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American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril

The American Bahá'í Community, in this, the opening year of the second phase of the World Spiritual Crusade upon which it has embarked, finds itself standing on the threshold of the seventh decade of its existence. It leaves behind it, as it enters the second decade of the second Bahá'í century, sixty years crowded with events and marked by exploits so stirring and momentous that they stand unsurpassed in the annals of any other national Bahá'í community with the sole exception of its venerable sister community in Bahá'u'lláh's native land.

Chief Executor of Divine Plan

The first to respond to the call of the New Day in the western world; for many years, in concert with the small band of Canadian believers residing in its immediate neighborhood, the sole champion of the newly proclaimed Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh; foremost in its decisive contribution to the creation of the pattern, the erection of the fabric, the enlargement of the limits, and the consolidation of the institutions of the embryonic World Order, the child of that same Covenant and the harbinger of a still unborn world civilization; singled out by the pen of the Center of that same Covenant for a unique and imperishable bounty as the principal custodian and chief executor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's¹ Divine Plan; doubly honored in the course of His extensive visit to the shores of its homeland through the distinction conferred by Him on the community's two leading centers, the one as the site where He laid the cornerstone of the holiest House of Worship in the Bahá'í world, and the other the scene of the proclamation of His Father's Covenant; the triumphant prosecutor of two successive historic Plans, boldly initiated by its elected national representatives for the propagation of the Faith it has espoused in the land of its birth, in the Dominion of Canada, in Central and South America and in the continent of Europe and for the erection of its own House of Worship, the Mother Temple of the West; outstanding in its role as the defender of the Faith, as the supporter of its down-trodden, long-persecuted sister communities in both the Asiatic and African continents, and as the formulator of the national Bahá'í constitution, embodying the by-laws regulating the internal affairs of the members of the Bahá'í communities; incomparable throughout the Bahá'í world as the dynamic agent responsible for the opening of the vast majority of the over two hundred sovereign states and chief dependencies of the globe to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh; surpassing

¹ Son of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh (meaning the Glory of God) and who was designated as the Center of His Covenant following Baha'u'lláh's death in 1892.

even its over a hundred-year old sister community in the cradle of that Faith in the number and variety of isolated centers, groups and local assemblies it has succeeded in establishing over the face of the Union stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific seaboard and from Alaska to Mexico; noteworthy in the rapid accumulation and wise expenditure of material resources, often involving a self-abnegation reminiscent of the self-sacrifice of the dawn-breakers of the Apostolic Age of the Faith, for the sole purpose of systematically propagating the Faith it has pledged itself to serve, of enhancing its prestige, of multiplying and perfecting its administrative agencies, of enriching its literature, of erecting its edifices, of launching its manifold enterprises, of succoring the needy among the members of its sister communities, of warding off the dangers confronting it from time to time through the malice of its enemies—the American Bahá'í Community, boasting of such a record of exalted service, can well afford to contemplate the immediate future, with its severe challenge, its complex problems, its hazards, tests and trials, with equanimity and confidence.

For there can be no doubt that the entire community, limited as is its numerical strength and circumscribed as are its meager resources, in comparison with the vastness of the field stretching before it, the prodigious efforts demanded of it, and the complexity of the problems it must resolve, stands at a most critical juncture in its history.

America Passing Through Crisis

Moreover, the country of which it forms a part is passing through a crisis which, in its spiritual, moral, social and political aspects, is of extreme seriousness—a seriousness which to a superficial observer is liable to be dangerously underestimated.

The steady and alarming deterioration in the standard of morality as exemplified by the appalling increase of crime, by political corruption in ever widening and ever higher circles, by the loosening of the sacred ties of marriage, by the inordinate craving for pleasure and diversion, and by the marked and progressive slackening of parental control, is no doubt the most arresting and distressing aspect of the decline that has set in, and can be clearly perceived, in the fortunes of the entire nation.

Parallel with this, and pervading all departments of life—an evil which the nation, and indeed all those within the capitalist system, though to a lesser degree, share with that state and its satellites regarded as the sworn enemies of that system—is the crass materialism, which lays excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being, forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society. It is this same cancerous materialism, born originally in Europe, carried to excess in the North American continent, contaminating the Asiatic peoples and nations, spreading its ominous tentacles to the borders of Africa, and now invading its very

heart, which Bahá'u'lláh in unequivocal and emphatic language denounced in His Writings, comparing it to a devouring flame and regarding it as the chief factor in precipitating the dire ordeals and world-shaking crises that must necessarily involve the burning of cities and the spread of terror and consternation in the hearts of men. Indeed a foretaste of the devastation which this consuming fire will wreak upon the world, and with which it will lay waste the cities of the nations participating in this tragic world-engulfing contest, has been afforded by the last World War, marking the second stage in the global havoc which humanity, forgetful of its God and heedless of the clear warnings uttered by His appointed Messenger for this day, must, alas, inevitably experience. It is this same all-pervasive, pernicious materialism against which the voice of the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant was raised, with pathetic persistence, from platform and pulpit, in His addresses to the heedless multitudes, which, on the morrow of His fateful visit to both Europe and America, found themselves suddenly swept into the vortex of a tempest which in its range and severity was unsurpassed in the world's history.

