaron can speak, you tell him what to say. I am your God and You are his God. You see it's interesting.

In exalted and emphatic tones Bahá'u'lláh elaborated His Covenant with His followers, who were not to be left shepherdless after His passing in 1892, as to His meaning. He left no room for interpretation or error of judgment. Above all Abdu'l-Bahá was the Center of the Covenant, a center in which an unexampled variety of divine prodigies converge. It is no wonder then, that Abdu'l-Bahá in an affirmation of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant exclaims. "So firm and mighty is this Covenant, that from the beginning of time until the present day, no religious dispensation has produced its like." During a period of 29 years from 1892, till 1921 through unceasing struggle and unremitting pain, inflicted by the attacks by the enemies of the Cause, Abdu'l-Bahá directed the far flung affairs of the Cause, traveled to the West to establish its teachings, delineated its

Institutions and revealed the whole pattern and framework of the Administrative Order brought by his Father. No narration, no exposition, no description indeed no literature yet exists, that adequately conveys the essential nature of one who accomplished so much against so many odds, yet it is increasingly demonstrable, that Abdu'l-Bahá's appointment as the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant welded the universal concepts of the Faith he championed, and prevented its reduction to a veritable pandemonium of contending factions and vested interests. Bahá'u'lláh's metaphorical designation of His son inspired feelings of awe, "The most Mighty Branch", "The limb of the law of God", "A shield unto all who are unto heaven and on earth", "A Shelter for all mankind", "A stronghold for whosoever hath believed in God", "The Master", "The Mystery of God". The last "The Mystery of God", is an expression according to Shoghi Effendi, by which Bahá'u'lláh himself has chosen to designate him which while it does not by any means justify us to assign him the station of prophet-hood, indicates how in the person of Abdu'l-Bahá, the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized. Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretive mind was the crucible in which Bahá'u'lláh's purpose and the sum of Bahá'í experience were fused in the creation of yet another heretofore unknown Institution, the Guardianship. From the reading of Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament following his passing on November 28th 1921, there flashes upon the consciousness of the bereaved Bahá'í community a youthful figure of Shoghi Effendi. As he according to that document is the "Sign of God", the "Chosen Branch", "The Guardian of the Cause of God", "He unto whom His loved ones must turn". He is the expounder of the Word of God. Abdu'l-Bahá's Will, a tri-partied document, regarded by Bahá'ís as the Charter of Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order, is elaborate in its emphasis on this appointment in a manner reminiscent of Bahá'u'lláh's own treatment of the appointment of the Center of the Covenant. Bahá'u'lláh had written in His own hand, in the *Kitáb-i-Ahd*, that is the Book of Covenant, in which the appointment of Abdu'l-Bahá was re-affirmed. Abdu'l-Bahá too wrote in his own hand, the Will and Testament. There are certain resemblances in the construction of the appointive language, of each in the elaboration, in the multiple confirmations, there is no room for doubt as to the identity of the appointee or the authority conferred upon him. You are familiar with these texts.

Shoghi Effendi tells us writing about, Guardian, Guardianship, about himself, he says, "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-Baha does not necessarily confer upon him a station co-equal with those, whose words he is called upon to interpret. He can exercise that right and discharge this obligation and yet remain infinitely inferior to both of them in rank and different in nature". For instance, he tells us that

"the Guardian cannot claim to be the perfect exemplar of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh or the stainless mirror that reflects His light". True, the Guardian, the offspring of Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretive mind the co-sharer in the genius of divine interpretation occupies a lesser rank, nonetheless he emerges as an unequal figure in his own right.

Shoghi Effendi as an Interpreter:

Shoghi Effendi's interpretive work has to be seen against the broad fabric of his responsibilities as a successor of Abdu'l-Bahá. With the passing of Abdu'l-Bahá it fell to him to guide the Bahá'ís toward fulfilling the world encompassing goals, set by Bahá'u'lláh and amplified by Abdu'l-Baha. There was a divine plan to be pursued. It required the firm establishment of new institutions. The pursuance of world wide Teaching Projects, the protection of the Faith against its enemies, in short the building of the New World Order proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. Through the extensive travels of Abdu'l-Bahá in the east and the west and the copious correspondence that flowed from his indefatigable pen, the Faith had been established in 35 countries but the adherents were for the most part loosely organized and largely unaware of the principles of Bahá'í Administration. If Shoghi Effendi's appointment as Guardian, was to have meaning, if it implied preserving the integrity of the Faith, as well as its teachings, he had to do more than explain the texts, he had to direct and guide his trust, through the crucible of transformation. He had to forge a Bahá'í community. In addition to interpretation, Shoghi Effendi's writings were made to serve three major objectives. These were in fact the essential purposes of his exegetic works. These three purposes were: the establishment and consolidation of Bahá'í Institutions, the prosecution of the Bahá'í Teaching programs, the nurturing of Bahá'í community life. Now let's look at the first.

Establishment and consolidation of the Bahá'í Institutions:

Shoghi Effendi gave paramount attention at the outset to building administrative Institutions. We find evidences of this among his first letters to the West. In a letter to the North American believers, 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 texts of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, in every locality, be it city or hamlet, where the number of adult 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."

