

What follows are selections from the letter I wrote to the Universal House of Justice in August of 1988. I have copied out those sections relevant to the question of a World Order of BA without a guardian.

What if, 30 years ago, someone had said, "I believe it possible that the World Order of the future could function without a Guardian." I suspect that his fellow believers might have thought him on the brink of breaking the Covenant, and might have said to him, "Now look here, friend, there will always be Guardians, for Shoghi Effendi portrays, in what he himself calls 'clear and unambiguous language,' an Administrative Order consisting of two pillars, one of which will be a living Guardian; besides, haven't you read where he says that 'Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would be 'mutilated' and 'the means required to enable it to take a long, uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking'? No, the Covenant of *this* Dispensation is unbreakable, for this is the Day which shall not be followed by the Night!" Indeed, David Hofman, in his commentary on the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (the part he wrote *before* Shoghi Effendi's passing), reveals the same assumptions when he speaks of the future extension of the Guardianship's activity "from the inspirer, champion and beloved guide of a small and struggling world community, to the full exercise of its duties and prerogatives as one of the twin pillars sustaining the single social order of the planet"; as on the next page, when he explains that from the "complementary functions of the two main institutions...the flexibility of the Administratative Order is derived" (pp. 7-8).

And yet, as fate would have it, today there is a World Order without a living guardian. And so Bahá'ís have had to re-evaluate and modify fundamental assumptions about some very basic aspects of their Faith.

I wonder if--in the absence of a living Guardian who could be the focus of doctrinal unity and yet preserve the authoritative *flexibility* of the same--insistence upon the absolute truth value and inerrancy of a particular set of written words is nothing more than an unjustifiable attempt to concentrate all validity and truth within the Bahá'í religious system.

And so, in the absence of a living guardian (and Shoghi Effendi was speaking as a living Guardian), to whom an ongoing, interactive, *personal* allegiance is possible, I'm not sure I can understand the doctrine of infallibility and the clinging to a set of written words as representing anything but a form devoid of content, perhaps even a kind of unintelligible

propaganda that may be used at will, and rather arbitrarily too, to maintain exclusivity in the realm of authoritative spiritual truth.

The Writings, severed from notions of literal infallibility, may open our heart and mind. And I can understand the role a living authority figure can play in maintaining the unity of the Cause. But now that the living blood of "infallible" interpretive guidance has ceased to flow, and interpretation can no longer be adapted to the changing times--and who can really doubt that "meaning" changes with time and place and audience?--and what has been written has become "a statement of truth which cannot be varied" (Compilation, 41) (even though the author is no longer there to say, "I didn't mean it to be taken quite that way," or, with a smile and a wink, to let us know that maybe he's overstating the case a bit)...how much more of an obstacle to dialogue and to the search for truth must the doctrine of infallibility pose now?

Sooner or later, those human attempts to explain reality, to understand life, which try to make it all fit into some neat and tidy conceptual package--be it stages of undeniably "progressive" revelation, or the indomitable onward and upward march of scientific socialism--must, it seems, be given up when Reality, like the shore of Walden, Thoreau's famous mystic pond, by the "rise and fall" of its waters, "asserts its title to a shore, and thus the shore is shorn, and the trees cannot hold it." Reality, like the pond, "licks its chops from time to time" and keeps us, the trees, from entirely comprehending its often unpredictable depths.

To me it seems that when the Guardian passed on, leaving no appointed successor, Reality did in fact intervene in the neat and tidy package of the Bahá'í Plan. It is to this that I wish to turn now, though necessarily my letter has touched upon it already--when considering the validity of the Bahá'í Faith, it is indeed difficult to avoid.

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In a letter, the Universal House of Justice quotes Shoghi Effendi as saying,

"Leaders of religion, exponents of political theories, governors of human institutions...need have no doubt or anxiety regarding the nature, the origin, or validity of the institutions which the adherents of the Faith are building up throughout the world. For these lie embedded in the Teachings themselves, unadulterated and unobscured by unwarranted inferences of unauthorized interpretations of His Word" (comp. 50).

This *may* have been true at the time Shoghi Effendi wrote this, when there was a functioning Guardianship, and the system of checks and balances that was to distinguish the future system from all other "man-made" systems seemed likely one day to come into being; but now that there is no functioning Guardianship, I do not see how the Universal House of Justice can seriously believe the Guardian's words still hold true. The validity of the present World Order is very far from clear, for the World Order "embedded in the Teachings" (and Shoghi Effendi "is an extension of...the Word itself" (comp. 59)) is clearly not the World Order of today.

