

The Covenant

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...A Covenant in the religious sense is a binding agreement between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behaviour in return for which He guarantees certain blessings, or whereby He gives man certain bounties in return for which He takes from those who accept them an undertaking to behave in a certain way. There is, for example, the Greater Covenant which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fulness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs. There is also the Lesser Covenant that a Manifestation of God makes with His followers that they will accept His appointed successor after Him. If they do so, the Faith can remain united and pure. If not, the Faith becomes divided and its force spent. It is a Covenant of this kind that Bahá'u'lláh made with His followers regarding 'Abdu'l-Bahá and that 'Abdu'l-Bahá perpetuated through the Administrative Order...

23 March 1975, from a letter written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

I. A Covenant: "...a binding agreement between God and man..."

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Day Spring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good.... It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other....

They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples.... Hasten to drink your fill, O men of understanding! They that have violated the Covenant of God by breaking His commandments, and have turned back on their heels, these have erred grievously in the sight of God, the All-Possessing, the Most High.

("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), Section CLV, pp. 330-31)

[1]

...Follow not, therefore, your earthly desires, and violate not the Covenant of God, nor break your pledge to Him. With firm determination, with the whole affection of your heart, and with the full force of your words, turn ye unto Him, and walk not in the ways of the foolish.... Break not the bond that uniteth you with your Creator, and be not of those that have erred and strayed from His ways.

("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", Section CLIII, p. 328)

[2]

Great is thy blessedness inasmuch as thou hast been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament.... Dedicate thyself to the service of the Cause of thy Lord, cherish His remembrance in thy heart and celebrate His praise in such wise that every wayward and heedless soul may thereby be roused from slumber.

(“Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas” (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1982), p. 262) [3]

...ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a centre of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: “This man is unquestionably a Bahá’í, for his manners, his behaviour, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá’ís.” Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God. For He hath, through irrefutable Texts, entered into a binding Covenant with us all, requiring us to act in accordance with His sacred instructions and counsels.

(“Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1982), sec. 35, p. 71) [4]

II. “...the Greater Covenant which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers...”

The Pattern

The Lord of the universe hath never raised up a prophet nor hath He sent down a Book unless He hath established His covenant with all men, calling for their acceptance of the next Revelation and of the next Book; inasmuch as the outpourings of His bounty are ceaseless and without limit.

(“Selections from the Writings of the Báb” (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1976), p. 87) [5]

Abraham, on Him be peace, made a covenant concerning Moses and gave the glad-tidings of His coming. Moses made a covenant concerning the promised Christ, and announced the good news of His advent to the world. Christ made a covenant concerning the Paraclete and gave the tidings of His coming. The Prophet Muḥammad made a covenant concerning the Báb, and the Báb was the One promised by Muḥammad, for Muḥammad gave the tidings of His coming. The Báb made a Covenant concerning the Blessed Beauty, Bahá’u’lláh, and gave the glad-tidings of His coming for the Blessed Beauty was the One promised by the Báb. Bahá’u’lláh made a covenant concerning a Promised One Who will become manifest after one thousand or thousands of years. That Manifestation is Bahá’u’lláh’s Promised One, and will appear after a thousand or thousands of years. He, moreover, with His Supreme Pen, entered into a great Covenant and Testament with all the Bahá’ís whereby they were all commanded to follow the Centre of the Covenant after His ascension, and depart not, even to a hair’s breadth, from obeying Him.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cf. “Bahá’í World Faith” (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 358) [6]

The Advent of Bahá’u’lláh

This is the Day, O my Lord, which Thou didst announce unto all mankind as the Day whereon Thou wouldst reveal Thy Self, and shed Thy radiance, and shine brightly over all Thy creatures. Thou hast, moreover, entered into a covenant with them, in Thy Books, and Thy Scriptures, and Thy Scrolls, and Thy Tablets, concerning Him Who is the Day-Spring of Thy Revelation, and hast appointed the Bayán to be the Herald of this Most Great and all-glorious Manifestation, and this most resplendent and most sublime Appearance.

(“Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh” (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 275) [7]

The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh concerning the next Manifestation

Verily God will raise up Him Whom God shall make manifest, and after Him Whomsoever He willeth, even as He hath raised up prophets before the Point of the Bayán. He in truth hath power over all things.

(“Selections from the Writings of the Báb”, p. 144) [8]

Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God ... ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying imposter.... Should a man appear ... ere the lapse of a full thousand years—each year consisting of twelve months according to the Qur’án, and of nineteen months of nine-teen days each, according to the Bayán—and if such a man reveal to your eyes all the signs of God, unhesitatingly reject him!