From this beginning Shoghi Effendi urged and guided the formation of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. On Nov. 4 1957 the time of his death, there existed as many as 26 National Spiritual Assemblies and over 1000 Local Assemblies throughout the world. The second purpose.

The prosecution of the Bahá'í Teaching Programs:

Having abolished the clergy, Bahá'u'lláh urged upon His followers to the primary duty of teaching His Faith as "the most meritorious of all deeds" moreover, Abdu'l-Bahá in a series of 14 letters known as the Tablets of the Divine Plan, addressed to the Bahá'ís in United States and Canada, outlined the program by which the teaching of the Faith was to be effected throughout the world. Although various Teaching Projects had been undertaken by the spontaneous response of individuals to these Tablets, it was not until 1937, sixteen years after the death of Abdu'l-Bahá that a systematic Teaching Scheme, known as the Seven Year Plan was adopted in this very room I think (Foundation Hall of the House of Worship in Wilmette) by the North American believers, under the tutelage of Shoghi Effendi and with the direction of their National Spiritual Assembly. There is a fascinating story surrounding this but I don't have the time to get into it. In the interim he had been building the administrative system, the channel through which the teaching enterprises, which were to grow successively larger until they encircled the globe were to be directed. The Second Five Year Plan launched in 1946 preceded the ambitious 10 year international teaching and consolidation plan initiated in 1953. At the time of his death in the mid point of the later Plan the Faith had already been established in 200 countries and dependencies. The plan achieved all its major goals and at the end in 1963, the centenary of the anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's mission, the Universal House of Justice was elected, by 56 National Spiritual Assemblies. The third,

Nurturing of Bahá'í Community life

Nurture of Bahá'í communities, let me make a few comments on that. The tragic circumstances, which greeted the birth of the Faith, imprisonment and martyrdom of the Herald Prophet the Bab, vehement opposition of the Muslim clergy, which led to the slaughter of some 20,000 Babis, the imprisonment and exile of Bahá'u'lláh, and the official proscriptions imposed upon His followers had by 1921 forged the beginnings of independent Bahá'í Community life in Iran and other muslim countries where Bahá'í membership had grown significantly. But although as a result of his travel from 1911 to 1913 Abdu'l-Bahá had raised up thousands of believers in the West. His instructions concerning Bahá'í collective life, had not yet been absorbed. As has already been observed, Spiritual Assemblies, the pivots around which the various communities revolved had not yet been established on a firm foundation. The believers had not yet known their significance as the channels for guiding and promoting the

application of certain devotional practices, such as fasting and praying, the dissemination of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching for developing the inner life of the individual believer, the use of the Bahá'í Calendar and the observance of Bahá'í Feasts, Holy Days and anniversaries. The demands upon Shoghi Effendi for instruction, clarifications and direction concerning these vital purposes were clear. He was the first and ultimate source of genuine guidance, to whom the Bahá'ís must turn. His treatment of each and all was inextricably linked to his appointment as the expounder of the Word of God. These purposes were made the avenues of his exegetic expression, the means by which life was breathed into his explanations. Every thought he expressed had some particular implication for the immediate or future action of the community, whether that action concerned institutional functions, great undertakings, or the transformation of the character of an individual. It becomes increasingly evident from the reading of his writings, in relation to the occasions which elicited them that thought is not to be wasted on sheer argument, much less on satisfying the pride of authorship as has been true of the philosophic and exegetic tradition followed by ancient and modern theologians. Hair splitting arguments are to be avoided entirely. Thought expressed must serve some purpose, be related to some direction, or deed, must urge, inform, confirm or amplify action. Thus we discover in his performance as interpreter an eminent example of Abdu'l-Bahá's meaning when he states, " The reality of man is his thought", and points out the two differences in two classifications of thought namely, thought that belongs to the world of thought alone and thought that expresses itself in action. Shoghi Effendi's interpretations were obviously oriented to action. In much the same way the as texts he was called upon to interpret. I have already referred to the texts that got us launched in establishing Institutions, Local and National. Here instruction and interpretation are synthesized. They are one and the same thing, because he is asserting the authority and meaning of the Kitab-i-Aqdas when he calls us to establish Local or National Houses of Justice or Spiritual Assemblies. The only variable is time. The use of which falls within the discretion of his authority as appointed guide. An exposition of functions of Local Spiritual Assemblies follows the instructions and forms the basis of the letter containing it. A letter in which is also included an explanation of the need and the basis for the establishment of the National Spiritual Assemblies. In another example a letter written on May 12 1925, Shoghi Effendi Explains further about the formation of National Spiritual Assemblies. He writes, "Regarding the method to be adopted for the election of the National Spiritual Assemblies, it is clear that the texts of the Beloved's Testament," that is Abdu'l-Bahá'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, " 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 Bait-ul-Adl." i.e. Universal House of Justice. The Guardian goes on , "These words, clearly indicate that a three stage election has been provided by Abdu'l-Bahá for the formation of the International House of Justice, and as it is explicitly provided in his Will and Testament that the Secondary Houses of Justice, i.e. the National Spiritual 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 the believers in their respective provinces." You see he lets us, he opens a window and lets us into his processes of thinking. "In view of these complimentary instructions, the principle set forth in my letter of March 12, 1923 has been established requiring believers in every country to elect a certain number of delegates, who in turn will elect their national representatives, whose" that is the National Assembly, you see, "sacred obligation and privilege will be to elect in time God's Universal House of Justice". Here we gather some insight into the progressive stages of exegesis, as they relate to the growth and actions of the community. This letter which went on to amplify the principles enunciated by Abdu'l-Bahá was a reply to a communications dated April 4 and 18, 1925 which the Guardian had received from the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada that supplied him with the information on a variety of subjects and raised questions that he had already treated in a letter written two years before. A number of points emerge from a scrutiny of such letters. Interpretations are given in response to the expressed or demonstrated need of the community at the time. Shoghi Effendi seems completely to avoid gratuitous, random interpretations of the Sacred texts. The questions and needs of the community outline the course and output of his exegesis. In this way his exegesis evolves with the community. It is thus possible to trace and gauge the progressive stages of Bahá'í community development by reading his letters chronologically. Since they rest on enduring principles, the interpretations given are not limited by time. They both satisfy and transcend the need of the moment, and thus serve the future as well as the present. Take for example the letter just cited, above earlier. The principles of elections for the National Spiritual Assemblies which he explains are unchangeable, yet they are written in reply to a question of the moment. The introductions of similar letters, repeatedly affirm the interplay between the information or question received by Shoghi Effendi and the subsequent guidance he issued. Refer for instance, to his letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, this one dated 27 February 1929, he writes, "Dearly Beloved Co-workers, I have been acquainted by the perusal of your latest communications with the nature of the doubts that have been publicly expressed by one who is wholly misinformed as to the true precepts of the Cause. Regarding the validity of the Institutions that stand inextricably interwoven with the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh" or to his letter dated March 21, 1930 "Dearly Beloved Co-workers, amid the reports that have of late reached the Holy Land most of which witnessed