Shoghi Effendi claims that the Administrative Order represents "the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fulness of time the whole of mankind" (Dispensation, 52). "The pillars that sustain its authority and buttress its structure," he says, "are the twin institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice" (ibid., 65). These pillars, he says, are "essential in their functions" and "inseparable" (ibid, 56). So essential are these two pillars, in fact, that, "Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would be mutilated...Its prestige would suffer, the means required to enable it to take a long, an uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking, and the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn"; and "Severed from the no less essential institution of the Universal House of Justice this same System...would be paralyzed in its action and would be powerless to fill in those gaps which the Author of the Kitab-i-Aqdas has deliberately left in the body of His legislative and administrative ordinances" (ibid, 56). "mutilated," "completely lacking," "necessary," "totally withdrawn": indeed, as Shoghi Effendi himself asserted, this is "clear and unambiguous language" (ibid, 56). The whole vision Shoghi Effendi gives us is one of organic growth based on two central, essential organs. Indeed, deprived of an "essential" organ, an organism, a "new-born child" (ibid. 52), must of necessity be "mutilated" and deprived of certain vital functions. Either an organ is essential, or it is not. When one of the two pillars "that sustain its authority and buttress its structure" is removed, in all honesty, can the people of the world still be expected to "have no doubt or anxiety" regarding the validity of the present World Order?

To take it from another angle, consider, for example, a World Order without the equally (but certainly no more?) essential pillar--the Universal House of Justice. Again, Shoghi Effendi's words are no less clear: the "System...would be *paralyzed* in its action and would be *powerless* to fill in those gaps...."

When the specially appointed, authoritative, infallible interpreter of the implications of scripture has already interpreted the meaning of the World Order without a Guardian, and in such clear language, I find it difficult to

understand the Universal House of Justice's attempts to reassure the believers that the World Order is still, nevertheless, essentially intact. What do such attempts imply about the reliability of Shoghi Effendi's guidance?

As the Universal House of Justice admits, "Future Guardians are clearly envisaged and referred to in the Writings" (comp. 57). Indeed, not only that, but Shoghi Effendi makes the very distinction of the Bahá'í World Order dependent upon the presence of such Guardians: "It would be utterly misleading to attempt a comparison between this unique, this divinely-conceived Order and any of the diverse systems which the minds of men...have contrived for the government of human institutions" (Dispensation, 60). I find Shoghi Effendi's claims to the uniqueness of the Bahá'í Order questionable enough with a living Guardian involved; without one, I see no substance to the claim at all. For example, he says, "The Administrative Order...must in no wise be regarded as purely democratic in character," in part because "by virtue of the actual authority vested" in him who "symbolizes the hereditary principle," the guardian "ceases...to be the figurehead...associated with...constitutional monarchies" (ibid., 61). And how can he make it any clearer than the following?

"The hereditary authority which the Guardian is called upon to exercise, the vital and essential functions which the Universal House of Justice discharges, the specific provisions requiring its democratic election...-- *these combine* to demonstrate the truth that this...Order, which can never be identified with any standard types of government..., embodies and blends with the spiritual verities on which it is based the beneficent elements which are to be found in each one of them" (ibid., 62, emphasis mine).

Today the World Order consists of nothing but a set of authoritative writings (scripture) and a democratically elected legislative, or administrative, body. How is this unique? It sounds rather like many religious institutions with which I am familiar. Now, it might be claimed that this particular Order--as it stands--is "divinely" ordained, whereas the others are not (though of course this assertion is full of internal inconsistencies and contradictions, as I hope I have been able to point out); but this is rather like begging the question of its validity, is it not? Without exaggeration, I can truly say that it seems to me the claims of the Universal House of Justice regarding its relationship to other religious bodies boils down to essentially the following: "We are no different from you [though the House never really admits even this]; but we are valid, and you are not, because we say our scriptures say so." But, then again, that's what the Catholics, the Mormons, and the Southern Baptists say too, isn't it? Strangely enough, with its administrative organizations, its scriptures, and its Pope--and the increasingly ecumenical,

even universal, nature of its message--the Catholic Church of today seems more like Shoghi Effendi's World Order than the Bahá'í World Order itself.