Collateral with this ominous laxity in morals, and this progressive stress laid on man's material pursuits and well-being, is the darkening of the political horizon, as witnessed by the widening of the gulf separating the protagonists of two antagonistic schools of thought which, however divergent in their ideologies, are to be commonly condemned by the upholders of the standard of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh for their materialistic philosophies and their neglect of those spiritual values and eternal verities on which alone a stable and flourishing civilization can be ultimately established. The multiplication, the diversity and the increasing destructive power of armaments to which both sides, in this world contest, caught in a whirlpool of fear, suspicion and hatred, are rapidly contributing; the outbreak of two successive bloody conflicts, entangling still further the American nation in the affairs of a distracted world, entailing a considerable loss in blood and treasure, swelling the national budget and progressively depreciating the currency of the state; the confusion, the vacillation, the suspicions besetting the European and Asiatic nations in their attitude to the American nation; the overwhelming accretion of strength to the arch enemy of the system championed by the American Union in consequence of the re-alignment of the powers in the Asiatic continent and particularly in the Far East—these have, moreover, contributed their share, in recent years, to the deterioration of a situation which, if not remedied, is bound to involve the American nation in a catastrophe of undreamed-of dimensions and of untold consequences to the social structure, the standard and conception of the American people and government.

No less serious is the stress and strain imposed on the fabric of American society through the fundamental and persistent neglect, by the governed and governors alike, of the supreme, the inescapable and urgent duty—so repeatedly and graphically represented and stressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His arraignment of the basic weaknesses in the social fabric of the nation—of remedying, while there

is yet time, through a revolutionary change in the concept and attitude of the average white American toward his Negro fellow citizen, a situation which, if allowed to drift, will, in the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cause the streets of American cities to run with blood, aggravating thereby the havoc which the fearful weapons of destruction, raining from the air, and amassed by a ruthless, a vigilant, a powerful and inveterate enemy, will wreak upon those same cities.

The American nation, of which the community of the Most Great Name² forms as yet a negligible and infinitesimal part, stands, indeed, from whichever angle one observes its immediate fortunes, in grave peril. The woes and tribulations which threaten it are partly avoidable, but mostly inevitable and God-sent, for by reason of them a government and people clinging tenaciously to the obsolescent doctrine of absolute sovereignty and upholding a political system, manifestly at variance with the needs of a world already contracted into a neighborhood and crying out for unity, will find itself purged of its anachronistic conceptions, and prepared to play a preponderating role, as foretold by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the hoisting of the standard of the Lesser Peace, in the unification of mankind, and in the establishment of a world federal government on this planet. These same fiery tribulations will not only firmly weld the American nation to its sister nations in both hemispheres, but will through their cleansing effect, purge it thoroughly of the accumulated dross which ingrained racial prejudice, rampant materialism, widespread ungodliness and moral laxity have combined, in the course of successive generations, to produce, and which have prevented her thus far from assuming the role of world spiritual leadership forecast by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unerring pen—a role which she is bound to fulfill through travail and sorrow.

American Bahá’ís Stand at Crossroads

The American Bahá’í Community, the leaven destined to leaven the whole, cannot hope, at this critical juncture in the fortunes of a struggling, perilously situated, spiritually moribund nation, to either escape the trials with which this nation is confronted, nor claim to be wholly immune from the evils that stain its character.

At so critical a period, at so challenging an hour, the members of a community, invested by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with a primacy which can, through neglect and apathy, be allowed to lose its vital power and driving force, are immersed in a task, and are faced with responsibilities, which a World Spiritual Crusade, the third and greatest collective enterprise embarked upon in American Bahá’í history, has thrust upon them before the eyes of their admiring and expectant sister communities throughout the world. They now stand at the crossroads, unable to relax for a moment, or hesitate as to which road they

² The Most Great Name refers to the Name of God in this day and age, “O Thou Glory of the Glorious”.

should tread, or to allow any decline in the high standard they have, for no less than six decades, undeviatingly upheld. Nay, if this primacy is to be safeguarded and enhanced, a consecration, not only on the part of a chosen few, to every single objective of the Ten-Year Plan to which they are now pledged, and a pouring out of substance, not only by those of limited means, but by the richest and wealthiest, in a degree involving the truest sacrifice, for the purpose of insuring the attainment of the aims and purposes of the Plan in its present phase of development, are imperative and can brook no delay.

