

# Shoghi Effendi and the Early Development of Bahá'í Administration in North America, 1922–1927

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## Abstract

*One of the major innovations of Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship was the development of a worldwide Bahá'í administrative system based on locally and nationally elected spiritual assemblies. This paper identifies the key elements of this system as laid out by Shoghi Effendi in 1922–23 (almost immediately after his accession as Guardian), and elaborated in some details over the next few years in letters he wrote to the American and Canadian Bahá'ís.*

## Keywords

Shoghi Effendi Rabbani  
 The Bahá'í  
 Guardianship  
 North American  
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 1920s

## Introduction

This paper describes Shoghi Effendi's establishment and elaboration of the Bahá'í administrative system based on locally and national elected spiritual assemblies at the very beginning of his ministry during the six-year period, 1922–1927. First developed in detail in collaboration with the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, it became the template for Bahá'í communities worldwide.

Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship (1922–1957) was a crucial period in the development of the Bahá'í Faith in various ways, witnessing: (1) a profound change in the nature of Bahá'í leadership from personalistic to more institutional forms (a 'routinization of charisma' in sociological terms);<sup>1</sup> (2) the initial development of the modern system of Bahá'í administration (the topic of the present paper); (3) the adoption of systematic planning as a means of furthering the expansion and consolidation of the Faith – which led to what might be described as the 'globalization' of the Bahá'í movement from the 1950s onwards;<sup>2</sup> and (4) the establishment of modern Bahá'í creedal forms and expressions of belief and practice.<sup>3</sup>

The first major series of administrative developments during Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship – what Bahá'ís now term their 'Administrative Order' – took place during the first six years of his ministry (1922–1927), and was crucially focused on developments in the Bahá'í community of the United States and Canada, although not confined to it.<sup>4</sup>

I have divided the account into two sections: (I) Establishing the basic system of modern Bahá'í administration, 1922–1923; and (II) Development and detail, 1923–1927.

## I. Establishing the Basic System of Modern Bahá'í Administration, 1922–1923

'Abdu'l-Bahá died on 28 November 1921. Due to passport difficulties, Shoghi Effendi was not able to reach Haifa until 29 December. He was then in a state of nervous collapse and had to be confined to bed for a number of days to recover. He was not present for the reading of his grandfather's Will to senior family members on 3 January, in which it was revealed that Shoghi Effendi – then only 24 years old – was to be 'Abdu'l-Bahá's successor, serving as the first of a series of hereditary 'Guardians' of the Cause. We may date the beginning of his Guardianship from this first reading of the Will. Shoghi Effendi himself had no foreknowledge of his appointment.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Will and Testament* created the institution of the Guardianship, naming Shoghi Effendi as the first Guardian and defining the system of future successions. It set out the method of electing the future Universal House of Justice, and described the formation of Secondary Houses of Justice (what were to become the national spiritual assemblies established by Shoghi Effendi). The Will also condemned the actions of members of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family, led by his half-brother Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, in opposing him and disinherited them from the line of succession from his father.<sup>5</sup>

The Will was first read publicly on 7 January, and on the same day, Bahíyyih Khánum, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, cabled to the Bahá'ís in Iran announcing Shoghi Effendi's appointment. She informed the American Bahá'ís on 16 January. Shoghi Effendi wrote to the Iranian and American Bahá'ís on 21 January, urging them to arise in service to the Cause. In his letter to the Americans, Shoghi Effendi wrote of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's promises and assurances for the future, called on them to be vigorous in their service to the Faith, to be selfless, united and detached, and assured them of the 'effective power' and support of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's grace [BA 15–17].

In the early months of his Guardianship, Shoghi Effendi had both to come to terms with his new situation and deal with the wide and often challenging array of work that confronted him as head of a complex and widely-spread religious movement. Thus, at a personal level he was undoubtedly suffering from enormous stress at this time. Not only was he mourning the death of his beloved grandfather to whom he had been deeply attached, but he had to try to understand and come to terms with what his own appointment as Guardian signified and entailed. Meanwhile, he was having to deal with the enormous amount of correspondence that he was receiving as the new head of the Bahá'í Cause and respond to two immediate crises concerning the Bahá'í holy shrines at Bahjí in Palestine (where Bahá'u'lláh was buried) and Baghdad (one of Bahá'u'lláh's former residences).<sup>6</sup>

He also devoted much attention to the question of the future development of the Bahá'í Faith in the aftermath of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, evidently making a detailed study of the Will, a document hitherto unknown to the Bahá'í world as well as to Shoghi Effendi himself. Significantly, one of his first actions as Guardian was to translate the lengthy document into English. In the United States, at least, a copy was available from February 1922 onwards, and, it (or parts of it?) was read aloud to an assemblage of Bahá'ís.<sup>7</sup>

Selected extracts also seem to have been circulated, but it was not until November 1924, that Shoghi Effendi decided that conditions were now

favourable for the general circulation of the Will amongst the Bahá'ís in North America, but even then only in manuscript form and with only one copy each being sent to every 'recognized' Bahá'í. Duplicate copies were not to be made or published anywhere [BA 74].<sup>8</sup> The reasons for this extreme caution are not clear, but it is plausible that this was an example of Shoghi Effendi's stated appeal to the Bahá'ís to focus on the 'constructive dynamic principles' of the Faith rather than its more negative teachings [BA 18] – in this case 'Abdu'l-Bahá's denunciations of His own family members for their opposition to his leadership.

In addition, in February and March 1922, he met with various eminent Bahá'ís whom he had invited to Haifa to discuss the present state and future progress of the Faith. These comprised the Americans Emogene Hoagg (already living in Haifa), Roy Wilhelm, Mountford Mills, and Charles Mason Remey; from England, Lady Sara Blomfield, Ethel Rosenberg and Major Wellesley Tudor Pole; Laura and Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney from France; and Consul Albert Schwarz and his wife Alice from Germany. Syed Mustafa Roumie (Siyyid Muşţafá Rúmí) from Burma and Corinne True and her daughter Katherine from the United States arrived later, but travel difficulties prevented the attendance of two leading Iranian Bahá'í teachers, Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn (Ávárih) and Mírzá Asadu'lláh Faḍíl Mázandarání.<sup>9</sup>

After the consultations, Shoghi Effendi evidently decided that it would be premature to immediately elect the Universal House of Justice – a decision contrary to the opinion of both some of the Bahá'ís and local British authorities.<sup>10</sup> Instead, he embarked on a longer-term project of establishing what would be an eventually uniform system of Bahá'í administration worldwide. This system would centre on the formation of elected Local and National Spiritual Assemblies wherever possible as a firm basis for the future election of the Universal House of Justice. In the event, although Shoghi Effendi did consider the possibility of having the election for the House held during his lifetime, it was not until 1963 – five-and-a-half years after his death – that it was first elected.<sup>11</sup>

### 1a. The Letter of March 1922

This new vision was communicated in a lengthy letter dated 5 March 1922 – that is roughly two months after Shoghi Effendi's accession to the Guardianship [BA 17-23].<sup>12</sup> The section on Spiritual Assemblies comes after a long 'prologue' in which Shoghi Effendi called on the Bahá'ís to try to understand the significance of this 'Hour of Transition', and carry on the Master's ['Abdu'l-Bahá's] work. This was a 'challenging hour' in Bahá'í history and 'we' all needed to subordinate our personal likings and local interests to the 'interests and requirements' of the Cause. 'We' should present a solid united front to the world, desiring only to serve and propagate the Faith. The Bahá'ís should give 'absolute' prominence to the 'constructive dynamic principles' of the Faith rather than give undue attention to the more negative teachings (presumably a reference to 'Covenant-breaking').<sup>13</sup> This was particularly true for the American Bahá'ís. It was necessary to abandon suspicion of other Bahá'ís and forget 'past impressions' [BA 17–19].<sup>14</sup>