The Universal House of Justice says that there is "nowhere any promise or guarantee that the line of Guardians would endure forever; on the contrary there are clear indications that the line could be broken. Yet, in spite of this, there is a repeated insistence in the Writings on the indestructibility of the Covenant and the immutability of God's Purpose for this Day" (comp. 57). That there is "nowhere any promise...that the line of Guardians would endure forever" is a matter of interpretation. Many passages to me imply that it was in fact promised. But the only "clear indication that the line could be broken" with which I am familiar is that passage in the Aqdas regarding "endowments dedicated to charity" (comp. 57). This is indeed a "striking passage which envisages...such a break." But this passage could be interpreted to mean something quite different than what the UHJ appears to be suggesting indirectly (namely, that a House elected after the passing of the guardianship has been foreseen), could it not? "House of Justice...should it be established in the world *by then*" (emphasis mine)--could not this suggest a Universal House of Justice established in the time of a living guardian, or at least just before his passing? We can only speculate on the difference that might make. The constitution of the Universal House of Justice would have been written with the help of the guardian, for one thing. And, "Otherwise the endowments should be referred to the people of Bahá"--some provision even seems to be made here for a "Covenant" and "Purpose" that can survive in the absence of a House of Justice, does it not? Yes, these verses do indicate the possibility of a break in the line of the guardians, but it is less clear what they imply about a Universal House of Justice established after the ending of the hereditary guardianship.

But be that as it may, these verses are from the writings of *Bahá'u'lláh*. In SE's writings on the other hand, we find much less ambiguous passages about the future existence of Guardians, such as the following: continuing on the theme of the uniqueness of the Bahá'í Order, he says, "The admitted evils inherent in each of these systems being rigidly and permanently excluded, this unique Order, however long it may endure and however extensive its ramifications, cannot ever degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagoguery which must sooner or later corrupt the machinery of all man-made and essentially defective political institutions" (Dispensation, 62). Now, he clearly made the hereditary guardianship part of his argument for the inviolability of the system. So, either the Order has already ceased to "endure" (he didn't *exactly* say here that it would endure forever, just as he didn't *quite* say that the Order outlined in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá would actually come to an end if it were ever

divorced from the institution of the Guardianship--he just said that *that* Order would be "mutilated and deprived" of certain essential functions)--or, Shoghi Effendi was mistaken about there being future guardians, and Bahá'u'lláh, with a broader vision of the thing, was right about that; *or*, there is the possibility of some other World Order besides that defined by the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Or....?

Something, it seems to me, has to give, somewhere.

Elsewhere, Shoghi Effendi explains that "what is meant by 'this is the day which will not be followed by the night'" is that "In this Dispensation, divine guidance flows on to us in this world after the Prophet's ascension, through first the Master, and then the Guardians" (Lights of Guidance, #626). Now, either the night has fallen after all, or, again, Shoghi Effendi was mistaken in his understanding that there would be future Guardians. But if Shoghi Effendi was so mistaken about something so fundamental to the future of the Faith as the guardianship, in all honesty, how reliable is his guidance?

True, in the writings there is "repeated insistence...on the indestructibility of the Covenant and the immutability of God's Purpose for this Day"; but I'm not sure I see the connection of these assurances to the World Order as delineated by Shoghi Effendi. "Covenant" and "Purpose for this Day" are certainly broad terms. After all, there is always God's "Major Plan" to consider, proceeding "in ways directed by Him alone" (ibid. #856). True, Shoghi Effendi has said, "To what else if not to the power and majesty which this Administrative Order...is destined to manifest, can these utterances of Bahá'u'lláh allude: The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order" (Dispensation, 54). But Shoghi Effendi has clearly defined what he means by "this Administrative Order": a dynamic interaction between two living pillars. If I draw up a blueprint specifying two pillars for a building, is a building made of only one pillar the same building I designed? But perhaps Bahá'u'lláh does in fact mean something more than the Bahá'í Administrative Order when he speaks of "new World Order" and "wondrous System." Perhaps the Covenant is much broader than Bahá'ís living before the passing of Shoghi Effendi could have thought. I don't know. But, like I said, it seems to me that *something* has to give.

In spite of all this, the Universal House of Justice still seems to feel that it has dealt with the issue of Shoghi Effendi's passing with sufficient care to reassure the Bahá'ís of the world, perhaps even the peoples of the world, that the Ark is riding secure. This being the case, I feel obliged to examine the Universal House of Justice's treatment of the issue in more detail.

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In The Bahá'í World 1963-1968, under the section "The Authority, Powers and Functions of the Universal House of Justice," we read:

"One of the ways in which the friends will come to a fuller understanding of the authority, powers and functions of the Universal House of Justice will be through elucidations and statements made from time to time by that supreme body itself."

