

The Power of the Covenant

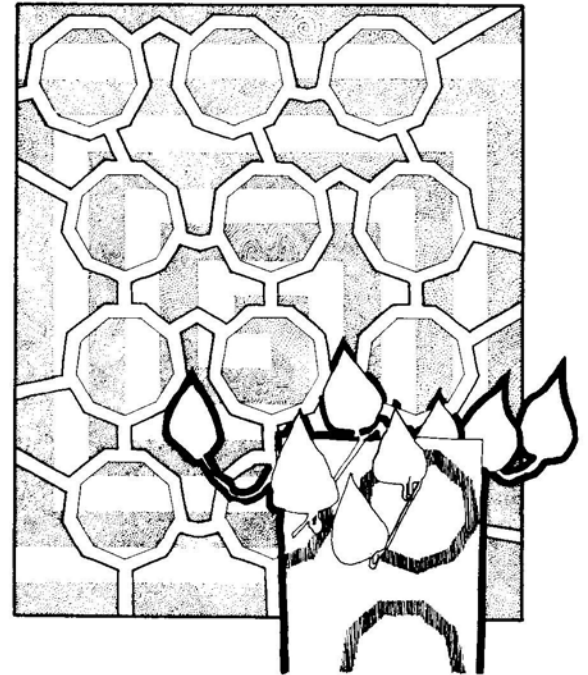
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The Power of the Covenant
Part One

Bahá'u'lláh's
Covenant with
Mankind

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The Power of the Covenant

There is a power in this Cause—a mysterious power—far, far, far away from the ken of men and angels; that invisible power is the cause of all these outward activities. It moves the hearts. It rends the mountains. It administers the complicated affairs of the Cause. It inspires the friends. It dashes into a thousand pieces all the forces of opposition. It creates new spiritual worlds. This is the mystery of the Kingdom of Abhá!

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 70

Know this for a certainty that today, the penetrative power in the arteries of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant. The body of the world will not be moved through any power except through the power of the Covenant. There is no other power like unto this. This Spirit of the Covenant is the real Centre of love and is reflecting its rays to all parts of the globe, which are resuscitating and regenerating man and illuminating the path to the Divine Kingdom.

ibid., p. 71

The first condition is firmness in the Covenant of God. For 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 one must make his steps firm in the Covenant—so that the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh may encircle from all sides, the cohorts of the Supreme Concourse may become the supporters and the 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 the hearts.

ibid., p. 77

Foreword

On the weekend of July 4 - 8, 1975, the members of all the senior institutions of the Bahá'í Faith in North America gathered at the House of Worship in Wilmette, to participate in a special conference called by the Universal House of Justice. The subject was the responsibility of the Bahá'í community for the protection of the Cause entrusted to us by Bahá'u'lláh. Three Hands of the Cause participated, as did all of the members of the Continental Board of Counsellors and the three National Spiritual Assemblies. All of the Auxiliary Board Members for North America likewise took part.

The conference had originated in an appeal from the Universal House of Justice dated November 26, 1974:

Five months before he passed away, the beloved Guardian ... drew our attention to the fact that from both without and within the Faith evidences of "increasing hostility" and "persistent machinations" were apparent, and that they foreshadowed the "dire contests" predicted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which were destined to "range the Army of light against the forces of darkness, both secular and religious".

The House of Justice went on to say:

The marvellous victories won in the name of Bahá'u'lláh since those words were written, and the triumphs increasingly being achieved by His dedicated and ardent lovers in every land, will no doubt serve to rouse the internal and external enemies of the Faith to fresh attempts to attack the Faith and dampen the enthusiasm of its supporters.

The House of Justice noted some recent evidences that this reaction has already begun in various parts of the world, and enclosed a compilation of excerpts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the beloved Guardian, which explain the principle that the progressive unfoldment of the Faith is bound, by its very nature, to raise up opposition which in turn will accelerate the expansion of the Cause. With this principle in mind, the House of Justice concluded:

We feel strongly that, whatever method is chosen to inform the friends, the time has come for them to clearly grasp the inevitability of the critical contests that lie ahead, to give you (the National Spiritual Assemblies) their full support ... and aid and enable the Faith of God to scale loftier heights, win more signal triumphs, and traverse more vital stages in its predestined course to complete victory and worldwide ascendancy.

On receipt of this letter Canada's National Assembly began developing a series of publications and regional seminars for the education of the Canadian community in the subject of the protection of the Cause. At this point we received further advice from the House of Justice that they were calling a special conference on the subject for the institutions of the Faith in North America. It was this meeting which assembled at the House of Worship, the weekend of July 4 - 8, and which produced important advances in the unity of the institutions of the Faith on this continent.

During the course of the consultations at Wilmette, our National Assembly had an opportunity to present the outline of the program which we were developing. It consisted essentially of resource material for a series of four weekend institutes to be conducted by the National Assembly for groups of local Spiritual Assemblies. It is this material, modified and expanded as a result of the invaluable discussions at Wilmette, that forms the content of this series of four booklets.

Each booklet introduces one of four different aspects of the subject of the protection of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and provides footnotes which will serve as an index to the Bahá'í texts from which the reference material has been drawn. The themes of the four presentations are:

- I Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant with Mankind.
- II The Problem of Covenant-breaking.
- III The Face of Opposition.
- IV Our Covenant with Bahá'u'lláh.

The booklets have been prepared as a stimulus and general guide to group discussions. Clearly, the material is in no sense

a comprehensive presentation of the subject matter concerned: the Cause of God is like an ocean and the truths it contains are limitless. Nor do the booklets represent authoritative statements of Bahá'í belief, apart from the various excerpts from the Scriptures of the Faith and from the commentaries of the Guardian and the guidance of the Universal House of Justice which are quoted.

