

# The Emergence of World Civilization

## An Exposition on Excerpts from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

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### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to extract the essence of Shoghi Effendi's ideas presented in that chapter of his seminal work — *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* — entitled "The Unfoldment of World Civilization." The book deals with the far and immediate future of global civilization that is particularly pertinent for the twenty first century and it is the last chapter that is so rich in possibilities. If ever a literary work were to be identified as a monument to its author this one would certainly suffice for the Beloved Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi.

In setting the stage for the study of a future Bahá'í civilization, the Guardian first drew out the contrast in the rise of the Administrative Order of the Faith of God and the disintegration of society as evidenced during the Great Depression of the 1930s. But it was not the Depression alone nor the events leading up to it before the crash of 1929 that caused the disintegration noted by Shoghi Effendi. They were rather symptomatic of much deeper cumulative breakdowns of social institutions harking back to the first warnings by Bahá'u'lláh in the previous century. The Guardian pointed out the mysterious manner in which the signs were heralding the birth of that World Order that would signalize the Golden Age of the Cause of God. He added that all fair-minded observers could not fail to discern them nor should one be misled by the slowness of the unfoldment of the civilization that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh were laboring to establish. And one

should not be deluded by the apparent well being resulting exclusively in material gain. He then referred to a well known quote by Bahá'u'lláh: “*Soon, will the present day Order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead... The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this Most Great, this new World Order.*” [WOB 161-162]

One of the fundamental principles of The New World Order espoused by Bahá'u'lláh involves the unification of the entire human race. He was quoted in reference to the Lesser Peace (political peace) with warnings to the rulers of the world after they refused “The Most Great Peace” as embodied in the famous letters to the kings and religious leaders of the world:

*Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions... Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice.* [GWB 253]

The Most Great Peace based on the divinely appointed ordinances that are implicit in the World Order that stands associated with the Holy Name of Bahá'u'lláh was brought into focus. The Guardian asserted “*the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes and nations – can rest on no other basis, and can be preserved through no other agency...*” [WOB 162] And from Bahá'u'lláh: “*It beseemeth all men in this Day to take firm hold on the Most Great Name, and to establish the unity of all mankind. There is no place to flee to, no refuge that any one can seek, except Him.*” [GWB 202]

## Humanity's Coming of Age

Shoghi Effendi inferred that the advent of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh should be regarded as signaling the coming of age of the human race. That its mission is the “organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations.” That it should not be viewed as just another spiritual revival, or only a further stage in progressive Revelation. It should be viewed as

“marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man’s collective life on this planet.” He took this startling concept a step further:

The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture — all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Era — should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop. [WOB 162]

The Guardian then compared “That mystic, all-pervasive, yet indefinable change, which we associate with the stage of maturity inevitable in the life of the individual...” to a similar stage that “must sooner or later be attained in the collective life of mankind, producing an even more striking phenomenon in world relations, and endowing the whole human race with such potentialities of well-being as shall provide, throughout the succeeding ages, the chief incentive required for the eventual fulfillment of its high destiny.” [WOB 164]

### **The Process of Integration**

This period in which we live was “likened to the culminating stage in the political evolution of the great American Republic the stage which marked the emergence of a unified community of federated states....” Reference was made to the stirring of a new national consciousness coupled with the birth of an infinitely richer civilization than its component parts could separately achieve. This may be viewed as the coming of age of the American people. Similarly, the stage at which mankind has now arrived is ripe for the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh which “has been endowed with such potentialities as are commensurate with the maturity of the human race — the crowning and most momentous stage in its evolution from infancy to manhood.” [WOB 166]

It was explained that the founders of past Religions have shed the splendors of one common Revelation at various stages

that marked the advance of mankind toward maturity. As such, they may be regarded as preliminary Manifestations paving the way for that Day when the whole world will have born its destined fruit. However, the underlying expressions of Bahá'u'lláh that established absolute oneness of all the Prophets should never be obscured. The Guardian further stated:

Any variations in the splendor which each of these Manifestations of the Light of God has shed upon the world should be ascribed not to any inherent superiority involved in the essential character of any one of them, but rather to the progressive capacity, the ever-increasing spiritual receptiveness, which mankind, in its progress towards maturity, has invariably manifested. [WOB 166]

### The Final Consummation

The progression of mankind current in this day was characterized, as a “stupendous evolution in the collective life of the whole human race” and that those who associate this with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh are the only ones who can grasp the significance of His words.

