

Electronic Communication with Covenant-breakers

by the Universal House of Justice

Compiled by the Universal House of Justice Research Department.

Regarding your concerns about Covenant-breakers participating in and posting material to the “Bahá’í Forum” on America Online (AOL), you should, of course, scrupulously and impartially uphold the rules of AOL's “Religion and Beliefs” area. You may warn the friends about interaction with Covenant-breakers if you feel it to be appropriate and if you can do so without violating the impartiality that you, as Forum manager, must demonstrate.

With respect to your concerns about your own contact with Covenant-breakers, you should feel no trepidation at having to interact with them in this particular situation and, if necessary, to read their postings. It is suggested, however, that your contact with them be kept to a minimum, as strictly required by your obligations as Forum manager. You will want to resist any temptation to be drawn into discussions or consideration of the arguments which they may advance.

(From a letter dated 28 May 1998 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

More generally, while it is disconcerting that Covenant-breaker material is being disseminated on the Internet, there is little that can or should be done to directly oppose such dissemination. Rather, the greatest protection to the Cause will be through ongoing deepening of the Bahá’í community in the Covenant and the history and teachings of the Faith. An important role that the Internet can play in this regard is to make authentic Bahá’í literature, on the Covenant and on Bahá’í teachings generally, easily available.

(From a letter dated 19 December 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

The House of Justice feels that, when Bahá’ís are teaching in an online “chat room” and Covenant-breakers intrude upon the discussion, the friends should not feel obliged to sign off simply because Covenant-breakers are present in this virtual space. They should, however, refrain from knowingly engaging the Covenant-breakers in discussions and, in any case, should avoid being drawn into contentious or disputatious situations.

(From a letter dated 27 October 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

The Universal House of Justice has received your email message of 29 September 1997 regarding the Covenant-breaking material sent to your personal email account.

The House of Justice is aware of such activities on the part of Covenant-breakers, and while it is closely following this issue, it sees no cause for undue concern. The friends should, of course, ignore any materials produced by Covenant-breakers which they may receive unsolicited by email or happen on while exploring the World Wide Web. With regard to your concerns over the content of the message, you are advised to turn to your Local Spiritual Assembly or an Auxiliary Board member for assistance in dealing with the spurious claims advanced in that message.

The best countermeasure to Covenant-breaker initiatives and the greatest protection for the Cause is for the believers to acquire a deeper appreciation of the station and purpose of Bahá'u'lláh and to become well-grounded in His Covenant.

(From a letter dated 7 October 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

In principle, no person can be considered a Covenant-breaker unless he has been so designated by the Head of the Faith. However, it is strongly advised not to associate with those who have fallen under the pernicious influence of groups such as the “Orthodox Bahá’ís”. They are infected with the spirit of Covenant-breaking, even if they are not all designated as such. Accordingly, the friends should not answer queries from individuals who obviously seek to draw them into the consideration of the spurious claims and logic of the Covenant-breakers.

(From a letter dated 3 July 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

Your faxed message dated 14 May 1997, requesting guidance concerning the attention given by the friends to postings by Covenant-breakers on the Internet, was received by the Universal House of Justice and referred to our Department for reply.

The House of Justice is aware of the electronic postings on the Internet by Covenant-breakers. While it is closely following this issue, it sees no cause for undue concern. “The Bahá’í World”, a Web site developed by the Bahá’í International Community’s Office of Public Information, was launched in July 1996. It, together with a range of specialized Bahá’í Internet presentations such as the new “One Country” site, now provides individuals interested in learning about the Bahá’í Faith with a large and ever-expanding body of authentic material on the Faith, attractively presented and illustrated. Sites maintained by Covenant-breaker groups will have a diminishing impact in the context of the information deluge on the Internet and against the background of the authorized Bahá’í source now accessible.

The greatest protection to the Cause will, of course, be through ongoing deepening of the Bahá’í community in the Covenant and the history and teachings of the Faith. To facilitate this, you may wish to bring attention to the availability of the Sacred Text on the Web site “The Bahá’í World” and on the Bahá’í World Centre FTP server.

(From a letter dated 4 June 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

Your email of 11 April 1997 regarding contact through the Internet between the friends and Covenant-breaker groups has been received by the Universal House of Justice. It is not possible to provide you with a list of Internet addresses of Covenant-breaker groups as you have requested, as no such listing is being maintained at the Bahá’í World Centre at this time.

Any plans that you have to alert the friends to Covenant-breaker activity on the Internet should, of course, be undertaken with wisdom and discretion so as to avoid giving Covenant-breakers more attention or prominence than they would otherwise receive.

(From a letter dated 4 May 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

Thus, if any participant in an email discussion feels that a view put forward appears to contradict or undermine the provisions of the Covenant, he should be free to say so, explaining candidly and courteously why he feels as he does. The person who made the initial statement will then be able to re-evaluate his opinion and, if he still believes it to be valid, he should be able to explain why it is not contrary to either the letter or the spirit of the Covenant. The participants in such a discussion should avoid disputation and, if they are unable to resolve an issue, they should refer the point to the Universal House of Justice since, in accordance with the Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá, “By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved...” and it has the authority to decide upon “all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure, and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book.” In this way the Covenant can illuminate and temper the discourse and make it fruitful.

(From a letter dated 16 February 1996 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

There is an ever increasing use by believers of the Internet and other available computer based means of communication. These open unlimited possibilities for continuous proclamation and teaching, bringing the Creative Word and the Sacred Writings as well as the ideas of individual believers to hearts and minds everywhere. It also offers easy access to these same believers by those whose purpose is to undermine their faith. By being constantly alert we are able to encourage the use of this medium by the friends while ensuring their protection from those who would prey on them.

(From a letter dated 11 May 1995 written by the International Teaching Centre to a Continental Counsellor)

Participation by enemies of the Faith or members of Covenant-breaker groups may, indeed, occur in the dialogue on electronic forums. It is not advisable for the institutions of the Faith or its individual

members to become directly involved in such discussion. It is neither wise nor possible to interfere with postings on public forums, but if it is observed that such activity is taking place on Bahá'í-only forums National Assemblies should be alerted so that they may provide appropriate advice to the administrator of the forum. The greatest protection to the Faith will not be through intervention on either open or closed electronic forums, but through ongoing deepening of the Bahá'í community in the Covenant and the history and Teachings of the Faith.

(From a letter dated 24 February 1995 written by the International Teaching Centre to a Continental Board of Counsellors)