Rather, the spirit of the discussion which the National Assembly hopes these thoughts will provide in the community is that described by the Universal House of Justice in a statement dealing with one of the central themes touched on in this series:

A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself from his study of its teachings. While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter, according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should by no means be suppressed. In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings. As Shoghi Effendi wrote: "To deepen in the Cause means to read the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form. ... There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the Writings, the more truths we can find in them, the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous." (*Well-spring of Guidance*, pp. 88-89)

Faithfully,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF CANADA

I The Mission of Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh is the universal Manifestation of God promised in the scriptures of all the world's religions. His Mission is to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, through the unification of mankind in one global family. In His "Most Holy Book" (the Kitáb-i-Aqdas) Bahá'u'lláh states:

O Kings of the earth! He Who is the sovereign Lord of all is come. The Kingdom is God's, the omnipotent Protector, the Self-Subsisting.¹

The implications of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission are breath-taking: The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh ... should, if we be faithful to its implications, ... be viewed not merely

as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, *but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet.* The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture ... should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will ... continue indefinitely to progress and develop.²

[italics added]

The following statement attributed to the Guardian explains how the work of those who have recognized Bahá'u'lláh is related to the vision:

The object of life to a Bahá'í is to promote the oneness of mankind. The whole object of our lives is bound up with the lives of all human beings; not a personal salvation we are seeking, but a universal one ... our aim is to produce a world civilization which will in turn react on the character of the individual.³

Nucleus and Pattern

The first glimmerings of the future global civilization have already begun to appear in the new social system which Bahá'u'lláh has brought into existence. Shoghi Effendi has described the Administrative Order which gives the community of Bahá'u'lláh form and a capacity to act, as "the nucleus" and "the very pattern" of the new World Order destined to emerge in the fullness of time. It is the "seed", the "embryo" of the Kingdom of God on earth.

In any embryonic form of life—in a human fetus, for example,—all the adult capacities are present. But they

are latent. Only as the embryo grows and develops do the limbs and organs appear. And only after the new human being is born and matures do these capacities attain perfection. So it is that one can begin faintly to identify in the spiritual and institutional life of the Bahá'í community some of the features of the global society destined to be born out of the suffering and chaos of our time. That these traces are no more than the faintest suggestion of the powers which a unified and spiritualized humanity will one day manifest may be appreciated from the words of Shoghi Effendi:

All we can reasonably venture to attempt is to strive to obtain a glimpse of the first streaks of the promised Dawn that must, in the fullness of time, chase away the gloom that has encircled humanity.⁴

What are some of these features?

The first is related to the pivotal teaching of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens". Bahá'u'lláh warns that "the well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."⁵ The most significant feature of Bahá'u'lláh's community, therefore, is that it has passed safely through the first critical century of its development with its *unity* firmly intact. There is no other great movement in all recorded history—religious, political or social—that has met this universal test to which life in the world subjects man's expressions of faith and loyalty. In every other case the process of schism has taken hold in the early stages, and has produced sects and factions. Only the community raised up by Bahá'u'lláh has succeeded in resisting this age-old blight. No effort that men have made to break the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and create a division in His community has survived the generation that saw it appear. The unique achievement which Bahá'í unity represents is a light that in time will attract to it the whole of mankind:

So powerful is the light of unity [Bahá'u'lláh says] that it can illuminate the whole earth.⁶

The community of Bahá'u'lláh has also established that it

is independent of all save God. Like Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and all the other major revealed religions the Bahá'í Faith has its own Prophet and its own sacred scriptures. Although it acknowledges and appreciates the Islamic matrix out of which it grew, it has been recognized as an independent religion by both Western scholars and Islamic religious authorities. Here again, the achievement is unique. There is no other modern religious movement, including those based on the claims of seers and "prophets", that has succeeded in escaping the gravitational pull of the parent faith that produced it. The Mormon Church, the Ahmadiyyah movement, and the Vedanta Society are examples from the Christian, Islamic and Hindu traditions which come readily to mind. In each case the new movement slipped in time into the role of a sect of its mother religion. This is not to disparage sects or churches but rather to recognize the limitations God has set on the work of man, however inspired and admirable it may be.

During a hundred years of growth the Bahá'í Cause has attracted adherents from every race, class, creed and nation on earth. What makes the community of Bahá'u'lláh *universal* is that this process of assimilation has not occurred at the expense of the cultural and individual diversity of its members. The individual who recognizes Bahá'u'lláh does not reject his cultural and spiritual origins in doing so; on the contrary he finds in the Faith the one context in which he can fully realize the value of his own unique endowments and put them to use, the context of his oneness with all mankind. The community of Bahá'u'lláh is the social expression of this principle of "unity in diversity" which runs throughout His Revelation. There is not on earth today another form of human association that has demonstrated this capacity to accept and integrate the whole range of man's experience.

A fourth characteristic of world order must be individual commitment to a *moral system* that transcends any one cultural heritage. For a global society to come into existence human conscience must be transformed. The myriad ethical codes inherited from the past must give way to a set of universal moral standards relevant to the age of man's maturity.

Merely to state the task is to indicate how far beyond human capacity it lies. Yet the beginnings of just such a re-moulding are readily apparent to any dispassionate observer of Bahá'u'lláh's community. Solely out of devotion to the Messenger of God, ordinary people in every part of the world have surrendered themselves to a process of education in ideals more comprehensive and challenging than the goals of the most advanced of social reformers: the eradication of prejudices, the independent investigation of truth, equality of opportunity for men and women, the attainment of social justice, and the establishment of a world order:

Is it within human power ... to effect in the constituent elements of any of the minute and indivisible particles of matter so complete a transformation as to transmute it into purest gold? Perplexing and difficult as this may appear, the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that we have been empowered to accomplish ... The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.⁷

As with the spirit, so with the form. A striking feature of the success of Bahá'u'lláh's Cause is that it is *institutional* rather than merely numerical. Physical life arises not simply out of the multiplication of cells, but through the balance and effectiveness of their organization. So it is with community: however important the variety and extent of its membership are, community life depends on a system of institutions. That is why the rapid expansion of Bahá'í Assemblies across the face of the planet—each one an embryonic consultative body with its own powers and functions—is so significant an achievement. Here again one looks in vain for another contemporary movement that has succeeded in incarnating its spirit in a coherent world-wide institutional fabric.