Now, Shoghi Effendi explained that, in the absence of the Guardianship, "the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its [the Universal House of Justice's] elected representatives would be totally withdrawn" (Dispensation, 56). The Universal House of Justice itself says, "the Interpreter of the Book must also have the authority to define the sphere of the legislative action of the elected representatives" (comp. 59). But certainly, then, definition of the "authority, powers and functions of the Universal House of Justice" is outside the "clearly defined sphere" (comp. 21) of the Universal House of Justice's jurisdiction, is it not?

The Universal House of Justice reassures the Bahá'ís that the possibility that the House "might stray beyond the limits of its proper authority...would conflict with all the other texts referring to its infallibility, and specifically with the Guardian's own clear assertion that the Universal House of Justice never can or will infringe on the sacred and prescribed domain of the Guardianship" (comp. 60). For Bahá'ís, appeal to "infallibility" may hold some weight; for "Leaders of religion, exponents of political theories," and "governors of human institutions," I doubt it would. But, in the face of all the other "texts" defining the Universal House of Justice in terms of an overall system involving a dynamic interplay between it and its head, the Guardian, how can the Universal House of Justice expect the few words "Neither can, nor will ever" (Dispensation, 58) to carry much weight at all? This is to fly in the face of the whole thrust of SE's explanation of the World Order. And in view of the fact that the overall rhetorical style to be found in the Writings is so inflated--with all the "always" and "nevers" and "Most Greats"--I would say these few words have even less value.

The Universal House of Justice says that it "is well aware of the absence of the Guardian and will approach all matters of legislation only when certain of its sphere of jurisdiction, a sphere which the Guardian has confidently described as 'clearly defined'" (comp. 47).

However, the Universal House of Justice also states that the Guardian "had the authority to state whether a matter was or was not already covered by the Sacred Texts and therefore whether it was within the authority of the

Universal House of Justice to legislate upon it" (comp. 47). But the Guardian not only "had" the authority; he was also *intended to have* such authority in the future, in his "necessary" interaction with the Universal House of Justice. Are we to seriously believe that there is no issue that may arise in the future that the Guardian has not already covered? 1000 years is a long time, after all. And what of all the Tablets as yet untranslated and uncollected ("We must remember that not only are all the teachings not yet translated into English, but they are not even all collected yet. Many important Tablets may still come to light which are at present owned privately," Unfolding Destiny, p. 445)? With these, won't the need for authoritative interpretation be as crucial as ever?

Is the Universal House of Justice referring above to the phrase "clearly defined" to be found in the Compilation on page 39? Indeed, its sphere of jurisdiction is in fact "clearly defined": over and over again, the powers of the Universal House of Justice are defined as confined to those of legislating on those "gaps" left in the laws and ordinances having to do with "civic affairs" and "material laws" and the like. Even in those few places where the Universal House of Justice is apparently given broader powers to "deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book" (comp. 14), such powers are, I think, always to be found in the immediate context, again, of "civic affairs" and the like. For example, immediately following the words just quoted (from comp. p. 14), we find "And inasmuch as this House...hath power to enact laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book and bear upon daily transactions, so also it hath power to repeal the same....This it can do because that law formeth no part of the Divine Explicit Text" (14). "Laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book and bear upon daily transactions"--there isn't even any comma between "not expressly recorded in the Book," and, "and bear upon daily transactions."

Even where the writings apparently give the Universal House of Justice certain leadership powers, it must not be forgotten that such writings assumed a living Guardian as head and functioning member of that House: "By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved and the guardian of the Cause of God is its sacred head and the distinguished member for life of that body. Should he not attend in person its deliberations, he must appoint one to represent him" (comp. 13). Again, note, there is no comma between "difficult problems are to be resolved," and, "and the guardian...is its sacred head and distinguished member." To the same effect, elsewhere 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that it is incumbent upon the Guardian to "appoint in his own life-time him that shall become his successor, that differences may not arise after his passing" (Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 12) (perhaps it is passages such as this one that Shoghi Effendi was interpreting when he explained that, in the absence of the Guardianship, "the integrity of the Faith



would be imperilled, and the stability of the entire fabric would be gravely endangered" (Disp. 56)). And likewise, "should the first-born of the guardian...not inherit of the spiritual...then must he, (the guardian...) choose another branch to succeed him" (Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 12).