(Bahá’u’lláh, cited in “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh - Selected Letters”, (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 132) [9]

Centuries, ... nay, countless ages, must pass away ere the Day-Star of Truth shineth again in its midsummer splendour, or appeareth once more in the radiance of its vernal glory.... Concerning the Manifestations that will come down in the future “in the shadows of the clouds,” ... know, verily, that in so far as their relation to the Source of their inspiration is concerned, they are under the shadow of the Ancient Beauty. In their relation, however, to the age in which they appear, each and every one of them “doeth whatsoever He willeth.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh - Selected Letters”, p. 167) [10]

III. The Lesser Covenant: “...that Bahá’u’lláh made with His followers regarding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá...”

Appointment

It is incumbent upon the Aghşán, the Afnán and My kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: “When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.” The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch (‘Abdu’l-Bahá). Thus have We graciously revealed unto you our potent Will, and I am verily the Gracious, the All-Powerful.

(Bahá’u’lláh, cited in “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh - Selected Letters”, p. 134) [11]

In accordance with the explicit text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh hath made the Centre of the Covenant the Interpreter of His Word—a Covenant so firm and mighty that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in “The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh - Selected Letters”, p.

136)

[12]

Today, the most important affair is firmness in the Covenant, because firmness in the Covenant wards off differences....

...Bahá'u'lláh covenanted, not that I (‘Abdu’l-Bahá) am the Promised One, but that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the Expounder of the Book and the Centre of His Covenant, and that the Promised One of Bahá'u'lláh will appear after one thousand or thousands of years. This is the Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh made. If a person shall deviate, he is not acceptable at the threshold of Bahá'u'lláh. In case of difference, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá must be consulted. All must revolve around his good pleasure. After ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, whenever the Universal House of Justice is organized it will ward off differences.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in “Star of the West”, vol. IV, no. 14, November 1913, p.

237)

[13]

Inasmuch as great differences and divergences of denominational belief had arisen throughout the past, every man with a new idea attributing it to God, Bahá'u'lláh desired that there should not be any ground or reason for disagreement among the Bahá'ís. Therefore, with His own pen He wrote the Book of His Covenant, addressing His relations and all people of the world, saying,

“Verily, I have appointed One Who is the Center of My Covenant. All must obey Him; all must turn to Him; He is the Expounder of My Book, and He is informed of My purpose. All must turn to Him. Whatsoever He says is correct, for, verily, He knoweth the texts of My Book. Other than He, no one doth know My Book.” The purpose of this statement is that there should never be discord and divergence among the Bahá'ís but that they should always be unified and agreed.... Therefore, whosoever obeys the Center of the Covenant appointed by Bahá'u'lláh has obeyed Bahá'u'lláh, and whosoever disobeys Him has disobeyed Bahá'u'lláh....

...Beware! Beware! lest anyone should speak from the authority of his own thoughts or create a new thing out of himself. Beware! Beware! According to the explicit Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh you should care nothing at all for such a person. Bahá'u'lláh shuns such souls.

(“The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912”, 2nd ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 322-23)

[14]

He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted Handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being “round Whom all names revolve”, the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation—styles and titles that are

implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the “Mystery of God”—an expression by which Bahá’u’lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.

(Shoghi Effendi, from a letter of 8 February 1934, published in “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh - Selected Letters”, p. 134) [15]

Bahá’u’lláh, the Revealer of God’s Word in this Day, the Source of Authority, the Fountainhead of Justice, the Creator of a new World Order, the Establisher of the Most Great Peace, the Inspirer and Founder of a world civilization, the Judge, the Lawgiver, the Unifier and Redeemer of all mankind, has proclaimed the advent of God’s Kingdom on earth, has formulated its laws and ordinances, enunciated its principles, and ordained its institutions. To direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation He instituted His Covenant, whose power has preserved the integrity of His Faith, maintained its unity and stimulated its world-wide expansion throughout the successive ministries of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. It continues to fulfil its life-giving purpose through the agency of the Universal House of Justice whose fundamental object, as one of the twin successors of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings.

(Universal House of Justice, “The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice” (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1972), pp. 3-4) [16]

Uniqueness of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant

As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past: It is the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant. By this appointment and provision He has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief.