Unity, independence, universality, a new morality, and a worldwide institutional framework are a few of the features that will mark the civilization of mankind's future. For a community of people to manifest these vital powers at this present stage in the process is a break-through in the social and spiri-

tual evolution of the human race. No matter how small or young or relatively weak such a community may be, or how faintly and tentatively it may express the qualities with which it has been endowed, it represents a new order of existence:

O people of Bahá! That there is none to rival you
is a sign of mercy.⁸

We can begin to understand Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for mankind only as we come to appreciate the miracle He has wrought. The unique features which His community has begun to manifest arise out of the organic wholeness of the divine system that informs it. What Bahá'u'lláh has accomplished is the creation of an embryonic global society that is a single organism, as a seed is an organism. He tells us that the birth of this new creation and its eventual manifestation of all the powers latent in it represent the desire of God, Himself, and that in time it will embrace all mankind:

He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful, cherisheth
in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body.⁹

II The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh

The secret of the organic wholeness of Bahá'u'lláh's community is the Covenant He established, "the Ark of Salvation,"¹⁰ "the pulsating artery in the body of the world,"¹¹ "the pivot of the oneness of mankind."¹²

A covenant is an agreement. Like all the Messengers of God before Him, Bahá'u'lláh has promised that after "one thousand or thousands of years"¹³ another Messenger of God will appear:

God hath sent down His Messengers to succeed to
Moses and Jesus, and He will continue to do so
"till the end that hath no end."¹⁴

In addition, however, Bahá'u'lláh has made a new and unique covenant with those who follow Him. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that this Lesser Covenant is "the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh"¹⁵. Acting on the Will of God, Bahá'u'lláh has entered into an agreement with mankind. Bahá'u'lláh's part in this agreement includes the creation of a universal "Centre" which is capable of uniting, harmonizing and developing all the infinitely varied elements of human nature. Man's part, as an individual, is the surrender of his ego to the Revelation of God and to the authority of this Centre.

The Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the Person of His own Son, Bahá'u'lláh focussed such functions as the interpreting of His laws and teachings, the demonstration of their practicality and power, and the designing of institutions to give them enduring effect. He exercises His unique functions because, in the words of the Guardian, He is:

... *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.¹⁶

Bahá'u'lláh's appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is explicitly stated in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the Book of His Laws:

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 ... refer ye whatsoever ye understand not in the Book to Him Who hath branched from this mighty Stock.¹⁷

In the Book of the Covenant, written entirely in His own hand, Bahá'u'lláh repeats the words of this appointment and states:

The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch ('Abdu'l-Bahá).¹⁸

In the Tablet of the Branch, Bahá'u'lláh explains the significance of the authority thus conferred on 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Whosoever turns to Him hath surely turned unto God, and whosoever turneth away from Him hath turned away from My beauty, denied My proof and is of those who transgress. Verily, He is the remembrance of God amongst you and His trust within you ... Thus have I been commanded to convey to you the message of God, your Creator; and I have delivered unto you that of which I was commanded.¹⁹

In creating the Centre of His Covenant, Bahá'u'lláh resolved for Bahá'ís the age-old problem of all human social organization, the problem of *authority*. Throughout history men have alternately been attracted to authority and repelled from it. On the one hand they have recognized that it is essential to the achievement of any degree of peace, order and freedom. On the other, they have been repeatedly disillusioned by the harm it has eventually inflicted on these same cherished achievements. It has seemed impossible either to live with authority or to live without it.

The life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá marks the turning point in this long and unhappy history. The effects of His life on those who surrendered themselves to its influence are convincing proof that the power we call God is not capricious or cruel, but beneficent and supremely rational. Its outward expressions are the manifestations of an inner moral authority that is part of the order of creation itself. The paradox of divine authority, and also its identifying sign, is that submission to it produces true freedom. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh:

Whatever duty Thou hast prescribed unto Thy servants ... is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their inmost being, the station of knowledge of their own selves.²⁰

The same principle applies to Bahá'í community life. The unique features which today distinguish the Bahá'í world community, and which have such significance for mankind's future, can be discerned in the fellowship of the early be-

lievers who had the joy of working directly under the guidance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Their history clearly demonstrates the truth underlying all human association: that the phenomenon we call "unity" is not the product of a series of compromises, but rather is the system of relationships that arises when all those involved are centered on a single Point of love that nourishes and protects its members. The Centre of unity established by Bahá'u'lláh is unique in its capacity to attract and hold the loyalty of all mankind.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá ascended in November 1921, Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant had been firmly established in the hearts of the believers as it had already been in the Writings of the Manifestation of God and His chosen Interpreter. All the developments of the Cause since that time, and all those which lie ahead are the unfolding of this original, mighty trust. Each one of the institutions created in Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant was more clearly explained, sometimes elaborated and in several cases erected by the hands of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself. The whole range of Bahá'u'lláh's moral teachings, now slowly appearing through the gradual unfoldment of the laws of the *Aqdas*, was once and perfectly manifested in the life lived by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The diversity of the present-day Bahá'í community owes its greatest impulse to the indiscriminating love with which 'Abdu'l-Bahá welcomed persons of every background, interest and personality, and which He then patiently nurtured in those who responded.

Finally, the world-wide expansion of the Cause was given its great impetus by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's historic teaching journey through the West, and has been patterned in every respect on the guidelines laid down in the Tablets of the Plan He conceived.

Divine Justice /

What we see in the events of the past several decades is the first stage in the flowering of the divine authority which Bahá'u'lláh planted in human affairs through the establishment of His Covenant, and His appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

as its Centre. In 'Abdu'l-Bahá's lifetime this authority affected chiefly the individual believer, who experienced it as the love of God. It captivated hearts and transformed character. With the rise of the Bahá'í world community, the loving authority at the heart of the Cause now begins to manifest itself as the power that moulds men's social relationships, the power that Bahá'u'lláh cherishes above anything else and that expresses the essential feature of His World Order:

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice.²¹

In time the divine justice operating out of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh will bring under its influence the whole of mankind.

