

sustained and concentrated study. Instituted by the Revealer of God's Word in this Day to direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation, the Covenant in essence guarantees the continuation of divine guidance after the ascension of the Manifestation through the presence in the world of an institution to which all the friends must turn.

So important for the development of the Faith at this time is the understanding of the Covenant in all its aspects that it has been designated as a major theme of the Six Year Plan. It is our earnest hope that the new compilation, consisting of extracts which convey essential elements of the Covenant, will serve not only to deepen the understanding and love of the believers for the Covenant, but also to increase their level of conviction, and their loyalty to the Cause and its Institutions. To this end you will undoubtedly wish to arrange for the compilation to be made available to the friends and, if translation is required, to have it translated in full into the main language or languages used in the areas under your jurisdiction. Should it be necessary to translate the text into vernacular languages of limited usage, you are free of course to prepare an abridged form by selecting extracts from the compilation.

With loving Baha'i greetings,

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cc: Th! Hands of the Cause of God
The International Teaching Centre
Counsellors
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I

The

Covenant

Materials assembled by the Research Department
of the Universal House of Justice

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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 Baha'u'llah made with His followers regarding 'Abdu'l-Baha and that 'Abdu'l-Baha perpetuated through the Administrative Order...

23 March 1975, from a letter written by the

Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

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I.

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

1. ...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", 2nd rev. ed.

(Wilmette: Baha' Publishing Trust, 1982), Section CLV, pp. 330-31

2. ...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 CUII, p. 328

3. 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' [rev. ed.]

(Haifa: Baha' World Centre, 1982), p. 262

4. ... ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye

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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

The Lesser Covenant: " ...•that Bahfi'u'llah made with His followers regarding 'Abdu'l-Baha ..."

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11. ... It is incumbent upon the Agh~an, the Afnan and My kindred to tum, 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, tum 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-Baha). Thus have We graciously revealed unto you our potent Will, and I am verily the Gracious, the All-Powerful.

Bahfi'u'llah,cited in "The World Order of Bahflu'llah - SelectedLetters", 2nd rev. ed. (Wilmette:Bah/JrPublishingTrust, 1974),p. 134.

12. ... In accordance with the explicittext of the Kitab-i-Aqdas Baha'u'llah 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-Baha,cited in "The World Order of Baha'u'llflh-SelectedLetters",p. 136

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

Baha'u'llfili covenanted, not that I am the Promised One, but that 'Alxlu'l-Baha is the Expounder of the Book and the I

Centre of His Covenant, and that the Promised One of Baha'u'llah will appear after one thousand or thousands of years. This is the Covenant which BaM.'u'llahmade. If a person deviates, he is not acceptable at the threshold of Baha.'u'llah.In case of differences, 'Abdu'l-Baha must be consulted. All must revolve around his good pleasure. After 'Abdu'l-Baha, whenever the Universal House of Justice is organized it will ward off differences.

'Abdu'l-Bahli, cited in "Star of the West", vol. IV, no. 14, November 1913, p. 237

14. Inasmuch as great differences and divergences of denominational belief had arisen throughout the past, every man with a new idea attributing it to God, Baha'u'llah desired that there should not be any ground or reason for disagreement among the Baha'is. 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 Centre 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 Baha'is but that they should always be unified and agreed Therefore, whosoever obeys the Centre of the Covenant appointed by Baha'u'llah has obeyed Baha'u'llah, and whosoever disobeys Him has disobeyed Baha'u'llah 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 Baha'u'llah you should care nothing at all for such a person. Baha'u'llah shuns such souls. •

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

15. He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Centre and Pivot of Baha'u'llah'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 Baha'i ideal, the incarnation of every Baha'i virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of I

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-Baha. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the "Mystery of God" -- an expression by which Baha'u'llah 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-Baha 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, in "The World Order of Bahji'u'llah - Selected Letters", p. 134

16. Baha'u'llah, 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

Word.

The Universal House of Justice. from a letter of 27 May 1966,
in "Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968", p. 90

32. 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

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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-Baha and by Baha'u'llah 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,
in "Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968", pp. 82-84

33. 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

34. ... 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 Baha'i 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

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position to do everything necessary to establish the World Order of Baha'u'llah on this earth. Unity of doctrine is maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and the voluminous interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Baha 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, in "Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968", pp. 52-53 35. In the Baha'i Faith there are two authoritative centres 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 Baha'u'llah, 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 Kitab-i-Aqdas Baha'u'llah 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 Kitab-i-'Ahd (the Book of Baha'u'llah's Covenant), He makes it clear that this reference is to 'Abdu'l-Baha. In the Aqdas Bah'u'llah 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 Kitab-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

II

V.

Response to the Lesser Covenant assures that

" ... the Faith can remain united and pure."

36. ... the power of the Covenant will protect the Cause of Baha'u'llah 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 Baha'i world save the Covenant of God; otherwise differences like unto a most great tempest will encompass the Baha'i 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 Baha'u'llah 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-Baha, 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-Baha to the North American Bah/i'is', rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bah/i' Publishing Trust, 1977), p. 49.

The last sentence is a newly authorized translation.

37. 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-Baha" [rev. ed]

(Haifa: Bahar World Centre, 1982), p. 209

38. 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 predicted 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

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world brotherhood and peace. All this shall be accomplished within the Covenant of the everlasting Father, the Covenant of Baha'u'llah.

The Universal House of Justice,
Ri<f.vanMessage 1973 to the BahfJ' {sof the World

39. The Baha'is must cling firmly to the knowledge that the Cause is safely in God's hands, that the Covenant of Baha'u'llah 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 Abha 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

VI.

The power of the Covenant

40. 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 finn in the Covenant and the Testament and art turning thy face to the Luminary of the world, His Highness Baha'u'llah.

'Abdu'l-Bahfi, cited in "Star of the West", vol. 14, no. 7, October 1923, p. 225

41. ... 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-Baha, cited in "God Passes By" (Wilmette: Baha1 Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 238; p. 239

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42. 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. H 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-Baha", [rev. ed.] (Haifa: Bahfi' (World Centre, 1982), p. 228

43. ... No power can eliminate misunderstanding 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-Baha, from a recently translated Tablet

44. 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 Baha'fs, 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-Baha, cited in "Bahfl(World Faith"

(Wilmette: Bahfl(Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 357-58.

45. ... Launched through these very acts² into the troublesome seas of ceaseless tribulation, piloted by the mighty arm of 'Abdu'l-Baha and manned by the bold initiative and abundant vitality of a band of sorely-trying disciples, the Ark of Baha'u'llah'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 o/21 April 1933, in

'The World Order of Baha'u'llah - Selected Letters", 2nd rev. ed.

(Wilmette: Balla' Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 84

2. Eveqts associated with the introductionoof the Faith in the West

46. The Covenant is the "axis of the oneness of the world of

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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 Revelation.s. The Covenant is, moreover, embedded in the Writings of Baha'u'llah Himself. Thus, as you clearly see, to accept Baha'u'llah is to accept His Covenant; to reject His Covenant is to reject Him.

3 January 1982. from a letter written on behalf of the

UniversalHouse of Justice to an individualbeliever

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