The point I am trying to make is simply that the version of the World Order about which even non-Bahá'ís are to "have no doubt or anxiety" (Comp. 50) clearly, and in no uncertain terms, included a living Guardian. Perhaps Shoghi Effendi really could not have appointed anyone as his successor; but even if "another branch" could be interpreted in no other way except "blood relative," why--unless they were already committed to the inerrancy of the Writings and of the Universal House of Justice--why should non-Bahá'ís be expected to "have no doubt or anxiety" about the validity of the World Order as it exists today, deprived as it is of the guardianship?

All that about "commas" may seem too much. But it is certainly no more pedantic than the Universal House of Justice has to get in its attempt to salvage the validity of the Order they represent. Furthermore, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will, it is written that "This written paper hath for a long time been preserved under ground, damp having affected it. When brought forth to the light it was observed that certain parts of it were injured by the damp, and the Holy Land being sorely agitated it was left untouched" (15). What does this mean? Even if the assurances "embedded in the writings" were originally clear, it appears that the writings themselves might not be as legible as one would hope. I have heard that, in Arabic and Persian, a small dot here and there can make a big difference in meaning; in English, too, a comma can drastically change the implications of a sentence. Might not a few dots or commas have been lost, due to "dampness"? How much less are we to be assured of the inerrancy of texts when they have even suffered from physical damage? Doctrines of infallibility and inerrancy must breed pedants, it would seem--be they for the doctrines, or against them!

But to continue [Shoghi Effendi urges us to "critically examine" (Dispensation, 54) the thing, after all]...

Just as it does with "clearly defined" and "can and will never," the Universal House of Justice generally quotes only those portions of passages like those just cited above (comp. 13, 14) which appear to give the Universal House of Justice nearly unlimited power in deliberating upon, say, "questions that are obscure," while it ignores the overwhelming thrust of the surrounding context, sometimes even the rest of the sentence.

In his Will, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states "Unto this body [the Universal House of Justice] all things must be referred." This can seem to mean one thing, when taken out of context. But of course, in context, this does not mean matters of interpretation--as the Will as a whole makes clear. And indeed, as usual, this statement is followed immediately by "It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text." "ordinances

and regulations," yes--but surely not definition of the sphere of its own legislative action? And in his Will, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also states, "He [the Guardian] is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendents." "will succeed"--again, out of context, and in conjunction with those passages that imply some divine protection of the Guardian, this word "will" could suggest assurance of the continuation of the line of Guardians. True, "neither can, nor will ever" is stronger than simply "will succeed," but really, isn't it rather too fine a point to base so much "reassurance" on?

'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, "Those matters of major importance which constitute the foundation of the Law of God are explicitly recorded in the Text, but subsidiary laws are left to the House of Justice" (comp. 47). Are we to believe that the meaning of the government of the Bahá'í world without the Guardian is not a matter of major importance?

Nevertheless, the Universal House of Justice implies that Shoghi Effendi has already somehow performed his definitive function: "The writings of the Guardian and the advice given by him over the thirty-six years of his Guardianship show the way in which he exercised this function in relation to the Universal House of Justice" (comp. 59). And yet, even the constitution of the Universal House of Justice was not written before SE's passing. How can the House take it upon itself to write, independently of the Guardian's active advice, its own constitution? If this is not defining its own sphere of legislative action, I do not know what possibly could be. And what, after all, could Shoghi Effendi have meant, then, when he said, without the Guardianship, the means for the Order "to take a long, an uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking" (Disp, 56)? The membership of the Universal House of Justice changes frequently; only the normal span of a man's life encompasses more than one generation. Obviously, Shoghi Effendi was referring to the vital role the guardianship would play in the *future*.

The Universal House of Justice has said that "we stand too close to the beginnings of the System ordained by Bahá'u'lláh to be able fully to understand its potentialities or the interrelationships of its component parts" (comp. 60). It seems to me that the House too frequently uses this appeal to the alleged "mystery" of it all in order to side-step the real issues. (Though, indeed, it *is* difficult to understand the relationship between one pillar and no pillar.)

The Universal House of Justice is echoing Shoghi Effendi: "We stand indeed too close to so monumental a document to claim for ourselves a complete understanding of all its implications" (comp. 21). Of course Shoghi Effendi said we could not claim *complete* understanding: who could, before the second pillar of the Order had even been established? He said, rather, that it would be the job of future generations (and, one would presume,

future guardians) to "define with accuracy and *minuteness*..and to analyze *exhaustively*..." (Dispensation, 55, emphasis mine) the nature of the World Order. But he also said, in his introduction to his interpretation of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "My present intention is to elaborate certain salient features of this scheme which, however close we may stand to its colossal structure, are already so clearly defined that we find it inexcusable to either misconceive or ignore" (Dispensation, 55).