The purpose of Justice [Bahá'u'lláh tells us] is the appearance of unity among people.²²

He explains that global peace and the emergence of a universal civilization are entirely dependent on the creation of unity:

The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.²³

The Universal House of Justice underlines the implications of this truth:

Most people take the opposite point of view: they look upon unity as an ultimate, almost unattainable goal and concentrate first on remedying all the other ills of mankind. If they did but know it, these other ills are but various symptoms and side effects of the basic disease—disunity.²⁴

III

The Laws of Bahá'u'lláh

The divine justice which will bring about the unity of mankind is to be found nowhere but in the laws revealed by God. Law is the foundation of all human society. Without it, order is impossible, and without order there is no framework within which all of the other spiritual, cultural, technological and intellectual activities which depend on human association can develop.

Even personal freedom depends on law. One of the strangest paradoxes of human life is that in order to be free, man must surrender his freedom to a system of laws. In-

deed, the degree of his freedom depends exactly on the degree to which he is willing to surrender it. An obvious example is the traffic system in a modern city. Because all (or most) of us are willing to accept irksome limitations like traffic lights, speed limits, and a host of directional signals, we can move easily and swiftly about a vast labyrinth of streets, accomplishing enormous feats of work in a single day. A person from a primitive village brought into such a city regards the entire situation as both miraculous and terrifying. To him the inhabitants of the city have the freedom of gods (if not the intelligence). Should the traffic laws be suspended for one day, however, the "gods" would be trapped in a chaos that would swiftly reduce them to very modest proportions. Should all other laws be simultaneously abandoned, most of the freedoms that human beings cherish would vanish with them overnight.

The frightening thing about the present age, of course, is that this is precisely what is happening. All around us, laws and practices inherited from the past are being openly abandoned or steadily eroded. Much of this breakdown is essential if men are to move beyond their cultural limitations into one human race. The breakdown is not, however, rational or controlled. It is total. Laws are broken or discarded simply because they are laws. They are considered not means to freedom but restrictions on freedom. Bahá'ís know that this process will not be halted. Bahá'u'lláh warns that it will eventually undermine every one of man's existing social structures: "The dust of sedition (lawlessness) hath clouded the hearts of men and blinded their eyes". "After a time all the governments on earth will change. Oppression will envelop the world."²⁵

The most important question about law is its source. Many persons appear still to cling to the theories of political philosophers on which most modern republics claim to be based. Increasing numbers of peoples, however, are aware of the gulf between these theories and the facts of modern human existence. They do not want theories; they want results, in terms of sanity, justice and spiritual freedom.

For Bahá'ís the source of law is clearly stated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

The religions of God are the true source of the spiritual and material perfections of man ...²⁶

There are some who imagine that an innate sense of human dignity will prevent man from committing evil actions ... And yet, if we ponder the lessons of history it will become evident that this very sense of honour and dignity is itself one of the bounties deriving from the instructions of the Prophets of God.²⁷

Revelation is the real source of law because law, to be effective as a foundation for a society, depends on the transformation of human conscience. Repeatedly in all the holy scriptures the human heart or conscience is referred to as the "earth". It is only the Revelation of God which can drive the roots of law deep into this earth. Unless the roots of the laws and institutions of a community are firmly embedded in the hearts of the mass of the people the social order cannot survive. Nor can any real cultural advances occur. If history teaches anything it teaches this lesson, over and over again.

This suggests the importance of the laws revealed by Bahá'u'lláh as the Universal Manifestation of God. The initial revelation of divine law was called by Bahá'u'lláh "The Most Holy Book", the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. What seems most remarkable to anyone who has seen a copy of the Arabic original is that so much material could be compressed into so small a volume. The reason is that the *Aqdas* states only fundamental principles in each area of law. The longer expository passages relate to the spiritual perspective and social order which are the context for the individual subjects. A prominent Russian scholar, Prof. A. Toumansky, has compared Bahá'u'lláh's pen writing the *Aqdas* to a bird—now soaring on the heights of vision; now swooping down for an instant to touch the simplest and most homely questions of everyday life.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas

The *Aqdas* was the germ and nucleus of a great body of Writings which followed in subsequent years. It is not itself a legal

code, nor can it be properly comprehended apart from the body of documents which elaborate, develop and explain it. On this point the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith said:

The reason it [the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*] is not circulated amongst all the Bahá'ís is, first, because the Cause is not yet ready or sufficiently matured to put all the provisions of the *Aqdas* into effect and, second, because it is a Book which requires to be supplemented by detailed explanations and to be translated into other languages by a competent body of experts. The provisions of the *Aqdas* are gradually, according to the progress of the Cause, being put into effect already, both in the East and the West.²⁸

The relation between a statement in the *Aqdas* and a law of the Bahá'í Faith has been compared to that between a seed and a rosebush. Although the rose is fully present in the seed, it is not discoverable, even by a microscope. Only a long natural process brings it into appearance. Similarly, only an exhaustive study of the development of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching on any one subject, a study carried out by trained scholars acting under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, and with all the sources at hand, can produce a codified statement of Bahá'í law on any topic.

Bahá'u'lláh says on this subject:

Know of a certainty that in every Dispensation the light of Divine Revelation hath been vouchsafed to men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity. Consider the sun. How feeble its rays the moment it appeareth above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approacheth its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light. How steadily it declineth until it reacheth its setting point. Were it all of a sudden to manifest the energies latent within it, it would no doubt cause injury to all created things ... In like manner, if the Sun of Truth were suddenly to reveal, at the earliest stages of its manifestation, the full measure

of the potencies which the providence of the Almighty hath bestowed upon it, the earth of human understanding would waste away and be consumed; for men's hearts would neither sustain the intensity of its revelation, nor be able to mirror forth the radiance of its light. Dismayed and overpowered, they would cease to exist.²⁹

The Guardian, in a letter written on his behalf, adds:

The Laws revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Aqdas* are, whenever practicable and not in direct conflict with the Civil Laws of the land, absolutely binding on every believer or Bahá'í institution whether in the East or in the West. Certain laws, such as fasting, obligatory prayers, the consent of the parents before marriage, avoidance of alcoholic drinks, monogamy, should be regarded by all believers as universally and vitally applicable at the present time. Others have been formulated in anticipation of a state of society destined to emerge from the chaotic conditions that prevail today. When the *Aqdas* is published this matter will be further explained and elucidated. What has not been formulated in the *Aqdas*, in addition to matters of detail and of secondary importance arising out of the application of the laws already formulated by Bahá'u'lláh, will have to be enacted by the Universal House of Justice.³⁰