(“The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912”, pp. 455-56) [17]

To direct and canalize these forces let loose by this Heaven-sent process, and to insure their harmonious and continuous operation after His ascension, an instrument divinely ordained, invested with indisputable authority, organically linked with the Author of the Revelation Himself, was clearly indispensable. That instrument Bahá’u’lláh had expressly provided through the institution of the Covenant, an institution which he had firmly established prior to His ascension. This same Covenant He had anticipated in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, had alluded to it as He bade His last farewell to the members of His family, who had been summoned to His bed-side, in the days immediately preceding His ascension, and had incorporated it in a special document which He designated as “the Book of My Covenant,” and which He entrusted, during His last illness, to His eldest son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Written entirely in His own hand ... this unique and epoch-making Document, designated by Bahá’u’lláh as His “Most Great Tablet,” and alluded to by Him as the “Crimson Book” in His “Epistle to the Son of the Wolf,” can find no parallel in the Scriptures of any previous

Dispensation, not excluding that of the Báb Himself. For nowhere in the books pertaining to any of the world's religious systems, not even among the writings of the Author of the Bábí Revelation, do we find any single document establishing a Covenant endowed with an authority comparable to the Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh had Himself instituted.

(Shoghi Effendi, "God Passes By" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 237-38) [18]

...There is, though, a great difference between this and previous Dispensations, for Bahá'u'lláh has written that this is "the Day which shall not be followed by night" ("God Passes By", p. 245). He has given us His Covenant which provides for a continuing centre of divine guidance in the world. The Bahá'í Faith has not lacked for ambitious men who would seize the reins of authority and distort the Faith for their own ends, but in every case they have broken themselves and dashed their hopes on the rock of the Covenant.

(14 January 1979, from a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [19]

IV. The Lesser Covenant: "...that 'Abdu'l-Bahá perpetuated through the Administrative Order..."

Twin Successors

O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghṣán (Branches), the Afnán (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abhá Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi—the youthful branch branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees and the fruit grown from the union of the two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness,—as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghṣán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendents.

("The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1968), p. 11) [20]

And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers. Its members must be manifestations of the fear of God and day-springs of knowledge and understanding, must be steadfast in God's faith and the well-wishers of all mankind.

("The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", p. 14) [21]

...Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself.

("The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", p. 19) [22]

...They [Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá] have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the

institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.

(Shoghi Effendi, from a letter of 21 March 1930 published in “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh - Selected Letters”, pp. 19-20) [23]

...under the Covenant of God, Shoghi Effendi was, during his ministry as Guardian of the Cause, the point of authority in the Faith to which all were to turn... The same thing applies to the position occupied by the Universal House of Justice in its relationship to the friends.

(9 November 1981, from a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [24]

Authority

The sacred and youthful branch, the guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God; whoso disputeth with him hath disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself and turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned aside from God.

(“The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, p. 11) [25]

...it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Bahá’u’lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.

(Shoghi Effendi, from a letter of 8 February 1934, published in “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh - Selected Letters”, pp. 149-50) [26]

...In the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, in the enactment of the legislation necessary to supplement the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the members of the Universal House of Justice, it should be borne in mind, are not, as Bahá’u’lláh’s utterances clearly imply, responsible to those whom they represent, nor are they allowed to be governed by the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful, or of those who directly elect them. They are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience. They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration, but must reserve for themselves the right of an unfettered decision. “God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth,” is

Bahá'u'lláh's incontrovertible assurance. They, and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation.

(Shoghi Effendi, from a letter of 8 February 1934, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh - Selected Letters", p. 153) [27]

The Passing of Shoghi Effendi

At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi's death it was evident, from the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy Texts¹, that it had been impossible for him to appoint a successor in accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a letter of 9 March 1965, published in "Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 44) [28]

After prayerful and careful study of the Holy Texts bearing upon the question of the appointment of the successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, and after prolonged consultation which included consideration of the views of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, the Universal House of Justice finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a letter of 6 October 1963, published in "Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968", p. 11) [29]

The Universal House of Justice

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is unbroken, its all-encompassing power inviolate. The two unique features which distinguish it from all religious covenants of the past are unchanged and operative. The revealed Word, in its original purity, amplified by the divinely guided interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, remains immutable, unadulterated by any man-made creeds or dogmas, unwarrantable inferences, or unauthorized interpretations. The channel of Divine guidance, providing flexibility in all the affairs of mankind, remains open through that Institution which was founded by Bahá'u'lláh and endowed by Him with supreme authority and unfailing guidance, and of which the Master wrote: "Unto this body all things must be referred." How clearly we can see the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's assertion: "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure."