The mighty and laudable effort exerted, by a considerable number of pioneers, in the course of the opening phase of this world-encircling Crusade, in the virgin territories of the globe, must, if this primacy is to remain unimpaired, be increased, doubled, nay trebled, and must manifest itself not only in foreign fields where the prizes so laboriously won during the last twelve months must, at whatever sacrifice, be meticulously preserved, but throughout the entire length and breadth of the American Union, and particularly in the goal cities, where hitherto the work has stagnated, and which must, in the year now entered, become the scene of the finest exploits which the home front has yet seen. A veritable exodus from the large cities where a considerable number of believers have, over a period of years, congregated, both on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, as well as in the heart of the country, and where, owing to the tempo and the distractions of city life, the progress of the Faith has been retarded, must signalize the inauguration of this most intensive and challenging phase of the Crusade on the home front. Most certainly and emphatically must the lead be given by the two focal centers of Bahá'í activity which rank among the oldest of and occupy the most honored position among, the cities throughout the American Union, the one as the mother city of the North American continent, the other named by 'Abdu'l-Bahá the City of the Covenant. Indeed, so grave are the exigencies of the present hour, and so critical the political position of the country, that were a bare fifteen adult Bahá'ís to be left in each of these cities, over which unsuspected dangers are hanging, it would still be regarded as adequate for the maintenance of their local spiritual assemblies.

World Crusade Tasks

While this vital process of multiplication of Bahá'í isolated centers, groups and local assemblies is being accelerated, through a rapid and unprecedented dispersion of believers, and as the result of the initiation of vigorous teaching activities, through individuals as well as administrative agencies, the incorporation of full-fledged local assemblies—a process which has been noticeably slackening in recent years—must be given immediate attention by the community's elected national representatives, reinforcing, thereby, the foundations of local Bahá'í communities, and paving the way for the establishment, in a not too distant future, of local Bahá'í endowments.

The inauguration of the first dependency of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*³, the first link to be forged destined to bind the Community of the Most Great Name to the general public, expectant to witness the first evidences of direct Bahá'í service to humanity as a complement to Bahá'í worship, is yet another task which must be conscientiously tackled and fulfilled in the course of the second phase of this Ten-Year Plan. The consummation of this project must synchronize with the termination of the landscaping of the area surrounding the Temple—a double achievement that will mark yet another stage in the materialization of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's often expressed and cherished hopes for this holiest House of Worship in the Bahá'í world.

Yet another task, of extreme urgency and of great spiritual significance, is the selection and purchase of the site of the future *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* in Sweden, as well as the appropriation of sufficient funds during the coming two years, for the establishment, on however modest a scale, of a national *Hazíratu'l-Quds*⁴ in Anchorage, Alaska, in Panama City and in the capital of Peru, in Suva, in Tokyo and in Johannesburg, and the lending of financial assistance to the Italo-Swiss National Assembly, the proud daughter of the American Bahá'í Community, for the erection of a similar national center in the Italian and Swiss capitals.

Of no less importance, though involving a smaller outlay of funds, is the establishment of token national endowments in the aforementioned cities, in anticipation of the formation of an independent national spiritual assembly in each of them, at a later stage in the execution of this stupendous Plan.

The translation and publication of Bahá'í literature in the European and American Indian languages, allocated to your Assembly and its European Teaching Committee under the provisions of the Ten-Year Plan, is yet another objective of this second phase of this World Crusade, a task that must be resolutely pursued and speedily consummated in order to facilitate the intensive teaching activity which, at a later stage, must be conducted for the purpose of converting a considerable number of the minority races in both Europe and America to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

The all-important teaching enterprises in France and Finland, designed to broaden the basis of the infant Administrative Order in both countries, and extend the ramifications of the Faith to their chief towns and cities, is yet another responsibility which should be promptly discharged, as an indispensable preliminary to the establishment in each of these two countries of an independent national assembly.

Finally, the establishment of a Bahá'í Publishing Trust, similar in its essentials to the institution already functioning in the British Isles, and which must serve as a model for other national assemblies in both the East and the West, is a matter to which prompt and earnest attention must be directed in

³ A designation in Persian meaning the Dawning Place of the Mention of God (a place of worship and its dependencies serving humanity).