This Day, however, is unique, and is to be distinguished from those that have preceded it. The designation ‘Seal of the Prophets’ fully revealeth its high station. The Prophetic Cycle hath verily ended. The Eternal Truth is now come. He hath lifted up the ensign of power, and is now shedding upon the world the unclouded splendor of His Revelation. In this most mighty Revelation, all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation. That which hath been made manifest in this preeminent, this most exalted Revelation, standeth unparalleled in the annals of the past, nor will future ages witness its like. [WOB 167]

The following confirmative words reiterated by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s pronouncement were quoted: “*Centuries,*” He affirms in one of His Tablets, “*nay, countless ages, must pass away ere the Day-*

*Star of Truth shineth again in its mid-summer splendor, or appeareth once more in the radiance of its vernal glory...*" [WOB 167]

### **Pangs of Death and Birth**

Up to this point the Guardian has set the stage for a deeper understanding of what bodes for the future in the life of humankind. Beginning fifteen short years after the passing of his beloved grandfather 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi brought to bear, the culmination of spiritually disintegrating conditions of the world in the nineteen thirties. Concurrently he reflected upon the startling fulfillment of prophetic utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá with expectations of much more to follow especially regarding the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh and the Golden Age of the Most Great Peace. He explained that the World Order that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh fosters was yet to be born, that the creative energies released by the Heroic Age of the Faith were not yet crystallized into a world society that would mirror forth the brightness of His glory. Although the framework of His Administrative Order was erected, and the Formative Age had begun, the promised Kingdom remained "uninaugurated."

Reference was made to "the generation of the half-light" destined to endure the dark forces that would spawn a flood of agonizing afflictions before the dawn of the Golden Age of the Faith. The ensuing seven decades since the writing of these letters have certainly confirmed those dire warnings, and there is yet more to come before this travailing age "can yield its fairest fruit." He referred to that time as an incubation period for the World Commonwealth envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh. He further said "We stand on the threshold of an age whose convulsions proclaim alike the death-pangs of the old order and the birth-pangs of the new." [WOB 169]

### **Universal Fermentation**

The Guardian summarized the reality of a process that the bulk of mankind was apparently not fully aware that he called Universal Fermentation. This was defined as a worldwide phenomenon that continues to this day involving religious, social, economic and political evidences in anticipation of the

Day when unity of the human race will be established. He further asserted that we were in a twofold process, each of which would “bring to a climax the forces that were transforming the face of our planet. The first was and is essentially an integrating process, while the second was and is fundamentally disruptive.” One is an unfolding System that will serve as a pattern for a future world polity toward which a disordered world is advancing. The other is a disintegrating influence that tends to tear down the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity’s progress towards its destined goal.

A titanic, a spiritual struggle, unparalleled in its magnitude yet unspeakably glorious in its ultimate consequences, is being waged as a result of these opposing tendencies, in this age of transition through which the organized community of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh and mankind as a whole are passing. [WOB 170]

The Guardian explained that the constructive process was associated with the nascent Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, that it was the harbinger of a New World Order whereas the destructive forces were characterized by a civilization that was falling into chaos and decline.

### **This Age of Transition**

Our focus was then drawn to the outstanding events that were transpiring in that formative period referred to as “this Age of Transition” and the tendencies that characterized it. Its tribulations were the precursors of “that Era of blissful felicity” which would “incarnate God’s ultimate purpose for all mankind.” It was inferred that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing in 1921 ushered in its opening phase.

Shoghi Effendi identified two momentous events that just preceded this opening phase in which we are still living. They were precipitated by World War I with the fall of the German Empire and the extinction of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The war “signalized the opening of the Age of Frustration destined to precede the establishment of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.” At the time of this writing over seventy years ago, the Guardian referred to these events as being “the

earliest occurrences of that turbulent Age, into the outer fringes of whose darkest phase we are now beginning to enter.” [WOB 170] The twentieth century has certainly confirmed the truth of these remarks.

Germany had previously conquered Napoleon III and reveled in glory that would be short lived even after the warnings by Bahá'u'lláh: “*O King of Berlin!... Take heed lest pride debar thee from recognizing the Day-Spring of Divine Revelation, lest earthly desires shut thee out, as by a veil, from the Lord of the Throne above and of the earth below. Thus counseleth thee the Pen of the Most High...*” [KA 51] And again: “*O banks of the Rhine! We have seen you covered with gore, inasmuch as the swords of retribution were drawn against you; and so you shall have another turn. And We hear the lamentations of Berlin, though she be today in conspicuous glory.*” [KA 53]

Germany was utterly vanquished only to rise again and plunge Europe into that darkest phase of a turbulent age spoken of by Shoghi Effendi, a phase of unparalleled horror that reached its zenith in World War II.