He made "certain salient features" very clear indeed; but now the Universal House of Justice must find ways to get around this. Why has the World Order suddenly become so mysterious?

In the preamble of the constitution of the Universal House of Justice, the House states,

"The Universal House of Justice is the supreme institution of an Administrative Order whose salient features, whose authority and whose principles of operation are clearly enunciated in the Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith and their authorized interpretations. This Administrative Order consists, on the one hand, of a series of elected councils, universal, secondary and local, in which are vested legislative, executive and judicial powers over the Bahá'í community and, on the other, of eminent and devoted believers appointed for the specific purposes of protecting and propagating the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh under the guidance of the Head of that Faith" (elsewhere in the Declaration: "There being no successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, the Universal House of Justice is the Head of the Faith"....Is this a legislative body without its own head asserting its right to be head of the Faith itself? Or, in the writings, has the House been given the right to assume Headship?)

These certainly are not the "salient features" mentioned by Shoghi Effendi whose writings represent some of those "authorized interpretations" of which the House speaks.

Speaking of the Covenant, the House asserts in the "Declaration of Trust" that "It continues to fulfil its life-giving purpose through the agency of the Universal House of Justice whose fundamental object, as one of the twin successors of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith, *to safeguard the unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings.*" (emphasis mine). The last few words are taken from Shoghi Effendi's Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh (56), the surrounding context of which, as usual, is speaking of an integrated functioning of the two--not of the division of power in an Order "Divorced from the...Guardianship" or "Severed from the no less essential...Universal House of

Justice" (56). The "integrity" and "flexibility" of the teachings obviously were to arise out of the "*complementary*" (56) functioning of the twin pillars.

In the "Declaration of Trust" of the constitution, the House asserts the following:

"Among the powers and duties with which the Universal House of Justice has been invested are:

To...defend...the Cause of God...To advance the interests of the Faith of God...To promulgate and apply the laws...to administer the affairs...to...coordinate...its activities;...to provide for the enforcement of its decisions;...to found institutions;...to be responsible for ensuring that no...institution within the Cause abuse its privileges...."

(The text is indented in a way similar to the way a quote from Shoghi Effendi is indented on the following page. Is the text quoted from somewhere, and are the quotation marks left out? Or is this a summary written by the House itself?)

Shoghi Effendi has written, on the other hand: "*Acting in conjunction with each other* these two *inseparable* institutions administer its affairs, coordinate its activities, promote its interests, execute its laws and defend its subsidiary institutions" (56, emphasis mine). He even contrasts this with the powers that each does in fact hold separately: "Severally, each operates within a clearly defined sphere of jurisdiction...Each exercises, within the limitations imposed upon it, its powers, its authority, its rights and prerogatives" (56). If he wanted to make it any clearer, I'm not sure that he could. If the Universal House of Justice wanted to obscure his writings any more, I'm not sure that they could.

It certainly seems to me that the waters of Walden have--as they are so wont to do--once again shorn the shore. It's never easy for trees who would have inerrant roots.

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The NSA of Canada claims that the Universal House of Justice has "been given unique powers in the field of deduction" (The Power of the Covenant, part. 1, page 26). But I am forced to wonder.

The Universal House of Justice says, for example:

"As you point out with many quotations, Shoghi Effendi repeatedly stressed the inseparability of these two institutions. Whereas he obviously envisaged their functioning together, it cannot logically be deduced from this that one is unable to function in the absence of the other. During the whole thirty-six

years of his Guardianship Shoghi Effendi functioned without the Universal House of Justice. Now the Universal House of Justice must function without the Guardian, but the principle of inseparability remains. The Guardianship does not lose its significance nor position in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh merely because there is no living Guardian" (comp. 49).

Certainly this is rather odd reasoning? The institution of the guardianship necessarily existed before the Universal House of Justice; whereas the Universal House of Justice--as defined by Shoghi Effendi--necessarily did not exist before Shoghi Effendi. The Universal House of Justice is defined in part in terms of the Guardian. If a playwright writes a play, and puts himself and his descendants into it as a central character, can the play go on without him, without them? Or must it become a different play? (Besides, how could any of the *NC4*'s needed to establish the House of Justice have been established if there were no Guardian around to spread the Faith first?) And, "The Guardianship does not lose its significance nor position in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh merely because there is no living Guardian." It doesn't? What then is its significance and position? But if the Universal House of Justice tells us, is that not interpreting the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in much the same way as Shoghi Effendi has done? Can the Universal House of Justice define the World Order by which it itself is defined? And "merely"--doesn't this fly in the face of all that Shoghi Effendi said about "Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship...." etc.? And in what sense is the present Order not now "separated" from the hereditary guardianship? The "principle of inseparability," as the Universal House of Justice refers to SE's more emphatic characterizations of "inseparable" (no "principle" here) and "essential," was defined in terms of an ongoing, dynamic interaction between a living Guardian and a Universal House of Justice, of which he was to be member and head. A body without a head is what we must apparently conclude the Universal House of Justice consists of today. Is this really the same House to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have asked the whole world to submit?