⁴ A designation for a Bahá'í Center where a local or National Spiritual Assembly meets. The phrase means "Sacred Fold".

the course of the second phase of the Plan, and which will require full and speedy consultation with the national elected representatives of the British Bahá'í Community.

A systematic campaign designed to proclaim the Faith to the masses through the press and radio must moreover be launched and maintained with vigilance, persistence and vigor.

The American Bahá'í Community—the champion-builders of an Order which posterity will hail as the harbinger of a civilization to be regarded as the fairest fruit of the Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh; the principal trustees of a Plan which future generations will acclaim as one of the two greatest legacies left by the Center of His Covenant; marching in the van of a Crusade which history will recognize as the most momentous spiritual enterprise launched in modern times; beset by the same anxieties and perils by which the nation of which it forms a part finds itself, to an unprecedented degree, afflicted and surrounded—such a community is, at this hour, experiencing the impact of a challenge unique in its sixty years of existence.

Challenge to Each Individual Bahá'í

In its meteoric career its fortunes have risen so swiftly, its exploits have so greatly multiplied, its spirit in times of emergency has swelled and risen so high, it has earned on such occasions the applause and excited the admiration of its sister communities throughout both hemispheres to such a degree, that it cannot, at this critical hour in its destinies, suffer this golden opportunity to slip from its grasp, or this priceless privilege to be irretrievably forfeited.

This challenge, so severe and insistent, and yet so glorious, faces no doubt primarily the individual believer on whom, in the last resort, depends the fate of the entire community. He it is who constitutes the warp and woof on which the quality and pattern of the whole fabric must depend. He it is who acts as one of the countless links in the mighty chain that now girdles the globe. He it is who serves as one of the multitude of bricks which support the structure and insure the stability of the administrative edifice now being raised in every part of the world. Without his support, at once whole-hearted, continuous and generous, every measure adopted, and every plan formulated, by the body which acts as the national representative of the community to which he belongs, is foredoomed to failure. The World Center of the Faith itself is paralyzed if such a support on the part of the rank and file of the community is denied it. The Author of the Divine Plan Himself is impeded in His purpose if the proper instruments for the execution of His design are lacking. The sustaining strength of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, the Founder of the Faith, will be withheld from every and each individual who fails in the long run to arise and play his part.

The administrative agencies of a divinely conceived Administrative Order at long last erected and relatively perfected stand in dire need of the individual believer to come forward and utilize them with undeviating purpose, serene confidence and exemplary dedication. The heart of the Guardian cannot but leap with joy, and his mind derive fresh inspiration, at every evidence testifying to the response of the individual to his allotted task. The unseen legions, standing rank upon rank, and eager to pour forth from the Kingdom on high the full measure of their celestial strength on the individual participants of this incomparably glorious Crusade, are powerless unless and until each potential crusader decides for himself, and perseveres in his determination, to rush into the arena of service ready to sacrifice his all for the Cause he is called upon to champion.

Appeal for Dedication

It is therefore imperative for the individual American believer, and particularly for the affluent, the independent, the comfort-loving and those obsessed by material pursuits, to step forward, and dedicate their resources, their time, their very lives to a Cause of such transcendence that no human eye can even dimly perceive its glory. Let them resolve, instantly and unhesitatingly, to place, each according to his circumstances, his share on the altar of Bahá'í sacrifice, lest, on a sudden, unforeseen calamities rob them of a considerable portion of the earthly things they have amassed.

Now if ever is the time to tread the path which the dawn-breakers of a previous age have so magnificently trodden. Now is the time to carry out, in the spirit and in the letter, the fervent wish so pathetically voiced by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who longed, as attested in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, to "travel though on foot and in the utmost poverty" and raise "in cities, villages, mountains, deserts and oceans" "the call of Yá-Bahá'u'l-Abhá!"⁵

Then, and only then, can the members of this community hasten the advent of the day when, as prophesied by His pen, "heavenly illumination" will "stream" from their country "to all the peoples of the world." Then, and only then will they find themselves "securely established upon the throne of an everlasting dominion."

That the members of this community, of either sex and of every age, of whatever race or background, however limited in experience, capacity and knowledge, may arise as one man, and seize with both hands the God-given opportunities now presented to them through the dispensations of an all-loving, ever-watchful, ever-sustaining Providence, and lend thereby a tremendous impetus to the propelling forces mysteriously guiding the operations of this newly launched, unspeakably potent, world-

⁵ The Great Name of God, meaning O Thou Most Glorious of the Glorious.

encompassing Crusade, is one of the dearest wishes which a loving and longing heart holds for them at this great turning point in the fortunes of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the American continent.