(The Universal House of Justice, from a letter of October 1963, published in "Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968", p. 13) [30]

The Universal House of Justice, which the Guardian said would be regarded by posterity as "the last refuge of a tottering civilization," is now, in the absence of the Guardian, the sole infallibly guided institution in the world to which all must turn, and on it rests the

¹ Shoghi Effendi had no children and all the surviving Aghsán had broken the Covenant.

responsibility for ensuring the unity and progress of the Cause of God in accordance with the revealed Word.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a letter of 27 May 1966, in “Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968”, p. 90) [31]

The infallibility of the Universal House of Justice, operating within its ordained sphere, has not been made dependent upon the presence in its membership of the Guardian of the Cause....

However, quite apart from his function as a member and sacred head for life of the Universal House of Justice, the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, had the right and duty “to define the sphere of the legislative action” of the Universal House of Justice. In other words, he had the authority to state whether a matter was or was not already covered by the Sacred Texts and therefore whether it was within the authority of the Universal House of Justice to legislate upon it.... The question therefore arises: In the absence of the Guardian, is the Universal House of Justice in danger of straying outside its proper sphere and thus falling into error? Here we must remember three things: First, Shoghi Effendi, during the thirty-six years of his Guardianship, has already made innumerable such definitions, supplementing those made by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and by Bahá’u’lláh Himself. As already announced to the friends, a careful study of the Writings and interpretations on any subject on which the House of Justice proposes to legislate always precedes its act of legislation. Second, the Universal House of Justice, itself assured of divine guidance, is well aware of the absence of the Guardian and will approach all matters of legislation only when certain of its sphere of jurisdiction, a sphere which the Guardian has confidently described as “clearly defined”. Third, we must not forget the Guardian’s written statement about these two Institutions: “Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other.”

(The Universal House of Justice, from a letter of 27 May 1966, published in “Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968”, pp. 82-84) [32]

The Universal House of Justice, beyond its function as the enactor of legislation, has been invested with the more general functions of protecting and administering the Cause, solving obscure questions and deciding upon matters that have caused difference.

(From a letter of 7 December 1969, in “Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1968-1973” (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 38-39) [33]

...Upon the Universal House of Justice, in the words of the Guardian, “has been conferred the exclusive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the Bahá’í writings”. Its pronouncements, which are susceptible of amendment or abrogation by the House of Justice itself, serve to supplement and apply the Law of God. Although not invested with the function of interpretation, the House of Justice is in a position to do everything necessary to establish the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh on this earth. Unity of doctrine is maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and the voluminous interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, together with the absolute prohibition against anyone propounding “authoritative” or “inspired” interpretations or usurping the function of Guardian. Unity of administration is assured by the authority of the Universal House of Justice.

(The Universal House of Justice, from a letter of 9 March 1965, published in “Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968”, pp. 52-53) [34]

In the Bahá'í Faith there are two authoritative centers appointed to which the believers must turn, for in reality the Interpreter of the Word is an extension of that center which is the Word itself. The Book is the record of the utterance of Bahá'u'lláh, while the divinely inspired Interpreter is the living Mouth of that Book—it is he and he alone who can authoritatively state what the Book means. Thus one center is the Book with its Interpreter, and the other is the Universal House of Justice guided by God to decide on whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Book. This pattern of centers and their relationships is apparent at every stage in the unfoldment of the Cause. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh tells the believers to refer after His passing to the Book, and to “Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.” In the Kitáb-i-'Ahdí (the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant), He makes it clear that this reference is to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh also ordains the institution of the Universal House of Justice, and confers upon it the powers necessary for it to discharge its ordained functions. The Master in His Will and Testament explicitly institutes the Guardianship, which Shoghi Effendi states was clearly anticipated in the verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, reaffirms and elucidates the authority of the Universal House of Justice, and refers the believers once again to the Book: “Unto the Most Holy Book everyone must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice,” and at the very end of the Will He says: “All must seek guidance and turn unto the Center of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.” (From a letter of 7 December 1969, in “Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1968-1973”, pp. 42-43) [35]

V. Response to the Lesser Covenant assures that “...the Faith can remain united and pure.”

...the power of the Covenant will protect the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh from the doubts of the people of error. It is the fortified fortress of the Cause of God and the firm pillar of the religion of God. Today no power can conserve the oneness of the Bahá'í world save the Covenant of God; otherwise differences like unto a most great tempest will encompass the Bahá'í world. It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else.... Therefore, in the beginning the believers must make their steps firm in the Covenant so that the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh may encircle them from all sides, the cohorts of the Supreme Concourse may become their supporters and helpers, and the exhortations and advices of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, like unto the pictures engraved on stone, may remain permanent and ineffaceable in the tablets of all hearts.