the triumphant march of the Cause, a few seem to betray a certain apprehension, regarding the validity of the Institutions which stand inseparably associated with the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh." These are the opening passages of the letters published under the respective titles, "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh" and "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh - further Considerations" These are indispensable documents, you can't survive without reading them. These are the responses to those questions, to those letters. Both as I say are indispensable responses on the philosophy of Bahá'í Administration. It is no wonder then, that Shoghi Effendi had an insatiable need for information, and was relentless in the gathering and meticulous in the classification of data. You of the present generation must remember that the House of Justice needs information. It does not get revelation, and if you do not supply information, you are likely to miss out on a lot of things, and it is likely to make its own decisions in its own way and you will have to obey it. (Laughter from the audience). He writes "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." This he sent in a cable, but he could not have relied and did not rely solely on Assemblies for information. Amatu'l-Baha writes in her biography of him that he did not always wait until official channels corroborated the arrival of a pioneer at the pioneering post or some other good news which has been conveyed to him 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 details of his maps and plans, was astonishing, she says. Although the data he received were put to a variety of uses, it is evident that the springs of interpretation were often activated by the influx of information. His principle of translating exegesis into action were variously manifested in his methods of persuasion, by which he alternately employed several modes of praise, censure and exhortation. A brief survey of the Advent of Divine Justice, the published letter which Shoghi Effendi wrote to the Bahá'ís of Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada on December 25 1938, will illustrate his methods. I will just do a run through this.

[+CHAPTER2]

In April 1937, these Bahá'ís had at the direction of the Guardian, launched the Seven year Plan. The first long range Teaching Program designed as a systematic response to Abdul-Baha's Charter. The Plan set three goals to be accomplished by the end in 1944, of the first century of the Bahá'í era. Forming a Local Spiritual Assembly in each province of Canada and in each State of the United States, establishing a Bahá'í Center in each country of Central and South America and in certain European countries, and completing the exterior ornamentation of the Temple in Wilmette. These were the three major

goals of the Seven Year Plan, the First Seven Year Plan. And the series of letters and cablegrams he sent to the North American believers during the first year of the Plan, Shoghi Effendi marvels at the range which the driving force of their ceaseless labors has acquired and the heights which the sublimity of their faith has attained. His exhortations are frequent and compelling. The Seven Year Plan, he writes, "must at all costs be prosecuted with increasing force and added consecration. The American believers must gird up their loins of endeavor and step into the arena of service with such heroism as shall astound the entire Bahá'í World. But intermingled with his expression of gratification and praise, are displays of anxiety, increasingly intensified by the falling shadows of World War II. He intimates his deepening concern, not from fear of the gathering specter but from uneasiness about its probable repercussions upon the outlook of those who were to prosecute such a bold program. So he writes. "Severe, and unprecedented as may be the internal tests and ordeals, which the members of this community may yet experience, however tragic and momentous the external happenings which might well disrupt the fabric of the society in which they live, they must not throw out these six remaining years, allow themselves to be deflected from the course, they are now steadily pursuing."