The need to protect Bahá'í unity placed heavy responsibilities on the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies – which would eventually evolve into the future local and national Houses of Justice referred to in the Bahá'í

writings.<sup>15</sup> Thus, it was vitally necessary for a Local Spiritual Assembly to be established in every locality where the number of adult declared Bahá'ís exceeded nine, and to make provision for the indirect election of a National Assembly to represent the interests of all the American Bahá'ís and Local Assemblies [BA 20].<sup>16</sup>

As seen from their writings (which Shoghi Effendi cited at length), Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá had laid out the duties and functions of Spiritual Assemblies, revealing their sacred nature, their grave responsibilities and the wide scope of their activities [BA 20–23]. So great was their authority, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had once directed that the Spiritual Assembly of Cairo should decide whether or not a translation which he himself had corrected should be published [BA 23]. Clearly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wanted the Assemblies not only to approve all Bahá'í publications, but also to decide upon all matters that concerned the interests of the Cause, whether individually or collectively. Local matters should be decided by the responsible Local Assembly and national matters by the National Assembly. There was no exception [BA 23]. It was up to the National Assembly to determine which matters were of national or only local interest.<sup>17</sup>

It was vital for the unity of the Cause, solidarity amongst the Bahá'ís and the 'full, speedy and efficient working' of all Bahá'í spiritual activities for there to be complete harmony and cooperation between the various Local Assemblies and their members and particularly between each of the Local Assemblies and the National Assembly [BA 24].

All major Bahá'í activities [in North America] were to come under the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly which should appoint special committees with responsibility for each activity. These committees would superintend the management of *Star of the West* and any other Bahá'í periodical designated by the National Assembly; all publication, reprinting and distribution of Bahá'í literature; the stimulation and maintenance of the teaching campaign; the work on the Bahá'í House of Worship (the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* ['Dawning-place of the mention of God'] then beginning construction near Chicago);<sup>18</sup> the 'racial question'; receiving and associating with Oriental Bahá'ís; the care of the film of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the United States and the original matrix and records of His voice; and any other national activity. The National Assembly should constantly superintend all these committees. None of these activities were to be under the exclusive jurisdiction of any particular Local Assembly or group of Bahá'ís [BA 24].

The time had come for all Bahá'í activities to be harmonized and 'conducted with unity, cooperation and efficiency'. Their devout and earnest activities should be combined and systematized. With an all-powerful spirit pouring through them, the results of their efforts would transcend anything that had been achieved in the past, and stand as a 'convincing testimony' of the potency of the 'ever living' spirit of a now-departed Master [BA 24–25].

As to the question of dissension within the Bahá'í community (so evidently then of concern to the American Bahá'ís), when a careful observer was assured that an evil action was being committed and felt that forbearance and kindness were no longer sufficient, he or she should quietly report the matter to the responsible Local Spiritual Assembly of that area and submit the case to their consideration. If the majority of the Local Assembly members were convinced of the case, then they should report it to the

National Spiritual Assembly as this was a matter which affected the entire body of [North] American Bahá'ís. The National Assembly would then obtain all the available information about the case and carefully consider the situation. It alone could make the 'ultimate decision', consulting with 'the Holy Land' (i.e. Shoghi Effendi) if it needed to [BA 19].

Meanwhile, those eminent Bahá'ís who had gathered in Haifa to consult with Shoghi Effendi about the future of the Bahá'í Faith were returning to their homes, in some cases taking verbal messages from him back to their homelands – for the Germans and British, instructions to begin forming Local Spiritual Assemblies according to the framework he had established in preparation for the establishment of National Assemblies, and for the Americans, to transform the existing Executive Board of the Bahá'í Temple Unity into a National Spiritual Assembly – with directive, legislative functions rather than simply a committee to implement the decision of the Temple Unity.<sup>19</sup>

Coming back to Haifa in December 1922 after a lengthy absence in which he had tried to come to terms with his new position, Shoghi Effendi quickly returned to the matter of Bahá'í administration, clearly wanting to ensure that the project he had launched was being implemented and to encourage its participants in their work. Thus, in his first letter to the members of the now renamed American Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly (on 16 December 1922), he expressed his great pleasure at their work, including the 'efficient manner' in which they had carried out his 'humble suggestions'. He had read 'and re-read' their reports, and strongly approved of the way in which they had both centralized Bahá'í work in their hands and distributed it to various committees [BA 26–28].

He was even more pleased to learn that the National Assembly reported that it had the support of the North American Bahá'í community as a whole for 'if genuine and sustained cooperation' and 'mutual confidence' between the Bahá'ís and their Local and National Assemblies ceased, then the work of the Cause would also cease, and it would be impossible for it to function 'harmoniously and effectively' in the future. Inevitably, difficulties and differences would arise over time, but the Cause inspired a spirit of faith and devotion which would induce the Bahá'ís to overcome them. He hoped to hear of the Assembly's renewed efforts and determination to maintain the unity, effectiveness and dignity of the Cause [BA 28].

Shoghi Effendi asked the Assembly to convey his gratitude to all the members of the national Bahá'í committees, naming their members individually, emphasizing the importance of their work, assuring them of his prayers, and welcoming their own reports on their activities and plans for the future [BA 28–29], a practice he continued over the years.<sup>20</sup>

He also noted that he wanted detailed and official reports from each of the Local Spiritual Assemblies as soon as possible regarding their activities, organization, public and private gatherings, the 'actual position' of the Cause in their localities, and plans and arrangements for the future. He conveyed his best wishes and 'hearty assistance' in their work [BA 30].

## 1b. The Letter of March 1923

In March 1923, Shoghi Effendi penned a second lengthy letter on the subject of administration, addressing it collectively to the Bahá'ís of America, Europe, Japan, and Australia [BA 34–43]. The section on administration

deals with five topics: (1) The formation of Spiritual Assemblies; (2) The duties of Assemblies; (3) Individual responsibilities; (4) The Bahá'í Fund; and (5) The development of the administration.

Placing administrative matters in the context of a world which had suffered World War I and its aftershocks, he initially emphasized the Bahá'ís' responsibility to diffuse a 'regenerating Spirit of God' to the world [BA 34–35], before turning to the urgent need to establish the system of Spiritual Assemblies as based on the explicit texts of the *Aqdas* and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will.

### **1. The Formation of Spiritual Assemblies**

Local Spiritual Assemblies should be established in 'every locality' – city or hamlet – where the total number of adult declared Bahá'ís 'exceeded nine' ('adult' here being defined as being aged 21 or above). All matters relating to the Faith in a particular locality were to be 'directly and immediately' referred to the Local Assembly for 'full consultation and decision' [BA 37].

Similarly, it was vitally important that National Spiritual Assemblies be 'immediately' established in every country where there were sufficient Bahá'ís and conditions were favourable.<sup>21</sup> These National Assemblies would represent all the Bahá'ís in their country. Their immediate purpose would be both to 'stimulate, unify and coordinate' the activities of all the Bahá'ís and Local Assemblies they were responsible for by means of frequent personal consultations; initiate and provide general direction for Bahá'í activities in their respective countries; and keep in close and constant contact with the 'Holy Land' (i.e. Shoghi Effendi in Haifa). Beyond this, they would eventually evolve into 'National Houses of Justice' (the 'secondary' Houses of Justice referred to by 'Abdu'l-Bahá), and in conjunction with the other National Assemblies throughout the world directly elect the International House of Justice, that 'Supreme Council' that would 'guide, organize and unify' Bahá'í affairs globally [BA 39].<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, the 'absolute necessity' of the formation of Local Assemblies was based on their eventual evolution into local Houses of Justice. They were the 'firm foundation' on which the Bahá'í administrative structure was to be built [BA 37].

