Dearly-beloved brethren in 'Abdu'l-Bahá! With the ascension of Báb'u'lláh the Day-Star of Divine guidance which, as foretold by SháhiH Ahmad and Síyid Khámí, had risen in Shíráz, and, while pursuing its westward course, had mounted its zenith in Adrianople, had finally sunk below the horizon of 'Akka, never to rise again, ere the complete revolution of one thousand years. The setting of so effulgent an Orb brought to a definite termination the period of Divine Revelation—the initial and most vitalizing stage in the Bahá'í era. Inaugurated by the Báb, culminating in Báb'u'lláh, anticipated and extolled by the entire company of the Prophets of this great prophetic cycle; this period has, except for the short interval between the Báb's martyrdom and Báb'u'lláh's shaking experiences in the Siyáh-Chál of Tihrán, been characterized by almost fifty years of continuous and progressive Revelation—a period which by its duration and fecundity must be regarded as unparalleled in the entire field of the world's spiritual history.

The passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, on the other hand, marks the closing of the Heroic and Apostolic Age of this same Dispensation—that primitive period of our Faith the splendors of which can never be rivalled, much less be eclipsed, by the magnificence that must needs distinguish the future victories of Báb'u'lláh's Revelation. For neither the achievements of the champion-builders of the present-day institutions of the Faith of Báb'u'lláh, nor the tumultuous triumphs which the heroes of its Golden Age will in the coming days succeed in winning, can measure with, or be included within the same category as, the wondrous works associated with the names of those who have generated its very life and laid its pristine foundations. That first and creative age of the Bahá'í era must, by its very nature, stand above and apart from the formative period into which we have entered and the golden age destined to succeed it.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who incarnates an institution for which we can find no parallel whatsoever in any of the world's recognized religious systems, may be said to have closed the Age to which He Himself belonged and opened the one in which we are now laboring. His Will and Testament should thus be regarded as the perpetual, the indissoluble link which the mind of Him Who is the Mystery of...
It should be noted in this connection that this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established inasmuch as Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Will and confer the necessary authority on the body designated to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances. Therein lies the secret of its strength, its fundamental distinction, and the guarantee against dissipation and schism. Nowhere in the sacred scriptures of any of the world's religious systems, nor even in the writings of the Inaugurator of the Babi Dispensation, do we find any provisions establishing a covenant or providing for an administrative order that can compare in scope and authority with those that lie at the very base of the Bahá'í Dispensation. Has either Christianity or Islam, to take as an instance two of the most widely diffused and outstanding among the world's recognized religions, anything to offer that can measure with, or be regarded as equivalent to, either the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant or to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá? Does the text of either the Gospel or the Qur'án confer sufficient authority upon those leaders and councils that have claimed the right and assumed the function of interpreting the provisions of their sacred scriptures and of administering the affairs of their respective communities? Could Peter, the admitted chief of the Apostles, or the Imam 'Ali, the cousin and legitimate successor of the Prophet, produce in support of the primacy with which both had been invested written and explicit affirmations from Christ and 'Ali as 'Abdu'lláh that could have silenced those who either among their contemporaries or in a later age have repudiated their authority and, by their action, precipitated the schisms that persist to the present day? Where, we may confidently ask, in the record of history, are we to find echoes of similar protest from Jesus Christ, whether in the matter of succession or in the provision of a set of specific laws and clearly defined administrative ordinances, as distinguished from purely spiritual principles, can we find anything approaching the detailed injunctions, laws and warnings that abound in the authenticated utterances of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá? Can any passage of the Qur'án, which in respect to its legal code, its administrative and devotional ordinances marks already a notable advance over previous and more corruptated Revelations, be construed as placing upon an unsuitable basis the undoubted authority, with which 'Abdu'lláh had, verbally and on several occasions, invested His successor? Can the Author of the Babi Dispensation,
however much He may have succeeded through the provisions of the Persian Bayan in averting a schism as permanent and catastrophic as those that afflicted Christianity and Islam—can He be said to have produced instruments for the safeguarding of His Faith as definite and efficacious as those which must for all time preserve the unity of the organized followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh? Alone of all the Revelations gone before it this Faith has, through the explicit directions, the repeated warnings, the authenticated safeguards incorporated and elaborated in its teachings, succeeded in raising a structure which the bewildered followers of bankrupt and broken creeds might well approach and critically examine, and seek, ere it is too late, the invaluable security of its steadfast embrace.

No wonder that He Who through the operation of His Will has inaugurated so vast and unique an Order and Who is the Center of so mighty a Covenant should have written these words: "So firm and mighty is this Covenant that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like. "Whatsoever is latent in the innermost of this holy cycle," He wrote during the darkest and most dangerous days of His ministry, "shall gradually appear and be made manifest, for now is but the beginning of its growth and the day-spring of the revelation of its signs." "Fear not," are His reassuring words foreshadowing the rise of the Administrative Order established by His Will, "fear not if this Branch be severed from this material world and cast aside its leaves; nay, the leaves thereof shall flourish, for this Branch will grow after it is cut off from this world below, it shall reach the loftiest pinnacle of glory, and it shall bear such fruits as will perfume the world with their fragrance."