Again he says, "The rumblings that precede the eruption of those forces which must cause the limbs of humanity to quake, can already be heard." Yet he praises the community which is "standing ready, alert, clear-visioned and resolute."

It is against this background of bold planing and courageous action on the one hand and the precarious world conditions on the other that Shoghi Effendi penned one of his most widely used Works, as I refer to the Advent of the Divine Justice. He had seized upon the chance afforded him by the seeming incongruity of the humble plan of hope and the imminence of the war to reconcile the paradox in an exposition of Bahá'í principles. He begins this long and wonderful document with praise. "Best beloved brothers and sisters, in the love of Bahá'u'lláh, It would be difficult indeed to adequately express

the feelings of irrepressible joy and exaltation that flood my heart every time I pause to contemplate the ceaseless evidences of the dynamic energy which animates the stalwart pioneers of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, in the execution of the plan committed to their charge." He's got you. [laughter from the audience] He then documents the reasons for his praise, for he never stoops to flattery. He comments on the resourcefulness of the National representatives of the American believers, appreciates the generous support accorded them by the community at large, observes the close interaction, complete cohesion, continual harmony and fellowship between the various Bahá'í

agencies, as constituting a phenomenon which offers a striking contrast to the disruptive tendencies manifested in the present day society. "The community has reason to be grateful" he says, "for the interposition of a ever watchful providence." He writes, "Whereas every apparent trial, with

which the unfathomable wisdom of the Almighty deems it necessary to afflict His chosen community, serves only to demonstrate afresh, its essential solidarity, and to consolidate its inward strength. Each of the successive crisis in the fortunes of the decadent age exposes more convincingly than the one preceding it the corrosive influences that are fast sapping the vitality and undermining the basis of its declining institutions." He then enumerates certain crises afflicting the Bahá'í communities in Europe and Asia. The Nazi regime has banned the activity of the German Bahá'í community. In central Asia the city enjoying the unique distinction of having been chosen by Abdu'l-Bahá as the home of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkar of the Bahá'í world, the community finds itself at the mercy of the forces which alarmed at its rising power are now bent on to reducing it to utter impotence. In Persia, wherein reside the immense majority of its followers the community faces a continuing campaign of repression, in the Holy Land the heart and world center of the World embracing faith, as state of unrest interferes with the flow of pilgrims and suspends various projects associated with the physical development of the World Center. This somber survey of the state of the Bahá'í community is not however to become a litany of defeat, for Abdu'l-Bahá has written that, and he quotes you see, "the continent of America is in the eyes one true God, the land wherein the splendors of His light shall be revealed, and where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled, and where the righteous will abide and the free assemble." Shoghi Effendi sees it. "Already the community of the believers of the North American continent at once the prime mover and pattern of future communities which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is destined to raise up throughout the length and breadth of the western hemisphere, has despite the prevailing gloom shown its capacity to be recognized as the torchbearer of that light. The repository of those mysteries. The exponent of that righteousness, and the sanctuary of that freedom." When last did you read the Advent, Do you remember or know that you are all of that. Hence the North American Bahá'í Community is the one "chief remaining citadel, the mighty arm, which still raises aloft the standard of unconquerable faith." If you wonder why the pioneers took off and went into the wildernesses of the world, acquaint yourself with these texts. "Thus while its sister communities are bending beneath the tempestuous winds, that beat upon them from every side, this community preserved by the immutable decrees of an omnipotent Ordainer and deriving continual sustenance from the mandate with which the Tablets of the Divine Plan have invested it, is now busily engaged in laying the foundations and in fostering the growth of those institutions which are to herald the approach of the age destined to witness the birth and rise of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh".

He has resolved a paradox and the burden of the actual proof rests on the shoulders of the American Bahá'í Community. "A community, relatively negligible in its numerical strength." That fact itself a paradox. How can it bear this awesome challenge? He stirs the community's sense of pride by reciting its matchless and brilliant record of service. He does this for pages, paragraphs, but quickly warns that, "magnificent as has been this