For the sixty-five years between Bahá'u'lláh's passing and the passing of the Guardian (1892-1957), the Bahá'í world had access to the laws of the *Aqdas* through the guidance of the book's only appointed Interpreters, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. As circumstances demanded, the Master and the Guardian drew on the body of Bahá'u'lláh's Laws to answer questions and give explicit guidance to the infant communities springing up around the world. There was no other way in which Bahá'ís could have obeyed Bahá'u'lláh's command to turn to the *Aqdas*, as this is the only way sanctioned in Bahá'u'lláh's Writings. In the words of the House of Justice:

During the thirty-six years of his Guardianship, Shoghi Effendi fixed the pattern and laid the foundations of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh, set in motion the implementation of the Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the spread of the Faith throughout the world, and, as these twin processes of administrative consolidation and widespread expansion progressed, started to apply and enforce, gradually and according to the progress of the Cause, those laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* that in his estimation it was timely and practicable to apply and which were not in direct conflict with the civil law.³¹

As anticipated by the Guardian, who began the work himself, the Universal House of Justice set itself the task of completing the codification of the laws of the *Aqdas*, an essential step toward its eventual publication. This task was completed on the eve of the hundredth anniversary of the Revelation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* itself. The House of Justice emphasizes that:

The number of laws at present binding upon Bahá'ís is not increased by the publication of this work. When the Universal House of Justice deems it advisable it will inform the friends what additional laws are binding upon them, and will provide whatever guidance and supplementary legislation will be necessary for their application.³²

Together with obedience, the challenge which the *Aqdas* presents to Bahá'ís is to understand the fundamentally *spiritual* character of the laws revealed by God.

Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power.³³ In this same beautiful passage Bahá'u'lláh points out that through obedience to the laws of the Revelation, mankind can perceive the "fragrance" of the robe of God Himself. The real purpose of law is to enable us to "ascend unto the station" conferred upon our inmost beings, the knowledge of our own selves.

This perception will also protect Bahá'ís against any attempt to judge the laws of God by the standards of human civilization. Clearly, mankind's future will bear little resemblance to present-day civilization. Apart from anything else, it is becoming increasingly evident that the kind of civilization we know will not much longer endure. We cannot imagine the conditions that will prevail on this planet even twenty years from now. Bahá'u'lláh's laws provide for mankind's needs regardless of the circumstances in which men may find themselves. Moreover they are revealed for the guidance of a human race which is at inconceivably different stages in its moral and cultural development. Finally, the laws of Bahá'u'lláh are flexible and evolutionary in their nature and effect. Through them humanity will gradually be led out of old and faulty habits into a common citizenship. This evolutionary principle is the very nature of the Revelation of God and of human life itself.

The law of God makes order possible because it re-creates and trains conscience. Conscience is the earth in which everything that is civilized is rooted. In this sense, Bahá'u'lláh is Himself the Creator of the world of the future:

Consider the hour at which the supreme Manifestation of God revealeth Himself unto men. Ere that hour cometh, the Ancient Being, Who is still unknown of men ... is Himself the All-Knower in a world devoid of any man that hath known Him. He is indeed the Creator without a creation ... This is indeed the Day of which it has been said: "Whose shall be the Kingdom this Day?" And none can be found ready to answer!³⁴

IV The Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh

The laws revealed by God do not operate in abstraction. The Guardian says of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* that it "not only preserves for posterity the basic laws and ordinances on which the fabric of His [Bahá'u'lláh's] future World Order must rest, but ordains ... the necessary institutions through which the integrity and unity of His Faith can alone be safeguarded."³⁵

Many times during His later years, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said to those around Him who were so deeply attached to His own Person: "Were ye to know what will come to pass after me, surely would ye pray that my end be hastened."³⁶

As is now evident, these comments referred to the World

Order revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, whose proper and safe unfoldment was assured through the appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as Centre of the Covenant. In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and elsewhere Bahá'u'lláh created the Institutions needed to guide this great evolutionary process. In His *Will and Testament*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, acting on the authority given Him by Bahá'u'lláh, defined, elaborated and in some instances supplemented these provisions for the social organization of our planet.

The first reference to this system in the Bahá'í Writings was the prophetic statement of the Báb in the Persian Bayán: Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh and rendereth thanks unto his Lord! For He will assuredly be made manifest. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the Bayán.³⁷

Among the numerous references to the same subject in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh is the striking assertion in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*:

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.³⁸

The System created through the provisions of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and the *Will and Testament* constitutes the Administrative Order of the Bahá'í Cause. The Guardian describes this Order as “the inviolable stronghold” within which the new World Order is slowly evolving. At the same time, he explains that the Administrative Order is also “the nucleus” and “the very pattern” of that universal system whose full nature is far beyond our present capacity to appreciate. That is to say, while the Administrative Order is designed to shelter and protect the future World Order, it is not something apart from that future system. Rather, the institutions and forms of the Administrative Order themselves represent both the shell and the seed of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are the twin pillars of this Administrative Order. Acting in their different but complementary and inseparable roles these two

institutions exercise the authority by which the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh will guide and protect the community of His followers throughout history. In His *Will and Testament* 'Abdu'l-Bahá says of them:

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 ...³⁹

Beware lest anyone falsely interpret these words, and like unto them that have broken the Covenant after the Day of Ascension (of Bahá'u'lláh) advance a pretext, raise the standard of revolt, wax stubborn, and open wide the door of false interpretation. To none is given the right to put forth his own opinion or express his particular convictions. 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.