To what else if not to the power and majesty which this Administrative Order—the rudiments of the future all-enfolding Bahá’í Commonwealth—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. Mankind’s ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.

—The Báb Himself, in the course of His references to “Him Whom God will manifest,” anticipates the System and glorifies the World Order which the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is destined to unfold. "Well is it with him," is His remarkable statement in the
THE DISPENSATION OF BAHA’U’LLAH

It should be stated, at the very outset, in clear and unambiguous language, that those twin institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá’u’lláh should be regarded as divine in origin, essential in their functions and complementary in their aim and purpose. Their creation, their fundamental object is to insure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings. 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. Severally, each operates within a clearly defined sphere of jurisdiction; each is equipped with its own attendant institutions—Instruments designed for the effective discharge of its particular responsibilities and duties. Each exercises, within the limitations imposed upon it, its powers, its authority, its rights and prerogatives. These are neither contradictory, nor detract in the slightest degree from the position which each of these institutions occupies. Far from being incompatible or mutually destructive, they supplement each other's authority and functions, and are permanently and fundamentally united in their aims.

Divest from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh would be mutilated and permanently deprived of that hereditary principle which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written, has been invariably upheld by the Law of God. "In all the Divine Dispensations," He states, in a Tablet addressed to a follower of the Faith in Persia, "the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright." Without such an institution the integrity of the Faith would be imperilled, and the stability of the entire fabric would be gravely endangered. 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.

Severed from the no less essential institution of the Universal House of Justice this same System of the Will of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would be paralysed in its action, would be powerless to fill in those gaps which the Author of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has deliberately left in the body of His legislative and administrative ordinances. "He is the Interpreter of the Word of God," ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, referring to the functions of the Guardian of the Faith, asserts, using in His Will the very term which He Himself had chosen when refuting the argument of the Covenant-breakers who had challenged His right to interpret the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh. "After him," He adds, "will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants." "The mighty stronghold," He further explains, "shall remain impregnable and safe through obedience to him who is the Guardian of the Cause of God." "It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice, upon all the Aqdas, the Afnan, the Hands of the Cause of God, to obey their obedience, submission and subordination unto the Guardian of the Cause of God." "It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice," Bahá’u’lláh, on the other hand, declares in the Eighth Leaf of the Exalted Paradise, "to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them. God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He wills, and He verily is the Provider, the Omniscient." "Unto the Most Holy Book" (the Kitáb-i-Aqdas), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states in His Will, "every one must turn, and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, is verily the truth and the purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath sworn forth malice, and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant." Not only does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá confirm in His Will Bahá’u’lláh’s above-quoted statement, but invests this body with the additional right and power to abrogate, according to the exigencies of time, its own enactments, as well as those of a preceding House of Justice. "Inasmuch as the House of Justice," is His explicit statement in His Will, "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 these laws form no part of the divine explicit text." Referring to both the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice we read these emphatic words: "The sacred and youthful Branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, as well as the Universal House of Justice to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abá’l-Báb, under the shelter and sustaining guidance of the Exalted One (the Báb) (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatever they decide is of God." From these statements it is made indubitably clear and evident
that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.

Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of the body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning and to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed utterances. He interprets what has been specifically revealed, and cannot legislate except in his capacity as member of the Universal House of Justice. He is barred from laying down independently the constitution that must govern the organized activities of his fellow-members, and from exercising his influence in a manner that would encroach upon the liberty of those whose sacred right it is to elect the body of his collaborators.

It should be borne in mind that the institution of the Guardianship has been anticipated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in an allusion He made in a Tablet addressed, long before His own ascension, to three of His friends in Persia. To their question as to whether there would be any person to whom all the Bahá'ís would be called upon to turn after His ascension He made the following reply: "As to the question ye have asked me, know verily that this is a well-guarded secret. It is even as a gem concealed within its shell. That it will be revealed is predestined. The time will come when its light will appear, when its essence will be made manifest, and its secrets unravelled. Dear-beloved friends! Exalted as is the position and vital as is the function of the institution of the Guardianship in the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and staggering as must be the weight of responsibility which it carries, its importance must, whatever be the language of the Will, be in no wise over-emphasized. The Guardian of the Faith must not under any circumstances, and
or to vacillate in proclaiming so firm a conviction must constitute a
shameless betrayal of the confidence reposed in me by 'Abdu'l-Bahá
and an unpardonable usurpation of the authority with which He
Himself has been invested.

A word should now be said regarding the theory on which this
Administrative Order is based and the principle that must govern
the operation of its chief institutions. 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, at
various periods of their history, have contrived for the government
of human institutions. Such a comparison would in itself betray a
lack of complete appreciation of the excellence of the handiwork
of its great Author. How could it be otherwise when we remember
that this Order constitutes the very pattern of that divine civiliza-
tion which the almighty Law of Baha'u'llah is designed to establish
upon earth? The divers and ever-shifting systems of human polity,
whither past or present, in the East or in the West, offer no adequate
criteria with which to estimate the potency of its hidden virtues or to appraise the solidity of its foundations.