record, reminiscent as it is, in some of its aspects, of the exploits with which the dawnbreakers of a heroic age have proclaimed the birth of the Faith itself, the task associated with the name of this privileged community, is far from approaching its climax, only beginning to unfold." He then points the community's vision to the grand possibilities of the future, which the successful prosecution of the Plan in progress will lead to. These include among others the election of the Universal House of Justice, and its establishment in the Holy Land. He asserts the certitude of the ultimate blessings that must crown the consummation of their mission. But again he warns, and now listen to this, "Dearly beloved friends, great as is my love and admiration for you, convinced as I am of the paramount share which you can and will undoubtedly have in both the continental and international spheres of the future Bahá'í activity and service," This is 1938, mark you, "I feel it nevertheless incumbent upon me to utter at this juncture, a word of warning, the glowing tributes so repeatedly and so deservedly paid to the capacity, the spirit, the conduct and the high rank of the American believers, both individually and as a community, must under no circumstances be confounded with the characteristics and the nature of the people from which God has raised them up. A sharp distinction between that community and that people must be made, and resolutely and fearlessly upheld, if we wish to give due recognition to the transmuting power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in its impact on the lives and standards of those who have chosen to enlist under His banner, otherwise the supreme and distinguishing function of His Revelation, which is none other than the calling into being a new race of men will remain wholly unrecognized and completely obscured." He then illustrates his meaning, by calling attention to the circumstances, and surroundings in which the prophets of God chose to appear. They deliver their message, in countries and amid peoples and races who are either in a state of decline, or in a state moral and spiritual degradation. he asserts the conviction that "not by reason of any racial superiority, political capacity or spiritual virtue, which a race or nation might possess but rather as a direct consequence of its crying needs, its lamentable degeneracy, and irremediable perversity, has the prophet of God chosen to appear in its midst, and with it as a lever has lifted the entire human race to a higher and nobler plane of conduct, for it is precisely under such circumstances, and by such means the prophets have from time immemorial chosen and were able to demonstrate their redemptive power to raise from the depths of abasement and of misery the people of their own race and nation empowering them to transmit in turn to other races and nations the saving grace and the energizing influence of their Revelation" . Isn't that an amazing perspective? This principle he suggests, applies to a lesser degree to the American Community, and you must listen carefully, "which has been appointed as the executor of the Divine Plan" Chief executors at that, "The American believers are not therefore," he says, "to imagine for a moment, that for some mysterious purpose or by any reason of inherent excellence or special merit, Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to confer upon their country and people so great and lasting a distinction, it is precisely by reason of the patent evils which notwithstanding its other admittedly great

characteristics and achievements, an excessive and binding materialism, has unfortunately engendered within it, the author of their Faith, and the Center its Covenant have singled it out to become the standard bearer of the New World Order envisaged in their Writings" Principle again of the lever, "It is by such means as this, that Bahá'u'lláh can best demonstrate to a heedless generation His Almighty Power, to raise up from the very midst of a people immersed in a sea of materialism, a prey to one of the most virulent and long-standing forms of racial prejudice, and notorious for its political corruption, lawlessness and laxity in moral standards, men and women, who as time goes by will increasingly exemplify those essential virtues, of self renunciation, of moral rectitude, of chastity, of indiscriminating fellowship, of holy discipline and of spiritual insight that will fit them for the preponderating share they will have in calling into being, that world order, and that world civilization of which their country no less than the entire human race stands in desperate need." Having thus explained a divine riddle, he exhorts the American believers, "to weed out by every means in their power, those faults and habits and tendencies which they have inherited from their own nation, and to cultivate patiently and prayerfully, those distinctive qualities and characteristics that are so indispensable to their effective participation in the great redemptive work of their Faith". His logic is impeccable. The force of his presentation convincing. A sensitive alteration of praise and censure and of exhortation accomplishes his dual purpose of fixing his meaning and inducing volition. There is drama as well in this versatile undulation of modes which holds and fascinates the reader to the point of taking action. This is precisely what moved hundreds of believers of various backgrounds to plant the banner of their newfound faith in remote parts of the earth amid peoples with whom they had been previously been wholly unfamiliar. Those distinctive qualities and characteristics, which he identified as rectitude of conduct, chastity and holiness, freedom from prejudice, with which they were to be indispensably armed for their magnificent undertakings received the full measure of his treatment in a subsequent section of this monumental message, a section constituting one of the most eloquent exegetic compositions to be found in his writings, you are all familiar with that, "They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character that all mankind may profit by their example," This is followed by a copious quoting of corroborative extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and "Abdu'l-Bahá. And then he goes on to elucidate further the themes that he has appointed you know of chastity and holiness, and again a compilation of corroborative extracts from the Writings, Having equipped the believers, with the tool of their success, he devoted the remainder of the Advent of Divine Justice to the questions of the Seven Year Plan, relating his comments to the broader divine plan of Abdul-Baha of which it is a part. You know from having read the book what he has done, in calling the friends to service in this Plan and explaining how they should go about it. He sends them to Latin America, he sends them scampering across the country here in the United States, he sends them throughout the reaches of Canada. Then he concludes about his dissertation letter with a word about the

destiny of America, as envisaged by Abdul-Baha assuring them that, "Paradoxical as it may seem", remember they are facing the Second World War, storm clouds are gathering. The Americans are in a state of isolationist zeal, as they frequently get into this, we want to pull in the horns. Remember our first President said, "Don't get entangled in the foreigners business". All right Shoghi Effendi is saying, "Paradoxical as it may seem, her only hope in extricating herself from the perils gathering around her is to become entangled in that very web of International Association which the hand of inscrutable Providence is weaving." Shoghi Effendi snatched the very words out of the literature of this country and turned it around. They said don't get entangled.