## **Collapse of Islám**

Within the context of sweeping changes in the politico-religious life of man in the early twentieth century there was a central theme of profound import regarding the long standing world of Islam and its collapse. The Guardian first pointed out how the power of the Shí'ih hierarchy crumbled in the wake of Muslim fanaticism after centuries of impregnable power. Secularization eroded the very foundation of Islámic orthodoxy. And Shí'ih Islam in particular paid the price for its intense hostility toward the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. It “had been degraded and demoralized, and was being condemned to hopeless obscurity and ultimate extinction.” Bahá'u'lláh encapsulated the process:

*Behold, O Muḥammad, how the sayings and doings of the followers of Shí'ih Islám have dulled the joy and fervor of its early days, and tarnished the pristine brilliancy of its light. In its primitive days, whilst they still adhered to the precepts associated with the name of their Prophet, the Lord of mankind, their career was*

*marked by an unbroken chain of victories and triumphs. As they gradually strayed from the path of their Ideal Leader and Master, as they turned away from the light of God and corrupted the principle of His Divine unity, and as they increasingly centered their attention upon them who were only the revealers of the potency of His Word, their power was turned into weakness, their glory into shame, their courage into fear. Thou dost witness to what a pass they have come.* [GWB 69]

With the downfall of the Qájár Dynasty and its unrelenting harassment of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh there followed the humiliation of the Shi'ih ecclesiastical leaders. The atrocious acts perpetrated on the Bábís, the martyrdom of the Báb, the banishment of Bahá'u'lláh to the most desolate of cities and the numerous cruel sentences passed on to His innocent followers "stand out as among the blackest acts for which posterity will hold this blood-stained dynasty responsible" declared Shoghi Effendi. "One more barrier that had sought to obstruct the forward march of the Faith was now removed." [WOB 173]

Bahá'u'lláh had been exiled from the land of His birth and through it all bore the brunt of increasing calamities placed on Him and the followers of the Báb when placed under the jurisdiction of the Sultán of Turkey.

The orders which these foes issued, the banishments they decreed, the indignities they inflicted, the plans they devised, the investigations they conducted, the threats they pronounced, the atrocities they were prepared to commit, the intrigues and baseness to which they, their ministers, their governors, and military chieftains had stooped, constitute a record which can hardly find a parallel in the history of any revealed religion. The mere recital of the most salient features of that sinister theme would suffice to fill a volume. [WOB 174]

The Bábí Cause of which Bahá'u'lláh was its leading proponent triumphed in spite of the endless persecution by the Iranian leaders both secular and religious. Add the cruel

machinations of the arrogant Turkish despot 'Abdu'l-'Azíz and the seditious actions of Bahá'u'lláh's own kindred and one can only marvel that the survival of the Cause is "one of the most intriguing and mysterious episodes of contemporary history." Through it all, the eroding, insidious forces of decay resulted in catastrophic convulsions within the Ottoman Empire culminating with the murder of the Turkish Sultán in 1876. Precipitating the overthrow of his successor, 'Abdu'l-Hamíd II in 1909 were the Russo-Turkish conflict, wars of liberation and the Young Turk movement in 1908 that liberated political and religious prisoners. For the first time since the tender age of eight and a half years, 'Abdu'l-Bahá breathed freedom.

With startling swiftness these events were followed with the calamitous Balkin wars and the liberation of Palestine including 'Akká and Haifa. Further dismemberment was decreed by the Treaty of Versailles and the Sultanate was abolished. The House of Uthman fell and the Caliphate was extinguished. The State Religion ceased to be and the Sharí'ah Law was annulled. About this, with respect to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, the Guardian stated:

The overthrow of the Sultanate and the Caliphate, the twin pillars of Sunní Islam, can be regarded in no other light except as the inevitable consequence of the fierce, the sustained and deliberate persecution which the monarchs of the tottering House of Uthman, the recognized successors of the Prophet Muḥammad, had launched against it. [WOB 173]

Shoghi Effendi compared the evidence of divine visitation that fell on the persecutors of Jesus Christ with those of Bahá'u'lláh during the first century of their respective dispensations. The Roman Emperor besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the rebuilt temple. He desecrated the Holy of Holies and removed its treasures to Rome. He further delivered the penultimate insult by establishing a pagan colony on mount Zion after massacring the Jews and dispersing the survivors. Christ had warned:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth

gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!... (Luke 13:34) And when He was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. (Luke 19:41-44)