From 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings it was clear that unlike the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the International [Universal] House of Justice, the National Assemblies were to be indirectly elected by the Bahá'ís: the Bahá'ís in a country would elect delegates who would in turn elect the National Assembly. Each country would have a set number of delegates (with each locality with more than nine adult Bahá'ís having an assigned number of delegates proportional to its Bahá'í population size).<sup>23</sup> The delegates would constitute a [national] Convention, and would first deliberate together concerning the affairs of the Faith in their country before electing the members of the National Assembly. Ideally, the delegates would gather together, but if not, they could communicate through correspondence. Until the Universal House of Justice was elected, the National Assemblies would be reelected annually [BA 39–40]. So too would the Local Assemblies – in their case on the first day of the Bahá'í Rīḍván festival, with the results ideally being announced on the same day [BA 41].<sup>24</sup>

## 2. *The Duties of Assemblies*

Shoghi Effendi also listed a number of what he held to be the Spiritual Assemblies 'vital' duties:

- a) The direction, extension and consolidation of the teaching work (i.e. the propagation of the Faith). This work was 'essential' to the interests of the Cause.
- b) Protecting the Faith from 'the dart of the mischief-maker and the onslaught of the enemy' (i.e. Covenant-breakers and – presumably – persecutors of the Faith). To this end, the Assemblies should be both 'vigilant and cautious', 'discrete and watchful'.
- c) Promoting unity and concord amongst the Bahá'ís, effacing 'every lingering trace' of distrust, coolness and estrangement, and securing their 'active and whole-hearted cooperation' in service to the Cause.
- d) Doing their utmost to extend 'at all times' the helping hand to the poor, sick and disabled, and to orphans and widows – regardless of colour, caste or creed.
- e) Promoting, as much as they were able, the material and spiritual enlightenment of youth and the education of children, and instituting and supervising systems of Bahá'í education.
- f) Trying to maintain regular, official and frequent correspondence with other Bahá'í centres 'throughout the world', reporting their own activities to them and sharing their news.
- g) Encouraging and stimulating the development of the various Bahá'í magazines around the world, subscribing to them and sending them reports and articles.<sup>25</sup>
- h) Arranging regular Bahá'í meetings, including the feasts and anniversaries, and any special gatherings designed to serve and promote 'the social, intellectual and spiritual interests' of humanity.<sup>26</sup>
- i) Supervising all Bahá'í publications and translations (during these days when the Cause was 'still in its infancy'), and providing for a 'dignified and accurate' presentation of all Bahá'í literature and its distribution to the general public [BA 37–38].

These were among the 'most outstanding' obligations of Assembly members everywhere. In those localities in which there was a large Bahá'í community, each function was to be assigned to a specialist committee. These committees would be appointed by the individual Assembly, and it would exercise 'constant and general supervision' over them [BA 39].

The National Assemblies bore 'grave responsibilities', for each had to exercise 'full authority' over all the Local Assemblies in its 'province'; direct, 'control and supervise' Bahá'í activities in general; and guard the Cause 'vigilantly' [against attacks]. Vital national issues over which it had full jurisdiction included the translation and publication of Bahá'í writings, the Bahá'í temple [*Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*], the propagation of the Faith, and any issues which were 'national' rather than local in nature. As with the Local Assemblies, particular responsibilities were to be assigned to committees appointed by the National Assembly and supervised by it [BA 40].

Each National Assembly would also define what it considered to be matters of national concern, so local matters could be left to the Local Assemblies.

Each National Assembly would also decide which matters should be referred to the Holy Land (i.e. to Shoghi Effendi) for consultation and decision [BA 40–41].

The efficient, harmonious and vigorous functioning of the Local and National Assemblies was the sole means for the future establishment of the Supreme House of Justice. When that Supreme House had been properly established, it would consider anew all aspects of Bahá'í administrative functioning, and lay down the directing principles that would govern Bahá'í affairs – for as long as it deemed advisable [BA 41].

### **3. Individual Responsibilities**

Shoghi Effendi also emphasized the responsibilities of the individual Bahá'í in the system he was trying to build. Every adult Bahá'í had a sacred duty to take part in the election of his or her Local Assembly, as well as its consolidation and efficient working. Certainly, he or she shouldn't stand aloof and assume an attitude of indifference or independence from it [BA 39].

All Bahá'ís should take an active part in the Assembly elections, abide by and enforce their decisions, and wholeheartedly cooperate with them in stimulating the growth of the Faith. By so doing, the Bahá'ís would avoid division and disruption, the Faith would not fall victim to conflicting interpretations, and would thus retain its purity and 'pristine vigour' [BA 41].

For their part, the members of Assemblies had to totally disregard their own likes, dislikes, personal interests and inclinations. Instead, they should concentrate their minds upon those measures that would contribute to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá'í community, and 'promote the common good' [BA 41].

### **4. The Bahá'í Fund**

Effective financing was basic to efficient administration. For Shoghi Effendi, the 'progress and execution' of spiritual activities was dependent on 'material means'. Therefore, it was essential for each newly established Local or National Assembly to establish a 'Bahá'í Fund'. This would be under the exclusive control of the Assembly. Each Assembly's treasurer would receive contributions from the Bahá'ís for the promotion of the interests of the Faith in its particular locality or country. It was the sacred obligation of every 'conscientious and faithful' Bahá'í who desired to see the Cause advance to contribute 'freely and generously' to this Fund. The members of the Spiritual Assembly would decide how to spend the money – whether on propagating the Faith ('teaching'), helping the needy, establishing Bahá'í educational institutions, or to extend their sphere of service 'in every way possible'. Shoghi Effendi hoped that Bahá'ís would realize the importance of this measure and contribute to the Fund – 'however modestly at first' [BA 41–42].

### **5. The Development of the Administration**

The Bahá'ís should realize that the 'full implications' and exact significance' of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions in His Will were not yet grasped. Nor had the Bahá'í Movement as a whole 'sufficiently crystalized' in the eyes of the world. In this period, when the Bahá'í Faith was still in a stage of 'tender growth' and transition, it was necessary to centralize authority within the community in the National Spiritual Assemblies, and concentrate power in the Local Assemblies.

At the same time, the Bahá'ís 'primary task' was to keep a 'vigilant eye' on the growth of this administrative system in order to combat effectively the forces of separatism and sectarian tendencies, lest the spirit of the Cause be obscured, its unity threatened, or its teachings corrupted. The Bahá'ís should guard against both the extremes of orthodoxy and 'irresponsible freedom'. Either could cause the Faith to deviate from the 'Straight Path' which alone could lead it to success [BA 42].

## II. Development and Detail, 1923–1927

Although Shoghi Effendi devoted much attention to building up the administrative system, he also emphasized that it was not an end in itself. As he wrote in a letter in January 1926, even as the administration grew and its activities diversified, it was essential to remember that it was all but a means to an end. It was an instrument for the propagation of the Faith, and it was teaching the Faith that was the Bahá'ís 'primary concern' and obligation: not administration, important though that was [BA 103]. Indeed, in his March 1923 letter on administration, he had pointedly reminded the Bahá'ís their most essential and urgent obligation was to bury their own cares and teach the Cause, delivering its message of salvation to a 'sorely-stricken world'. 'We' should ensure that concern with the secondary details of our affairs and activities didn't cause 'us' to neglect this primary duty. The Bahá'ís should heed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's call to action and service and, 'unfettered and unafraid', fulfil their glorious destiny [BA 42–43].