The Glory of Glories rest upon you!⁴⁰

The Guardian says of the functions of these “twin pillars” of the Administrative Order:

It should be stated, at the very outset, in clear and unambiguous language, that these twin institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh should be regarded as divine in origin, essential in their functions and complementary in their aim and purpose. Their common, their fundamental object is to insure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings. Acting in conjunction with each other these two inseparable institutions administer its affairs,

coordinate its activities, promote its interests, execute its laws and defend its subsidiary institutions. Severally, each operates within a clearly defined sphere of jurisdiction; each is equipped with its own attendant institutions—instruments designed for the effective discharge of its particular responsibilities and duties. Each exercises, within the limitations imposed upon it, its powers, its authority, its rights and prerogatives. These are neither contradictory, nor detract in the slightest degree from the position which each of these institutions occupies. Far from being incompatible or mutually destructive, they supplement each other's authority and functions, and are permanently and fundamentally united in their aims.⁴¹

The Guardianship

The Institution of the Guardianship, which was anticipated in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, was formally established by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His *Will and Testament*. In this latter document, written entirely in His own hand, signed and sealed by Him, the Master named His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, "Guardian of the Cause of God", and conferred on him the sole power of interpreting the Bahá'í teachings:

After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon ... 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 is the expounder of the words of God ...⁴²

The mighty stronghold shall remain impregnable and safe through obedience to him who is the guardian of the Cause of God. It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice, upon all the

Aghsán, the Afán, the Hands of the Cause of God to show their obedience, submissiveness and subordination unto the guardian of the Cause of God, to turn unto him and be lowly before him. He that opposeth him hath opposed the True One ...⁴³

The Universal House of Justice

The authority conferred on the House of Justice, which was created by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, is equally explicit. The name of this body was designated by Bahá'u'lláh, and its various functions are described in both the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and a number of other Sacred Texts:

This passage is written, at this time, by the Supreme Pen and is accounted of the Book of Aqdas. The affairs of the people are in charge of the men of the House of Justice of God. They are the trustees of God among His servants and the sources of command in His countries.⁴⁴

These functions include the exclusive right of legislation on matters not explicitly revealed in the Scriptures:

It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them. God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He verily is the Provider, the Omniscient.⁴⁵

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that the House of Justice also has the right to abrogate or change its own enactments as circumstances require:

Inasmuch as the House of Justice hath power to enact laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book and bear upon daily transactions, so also it hath power to repeal the same ... This it can do because these laws form no part of the divine explicit text.⁴⁶

Also in the *Will and Testament* 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained

the significance of this authority:

Unto the Most Holy Book [*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*] 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 Purpose of God Himself.⁴⁷

The Relationship of The Guardianship and The Universal House of Justice

Upon the death of Shoghi Effendi in November 1957 a situation existed which the Bahá'í community could not have foreseen. The Universal House of Justice explains its significance:

At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi's death it was evident, from the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy Texts, 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. This situation, in which the Guardian died without being able to appoint a successor, presented an obscure question not covered by the explicit Holy Text, and had to be referred to the Universal House of Justice.⁴⁸

The Universal House of Justice was therefore duly elected in the manner provided for in the Writings and various related statements of the Guardian, and took up its responsibilities for the guidance of the Cause. The Guardian had stated of the relationship between the two institutions:

They [i.e. 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 pro-

gressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.⁴⁹

He had also explained, however, that the powers of neither institution in any way interfered with the powers granted to the other:

It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of the Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to the Universal House of Justice by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, and repeatedly and solemnly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will. It does not constitute in any manner a contradiction to the Will and Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, nor does it nullify any of His revealed instructions.⁵⁰

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

Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members ...⁵¹

The Universal House of Justice has pointed out some of

the implications of these statements in relation to the present stage of development of the Cause:

... Shoghi Effendi repeatedly stressed the inseparability of these two institutions. Whereas he obviously envisaged their functioning together, it cannot logically be deduced from this that one is unable to function in the absence of the other. During the whole thirty-six years of his Guardianship Shoghi Effendi functioned without the Universal House of Justice. Now the Universal House of Justice must function without the Guardian, but the principle of inseparability remains. The Guardianship does not lose its significance nor position in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh merely because there is no living Guardian. 52

Service to the Cause of God requires absolute fidelity and integrity and unwavering faith in Him. No good but only evil can come from taking the responsibility for the future of God's Cause into our own hands and trying to force it into ways that we wish it to go regardless of the clear texts and our own limitations. It is His Cause. He has promised that its light will not fail. Our part is to cling tenaciously to the revealed Word and to the institutions that He has created to preserve His Covenant.⁵³

The Infallibility of The Universal House of Justice

The Universal House of Justice has explained the nature of the infallibility which the Covenant confers on its enactments:

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. Although in the realm of interpretation the Guardian's pronouncements are always binding, in the area of the Guar-

dian's participation in legislation it is always the decision of the House itself which must prevail. This is supported by the words of the Guardian: "The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within its own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.

"Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning and to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed utterances."⁵⁴

The Guardian, like 'Abdu'l-Bahá before him, left "innumerable definitions" and other interpretative commentary for the guidance of the Universal House of Justice in its exercise of its functions.

The House of Justice points out the way in which this allows the institution of the Guardianship to continue exercising its influence even though the line of living Guardians has come to an end:

It should be understood by the friends that before legislating upon any matter the Universal House of Justice studies carefully and exhaustively both the Sacred Texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi on the subject. The interpretations written by the beloved Guardian cover a vast range of subjects and are equally as binding as the Text itself.⁵⁵

Within the guidelines provided by this authoritative inter-

pretation, the House of Justice has also been given unique powers in the field of deduction in formulating its decisions. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

Those matters of major importance which constitute the foundation of the Law of God are explicitly recorded in the Text, but subsidiary laws are left to the House of Justice. The wisdom of this is that the times never remain the same, for chance is a necessary quality and an essential attribute of this world, and of time and place. Therefore the House of Justice will take action accordingly.

Let it not be imagined that the House of Justice will take any decision according to its own concepts and opinions. God forbid! The Supreme House of Justice will take decisions and establish laws through the inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit, because it is in the safekeeping and under the shelter and protection of the Ancient Beauty, and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an absolute obligation, and there is no escape for anyone ...

