

REVIEWS

The Child of the Covenant: A Study Guide to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Author: Adib Taherzadeh

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Reviewer: Tricia Fallon-Barry

This is a sequel to *The Covenant Of Bahá'u'lláh* (George Ronald, 1992), though in its comprehensiveness, it stands alone.

In his Preface, Adib Taherzadeh explains: "The organizational principle behind this guide is the relationship of the various parts of the Covenant and its verities to almost every subject mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament." He cautions readers to bear in mind Shoghi Effendi's statement: "The contents of the 'Will' of the Master are far too much for the present generation to comprehend. It needs at least a century of actual working before the treasures of wisdom hidden in it can be revealed."

The method employed by Taherzadeh is thorough and effective: "In some instances a study is made of a full paragraph, in many cases of a sentence, and sometimes of certain words." With characteristic humility, he expresses the desire that his "study guide, however inadequate in scope and depth, will stimulate the believers in their own study of this weighty document."

He prepares the way for his study of *The Will and Testament* with an enlightening 10-page Introduction that describes the uniqueness of the Bahá'í Covenant. This is followed by three preparatory chapters.

Chapter 1 deals with the "Prerequisites for the Study of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh": "Man can acquire the knowledge of God and come to understand the significance of His words only through purity of heart, detachment from earthly things and humility and meekness before His servants" (p. 15).

Chapter 2 chronicles the family of Bahá'u'lláh, with this caveat: "To attempt to study the life of Bahá'u'lláh from a purely human point of view is an unhelpful exercise" (p. 17).

Chapter 3 focuses on "Tests of Faith": "The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh will continue to be a testing ground for the followers of Bahá'u'lláh" (p. 32).

The main body of the work explores the text of *The Will and Testament* in great detail. The reader gains valuable background information through explanations from the Faith's Central Figures (e.g. p. 30), historical accounts (p. 72), memoirs (p. 183), eyewitness testimonies (p. 309), excerpts from letters (p. 191), notes (p. 351), etc.

Taherzadeh is an eloquent narrator - the book can be viewed as a narrative centred upon the Figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá - and his masterly story-telling is always engaging. One is reminded that "the greatest source of strength for a Bahá'í is to draw from the power of Bahá'u'lláh" (p. 157). Directing his audience to this power, Taherzadeh includes numerous inspiring passages from the sacred Writings.

Spiritual verities are illustrated through skilful analogies (e.g. 26, 34) and insightful observations (p. 36, 286).

The Will and Testament itself - some 23 pages or 55 paragraphs in its English translation and composed in three parts “during the darkest days” of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ministry - touches on virtually every aspect of the Bahá’í Faith. The author, in elaborating on each excerpt and its relationship to Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant, spans the Heroic to the Formative Age, from the Martyrdom of the Báb (p. 50) to the need for a Supreme Tribunal (p. 399). Paragraphs from *The Will and Testament* are treated thematically in relation to various aspects of the Covenant (e.g. teaching) and not sequentially.

While much of the subject-matter necessarily deals with the distasteful aspect of Covenant-breaking (16 chapters out of 40), Taherzadeh’s book testifies to the dialectic of victory and crisis perceived by Shoghi Effendi in the organic evolution of the Bahá’í Faith (*God Passes By*, p. xiii). Specific topics of interest given detailed attention here are “The Deviations of Mírzá Muhammad-’Alí,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s younger half-brother and named by Bahá’u’lláh as “the Greater Branch” (*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 222), which receives five chapters.

Shoghi Effendi, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s eldest grandson, is discussed in terms of his appointment as Guardian, the sole authoritative interpreter of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh (chapter 27), and who is under the protection of both the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh (chapter 28), as are his extraordinary achievements, “the terrible Covenant-breakers’ attacks he sustained” (chapter 29), the rebellion of many of his own relatives that he had to painfully endure (chapter 30) and the tremendous loyalty and devotion he attracted from the overwhelming majority of believers (chapter 31).

The concluding chapter (40) concentrates on “Steadfastness in the Covenant,” and ends with a prayer from *The Will and Testament* for the protection of God’s “trusted servants.”

Useful inclusions are the three appendices: “The Administrative Order,” excerpted from Shoghi Effendi’s 1934 letter, *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*, *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* (November 26th, 1972) and a Guide to Paragraphs in the Will and Testament, the latter presented in two sections that provide “an easy reference linking passages of the Will and Testament to the chapters of the book.”

This publication is a superb resource for all Bahá’ís (for whom it was written), the last important literary offering from this outstanding Bahá’í scholar. Indeed, it is a hitherto unrivalled in-depth study of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Will and Testament*, the “Child” born of that mystic intercourse between the minds of Bahá’u’lláh and His eldest Son, and described by the Guardian as “the Charter of a future world civilisation.” Together with such works as Michael Sours’s *The Prophecies of Jesus* (Oneworld, 1991), it is a prime example of Bahá’í exegesis.