Accordingly, after his general letters of 1922 and 1923 on administration, his focus changed. He was still concerned with the development of the administrative system, but now that the basic principles and structures had been established, he sought to ensure that the framework he had provided was successfully implemented rather than adding to it. He still commented on administrative issues, but most often in the form of elucidation and encouragement rather than establishing new principles.<sup>27</sup> He also still closely followed administrative developments across the Bahá'í world, writing to the Americans in January 1926, for example, that he had read their Convention minutes with 'deep pleasure and keen interest' [BA 102].

Indeed, by May 1926, he opined that the Bahá'í administrative machinery (at least in America) was now 'sufficiently evolved', and the Bahá'ís had come to grasp its purpose and method sufficiently well, that they should employ it 'fully and consciously' to advance the purpose for which it had been created, namely, to both (i) promote 'the steady and gradual expansion of the Movement' along 'broad, sound and universal lines', and (ii) insure the 'internal consolidation' of whatever had already been achieved. Thus, the 'dynamic forces' latent in the Faith could unfold and shape the lives of humankind, whilst the 'interchange of thought' and 'coordination of activities' amongst the 'diverse elements' which constituted the Bahá'í community could be fostered [BA 109].

In what was a general policy worldwide, all secondary administrative matters were to be decided by the individual National Assemblies in the light of their particular circumstances [BA 96]. He was concerned to establish a system that was universal without insisting on uniformity, although on some issues – such as pluralist voting (see below) - he favoured one

national variant over another and encouraged its general adoption, effectively ensuring that it became the international norm.

We may describe the topics covered under nine headings: (1) On National Spiritual Assemblies; (2) National Conventions; (3) Elections; (4) A spiritual approach to the administration; (5) The link with the future Universal House of Justice; (6) The Bahá'í fund; (7) Titles and lists; (8) The example of North America; and (9) The Declaration of Trust. Together with the two general letters of 1922 and 1923, these various directives and guidelines quickly became normative for the entire Bahá'í world.

### **1. On National Spiritual Assemblies**

In a number of letters, Shoghi Effendi commented both on the powers of the National Assembly and the style of leadership its members should aspire to.

Thus, in April 1923, he reiterated and commented on several points he had already made about the National Assembly's powers and functioning:

- a) That National Assemblies were to direct and manage all Bahá'í activities in their 'territory' and were the official representatives of the Faith to the general public, promoting and safeguarding the interests of the Cause. They had to be a 'true example' to all other Bahá'í institutions of what 'absolute harmony, mature deliberation and whole-hearted cooperation' could achieve. If any National Assembly failed to do this then the great plan for the future unfolded in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will would be disturbed and delayed [BA 46].
- b) That the National Assembly should send him official, frequent and comprehensive reports of its activities, including the 'inner and outward currents' of the Movement, the inter-relations between the Local Assemblies, and the general standing and progress of the Cause. He also wanted reports from the various national committees forwarded and approved by the National Assembly [BA 46].
- c) That as part of its directive role, the National Assembly was in charge of the *Star of the West* (and any other similar American Bahá'í publication). It fell under the 'exclusive control' of the Assembly, which, together with a responsible committee, would 'minutely guide' it and scrutinize its content, tone and language. It was not the personal organ of any particular locality or group [BA 46].
- d) Again, the National Assembly was responsible for the holding of all state Bahá'í congresses, Amity Conventions and any other 'universal associations' of the American Bahá'ís. It was up to the Assembly to direct and supervise their work via specific responsible committees. The same was true for receiving Oriental Bahá'ís [BA 47].

In January 1925, Shoghi Effendi clarified that the National Assembly ultimately determined who had voting rights within the Bahá'í administrative system, both when a Local Assembly was being established in a particular locality for the first time, and when differences arose between a new applicant and an established Local Assembly [BA 80].

Writing to the National Assembly in October 1927, Shoghi Effendi also advised the Americans not to allow national activities to become over-extended. He noted that their letters indicated a steady multiplication of

activities and ‘newly conceived plans’. This was excellent, but he warned them to be cautious so as to ensure that over-enthusiasm didn’t lead to a dissipation of resources. They needed to carefully estimate the extent of the resources available to them. Correspondingly, there had to be full consultation between the National Assembly and the Bahá’ís about any plans additional to those set by the National Assembly. Projects should not be started unless there was the assurance that there would be ‘adequate and continuous’ support for them [BA 140–41].<sup>28</sup>

In the same letter, he also noted that the National Assembly had placed a lot of detailed implementation of national activities into the hands of its committees. It was important to ensure that the committees reported fully to the Assembly, however, and that the Assembly reviewed the work of the committees each year. It was necessary to avoid both the evils of excessive centralization and of excessive decentralization. Balance was needed, and in the case of excessive control, there was the danger of it lessening the value of the ordinary Bahá’ís contributions, as well as embedding the Assembly itself in a mass of detail [BA 141–42].

Shoghi Effendi expressed the hope that the National Assembly members were aware of their ‘mighty responsibilities’, fully realizing that they needed to secure the ‘sustained cooperation’ and ‘full understanding’ of the Bahá’ís (May 1923) [BA 49].

To this end, in February 1924, he emphasized how important it was to realize that the ‘keynote’ of the Cause was humble fellowship and the spirit of ‘frank and loving consultation’. It was not ‘dictatorial authority’ or ‘arbitrary power’. The principle of the ‘undoubted right of the individual to self-expression’ and ‘his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views’ lay at the ‘very root’ of the Cause [BA 63]. Only the spirit of a true Bahá’í could reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, freedom and submission, the right of the individual and self-surrender, and ‘vigilance, discretion and prudence’ and ‘fellowship, candour and courage’ [BA 64].

The duties of those ‘freely and conscientiously’ elected by the Bahá’ís as their representatives were just as vital and binding as the obligations of their electors. Assembly members should consult both with their fellow Assembly members, and, as much as possible, with the Bahá’ís who they represented. This was their ‘function’. They were not to dictate to the Bahá’ís. They should see themselves as the ‘chosen instruments’ for a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause, but never suppose that they were superior to others in capacity or merit, or the sole promoters of the Bahá’í teachings. They were not the ‘central ornaments’ of the Cause. They should approach their task with ‘extreme humility’ and seek to win the confidence, ‘genuine support and respect’, esteem and ‘real affection’ of those they served. This would be achieved through open-mindedness, a ‘high sense of justice and duty’, candour, modesty, and ‘entire devotion’ to the welfare and interests of the Bahá’ís, the Cause and humanity as a whole. They had to avoid the ‘spirit of exclusivity’ at all times, along with the ‘atmosphere of secrecy’, and a domineering attitude. They had to banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations. Within the limits of ‘wise discretion’ they should take the Bahá’ís into their confidence, acquainting them with their plans and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel. In decision-making, they should first consult with the other Assembly members

dispassionately, earnestly and cordially, and then turn to God in prayer, and record their vote with ‘earnestness’, ‘conviction’ and ‘courage’. They should abide by the voice of the majority, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had said that this was the ‘voice of truth’, which was never to be challenged and always whole-heartedly endorsed. The rest of the Bahá’ís should ‘heartily respond’ to these assembly decisions, regarding them as the only means that could ensure the ‘protection and advancement’ of the Cause [BA 64].