(“Tablets of the Divine Plan Revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the North American Bahá'ís”, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1977), p. 49. The last sentence is a newly authorized translation.) [36]

Walk, therefore, with a sure step and engage with the utmost assurance and confidence in the promulgation of the divine fragrances, the glorification of the Word of God and firmness in the Covenant. Rest ye assured that if a soul ariseth in the utmost perseverance and raiseth the Call of the Kingdom and resolutely promulgateth the Covenant, be he an insignificant ant he shall be enabled to drive away the formidable elephant from the arena, and if he be a feeble moth he shall cut to pieces the plumage of the rapacious vulture.

(“Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá”, sec. 184, p. 209) [37]

The progress of the Cause of God gathers increasing momentum and we may with confidence look forward to the day when this Community, in God's good time, shall have traversed the stages predicated for it by its Guardian, and shall have raised on this tormented planet the fair mansions of God's Own Kingdom wherein humanity may find surcease from its self-induced confusion and chaos and ruin, and the hatreds and violence of this time shall be transmuted into an abiding sense of world brotherhood and peace. All this shall be accomplished within the Covenant of the everlasting Father, the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

(The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1973, to the Bahá'is of the World) [38]

The Bahá'is must cling firmly to the knowledge that the Cause is safely in God's hands, that the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is incorruptible and that they can have complete confidence in the ability of the Universal House of Justice to function "under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One".

(28 May 1975, from a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [39]

VI. The Power of the Covenant

Today the pulsating power in the arteries of the body of the world is the spirit of the Covenant—the spirit which is the cause of life. Whosoever is vivified with this spirit, the freshness and beauty of life become manifest in him, he is baptized with the Holy Spirit, he is born again, is freed from oppression and tyranny, from heedlessness and harshness which deaden the spirit, and attains to everlasting life.

Praise thou God that thou art firm in the Covenant and the Testament and art turning thy face to the Luminary of the world, His Highness Bahá'u'lláh.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in “Star of the West”, vol. 14, No. 7, October 1923, p. 225)[40]

It is indubitably clear ... that the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant.

The power of the Covenant is as the heat of the sun which quickeneth and promoteth the development of all created things on earth. The light of the Covenant, in like manner, is the educator of the minds, the spirits, the hearts and souls of men.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in “God Passes By”, p. 238-239) [41]

Today, the Lord of Hosts is the defender of the Covenant, the forces of the Kingdom protect it, heavenly souls tender their services, and heavenly angels promulgate and spread it broadcast. If it is considered with insight, it will be seen that all the forces of the universe, in the last analysis serve the Covenant.

(“Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, p. 228) [42]

...No power can eliminate misunderstandings except that of the Covenant. The power of the Covenant is all-embracing, and resolveth all difficulties, for the Pen of Glory hath explicitly declared that whatever misunderstanding may arise should be referred to the Centre of the Covenant.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a recently translated Tablet) [43]

Were it not for the protecting power of the Covenant to guard the impregnable fort of the Cause of God, there would arise among the Bahá'ís, in one day, a thousand different sects as was the case in former ages. But in this Blessed Dispensation, for the sake of the permanency of the Cause of God and the avoidance of dissension amongst the people of God, the Blessed Beauty (may my soul be a sacrifice unto Him), has through the Supreme Pen written the Covenant and the Testament....

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in “Bahá’í World Faith”, pp. 357-58) [44]

...Launched through these very acts² into the troublesome seas of cease-less tribulation, piloted by the mighty arm of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and manned by the bold initiative and abundant vitality of a band of sorely-tried disciples, the Ark of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant has, ever since those days, been steadily pursuing its course contemptuous of the storms of bitter misfortune that have raged and which must continue to assail it as it forges ahead towards the promised haven of undisturbed security and peace.

(Shoghi Effendi, from a letter of 21 April 1933, published in “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh - Selected Letters”, p. 84) [45]

The Covenant is the “axis of the oneness of the world of humanity” because it preserves the unity and integrity of the Faith itself and protects it from being disrupted by individuals who are convinced that only their understanding of the Teachings is the right one - a fate that has overcome all past Revelations. The Covenant is, moreover, embedded in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh Himself. Thus, as you clearly see, to accept Bahá’u’lláh is to accept His Covenant; to reject His Covenant is to reject Him.

(3 January 1982, from a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [46]

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² Events associated with the introduction of the Faith in the West.