Briefly, this is the wisdom of referring the laws of society to the House of Justice. In the religion of Islám, similarly, not every ordinance was explicitly revealed; nay not a tenth part of a tenth part was included in the Text; ... individual divines made conflicting deductions from the original revealed ordinances. All these were enforced. Today this process of deduction is the right of the body of the House of Justice, and the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the conclusions and endorsements of the body of the House of Justice whose members are elected by and known to the worldwide Bahá'í community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of individual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and result in schism, division,

and dispersion. The oneness of the Word would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken.⁵⁶

The House of Justice explains the difference between these powers of deduction and the interpretative authority which belonged to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian alone:

There is a profound difference between the interpretations of the Guardian and the elucidations of the House of Justice in exercise of its function to "deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure, and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book." The Guardian reveals what the Scripture means; his interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied. 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."⁵⁷

The Role and Functions of The Universal House of Justice

The House of Justice has briefly outlined its role in the development of the Cause and its major functions:

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 responsibility for ensuring the unity and progress of the Cause of God in accordance with the revealed Word. There are statements from the Master and the Guardian indicating that the Universal House of Justice, in addition to being the highest legislative body of the Faith, is also the body to which all must turn, and is the

“apex” of the Bahá’í Administrative Order, as well as the “supreme organ of the Bahá’í Commonwealth.” The Guardian has in his writings specified for the Universal House of Justice such fundamental functions as the formulation of future world-wide teaching plans, the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, and the guidance, organization, and unification of the affairs of the Cause throughout the world. Furthermore in *God Passes By* the Guardian makes the following statement: “The Kitáb-i-Aqdas ... not only preserves for posterity the basic laws and ordinances on which the fabric of His future World Order must rest, but ordains, in addition to the function of interpretation which it confers upon His successor, the necessary institutions through which the integrity and unity of His Faith can alone be safeguarded.” He has also, in “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh,” written that the members of the Universal House of Justice 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 lifeblood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation.”⁵⁸

V Opposition to Bahá’u’lláh

It may be helpful in conclusion to consider again the statement of Shoghi Effendi, with which this study began:

The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh ... should, if we be faithful to its implications, ... be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but *rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man’s collective life on this planet.* The emergence of a

world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture ... should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will ... continue indefinitely to progress and develop.⁵⁹

For thousands of years humanity has been evolving toward the day of its unification. All previous forms of social organization on the planet have been stages in mankind's preparation for the time when the earth will have become one country and mankind its citizens. The propelling force in this long evolutionary development has been the repeated intervention of God in human history, not only in a series of Divine Revelations, but through a sequence of Prophetic cycles stretching back beyond the memory of the human race.

Today this vast process has culminated in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Little wonder then at the language used by its Author:

"Verily I say! No one hath apprehended the root of this Cause. It is incumbent upon every one, in this day, to perceive with the eye of God, and to hearken with His ear. Whoso beholdeth Me with an eye besides Mine own will never be able to know me." ... "In this most mighty Revelation all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation." ... "The purpose underlying all creation is the revelation of this most sublime, this most holy Day, the Day known as the Day of God, in His Books and Scriptures—the Day which all the Prophets, and the Chosen Ones, and the holy ones, have wished to witness." ... "This is the Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things." "This is the Day whereon the Ocean of God's mercy hath been manifested unto men, the Day in which the Day Star of His loving-kindness hath shed its radiance upon them, the Day in

which the clouds of His bountiful favor have overshadowed the whole of mankind." ... "A fleeting moment, in this Day, excelleth centuries of a by-gone age. ... Neither sun nor moon hath witnessed a day such as this Day." "This is the Day whereon the unseen world crieth out, 'Great is thy blessedness, O earth, for thou hast been made the footstool of thy God, and been chosen as the seat of His mighty throne.' " ... "Peerless is this Day, for it is as the eye to past ages and centuries, and as a light unto the darkness of the times." ... "These days are God's days, a moment of which ages and centuries can never rival. An atom, in these days, is as the sun, a drop as the ocean." ... "O people! I swear by the one true God! This is the Ocean out of which all Seas have proceeded, and with which every one of them will ultimately be united. From Him all the Suns have been generated, and unto Him they will all return. Through His potency the Trees of Divine Revelation have yielded their fruits, every one of which hath been sent down in the form of a prophet, bearing a Message to God's creatures in each of the worlds whose number God, alone, in His all-encompassing knowledge, can reckon." ... "God the true One is My Witness! This is the Day whereon it is incumbent upon every one that seeth to behold, and every ear that harkeneth to hear, and every heart that understandeth to perceive, and every tongue that speaketh to proclaim unto all who are in heaven and on earth, this holy, this exalted, and all-highest Name."⁶⁰

It is against this background that we can begin to appreciate something of the significance in human history of the Covenant established by Bahá'u'lláh. We can appreciate something, too, of the convulsion that it must inevitably provoke in human affairs. The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is the key to the unification of mankind. As its embrace has gradually spread throughout the planet the concept of the oneness of mankind has become a reality for people of every back-

ground. As its influence has slowly permeated the consciousness of those who have recognized Bahá'u'lláh, an alternative way of life has begun to emerge for people everywhere. This universal and divine Covenant accepts no barriers of race, class, creed, or nation. It insists that all such lesser loyalties and identities be subordinated to the pre-eminent fact of mankind's oneness. And it does so in ways that re-structure the daily lives, re-mould the consciousness, and re-order the social relationships of all who enter upon it:

I testify that no sooner had the First Word proceeded, through the potency of Thy will and purpose, out of His mouth ... than the whole creation was revolutionized, and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths. Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing, in both the contingent world and the heavenly kingdom, entities of a new creation ...⁶¹

It is this irresistible process of the expansion and consolidation of Bahá'u'lláh's work throughout the planet that arouses opposition. There are those who see in it a threat to existing loyalties, institutions, identities, and ambitions. Many of these fears are groundless, based on an ignorance of Bahá'u'lláh's purpose. Others are quite realistic, arising out of at least a dim sense of the revolutionary changes in human affairs that such a process must involve. Both kinds of fear, however, have nurtured the persistent opposition which the Faith has encountered since the earliest days of the Mission of the Báb. In hindsight it is also evident that such fears were tributes to the consolidating strength of the Cause, as well as harbingers of its eventual triumph. The same principle, basic to the operation of God's will in human affairs, can be seen on a lesser scale in the history of every earlier Divine Revelation.