## **2. National Conventions**

In the North American context, perhaps the most difficult aspect of Shoghi Effendi’s policies to implement was changing what we might term the ‘power balance’ between the annual Bahá’í Convention and the newly-established National Spiritual Assembly. Unlike in other parts of the Bahá’í world, the Americans and Canadians had a long-established tradition of annual meetings of the Bahá’í Temple Unity at which an Executive Board would be elected.<sup>29</sup> Authority resided with the Temple Unity meeting in convention and the Executive Board then implemented its decisions. Shoghi Effendi’s ‘system’ reversed this relationship, vesting power in the National Assembly and considerably reducing the decision-making role of the annual meeting. The change from the old to the new system appears to have been a process of transition requiring both guidance from Shoghi Effendi and presumably careful collaboration between him and the National Assembly.<sup>30</sup>

Writing to the National Assembly in November 1923, Shoghi Effendi opined that in order to become ‘potent instruments’ for the realization of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s plan, both the National Assembly and the annual Convention had to endeavour to exemplify the high ideals of Bahá’í service and fellowship. They had to have strict regard for the dignity, welfare and ‘unity’ of the Cause [BA 53].

Then, in January 1925, he outlined the ways in which the National Convention should develop and function:

a) Hitherto, its primary function had been the election of the members of the National Spiritual Assembly, but this should change, reflecting both the growing importance of administration in Bahá’í affairs, the general sentiment amongst the Bahá’ís, and the increasing contacts between the various National Assemblies around the world. Traditionally, the annual meeting held under the auspices of the Bahá’í Temple Unity consisted of a series of inspirational speeches held over several days. There was also an opening banquet and musical interludes. The ‘business’ part of the events consisted of reports of progress on the temple project and the election of the executive board that would oversee the oncoming year’s activities.<sup>31</sup>

Now, Convention should also serve as a consultative body to the incoming National Assembly, which should seek the advice, opinions and ‘true sentiments’ of the delegates. Without any trace of reticence or aloofness, the newly elected Assembly members should unfold their plans, hopes and cares to the delegates, familiarize them with the matters they would have to consider in the coming year, and study and weigh the delegates’ opinions and judgements. Both during the Convention, and after it had ended and the delegates dispersed, the Assembly should find ways to cultivate understanding and a continuing

exchange of views with them, and to deepen their confidence. Great regard should be given to the delegates by the Assembly members, and [everyone] should remember that it was often the most lowly, untutored and inexperienced amongst the Bahá'ís who would be the one who added particular value to Assembly discussions by the inspiring force of their devotion [BA 79].

- b) As frequent and long-standing sessions of Convention were impractical, the National Assembly retained final authority on all matters that affected the Cause in [North] America (i.e. the reverse of the former practice of the Bahá'í Temple Unity). This included the right to decide whether any Local Assembly was functioning in accordance with Bahá'í principles. He hoped that the National Assembly would use its 'highly responsible position' both to conduct Bahá'í affairs wisely and efficiently and to extend the spirit of cooperation and mutual support with the American Bahá'ís as a whole [BA 80].
- c) Regarding the seating of Convention delegates, that is, the right to decide who could be a delegate, this was vested in the outgoing National Assembly [BA 80].
- d) When the Convention was in session, it was of 'infinite value' (and essential unless circumstances made it impossible) for all matters requiring immediate decision to be fully and publicly discussed by the newly-elected Assembly members and delegates. Ideally, as in all Bahá'í decision-making, these discussions would lead to unanimous agreement, but if this was not possible, the majority verdict should prevail to which the minority would fully submit [BA 80].

In April 1925, Shoghi Effendi noted that the basis for the allocation of delegates might change in the future if the condition of the community altered (e.g. an increase in the number of localities). Matters such as proxy voting at the Convention were up to the National Assembly to rule on [BA 83].

In May 1925, he reiterated his earlier statement (based on the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá) that the National Assembly should be elected indirectly by the Bahá'ís by means of locally-elected delegates. As a corollary of this principle, the Local Assemblies could not directly appoint the delegates. Nor would it be fair for the Assembly members themselves to be the delegates as some localities had much larger Bahá'í populations than others. The central principle for the present administration of the Faith was that the National Assemblies should be as independent as possible within their 'province' and not be hampered by the direct or indirect influence of any other institution [BA 84–85].

In October 1925, Shoghi Effendi made several points:

- a) Although it was not essential to convene a Convention and Congress every year, it was highly desirable to do so, both because the gathering performed a unique function in promoting harmony and good-will amongst the Bahá'ís, and to remove any misunderstandings between them, and in enhancing the prestige of the Faith [BA 91].
- b) Ideally, the election of the National Assembly should coincide with this great gathering of Bahá'ís. However, if it was ever not possible to hold a Convention in a particular year, the election could be accomplished by means of a postal ballot, as long as this was able to be done efficiently.

Certainly, in the case of individual delegates who were unable to attend the Convention, their votes could be received by post, although all delegates should be reminded that attendance was a ‘sacred responsibility’, and that their personal attendance enabled them to take an active part in the proceedings and report back to their fellow Bahá’ís when they returned home [BA 91].

- c) The National Assembly should set the date of the Convention during the Ridván period every year (whereas in previous years, it had varied) [BA 91].

### 3. Elections

Shoghi Effendi also gave attention to several aspects of the American National Assembly election procedure which had carried over from the old Bahá’í Temple Unity, specifically limiting the role of ‘alternate members’, and opposing both the [American] practices of nominating members and using majority rather than plurality voting.

The first of these issues was addressed in a letter to the American Assembly in November 1925, in which he stated that whilst it was permissible to elect ‘alternate’ members to the National Assembly for the purposes of consultation, they would not be entitled to vote, or be regarded as part of the required quorum for holding the meeting (i.e. 5 members out of the 9 full members) [BA 96].

Then, in a letter to the American National Assembly in May 1927, Shoghi Effendi noted that certain matters of administration were still uncertain. As the Bahá’í writings did not provide a detailed description of the manner of electing Local and National Assemblies, it would be the responsibility of the future Universal House of Justice to specify the relevant laws for Bahá’í elections. He himself had therefore chosen not to establish a uniform procedure for all Assemblies worldwide, allowing different National Assemblies to pursue their own procedures.

However, the practice that prevailed in the East had merit, being based on a plurality of votes rather than an absolute majority, and he recommended that the North American Bahá’ís consider adopting it. It entailed that those elected on to a Spiritual Assembly were those who received the most votes cast, but these did not have to be the majority of the electors. Although this meant that Assembly members might be elected who had not received an absolute majority of the votes, it enabled voters to vote freely for whoever they felt was best suited to serve on the Assembly. It also avoided the practice of nomination which was both detrimental to a silent and prayerful election, was difficult to organize when some voters sent in postal ballots, and excluded absent voters from any subsequent votes when the initial results were not clear cut [BA 136].

Shoghi Effendi also emphasized that the Bahá’ís should view elections as having a ‘spiritual aspect’, as in a letter of February 1924, in which he appealed to the American Bahá’ís to try to elect their Convention delegates – as well as their National and Local Assembly members – with that ‘purity of spirit’ that was the only means by which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ‘most cherished desire’ could be obtained. They should recall ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explicit and oft-repeated assurance that every Assembly elected in a rarefied atmosphere of selflessness and detachment was truly ‘appointed of God’, that its verdict was truly inspired, and that everyone should submit to its decisions cheerfully

and ‘unreservedly’. These were difficult but essential conditions for a productive year ahead [BA 65].