The Universal House of Justice says, "In attempting to understand the Writings...one must first realize that there is and can be no real contradiction in them, and in the light of this we can confidently seek the unity of meaning which they contain." But surely the "unity of meaning," the overall gist, even the metaphorical integrity, of Shoghi Effendi's writings must be abandoned if we must so closely scrutinize every word and split every hair in order to come up with some interpretation that salvages the idea of scriptural inerrancy, must it not?

The Universal House of Justice says, "There is a profound difference between the interpretation of the Guardian and the elucidations of the House of Justice." Indeed, the distinction had better be clear, for it represents the

difference between the theoretically "clearly defined" spheres of the Universal House of Justice and the Guardian, upon the alleged certainty of which the Universal House of Justice bases a lot of its arguments. But if there is anything that must be difficult to "clearly define," it must be the difference between "interpretation" and "elucidation." And, after all, how can the Universal House of Justice assure the unity of the faith--when, for example, even passages such as that quoted above relating to the "endowments dedicated to charity" (comp. 57) may be interpreted in such a way as to imply that the Universal House of Justice may not be essential to the "Covenant," and when the body of Bahá'í literature taken as a whole casts great doubt upon the validity of the present Order--without assuming some kind of authoritative interpretive role? I do not think it can. Nor do I think it has refrained from taking this role upon itself.

Now, to get pedantic, but, again, it seems I must, the dictionary (Webster's I think) defines "interpret" as follows: "1. to explain or tell the meaning of: translate into intelligible or familiar language or terms: expound, elucidate, translate." But the Universal House of Justice says, "when considering the references to the Guardianship in the writings of the Faith, and especially when *striving to understand how these references apply at the present time, you should realize that the word 'guardianship' is used with various meanings in different contexts*" (Lights of Guidance, \*629, emphasis mine). They go on to explain that "In certain cases it indicates the office and function of the Guardian himself, in others it refers to the line of Guardians, in still others it bears a more extended meaning embracing the Guardian and his attendant institutions." Clearly the "line of Guardians" ended with the first one, though, as is typical, the Universal House of Justice words it in a way that might give the uninitiated reader the feeling that the guardianship was still going on as planned (when I first started reading Bahá'í literature--even recently written literature--I myself assumed this). As for the "more extended meaning," the Universal House of Justice explains, "it would be quite incorrect to state, at the present time when there is no Guardián, that the Hands of the Cause are members of the Institution of Guardianship. Nor would it be correct to so designate the International Teaching Center, the Counsellors, the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants." If there is any other body that could be so designated, they do not say; again, there is almost the feeling that there could be, that there has been no irreparable loss here. And, "In the specific sense of referring to the office and function of the Guardian himself, the House of Justice finds that the prerogatives and duties vested in him are of three kinds." These are, first, those "which the Guardianship shares with the Universal House of Justice and which the House of Justice must continue to pursue." Fair enough.

[In 1994, I no longer believe that I can say "fair enough" to this, for the writings do not say that the UHJ can pursue any of its objectives without a Guardian as Head, voting member, and provider of authoritative interpretative context. But even to determine in any authoritative sense whether the Writings say something about this or not is a function that only a Guardian could fulfill.]

"Secondly, there are" those "which, in the absence of the guardian devolve upon the Universal House of Justice." Perhaps fair enough, though considering the fact that 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his Will and Testament gave to the Guardian--not to the Universal House of Justice (for obvious reasons, one would think)--the right to expel members of the House, it seems difficult to understand how the Universal House of Justice can now take over this duty, as it has done.

[Again, in 1994 I can no longer say even "perhaps fair enough" to this, for the House cannot decide for itself what its own duties must be in the absence of a guardian. This is a kind of Catch-22: the House must define its own sphere of action in the absence of a guardian, but it cannot, for only a guardian can define its sphere of action.]