The Universal House of Justice advises that the time has come for this principle to be more fully studied and understood by the Bahá'í Community. With this aim in view they have forwarded to each National Assembly the compilation

of excerpts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the Guardian, referred to in the introduction to this series of booklets. The concluding extracts in this study are taken from this compilation:

Bahá'u'lláh

Say: O people of God! Beware lest the powers of the earth alarm you, or the might of the nations weaken you, or the tumult of the people of discord deter you, or the exponents of earthly glory sadden you. Be ye as a mountain in the Cause of your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Glorious, the Unconstrained.⁶²

When the victory arriveth, every man shall profess himself as believer and shall hasten to the shelter of God's Faith. Happy are they who in the days of world-encompassing trials have stood fast in the Cause and refused to swerve from its truth.⁶³

'Abdu'l-Bahá

The prestige of the Faith of God has immensely increased. Its greatness is now manifest. The day is approaching when it will have cast a tremendous tumult in men's hearts. Rejoice, therefore, O denizens of America, rejoice with exceeding gladness!⁶⁴

How great, how very great is the Cause! How very fierce the onslaught of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Ere long shall the clamor of the multitude throughout Africa, throughout America, the cry of the European and of the Turk, the groaning of India and China, be heard from far and near. One and all, they shall arise with all their power to resist His Cause. Then shall the knights of the Lord, assisted by His grace from on high, strengthened by faith, aided by the power of understand-

ing, and reinforced by the legions of the Covenant, arise and make manifest the truth of the verse: "Behold the confusion that hath befallen the tribes of the defeated!"⁶⁵

... a large multitude of people will arise against you, showing oppression, expressing contumely and derision, shunning your society, and heaping upon you ridicule. However, the Heavenly Father will illumine you to such an extent that, like unto the rays of the sun, you shall scatter the dark clouds of superstition, shine gloriously in the midst of Heaven and illumine the face of the earth. You must make firm the feet at the time when these trials transpire, and demonstrate forbearance and patience. You must withstand them with the utmost love and kindness; consider their oppression and persecution as the caprice of children, and do not give any importance to whatever they do. For at the end the illumination of the Kingdom will overwhelm the darkness of the world and the exaltation and grandeur of your station will become apparent and manifest ...⁶⁶

The Guardian

How can the beginnings of a world upheaval, unleashing forces that are so gravely deranging the social, the religious, the political, and the economic equilibrium of organized society, throwing into chaos and confusion political systems, racial doctrines, social conceptions, cultural standards, religious associations, and trade relationships—how can such agitations, on a scale so vast, so unprecedented, fail to produce any repercussions on the institutions of a Faith of such tender age whose teachings have a direct and vital bearing on each of these spheres of human life and conduct?

Little wonder, therefore, if they who are holding aloft the banner of so pervasive a Faith, so chal-

lenging a Cause, find themselves affected by the impact of these world-shaking forces. Little wonder if they find that in the midst of this whirlpool of contending passions their freedom has been curtailed, their tenets condemned, their institutions assaulted, their motives maligned, their authority jeopardized, their claim rejected.⁶⁷

Fierce and manifold will be the assaults with which governments, races, classes and religions, jealous of its rising prestige and fearful of its consolidating strength, will seek to silence its voice and sap its foundations. Unmoved by the relative obscurity that surrounds it at the present time, and undaunted by the forces that will be arrayed against it in the future, this community, I cannot but feel confident, will, no matter how afflictive the agonies of a travailing age, pursue its destiny, undeflected in its course, undimmed in its serenity, unyielding in its resolve, unshaken in its convictions.⁶⁸

For let every earnest upholder of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh realize that the storms which this struggling Faith of God must needs encounter, as the process of disintegration of society advances, shall be fiercer than any which it has already experienced. Let him be aware that so soon as the full measure of the stupendous claim of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh comes to be recognized by those time-honored and powerful strongholds of orthodoxy, whose deliberate aim is to maintain their stranglehold over the thoughts and consciences of men, this infant Faith will have to contend with enemies more powerful and more insidious than the cruellest torture-mongers and the most fanatical clerics who have afflicted it in the past. What foes may not in the course of the convulsions that shall seize a dying civilization be brought into existence, who will reinforce the indignities which have already been heaped upon it!⁶⁹

We can discover a no less distinct gradation in the character of the opposition it has had to encounter ... an opposition which, now, through the rise of a divinely appointed Order in the Christian West, and its initial impact on civil and ecclesiastical institutions, bids fair to include among its supporters established governments and systems associated with the most ancient, the most deeply entrenched sacerdotal hierarchies in Christendom. We can, at the same time, recognize, through the haze of an ever-widening hostility, the progress, painful yet persistent, of certain communities within its pale through the stages of obscurity, of proscription, of emancipation, and of recognition—stages that must needs culminate in the course of succeeding centuries, in the establishment of the Faith, and the founding, in the plenitude of its power and authority, of the world-embracing Bahá'í Commonwealth.⁷⁰

No opportunity, in view of the necessity of insuring the harmonious development of the Faith, should be ignored, which its potential enemies, whether ecclesiastical or otherwise, may offer, to set forth, in a restrained and unprovocative language, its aims and tenets, to defend its interests, to proclaim its universality, to assert the supernatural, the supra-national and non-political character of its institutions, and its acceptance of the divine origin of the Faiths which have preceded it.⁷¹

Whatever may befall this infant Faith of God in future decades or in succeeding centuries, whatever the sorrows, dangers and tribulations which the next stage in its world-wide development may engender, from whatever quarter the assaults to be launched by its present or future adversaries may be unleashed against it, however great the reverses and setbacks it may suffer, we, who have been privileged to apprehend, to the degree our finite minds

can fathom, the significance of these marvelous phenomena associated with its rise and establishment, can harbor no doubt that what it has already achieved in the first hundred years of its life provides sufficient guarantee that it will continue to forge ahead, capturing loftier heights, tearing down every obstacle, opening up new horizons and winning still mightier victories until its glorious mission, stretching into the dim ranges of time that lie ahead, is totally fulfilled.⁷²

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