In a similar context, Bahá'u'lláh was quoted regarding Constantinople:

*O Spot that art situate on the shores of the two seas! The throne of tyranny hath, verily, been established upon thee, and the flame of hatred hath been kindled within thy bosom, in such wise that the Concourse on high and they who circle around the Exalted Throne have wailed and lamented. We behold in thee the foolish ruling over the wise, and darkness vaunting itself against the light. Thou art indeed filled with manifest pride. Hath thine outward splendor made thee vain-glorious? By Him Who is the Lord of mankind! It shall soon perish, and thy daughters and thy widows and all the kindreds that dwell within thee shall lament. Thus informeth thee the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. [KA 52-53]*

It was to the cruel Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz that Bahá'u'lláh wrote one of His famous letters to the leaders of the world. In it He admonished the brutal monarch, in clear and certain terms that he should set before him God's unerring balance and to weigh his actions every day and every moment. He warned: "*Bring thyself to account ere thou art summoned to a reckoning, on the day when no man shall have strength to stand for fear of God, the day when the hearts of the heedless ones shall be made to tremble.*" [GWB 235] To the ministers of the Turkish State He commanded "*to keep the precepts of God, and to forsake your own laws and regulations, and to be of them*

*who are guided aright... Ye shall, ere long, discover the consequences of that which ye shall have done in this vain life, and shall be repaid for them.*" [GWB 122-123] Bahá'u'lláh compared them to the many leaders of earlier ages who, while superior in rank, had committed the same things they were committing only to be consigned to inevitable doom. To the inhabitants of Constantinople He warned "*God assuredly dominateth the lives of them that wronged Us, and is well aware of their doings. He will, most certainly, lay hold on them for their sins....*" [GWB 129]

Thirteen hundred years would elapse after the passing of Muḥammad before the illegitimacy of the Caliphate would be publicly demonstrated. The Guardian quoted an astonishing Muslim tradition that corroborated the theme of the fall of Islam:

In the latter days a grievous calamity shall befall My people at the hands of their ruler, a calamity such as no man ever heard to surpass it. So fierce will it be that none can find a shelter. God will then send down One of My descendants, One sprung from My family, Who will fill the earth with equity and justice, even as it hath been filled with injustice and tyranny... A day shall be witnessed by My people whereon there will have remained of Islam naught but a name, and of the Qur'án naught but a mere appearance. The doctors of that age shall be the most evil the world hath ever seen. Mischief hath proceeded from them, and on them will it recoil... At that hour His malediction shall descend upon you, and your curse shall afflict you, and your religion shall remain an empty word on your tongues. And when these signs appear amongst you, anticipate the day when the red-hot wind will have swept over you, or the day when ye will have been disfigured, or when stones will have rained upon you. [WOB 179]

Bahá'u'lláh addressed the people of the Qur'án and affirmed: "*O concourse of Muslim divines! By your deeds the exalted station of the people hath been abased, the standard of Islam hath been reversed, and its mighty throne hath fallen.*" [WOB 179]

## Deterioration of Christian Institutions

Shoghi Effendi put the question: Could the deterioration that attacked the fabric of the Religion of Muḥammad exert its baneful influence on the institutions associated with the Faith of Jesus Christ? He maintained that no unbiased observer could fail to admit that the forces of irreligion and of a purely materialistic philosophy were spreading and were beginning to invade some of the most powerful Christian institutions of the western world. He affirmed that some of these institutions were already aware of the pervasive influence of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. He inferred that they would regard with deepening dismay the rise of His New World Order, as their inherent strength would increasingly deteriorate. He noted Bahá'u'lláh's comment made a half-century earlier:

*The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it?* [GWB 199]

Secularism, the menace that attacked Islam and every other established religion had laid hold on the communities of Christianity to such a degree that the Guardian considered the time in which we were moving as one of the most critical in the history of Christianity. Many Christian missionaries proclaimed: "A wave of materialism is sweeping round the world." Their reports reflected "the drive and pressure of modern industrialism, which are penetrating even the forests of Central Africa and the plains of Central Asia, make men everywhere dependent on, and preoccupied with, material things." [WOB 181] All this was compounded by the rise of communism characterized as 'religious irreligion' that had its own passionate sense of mission. Though the Soviet Union collapsed a half-century later, there still remains to this day one fifth of the world under the communist yoke of atheism. It was further stated that this form of attack was something new in history with respect to religion in general. And equally hostile to Christianity was nationalism, especially militant

nationalism. Yet unlike communism, nationalism is often bound up with one religion or another. On the other hand, the policies following World War I exerted a pernicious effect on the institutions and beliefs connected with Christianity, one of the most widely spread and best-organized religious systems of the world. Intolerant and militant nationalism attributed to the philosophy of Georg Friedrich Hegel deified the state, inculcated a war-spirit and incited racial animosity according to Shoghi Effendi. It also marked a weakening of the Church and diminished its spiritual influence:

It was being stabbed by an alien and militant atheism from without, and by the preachers of a heretical doctrine from within. Both of these forces, each operating in its own sphere and using its own weapons and methods, have moreover been greatly assisted and encouraged by the prevailing spirit of modernism, with its emphasis on a purely materialistic philosophy, which, as it diffuses itself, tends increasingly to divorce religion from man's daily life. [WOB 183]

The Guardian characterized the clash between these contending interests as disastrous and irreparably damaging. Examples were listed including the dismemberment of the Greek Orthodox Church in Russia and the blow sustained by the Church of Rome after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Also included was the separation of Church and state in Spain and the persecution the Catholic Church in Mexico. Listed too were the terrorization of Catholics and Lutherans in the heart of Europe and the turmoil experienced by the Church in Africa resulting from military campaigns. The decline in the fortunes of Christian Missions in Persia, Turkey and the Far East also exemplified reverses experienced by Christian ecclesiastical institutions in almost every part of the world. At this juncture, Shoghi Effendi posed an interesting question with an observation:

Might not this disintegrating tendency, from which Sunni and Shí'ih Islam have so conspicuously suffered, unloose, as it reaches its climax, still further calamities upon the various denominations of the Christian Church? In what manner and how rapidly this process,

which has already set in, will develop the future alone can reveal. Nor can it, at the present time, be estimated to what extent will the attacks which a still powerful clergy may yet launch against the strongholds of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the West accentuate this decline and widen the range of inescapable disasters. [WOB 184]

He then quoted a surprising prophetic statement by a Protestant minister of the times:

If Christianity wishes and expects to serve the world in the present crisis... it must cut back through Christianity to Christ, back through the centuries-old religion about Jesus to the original religion of Jesus. Otherwise, the spirit of Christ will live in institutions other than our own. [WOB 184]

An interesting parallel was drawn between the events in the early Christian centuries and the first century of the Bahá'í Era. The dominant religion of the Roman people was pagan but it was confronted by evasive philosophies and popular cults. They were surrounded by Neo-Platonists, Gnostic philosophers, Philonism, Mithraism and a myriad of sects, which perverted the state religion. These and paganism were swept away by the new Christian Faith. In the modern era, beginning with the first century of the Bahá'í Faith, most Christian Institutions were faced with conditions similar to those facing Roman state religion in the first centuries of the Common Era, namely conflicting beliefs and practices. Ironically, this condition was augmented by the bankruptcy of that same Faith that had conquered paganism in an earlier time. To all this, Shoghi Effendi made a timely promise:

Such institutions as have strayed far from the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ must of necessity, as the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh takes shape and unfolds, recede into the background, and make way for the progress of the divinely-ordained institutions that stand inextricably interwoven with His teachings. [WOB 185]

He inferred that the indwelling Spirit of God which animated the members of the early Church would be reborn in light of the

redefinition of its fundamental verities and the clarification of its original purpose. But he made a defining statement about the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh with respect to Christianity. He said that there could be no variance with the animating purpose or authority invested in the Faith of Jesus Christ and concluded with the following unequivocal words of Bahá'u'lláh.

We testify that when He came into the world, He shed the splendor of His glory upon all created things. Through Him the leper recovered from the leprosy of perversity and ignorance. Through Him the unchaste and wayward were healed. Through His power, born of Almighty God, the eyes of the blind were opened, and the soul of the sinner sanctified... He it is Who purified the world. Blessed is the man who, with a face beaming with light, hath turned towards Him. [GWB 85-86]

### **Signs of Moral Downfall**

Shoghi Effendi distinguished moral downfall as a thing apart from, yet intricately connected to the decline of religious institutions. He makes reference to the life and conduct of the individual as a counterpart to the organic whole of religious institutions. No matter what direction one might turn in the mid nineteen thirties, one could not fail to be struck by prevailing moral decadence among men and women. And it was undoubtedly the decline of religion as a social force that was responsible for such a degrading condition in the Christian world. The Guardian reiterated:

No wonder, therefore, that when, as a result of human perversity, the light of religion is quenched in men's hearts, and the divinely appointed Robe, designed to adorn the human temple, is deliberately discarded, a deplorable decline in the fortunes of humanity immediately sets in, bringing in its wake all the evils which a wayward soul is capable of revealing. [WOB 187]

He declared that under such conditions, the degradation of human conduct and the dissolution of human institutions reveal themselves in their most revolting ways and that this was the state that individuals and institutions were approaching. Further, when the human conscience becomes stultified and the

sense of decency obscured, the feelings of joy and hope are gradually extinguished. He quoted Bahá'u'lláh's lamenting questions: "*How long will injustice continue? How long is chaos and confusion to reign amongst men? How long will discord agitate the face of society?*" [GWB 215]

### **Breakdown of Political And Economic Structure**

The manner in which the moral downfall and the degeneration of religious institutions that took place in the first century of the Bahá'í Era was also reflected in the politico-economic realm but remains too complex to adequately estimate or analyze in a brief survey. Yet the potential impact of the world wide dilemma resulting from the increasing rivalries and ingrained hatreds in Europe and of the Great Depression were becoming a matter of deep concern for Shoghi Effendi.

The Great Depression, the aftermath of the severest ordeals humanity had ever experienced, the disintegration of the Versailles system, the recrudescence of militarism in its most menacing aspects, the failure of vast experiments and new-born institutions to safeguard the peace and tranquility of peoples, classes and nations, have bitterly disillusioned humanity and prostrated its spirits. [WOB 188]

The Guardian supported his argument with reference to a few small voices that were raised by religious scholars as well as political pundits regarding the looming alarm of worldwide conflagration. "If war should break out again on a major scale in Europe, it must bring the collapse of civilization as we know it in its wake" was the warning of a prominent Minister in Europe. Another Christian dignitary commented:

It is likely there will have to be one more great conflict in Europe to definitely establish once and for all an international authority. This conflict will be the most horrible of horrors, and possibly this generation will be called on to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of lives. [WOB 189]

The League of Nations was still in its embryonic state when the dark shadow of impending global disaster was sweeping

over a hapless world. Yet, Shoghi Effendi raised a glimmer of hope of a future triumph that this institution or “any other body that may supersede it, is destined to achieve.”

### **Bahá'u'lláh's Principle of Collective Security**

There were several significant landmarks in the “checkered” history of the League. The Guardian mentioned the Treaty of Guarantee, the proposal for a United States of Europe, economic unification of the continent, the Geneva Protocol and the policy of sanctions. After much deliberation, fifty some members pronounced “their verdict against an act of aggression which in their judgment has been deliberately committed by one of their fellow-members, one of the foremost Powers of Europe.” This was “an event without parallel in history.” [WOB 191]

For the first time in the history of humanity the system of collective security, foreshadowed by Bahá'u'lláh and explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, has been seriously envisaged, discussed and tested. For the first time in history it has been officially recognized and publicly stated that for this system of collective security to be effectively established strength and elasticity are both essential... [WOB 191-192]

Leaders of nations pronounced a movement of public opinion supporting the verdict. In the 1870s Bahá'u'lláh had said, “*The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized.*” [TB 165] And 'Abdu'l-Bahá, referring to the sovereigns of the world, reiterated: “*They must conclude a binding treaty, and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world, and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race...*” Then He followed with a startling characterization: “*All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to insure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant.*” [WOB 191-192]

On the other hand, Shoghi Effendi observed that The League of Nations still lacked the universality required for “the efficacious settlement of international disputes.” In fact, the

United States held it aloof while Germany and Japan abandoned its cause. Still, “the fact must be recognized that so important a decision marks one of the most distinctive milestones on the long and arduous road that must lead it to its goal, the stage at which the oneness of the whole body of nations will be made the ruling principle of international life.” [WOB 193] It was however, “a faint glimmer in the darkness” that enveloped an agitated humanity. The process of disintegration had to continue. Much suffering would occur among nations, creeds, classes and races before they would be forged into one organic commonwealth. We had been warned by Bahá’u’lláh:

*The civilization so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences will, if allowed to overlap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men... If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation... [SDC 64]*

### **Community of the Most Great Name**

The Guardian explained that the Bahá’í community alone was aware of the silent growth of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. They were the ones who were continuously consolidating through their activities a world embracing polity “amidst the welter of a tempestuous age.” It was a slow and unobtrusive building process to which the World Bahá’í community was consecrated and that constituted the one hope of a stricken society.