"Thirdly, there are those...which lie exclusively within the sphere of the Guardian himself and, therefore, in the absence of a Guardian, are inoperative except insofar as the monumental work already performed by Shoghi Effendi continues to be of enduring benefit to the Faith. Such a function is that of authoritative interpretation of the Teachings." Indeed.

[I would like to point out that the House doesn't seem to recognize the fact that words on paper--i.e. the Guardian's "interpretations"--do not explain themselves. We must read them, and interpret them, before they can have meaning for us. Yes--even "interpretations" must be interpreted! In other words, there is now, in the Bahá'í Faith, absolutely no authoritative interpretation of the Teachings whatsoever. There are written words, and written interpretations of words which themselves must now be interpreted. But there is no Interpreter.]

It is possible to become too pedantic, of course, but, after all, it is not I who wish to maintain the inerrancy of scripture and yet live in the real world too. The World Order as laid out by Shoghi Effendi I could at least understand and have some faith in. But, with the checks and balances gone, with the dynamic interaction of its component parts missing, I just cannot feel comfortable pledging my allegiance to the Order such as it is today.

The Universal House of Justice asserts that its own infallibility is not made dependent upon the presence of the Guardian (comp. 46). But the House itself admits that "It is, after all, the final act of judgment delivered by the Universal House of Justice that is vouchsafed infallibility, not any views expressed in the process of enactment" (comp. 56). Yes, and as the House also says, "It is...as a member of that body that the Guardian takes part in the process of legislation" (comp. 55-6). Precisely--the *process*. Final products are guaranteed by the process used to produce them. Final judgements are no different. The Guardian was to be involved in the legislative process of the Universal House of Justice: infallibility was only *clearly* "vouchsafed" final judgements arrived at through *interaction with* the Guardian. The assurance of infallibility as things stand now is little more than speculation.

The Universal House of Justice says it is "inconceivable that the other members would ignore any objection he [the Guardian] raised in the course of consultation or pass legislation contrary to what he expressed as being in harmony with the spirit of the Cause" (56). Again, the same Bahá'í rhetorical style--"inconceivable"...really? But if Remey, hand-picked I believe by Shoghi Effendi himself, could turn into such a Covenant-breaker, why not a member of the Universal House of Justice elected by the people at large? And why have the power to expell at all if the need to wield it could never even possibly arise? With only nine members in the House now, even just one person's vote can determine a majority. With a Guardian, that is, with ten members in the House, at least there would have to have been ~~two~~ members to determine the majority in a close vote: not much of a guarantee, but still, it is more than the Universal House of Justice can offer the world today.

True, Shoghi Effendi says of the World Order, "We must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications" (comp. 16). But, again, the Universal House of Justice of which Shoghi Effendi speaks is the one defined by him and by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the one that was to be in constant consultation with either him, his successor, or his appointed substitute. And "guidance" need not mean "elucidation"; it may mean simply administrative guidance, through which "implications" might indeed become apparent. But if it does mean some kind of authoritative "elucidation," then, again, where the clear distinction between the "spheres"?

True, it is said that "Let it not be imagined that the House of Justice will take any decision according to its own concepts and opinions. God forbid! The Supreme House of Justice will take decisions and establish laws through the inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit...and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an absolute obligation, and there is no escape for anyone" (comp. 48).



But, in the Writings themselves, is a Bahá'í really ever asked to accept the invariable truth value of some set of written words and the innate goodness of the people elected to the House, or even to accept the infallibility of the elected body as a whole, or is he rather asked to accept the *overall* system outlined in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and elaborated upon by Shoghi Effendi, which in fact would have provided a lot more checks and balances, and consequently a lot more assurances of its reliability?

Does the Universal House of Justice make questioning its own authority into virtual heresy by claiming that to question the authority of the House is, indirectly but no less assuredly, to question the authority of Shoghi Effendi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and even Bahá'u'lláh himself?

It may fairly be asked, "what else could the Universal House of Justice have done?" I could speculate, but will not. I have made my decision (by no means irrevocable, as I hope nearly all my decisions to be, pending future life experiences): I have turned in my card. The "Book itself" may be "the unerring Balance established amongst men" (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p.128), but, in practice I must follow 'Abdu'l-Bahá's advice: "weigh carefully in the balance of reason and science everything that is presented to you as religion. If it passes this test, then accept it, for it is truth! If, however, it does not so conform, then reject it, for it is ignorance!" I have done so, to the best of my ability; and though, as I have said, my decision is not irrevocable, I must decide to reject the Bahá'í Faith, as it has been presented to me by the present Bahá'í World Order.