He said No, paradoxical as it may seem entanglement is the thing. As was the custom when a letter such as this, is received from the Guardian, the National Assembly acted immediately to publish and circulate it. When therefore in September 1939, the first shots of World War II were fired, the North American Bahá'í Community knew how to react. At the end of its Seven Year Plan in 1944,

it had accomplished every goal that had been set for it. On D-Day a year later, it had already with the urging of its Guardian, been preparing for the second Seven Year Plan, which would take scores of its members to Teaching Frontiers designated for them in the war ravaged countries of Europe. Shoghi Effendi had succeeded eminently, in translating exegesis into heroic action, at one of the most critical and discouraging periods of world history. This is coming to end. A word more. It will come to an end. A word more about his skill of persuasion. "Exegesis is true to its purpose if it induces or perpetuates action in the building of the New World Order." The exegete as Augustine might have observed must therefore both expound knowledge and arouse response. As the earlier review of the Advent of Divine shows by employment of praise, censure and exhortation, Shoghi Effendi produces that rhetorical drama, which captivates and impels the reader, drama thus becomes a tool of instruction. But there is more. Time being an indispensable factor of drama, must also perform its appropriate functions. Shoghi Effendi knew that well; and he found ample opportunity to bend time to his advantage. Whether on the occasions of the observance of Bahá'í holy days and significant anniversaries, or of a Temple

construction project or of the arrival of pioneers at their remote posts, or of the death of teachers of the Faith, such ceremonial messages as he was often moved to write, that is statements in respect of the observance of important events were therefore not spent on these occasions alone but served also to heighten the horizon and intensify the vision of the faithful. A holy day is imminent. He writes, "Fellow laborers in the Divine Vineyard, On the 23rd of May of this auspicious year, (this was 1934) 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 Dispensation of so august, so momentous a Revelation. The rest of the introduction is about the prophetic missions of Bahá'u'lláh and the Bab,

an explanation of the position and the rank of Abdul-Baha and the discourse of the theory on which Bahá'í Administrative Order is based. The letter is now referred to as the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh. We can't live without it.

It is the anniversary of the death of Abdul-Baha. He writes, "The inexorable march of recent events has carried humanity so near to the goal foreshadowed by Bahá'u'lláh that no responsible follower of His Faith viewing on all sides the distressing evidences of the world's travails, can remain unmoved at the thought of its approaching deliverance. It would not seem inappropriate when at a time we are commemorating the world over the termination of the first decade since Abdul-Baha's sudden removal from our midst, to ponder in the light of the teachings bequeathed by him to the world, such events as have tended to hasten the gradual emergence of the World Order anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh. Thus began a letter now called the "Goal of a New World Order"

There are other examples of Shoghi Effendi's employment of time. He used the anniversary of the Ridvan festival, the anniversary of the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh at which time the administration of the Faith is renewed by the election of the Assemblies, to impress upon the Bahá'í community the practical steps towards the realization of its vision. In his messages of this occasion he would catalog and measure the communities' achievements, revise and interpret its goals, and praise and challenge its capacity. A sense of historical significance permeates these messages, in which the vision of the community is made to perceive through its accomplishments and goals, a panorama of the past, the present and the future. One such occasion in 1957, he writes, "As we gaze in retrospect, beyond the immediate past and survey in however a cursory a manner, the vicissitudes afflicting a tormented society, and recall the strains and stresses to which a fabric of dying order has been increasingly subjected, we cannot but marvel at the sharp contrast presented on the one hand by the accumulated evidences of the orderly unfoldment and the uninterrupted multiplication of the agencies of an administrative order designed to be the harbinger of a World Civilization, and on the other by the ominous manifestations of the acute political conflicts, of social unrest, of racial animosity, of class antagonism, of immorality and of irreligion proclaiming in no uncertain terms the corruption and obsolescence of the institutions of a bankrupt order. Against the background of these afflictive disturbances, the turmoil and retribution of a travailing age we may well ponder the portentous prophesies uttered well nigh four score years ago by the Author of our Faith, as well as the dire predictions made by him who is the unerring interpreter of His teachings, all foreshadowing a universal commotion of a scope and intensity unparalleled in the annals of mankind. Violent

derangement of the World's equilibrium, the trembling that will seize the limbs of mankind, the radical transformation of the human society, the rolling up of the present day order, the fundamental changes effecting the structure of governments, the weakening of the pillars of religion, the rise of dictatorships, the spread of tyranny, the fall of monarchies, the decline of ecclesiastical institutions, the increase of anarchy and chaos, the extension and consolidation of the movements of the left, the fanning into flame of the smoldering fire of racial strife, the development of infernal engines of war, the burning of cities, the contamination of the atmosphere of the earth, these stand out as the signs and portents that must either herald or accompany the retributive calamity which as decreed by Him who is the Judge, the Redeemer of mankind must sooner or later afflict the society which for the most part and for over a century has turned a deaf ear to the Voice of God's Messenger in this Day, a calamity which must purge the human race of the dross of its age old of corruption's and weld its component parts into a firmly knit world embracing fellowship, a fellowship destined in the fullness of time to be incorporated in the framework and to be galvanized by the spiritualizing influences of a mysteriously expanding, divinely appointed order, and to flower in the course of future dispensations into a civilization the like of which mankind has at no stage in its evolution witnessed." How is that for eloquence? I die when I read these things.