#### **4. A Spiritual Approach to the Administration**

There is as yet no detailed account of the development of what I will term ‘administrative consciousness’ amongst the North American Bahá’ís – a proper study of American Bahá’í history during the 1920s has yet to be written. Clearly, there were already divisions within the American community about questions relating to ‘Bahá’í organization’ during the lifetime of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and these came into sharper focus with Shoghi Effendi’s emphasis on administrative development.<sup>32</sup> I am not going to attempt to track those divisions here, however. Rather, I will describe Shoghi Effendi’s general comments on what might be described as the ‘spiritual approach to the administration’.

We see this in a brief comment in a letter of January 1925, in which he stated that only the ‘all-encompassing’ and ‘all-pervading’ power of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s guidance and love could enable the newly-established Bahá’í administrative order to gather strength and to flourish amid ‘the storm and stress of a turbulent age’. Ultimately, it would vindicate its high claim to be the sole ‘Haven of abiding felicity and peace’ [BA 80].

Shoghi Effendi made more substantial comments in a message to those attending the American Convention in June 1925. Individually, ‘we’ should seek to reinforce the ‘motive power’ of our spiritual activities, whilst collectively working to raise the standard of ‘administrative efficiency’ so vitally needed at this ‘advanced stage of our work’. ‘High aims and pure motives’ by themselves were not enough. Practical means of success were also needed, and these could only be achieved through concerted common effort [BA 87].

In this second context, the election of the members of the National Assembly bore great importance. The National Assembly had a ‘unique significance’, and was presently the ‘pivot’ round which all Bahá’í activities in America revolved. The members of the Assembly had to shoulder great responsibilities, and the delegates had a privileged and delicate task in their voting. The high qualifications of membership enumerated in the Bahá’í writings were daunting, and it was only the assurance of help from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ‘all-conquering spirit’ which brought comfort. Accordingly, in electing the new year’s Assembly, the delegates had to set aside all passion and prejudice as well as any ‘material consideration’, and choose those they thought best combined the necessary qualities of ‘unquestioned loyalty’, ‘selfless devotion’, a ‘well-trained mind’, ‘recognized ability’, and ‘mature experience’. He hoped that the elected members – the ‘privileged and chosen servants of the Cause’ – would be worthy stewards, whose loving service would redound to the honour, glory and power of the Faith [BA 87–88].

#### **5. The Link with the Future Universal House of Justice**

Shoghi Effendi also described the developing administration in terms of the concept of what he saw as a ‘new world order’ laid out in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, in a letter in February 1924, he stressed the need to clear ‘our’ minds from any ‘unhappy misunderstandings’ that might obscure our clear conception of that order. As yet, we were unable to discern its full value or significance: only time and the guidance of the future Universal House of Justice

would enable us to better grasp its provisions and implications. We should not judge it by human standards. God's ways were not necessarily those of men [BA 62]. It would be the Universal House of Justice that would define the broad lines that would guide the future activities and administration of the Bahá'í Movement. Prior to its establishment, the Bahá'ís should strive to get as clear a view as possible as to how to conduct the affairs of the Cause and then apply that to their activities with single-minded determination [BA 63].

The Local and National assemblies were the bedrock on which the future Universal House of Justice was to be established. They needed to be strong, and the transition period would continue until they were functioning vigorously and harmoniously. The promised era of universal recognition and accomplishment would be brought nearer if we consolidated the foundations of these Assemblies and gained a fuller understanding of their purpose [BA 63].

If certain instructions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were particularly emphasized at the present time, these were but provisional measures whose purpose was to protect the Cause in its infancy and growth until it had developed to the stage where it could withstand the 'unwisdom' of the Bahá'ís and the attacks of its enemies [BA 63].

Again, writing in January 1925, Shoghi Effendi stated that the system he had described would guide the administration of the Faith until the Universal House of Justice was established in the future [BA 78].

### **6. The Bahá'í Fund**

In his general letter of March 1923, Shoghi Effendi had emphasized the importance of establishing and supporting Bahá'í funds. He reiterated the urgent need for the National Assembly to establish a central Bahá'í fund in May 1923. Only by so doing could they conduct their activities effectively [BA 49].

In later letters, he emphasized that contributions to the Bahá'í funds were to be entirely voluntary and could be tied to supporting particular projects. Thus, in November 1923, whilst stating that it would be a sign of 'absolute confidence' in the National Assembly if the Bahá'ís and Local Assemblies contributed freely to the central Bahá'í fund, letting the National Assembly decide how to spend the monies received in meeting its various responsibilities, it was a basic principle that the Bahá'ís were absolutely free to specify the object and purpose of any donations they made to the national fund [BA 54]. Again, in January 1926, he emphasized that it was a 'cardinal' principle that all contributions to the Bahá'í funds were strictly voluntary in nature. It was allowable to make general appeals for support, but any contributions should be left entirely to the individual's discretion. Even the slightest and most indirect form of compulsion was wrong. [BA 101]

### **7. Titles and Lists**

Shoghi Effendi gradually instituted a standard system of administrative rules and procedures.

Thus, in April 1925, he 'suggested' what became the American Assembly's formal title for letterheads and the like as 'The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada' [BA 82-83]. All National and Local Spiritual Assemblies eventually came to share a common nomenclature.

He also attached much importance to up-to-date data bases for efficient administration. Thus, in May 1925, he requested that immediately after its annual election, each Local Assembly should send the complete list of its members to the National Assembly secretary, along with the name and full address of its own secretary. Copies of all these details should then be forwarded to Shoghi Effendi by the national secretary, along with a list of the names of the National Assembly members for the year and the national secretary's address [BA 85].

If it was possible, the National Assembly should also set about the task (in collaboration with the Local Assemblies) of compiling a membership roll of all Bahá'ís under its jurisdiction, indicating their names and permanent addresses, and differentiating between those Bahá'ís who lived in Local Assembly areas and those who were either isolated individuals or members of small Bahá'í groups that weren't yet large enough to form their own Local Assemblies. The roll should be kept up-to-date [BA 85]. He enclosed a provisional list of all Bahá'í centres throughout the world, except for Iran. It was inadequate, and he welcomed any corrections or additions which the Assembly could make. He intended that this list would evolve into a valuable section of the projected Bahá'í yearbook [BA 85–86].<sup>34</sup>

Writing in November 1925, Shoghi Effendi also established the principle that it was not possible to have two independent Bahá'í centres in the same city. Both should come under the jurisdiction of the responsible Local Spiritual Assembly [BA 96].<sup>35</sup>

### **8. The Example of North America**

From the 1890s, when the North American Bahá'í community first began to develop, it became a distinctive and prominent element within the international Bahá'í movement. Although numerically small, its members possessed a freedom of action and movement denied to the large and intermittently persecuted Bahá'í community of Iran or the small scattering of Bahá'ís across the Middle East, as well as a dynamism which the Bahá'í groups in India, Europe and later Australasia lacked. Only the well-developed Bahá'í communities of Russian Central Asia and the Caucasus were comparable, and their freedom ended after the establishment of the Soviet Union and its crusade against all forms of organized religion.

It was Natural then for Shoghi Effendi to turn to the American and Canadian Bahá'ís with particular expectation and hope for their support when he began his Guardianship. He was not disappointed. Both individually and collectively the North Americans were in the forefront of the administrative developments which he introduced in the 1920s, and later of the systematic teaching plans which he began in the 1930s. They also played an increasing role in supporting other national Bahá'í communities worldwide. In a letter in June 1925, Shoghi Effendi himself noted the importance of the Western Bahá'ís – particularly those of the United States – as now bearing the primary responsibility for achieving 'the universal recognition of the Bahá'í Faith' [BA 88]. More specifically, in October 1927, he stated that the mission of the [North] American Bahá'ís increasingly appeared to be to take the lead and set the example for Bahá'ís worldwide in laying a 'secure foundation' for permanent Bahá'í institutions [BA 140]. One of the most important expressions of this leading role was achieved in 1927 with the

writing and publication of a legal Declaration of Trust and accompanying by-laws by the American National Assembly (below).