In a world with impaired political and social institutions and whose religious systems had become anemic, this “healing agency” was taking shape and was mobilizing its forces for the complete redemption of mankind. For almost a century it had succeeded in preserving its identity in spite of the incessant persecutions to which its leaders had been subjected. Its enemies had actually caused the Faith to purge and purify its life instead of retarding its growth. They had utterly failed to create a permanent schism among its ranks. Those who seditiously violated the trust of its cause were powerless to cloud its radiance.

Persia had been the first to repress and oppose it. Its monarchs had miserably fallen, their dynasty had collapsed, their name was execrated, the hierarchy that had been their ally and had propped their declining state, had been utterly discredited. Turkey, which had thrice banished its Founder and inflicted on Him cruel and life-long imprisonment, had passed through one of the severest ordeals and far-reaching revolutions that its history has recorded, had shrunk from one of the most powerful empires to a tiny Asiatic republic, its Sultanate obliterated, its dynasty overthrown, its Caliphate, the mightiest institution of Islam, abolished. [WOB 196]

Concurrently, the Bahá'í Faith forged unerringly ahead, unified and undaunted. Its followers had become so inspired that nothing could undermine their resolution.

### **A World Religion**

The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh had succeeded in visibly demonstrating its claim to be regarded as a World Religion and not simply a philosophy of life or a mere sect of Shí'ih Islam, a movement or an eclectic code of ethics. Its destiny would in time reach the status of a world-embracing commonwealth and would become the instrument of the Most Great Peace. Indeed, the Faith was characterized by one of Europe's royalty:

It is like a wide embrace, gathering together all those who have long searched for words of hope. It accepts all great Prophets gone before it, destroys no other creeds, and leaves all doors open. The Bahá'í teaching brings peace to the soul and hope to the heart. To those in search of assurance the words of the Father are as a fountain in the desert after long wandering. Their writings are a great cry toward peace, reaching beyond all limits of frontiers, above all dissension about rites and dogmas.... [WOB 197]

The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh had transformed the hearts of its followers and made them lovers of mankind regardless of race, creed or nationality. It preserved their patriotism and safe

guarded their lesser loyalties. More importantly, it reaffirmed the Divine origins of all religions and the underlying unity with respect to the links that bind them together.

Their Faith they conceive to be essentially non-political, supra-national in character, rigidly non-partisan, and entirely dissociated from nationalistic ambitions, pursuits, and purposes." They do not identify with political or ecclesiastic institutions but do uphold the laws of the Faith and do live by its principles. These are considered to be "the warp and woof of the institutions upon which the structure of His World Order must ultimately rest. [WOB 199]

Shoghi Effendi listed a variety of accomplishments by the Faith in the short span of time since its inception, a few of which follow. It had demonstrated the force of its cohesive strength and of its integrating power in the fashioning of the legal instruments designed to safeguard and regulate the corporate life of its institutions. It had accumulated adequate resources, material as well as cultural in every inhabited continent. It was proving its virility and capacity in laying the foundations for the gradual formation and establishment of its educational, cultural and humanitarian institutions. It was demonstrating extraordinary vitality with which its valiant defenders, its elected representatives, its itinerant teachers and pioneer administrators were pleading its cause. It was acknowledged by the spontaneous tributes paid by royalty, princes, statesmen and scholars to the sublimity of its cause and the station of its Founders. It was counteracting the disintegrating influences to which religious systems, moral standards, and political and social institutions were being subjected. He summarized:

From Iceland to Tasmania, from Vancouver to the China Sea spreads the radiance and extend the ramifications of this world-enfolding System, this many-hued and firmly-knit Fraternity, infusing into every man and woman it has won to its cause a faith, a hope, and a vigor that a wayward generation has long lost, and is powerless to recover. They who preside over the

immediate destinies of this troubled world, they who are responsible for its chaotic state, its fears, its doubts, its miseries will do well, in their bewilderment, to fix their gaze and ponder in their hearts upon the evidences of this saving grace of the Almighty that lies within their reach – a grace that can ease their burden, resolve their perplexities, and illuminate their path. [WOB 201]

### **Divine Retribution**

The Guardian quoted a familiar phrase of Bahá'u'lláh's. "*O ye peoples of the world! Know, verily, that an unforeseen calamity followeth you, and grievous retribution awaiteth you. Think not that which ye have committed hath been effaced in My sight.*" [HW 44] And another: "*We have a fixed time for you, O peoples. If ye fail, at the appointed hour, to turn towards God, He, verily, will lay violent hold on you, and will cause grievous afflictions to assail you from every direction....*" [GWB 213] How forbidding, how prophetic were these words! A short three years after this letter by Shoghi Effendi, the calamitous WW II began with horrific consequences that we are still dealing with sixty plus years after the armistice. He then encapsulated Bahá'u'lláh's description of the stages in the evolution of human civilization:

The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend. [WOB 201]

### **World Unity the Goal**

The penultimate goal of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the spiritual unification of the planet. Following that, the ultimate

goal is to establish a Universal Peace supported by a World Federation wherein the personal freedom of all individuals would be secure and the autonomy of its state members safeguarded. This commonwealth, envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh in the late 1800s must consist of a world legislature that would control the entire resources of its component nations. Its responsibility would be to enact laws that would satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. As He exclaimed:

O ye children of men, the fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race... He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful, cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body. [WOB 202-203]

The Guardian continued with an extraordinary description of the Golden Age of Bahá'u'lláh's Dispensation. He listed numerous idealized conditions that would become reality by virtue of the Divine outpourings of the pen of Bahá'u'lláh. Every aspect of life from the innermost heart of the soul to the outer world embracing unity of global society will be empowered by the agency of the Blessed Beauty. No aspect of life on this earth will be neglected. He reminded the reader of the prophecies of Isaiah some twenty-five centuries earlier:

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more... (Isaiah 2:4) And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots... And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:1-2)

St. John, the author of the Apocalypse, was further quoted regarding The New Jerusalem, a term that 'Abdu'l-Bahá described as Divine Civilization and symbolized by Bahá'u'lláh as His Most Holy Book, the book of laws which constitute a

charter for the New World Order “whose provisions must remain inviolate for no less than a thousand years.” [PUP 101-102]

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea... And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God... And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:1-4)

The Guardian called to mind an affirmation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

*One of the great events which is to occur in the Day of the manifestation of that Incomparable Branch (Bahá'u'lláh) is the hoisting of the Standard of God among all nations. By this is meant that all nations and kindreds will be gathered together under the shadow of this Divine Banner, which is no other than the Lordly Branch itself, and will become a single nation.* [SAQ 55]

And finally from Bahá'u'lláh regarding the new creation, that World Order in the Golden Age of His Dispensation:

*Great is thy blessedness, O earth, for thou hast been made the foot-stool of thy God, and been chosen as the seat of His mighty throne. The realm of glory exclaimeth: “Would that my life could be sacrificed for thee, for He Who is the Beloved of the All-Merciful hath established His sovereignty upon thee, through the power of His Name that hath been promised unto all things, whether of the past or of the future.* [GWB 30]

## Conclusion

Shoghi Effendi has masterfully identified the negative impacts of tumultuous events in human history of the last century and has skillfully laid out the solutions that are readily

available based on the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh. The Guardian emphasized unity of the body of mankind as the essential mission of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and he said that the tribulations of the Age of Transition that we were entering were characterized as the precursors of the era that would incarnate God's ultimate purpose for mankind. Further, the collapse of Islam and the deterioration of Christian Institutions resulting from chronic internal corruption allowed secularism and a wave of materialism to sweep the world. Intricately connected with this were the signs of moral downfall and the resultant breakdown of political and economic structure. The Great Depression added further disillusionment and with the menacing aspects of a recrudescing militarism the spirits of humanity became prostrate.

Only a Divine Physician could heal an ailing society and this would involve Bahá'u'lláh's Principle of Collective Security, which would be universally realized by the holding of a vast, all-embracing assemblage. The first steps were achieved with the establishment of the League of Nations. Albeit embryonic, the League produced an event unparalleled in history by pronouncing a verdict by fifty of its members against one of its own due to an act of aggression. But it was the Bahá'í community alone that was aware of the silent growth of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Indeed, the Faith had emerged as a World Religion and reaffirmed the Divine origins of all religions with their underlying unity.

This treatise is but a mere sketch of Shoghi Effendi's letter dated March 11, 1936. In it he captured the enormous vision of Bahá'u'lláh in brilliantly descriptive language and he brought the impact of spiritual realities on the material world into bold relief. His baleful predictions made over seventy years ago have become painfully true and the end is not in sight. Still, in the context of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh there is a resplendent light at the end of a very long tunnel. In reflecting on human culture from the birth of its spiritual identity through the stages of childhood and adolescence we find ourselves abstrusely approaching a threshold of an unparalleled golden age in the spiritual and material life of man on this planet.