Among the most appealing features of Shoghi Effendi's writings, and particularly of his occasional messages are the meaning they give to history, and the prospect they assign to the future. The future, or put differently the destiny of humanity emerges as the dominant theme of his work, and from the vision of it we gather a hitherto unformulated understanding of the past and the present. In his essay, *Unfoldment of the World Civilization*, for instance, there is an outline of the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation which lends the reader an unusual perspective of historical process. A process that occurs in the light of man's purpose which according to Bahá'u'lláh is to carry forward an ever advancing civilization, having evolved through the various units of social life, family, tribe, city-state and nation, mankind's present goal is the unity of nations a world superstate, the final step in man's social evolution. This goal is concomitant with his impending spiritual maturity. I don't want to read the passage that folds that out. That's too long. But you know how wonderful it is, in the *Unfoldment of the World Civilization* where he gives the vision of the unity of mankind. We pass that by today. But, ummm... just a smidgen. [laughter from audience] "The unity of the human race as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh," he writes, "implies the establishment of a world commonwealth, in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded." that's a taste.

Now the other day when we were getting ready to put up our website, I remembered a line from this very section of his letter, and it says this: "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." He wrote that 60 years [rather] 61 years ago, and now we go to our computers and we push a button and there it is.

Future society thus outlined is no utopian dream. On the contrary it is the natural outcome of man's spiritual maturity as is fruit bearing the natural consequence of the maturity in the tree. Attaining to such a society involves a travail of growth, and transition which in spiritual terms implies a transformation in the character of man - a transformation analogous to the process of adolescence, Shoghi Effendi therefore encourages no illusory ease of attainment of world unity. He is as forthright as about the setbacks and pitfalls to be encountered, as he reassuring of the inevitability of this attainment. Referring to Bahá'u'lláh's principle of federation of nations, Shoghi Effendi once mused, "Who knows that for so exalted a conception to take shape a suffering more intense than any it has yet experienced will have to be inflicted upon humanity. Could anything less than the fire of a civil war with all its violence and vicissitudes, a war that nearly rent the great American Republic have welded the states, not only into a union of independent units, but into a nation in spite of all the ethnic differences that characterize its component parts, that so fundamental a revolution involving such far reaching changes in the structure of the society can be achieved through the ordinary processes of diplomacy and education seems highly improbable, 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." You see how straightforward he was about things. By statements such as this Shoghi Effendi kept the balance between prospect and practicality. One derives from his balanced outlook, a quality of naturalness about the goals of the Bahá'í Faith

and their attainment, a cohesive and compelling analysis of historical process emerges from the portrayal of cause, effect and prospect in such essays as the Goals of a New World Order, The Unfoldment of World Civilization and the Promised Day is Come. This quality of naturalness induces belief in his perceptions - a belief which is enhanced by the success of the Bahá'í community in translating his instructions into triumphs despite some of the most trying circumstances. One recalls for instance that the instructions and advice given in the Advent of Divine Justice and the other letters that Shoghi Effendi wrote in the 30's and 40's guided the community towards the accomplishment of its goals amid the confusion and doubts caused by the World War II.

Now a word about him as the interpreter. I think now I am coming closer to the end, bear with me a little bit. Shoghi Effendi wrote a prodigious quantity of letters which formed the bulk of his literary work, but he also translated the words of the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh and Abdul-Baha from Arabic and Persian into

English. Gifted with a masterly grasp of the rich vocabulary and the subtle nuances of English, and endowed with the power of unerring perception, he turned any translation into a thing of wonder and delight. His major works of translation include three complete works of Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, and the Kitab-i-Iqan, and the compilations of Bahá'u'lláh's writings for instance the Gleanings from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Prayers and Meditations. One of his most celebrated translations is the Dawn Breakers - Nabil's narrative of the early days of the Babi Revelation. 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 unfailing in fidelity of its source. Although a considerable number of Shoghi Effendi's letters and messages now appear in several anthologies and in a few instances a single letter has been lengthy enough to be published as a book, for instance the Advent of the Divine Justice and The Promised Day is Come, he actually set out to write only one book in English - God Passes By - which is a stupendous history of the first century of the Bahá'í Faith. It is in this book that one can appreciate the versatility of his narrative style. The temptation to set an example is irresistible. The extract I will now read follows a recitation of vivid activities during Abdu'l-Bahá's travels in the West. Note how skillfully Shoghi Effendi produces two contrasting bodies of narrative, one in an opening series of questions, the other in a corresponding series of answers. In this one paragraph salient features of almost seventy years of Bahá'í history are strung together in contrasting colors as it were upon the thread of Abdul-Baha's life. Listen. "Who knows what thoughts flooded the heart of Abdu'l-Bahá as He found Himself the central figure of such memorable scenes as these? Who knows what thoughts were uppermost in His mind as He sat at breakfast beside the Lord Mayor of London, or was received with extraordinary deference by the Khedive himself in his palace, or as He listened to the cries of "Allah-u-Abha" and to the hymns of thanksgiving and praise that would herald His approach to the numerous and brilliant assemblages of His enthusiastic followers and friends organized in so many cities of the American continent? Who knows what memories stirred within Him as He stood before the thundering waters of Niagara, breathing the free air of a far distant land, or gazed, in the course of a brief and much-needed rest, upon the green woods and countryside in Glenwood Springs, or moved with a retinue of Oriental believers along the paths of the Trocadero gardens in Paris, or walked alone in the evening beside the majestic Hudson on Riverside Drive in New York, or as He paced the terrace of the Hotel du Parc at Thonon-les-Bains, overlooking the Lake of Geneva, or as He watched from Serpentine Bridge in London the pearly chain of lights beneath the trees stretching as far as the eye could see? Memories of the sorrows, the poverty, the overhanging doom of His earlier years; memories of His mother who sold her gold buttons to provide Him, His brother and His sister with sustenance, and who was forced, in her darkest hours, to place a handful of dry flour in the palm of His hand to appease His