### **9. The Declaration of Trust**

The first period of administrative development may be said to have been brought to fruition with the American Assembly's Declaration of Trust (1927), a legal document which along with its accompanying by-laws marked an important marker in the institutionalization of the Faith.

Writing in May 1927, Shoghi Effendi welcomed his receipt of the Declaration, calling its production a 'milestone' in the development of the American Bahá'í administration. It was clear, concise, sound and complete. It was a 'worthy and faithful' exposition of the 'constitutional bases' for Bahá'í communities everywhere, and foreshadowed the future emergence of the 'world Bahá'í Commonwealth'. When this Declaration of Trust was correlated and combined with a set of by-laws which he wanted the Assembly to prepare, it would serve as a pattern for every National Assembly in the world which hoped to conform with the 'spirit and letter' of the present Bahá'í order pending the formation of the Universal House of Justice. He 'eagerly' awaited the completed by-laws which should supplement the provisions of the Declaration, clarify its purpose, and explain the underlying principles more fully [BA 134–35].

After he had reviewed it, the National Assembly should submit it to the Local Assemblies [in North America] which would seek its ratification by the body of recognized Bahá'ís. He would like to include the joint document together with the accompanying indenture of trust in the next issues of the Bahá'í Year Book, so that both Bahá'ís and sympathizers could get a 'clear and correct' vision of the 'preliminary framework' of the complete system of 'world administration' implicit in the Bahá'í teachings [BA 135].<sup>36</sup>

Later, in October 1927, he expressed his pleasure with the by-laws that had been drafted, and recommended that the combined document should be adopted by all of the other National Assemblies in so far as their particular circumstances permitted: the Americans should send them all copies [BA 142–43].

For the outside world, the by-laws would represent the aspirations, motives and objectives of the Bahá'ís. Whilst giving 'due emphasis' to the 'concentrated authority', rights and privileges of the National Spiritual Assembly, they should stress the responsibilities of Assembly members as 'faithful stewards' of those who had elected them. One of the most important and 'sacred' duties of Assembly members was the requirement that they seek to win the affection and confidence of those whom they were privileged to serve. They should acquaint themselves with the 'considered views' and sentiments of the Bahá'ís. There should be no 'self-contained aloofness', secrecy, or 'the stifling atmosphere of dictatorial assertiveness' by the Assembly members. The National Assembly had the 'exclusive right of final decision', but its members should 'invite discussion, provide information, ventilate grievances' and welcome the advice of all Bahá'ís, including the 'most humble and insignificant'. They should foster a sense of 'interdependence and co-partnership' between themselves and individual Bahá'ís and Local Assemblies, justifying their actions and revising their verdicts when necessary [BA 143–44].

## A Concluding Comment

Administrative institutionalization has become an established part of the Bahá'í Faith as a globally dispersed religious movement, entering a new and very distinctive phase with the formation of the Universal House of Justice in 1963. The system of local and National Assemblies (with their attendant processes of consultation, elections and service committees) remains fundamental to modern Bahá'í administration, albeit now augmented by other elements. It is of note that the establishment of the Assembly system was achieved over the course of a mere six years at the beginning of what Shoghi Effendi later came to term the 'Formative Age' of Bahá'í development. This establishment was not without its problems, both in terms of the effective functioning of individual Assemblies and Bahá'í communities, and the short-lived opposition movement which emerged in the late 1920s and early 1930s,<sup>37</sup> but it has proven durable and continues to provide the Bahá'ís with a system of organization and planning which is both non-clerical (the Bahá'í Faith has no priests) and remarkably adaptable to a wide range of local and national communities.<sup>38</sup>

The administrative innovations of the 1922–1927 period represented a major change in the functioning of the Bahá'í Faith. There had been a variety of Bahá'í organizations before 1922, but they were less important in the overall functioning of the religion than eminent teachers of the Faith. With Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship, not only did he, as the new centre of the Faith, adopt a more institutional role than his grandfather had done, but he also established a framework of organization which ensured that a similar shift occurred within the local Bahá'í communities. He also established a single system internationally which came to replace the previous diversity of local forms. The new organizational system provided the Bahá'ís with institutions of directive authority on which Shoghi Effendi came to rely for the implementation of Bahá'í planning goals. As such, it appears to have greatly facilitated the global expansion of the Faith which began in earnest in the 1950s and which in turn led to an enormous increase in the diversity of Bahá'í groups and communities worldwide. The new system also came to provide a basis for legal incorporation and recognition of Bahá'í bodies in various countries.

### Suggested citation

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## Endnotes

1. See Peter Smith, 'Peter Berger's early work on Bahá'í Studies', *Journal of Religious History*, 43(1), 2019, 45–69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9809.12559>.
2. See Peter Smith, 'Babi-Bahá'í expansion and "geo-cultural breakthroughs"', *Journal of Religious History*, 40(2), 2016, 225–36.
3. For a brief overview of Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship see Peter Smith, *An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 55–69. Shoghi Effendi's widow, Ruhiyih Rabbani, has provided a detailed account of his life and work: *The Priceless Pearl*, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969.
4. Thus, the main source for Shoghi Effendi's early statements on the development of Bahá'í administration are found in a short selection of his letters to the North Americans in the volume *Bahá'í Administration*, first published in 1928 (I am using a later edition: Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, rev. ed., Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1945). To reduce the number of footnotes, all page references to this book are included in the text in the form 'BA [page number]'. Note that we do not presently have access to the letters from the North American Bahá'ís and their institutions to which Shoghi Effendi was frequently replying.  
 The second series of major administrative developments under the Guardianship (the formation of the International Bahá'í Council and the appointment of functioning Hands of the Cause and of the members of the auxiliary boards to assist them) took place during the 1950s and are outside the concerns of the present paper. On the overall system of Bahá'í administration see Smith, *Introduction* 175–86, and Peter Smith, *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2000, 24–28.  
 On early institutionalization in the West see Peter Smith, 'The Bahá'í Faith in the West: A survey' in Peter Smith (ed.), *Bahá'ís in the West*, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2004, 10–15, and more generally, Peter Smith, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions: From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 120–22.
5. On the Will, see Smith, *Encyclopedia*, 356–57. On Muḥammad-'Alí, see *ibid* 252.
6. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death prompted His half-brothers and long-time opponents to seize the keys to Bahá'u'lláh's shrine at Bahjí on 30 January, leading to the intervention of the governor of Acre (See Moojan Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1982, 456–57). In Iraq, King Faisal ordered the Bahá'ís to be evicted from the former house of Bahá'u'lláh in order to pacify the local Shí'ites. The first crisis was resolvable – Shoghi Effendi got the keys back on 8 February 1923, but he had no means of effectively influencing the Iraqi government despite mounting a long-running campaign to gain international support for the Bahá'ís case (Smith, *Encyclopedia*, 66–67).
7. Loni Bramson-Lerche. 'Some aspects of the establishment of the Guardianship' in Moojan Momen (ed.), *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi*, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1988, 270.
8. Published extracts from the Will appeared in 1923 in John E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1923, 220–25. A translation of the entire document was not published until 1935: *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee. My [1944] copy runs to 22 pages of text: Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
9. Robert Weinberg, *Ethel Jenner Rosenberg: The Life and Times of England's Outstanding Bahá'í Pioneer Worker*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1995, 207–209; Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 55–56. On Fazel see *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (under name). On Tudor Pole see Lil Osborn, 'The extraordinary life and work of Wellesley Tudor Pole: Bahá'í seer'. Bahá'í Library Online, 2013. (Last accessed 10 August 2018.), and *Wikipedia* (under name). On Hoagg see *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 10, 1944–1946, 520–26. On the others see Smith, *Encyclopedia* 52–53 (Avareh), 93–94 (Blomfield), 126 (the Dreyfus-Barneys), 248 (Mills), 292 (Remey), 299 (Rosenberg), 301 (Rumi), 306 (the Schwarzes), 342 (C. True), 355–56 (Wilhelm).

10. Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, 55–56.
11. On the Universal House of Justice see Smith, *Encyclopedia*, 346–50.
12. The letter was first published in the periodical *Star of the West* 13: 83–88. A copy also appears to have been sent to the British Bahá'ís (Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of the British Isles*, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981, 3–9).
13. In Bahá'í terminology, a 'Covenant-breaker' is any declared Bahá'í who rejects the official order of leadership succession in favour of some alternative. See Smith, *Encyclopedia*, 114–16.
14. There are a number of references in *Bahá'í Administration* to disharmony amongst the American Bahá'ís. We do not as yet have a proper history of the American Bahá'í community during the 1920s to estimate the extent of these problems or even to exactly identify their cause or causes, but clearly for some leading American Bahá'ís, Covenant-breaking and internal dissension were the major problem confronting the American Bahá'ís in 1922 (For example, see Bramson-Lerche, Establishment 262). For accounts of the early beginnings of the American Bahá'í community see Robert Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America*. Vol. 1. *Origins, 1892–1900*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998; and Vol. 2. *Early Expansion, 1900–1912*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1995, and Peter Smith, 'The American Bahá'í community, 1894–1917' in Moojan Momen (ed.), *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, vol. 1, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1982, 85–223. On early developments in Canada, see Will C. van den Hoonard, *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898–1948*, Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996.
15. The reference to the 'House of Justice' (*Baytu'l-'Adl*), one of which was to be established in every city, appears in Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, as does the reference to the Universal House of Justice (*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992, 29 K30; 35 K42). The reference to the 'secondary' Houses of Justice, one of which was to be established in each country, first appears in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will (*Will*. 14).
16. In Bahá'í practice, Local Assemblies came to be established when there was a minimum of nine adult Bahá'ís, i.e. nine or above, not just over nine. Where there were more than nine Bahá'ís, the Local Assembly would be elected.
17. Shoghi Effendi clarified that 'national affairs' referred only to the spiritual activities of the Bahá'ís and not anything of a political nature as Bahá'ís were 'strictly forbidden' to meddle in any way with political matters (BA 23–24).
18. On the American temple (at Wilmette, near Chicago), see Bruce W. Whitmore, *The Dawning Place: The Building of a Temple, the Forging of the North American Bahá'í Community*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984. On Bahá'í temples in general see Smith, *Encyclopedia*, 235–41.
19. Weinberg, *Rosenberg* 209, 211–12; Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 56. On the Bahá'í Temple Unity see Smith, *Encyclopedia*, 70.
20. He specifically mentioned the committees for building the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* [Bahá'í temple], publishing and reviewing, teaching, and children's educational work.
21. Shoghi Effendi instanced three 'national' communities in which he then wanted National Assemblies formed: 'America' (i.e. the United States and Canada, and including the American Pacific islands like Hawaii), Great Britain, and Germany (BA 39, 40).
22. Shoghi Effendi variously used the terms 'International', 'Supreme' and 'Universal' House of Justice.
23. Germany and America would each have 95 delegates, whilst Britain [with fewer Bahá'ís] would only have 19 (BA 40).
24. The Riqván (Rezvan) festival commemorates Bahá'u'lláh's initial declaration of mission to some of His immediate followers as he was about to leave Baghdad in 1863. The twelve day commemoration begins on the 21 April and ends on 2 May. See Smith, *Encyclopedia*, 296–97.
25. Shoghi Effendi listed the *Star of the West* (USA); *Magazine of the Children of the Kingdom* (USA); the *Bahá'í News* (India); the *Khurshíd-i-Khávar* [Sun of the East] (Turkestan); the *Star of the East* (Japan); and the 'Sun of Truth' (*Sonne der Wahrheit*, Germany).
26. On Bahá'í holy days see Smith, *Encyclopedia*, 182–83.

27. For an example of elucidation see a letter in January 1925, addressing 'fundamental questions of general policy' which had been raised by the American National Assembly, in which Shoghi Effendi noted that he had already outlined the 'basic principles' in previous letters, but now chose to elucidate and explain them in more detail (BA 78). For an example of encouragement see a letter to the members of the American National Assembly in April 1923, when Shoghi Effendi thanked them for their constant vigilance and care in upholding the Faith's 'fundamental principles' and guarding its 'essential interests', and their faithful, vigorous and efficient administration of its affairs (BA 45) (As was often the case with his encouragement, he presented indirectly the qualities he desired).
28. Examples could include affiliation with groups with ideals with which the Bahá'ís were sympathetic, establishing new magazines additional to those already established, and financial support for philanthropic causes (BA 140).
29. For a brief sketch of the Bahá'í Temple Unity's development see Smith, 'American Bahá'í community', 136–55.
30. It is of note that Shoghi Effendi dated the establishment of the North American National Assembly to 1925, that is two years later than the British, German and Indian Assemblies in 1923, and a year later than Egypt in 1924, despite the organizational 'lead' of the Americans with their Temple Unity (established in 1909) (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944, 333).
31. The 1921 (13<sup>th</sup>) 'Congress and Convention', for example, was held over 5 days (23–27 April) (*Star* 12/1: 18; 12/4: 71–79, 85–92); the 1922 (14<sup>th</sup>) Convention was also 5 days (22–26 April) (*Star* 13/1: 14–15, 13/4: 67–74, 89–93) and the 1923 (15<sup>th</sup>) Convention 6 days (28 April–3 May) (*Star* 14/3: 67–82).
32. For some preliminary essays see Loni Bramson-Lerche. 'Some aspects of the development of the administrative order in America, 1922–1936' in Moojan Momen (ed.) *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, vol. 1, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1982, 255–300; Bramson-Lerche, 'Establishment 253–93'; and Peter Smith, 'Reality magazine: editorship and ownership of an American Bahá'í periodical' in Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen (eds.), *From Iran East and West*, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1984, 135–55. On the 'Chicago Reading Room' and other events of the 1910s, see Smith, 'American Bahá'í community', 85–223.
33. This was a theme he developed in more detail in a major series of long letters written between 1929 and 1936, and published as *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955.
34. This soon became a reality, with a list of National Spiritual Assemblies and of selected Local Assemblies and Bahá'í groups worldwide in 1926 (*Bahá'í Year Book*, vol. 1. Reprinted, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980 [1<sup>st</sup> published 1926]). A much fuller list, a global 'Bahá'í directory' for 1928 appeared in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. 2, April 1926–April 1928, Reprinted, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, 181–90. [1<sup>st</sup> published 1928].
35. The modern exception to this principle occurs when the civil administration for a city is itself divided – for example with London boroughs – in which case, the responsible National Assembly can call for Local Assemblies to be elected on the basis of the civil divisions.
36. For the full text see *Bahá'í World*, vol. 2, 89–97.
37. On this opposition see Smith, 'Bahá'í Faith in the West' 12–15; Smith, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religion*, 122–26.
38. By 2001, there were a reported 182 National Assemblies worldwide together with 11,740 Local Assemblies (*The Bahá'í World, 2000–2001: An International Record*, Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 2002, 277). This compares to 9 National and 102 Local Assemblies in 1928 (Smith, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, 161).