The Baha'i Commonwealth of the future, of which this vast
Administrative Order is the soil framework, is, both in theory and
practice, not only unique in the entire history of political insti-
tutions, but can find no parallel in the annals of any of the world's
recognized religious systems. No form of democratic government;
no system of autocracy or of dictatorship, whether monarchical or
or republican; no intermediary scheme of a purely aristocratic order;
nor even any of the recognized types of theocracy, whether it be
the Hebrew Commonwealth, or the various Christian ecclesiastical
organizations, or the Imamate or the Caliphate in Islam—none of
these can be identified or be said to conform with the Administrative
Order which the perfect Architect has fashioned.

This new-born Administrative Order incorporates within its
structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the
three recognized forms of government, without being in
any sense a mere replica of any one of them, and without intro-
ducing within its machinery any of the objectionable features
which they inherently possess. It blends and harmonizes, as no
government fashioned by mortal hands has as yet accomplished,
the salutary truths which each of these systems undoubtedly contains

without vitiating the integrity of those God-given verities on which it
is ultimately founded.

The Administrative Order of the Faith of Baha'u'llah must in
no wise be regarded as purely democratic in character inasmuch as
the basic assumption which requires all democracies to depend funda-
mentally upon getting their mandate from the people is altogether
lacking in this Dispensation. In the conduct of the administrative
affairs of the Faith, in the enactment of the legislation necessary
to supplement the laws of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the members of the
Universal House of Justice, should be borne in mind, are not,
as Baha'u'llah's utterances clearly imply, responsible to those whom
they represent, nor are they allowed to be governed by the feelings,
the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the
faithful, or of those who directly elect them. They are to follow,
in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their con-
science. They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with
the conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispar-
nately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their
consideration, but must not, in the cases of the House of Justice,
be subjected to an unfettered decision. "God will wisely inspire them
with whatsoever He wills," is Baha'u'llah's incontrovertible assurance. They, and
not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them,
have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is
at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation.
Moreover, he who symbolizes the hereditary principle in this Dis-
ensation has been made the interpreter of the words of its Author,
and ceases consequently, by virtue of the actual authority vested
in him, to be the figurehead invariably associated with the prevail-
ing systems of constitutional monarchies.

Nor can the Baha'i Administrative Order be dismissed as a
hard and rigid system of unmitigated autocracy or as an idle imita-
tion of any form of absolutist ecclesiastical government, whether
it be the Papacy, the Imamate or any other similar institution, for
the obvious reason that upon the international elected representa-
tives of the followers of Baha'u'llah has been conferred the exclu-
sive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the
Baha'i writings. Neither the Guardian of the Faith nor any institu-
tion apart from the International House of Justice can ever usurp
this vital and essential power or encroach upon that sacred right.

The abolition of professional priesthood with its accompanying
sacraments of baptism, of communion and of confession of sins,
The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh

The laws requiring the election by universal suffrage of all local, national, and international Houses of Justice, the total absence of ecclesiastical authority with its attendant privileges, corruptions and bureaucratic tendencies in the administration of its affairs.

Nor is this Order identified with the name of Bahá'u'lláh to be continued with any system of purely aristocratic government in view of the fact that it upholds, on the one hand, the hereditary principle and enfranchises the Guardian of the Faith with the obligation of interpreting its teachings, and provides, on the other, for the free and direct election from among the mass of the faithful of the body that constitutes its highest legislative organ.

Whereas this Administrative Order cannot be said to have been modelled on any of these recognized systems of government, it nevertheless embodies, reenforces and assimilates within its framework such wholesome elements as are to be found in each one of them. The hereditary principle 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, and the authority which is vested in the hands of the representatives of the faithful—these combining to demonstrate the truth that this divinely-intended Order, which can never be identified with any of the standard types of government referred to by Aristote in his works, 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. The admitted evils inherent in each of these systems being radically 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 demagogy which must sooner or later corrupt the machinery of all man-made and essentially ineffective political institutions.

Dearly-beloved friends! Significant as are the origins of this mighty administrative structure, and however unique its features, the happenings that may be said to have heralded its birth and signalized the initial stage in the process of a slow and steady consolidation that characterizes the growth of its infant strength and the devastating onslaught of the forces of disinte-
are the Mashriq-ul-Ashâb and its Dependencies. The pillars that sustain its authority and buttress its structure are the dual institutions of the Guardianship of the Universal House of Justice. The central, the underlying aim which animates it is the establishment of the New World Order as adumbrated by Bahá’u’lláh. The methods it employs, the standard it inculcates, incline it to neither East nor West, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither rich nor poor, neither white nor colored. Its watchword is the unification of the human race; its standard the “Most Great Peace”; its consummation the advent of that golden millennium—the Day when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the Kingdom of God Himself, the Kingdom of Baha’u’lláh.

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SHOGHI