hunger; of His own childhood when pursued and derided by a mob of ruffians in the streets of Tihran; of the damp and gloomy room, formerly a morgue, which He occupied in the barracks of Akka and of His imprisonment in the dungeon of that city - memories such as these must surely have thronged His mind. Thoughts, too, must have visited Him of the Bab's captivity in the mountain fastnesses of Adhirbayjan, when at night time He was refused even a lamp, and of His cruel and tragic execution when hundreds of bullets riddled His youthful breast. Above all His thoughts must have centered on Bahá'u'lláh, Whom He loved so passionately and Whose trials He had witnessed and had shared from His boyhood. The vermin-infested Siyah-Chal of Tihran; the bastinado inflicted upon Him in Amul; the humble fare which filled His kashkul while He lived for two years the life of a dervish in the mountains of Kurdistan; the days in Baghdad when He did not even possess a change of linen, and when His followers subsisted on a handful of dates; His confinement behind the prison-walls of Akka, when for nine years even the sight of verdure was denied Him; and the public humiliation to which He was subjected at government headquarters in that city - pictures from the tragic past such as these must have many a time overpowered Him with feelings of mingled gratitude and sorrow, as He witnessed the many marks of respect, of esteem, and honor now shown Him and the Faith which He represented.

(God Passes By, pages 292-293)

It should perhaps not be surprising at all, given the motivations of his purpose, to observe that Shoghi Effendi also possessed the power of definition to a superlative degree, and found more ways than a celebrated giant of letters to use this power. When you read for example his definition of a chaste and holy life, you perceive resources of this power that would hardly occur to you in reading the writings of the modern literati. Shoghi Effendi took to his literary endeavours this code of chastity and holiness as he had defined it. Neither art nor literature is to be prostituted. The use of language must therefore reflect the virtues of rectitude, and yet employ the creative force of imagination. Deny falsity and yet be quickened by drama. Eschew perversity and yet engage the appeal of beauty. Language must exhibit a wholesome respect for the meaning of words. A meticulous attention to the arrangements of sentences a precise calculation of the effect of paragraphs. In any case it must say what it means and mean it well. The good purpose of language is related to the principle of a chaste and holy life. The proper use of language is related to the principle of rectitude of conduct. You see then that the fabric of his literary work owes its strength and integrity to this strict adherence to these principles; unlike the perversion of the language which George Orwell saw in modern political writing as largely the defense of the indefensible. His manner, his usage, his motivation of language, embody the high principles it espouses and legitimizes the information and pleasure it conveys. The messages of the Guardian grew into a voluminous body of literature of a wholly new character; and although there is much more to be said about its uncommon literary quality that can be contained in this talk, the deepest sense of its character, it can be said in summary is in the realm of the

spirit and thus remains somewhat elusive except to those who experience it directly. One could remark randomly about his periodic sentence in which multiple compounds of phrases explode with brilliant sparks of meaning at the ending statement, about the baroque constructions, in which words are arranged in rich designs of meaning and imagery like the settings of fine stone, about the appreciation of assonance and alliterations, about the lyrical cadence of his sentences, which sound better and seem to enlarge upon their meanings when read aloud, about his one sentence paragraphs, about the mathematical precision of his usage, about his ability to compress multitudinous meanings into a slight space, to reconcile conciseness and amplitude, precision and suppleness, force and elegance. You might say in the end that Shoghi Effendi has distilled the ancient classical virtues, in fact he has distilled the virtues of language in any age and clothed them with the principles of spirit, you could say he rescued the virtues of English, in this respect Orwell who in this century bemoaned the plight of English in our decadent civilization, would most likely have loved and lauded Shoghi Effendi's continual success in loading such substance into his sentences that they seem to crackle with the weight of their significances. The roots of all these marvels in the writings of Shoghi Effendi have their deeper foundation elsewhere. Their foundation is in the fear of God, to which Bahá'u'lláh repeatedly exhorts humanity. In these exhortations Bahá'u'lláh exhorts all people to what ennobles them, that correct respect for the majesty of their God, who created them out of his love, to carry forward and ever advancing civilization, which ultimately must lead them inexorably and eternally toward Him. Shoghi Effendi being the noblest of men knew better than anyone else, how vital was this sense of respect to the critical role, in which he must unerringly guide through his interpretation of God's Word the processes of an ever advancing civilization.

— Remembering Shoghi Effendi as Interpreter (Used by permission of the curator)