



Sinaiatic Covenant which involves the obligation of the Israelites to acknowledge and follow the laws of God in return for which God will exalt Israel. (Exodus 24:4-8; 28:1-2) Also of importance from the Bahá'í viewpoint is the prophetic covenant made by God through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 32:37-42) in which He promises a day in which He will gather up Israel from all the countries to which they have been driven and bring them back to the Holy Land. God promises not to turn away from them and to do them good. ("And they shall be my people, and I will be their God." Jeremiah 32:38) This covenant is important both because the first part is considered by Bahá'ís to have been fulfilled by Bahá'u'lláh with the in-gathering of Jews to the Holy Land and because the latter part can be considered the archetypal form of the greater covenant which has been re-confirmed in subsequent revelations.

The important difference between the usual understanding of the covenant in the Hebrew Bible and the Bahá'í understanding is that Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes God's testing of humanity through the covenant. In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* and elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh writes of the fact that when humanity makes the covenant that it will obey God's guidance, this is then put the test when the next Manifestation of God comes. The people are put to the test of whether they are truly attuned to the voice of God and recognize it when it comes from a new source or whether they reject the new revelation.

In the New Testament, the blood of the sacrificial animals that marked the seal of the covenant in Judaism (Exodus 24:8) is replaced by the sacrificial blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:13-28). The covenant thus changes from being concerned with obedience of the law to a covenant wherein whoever believes is assured of grace with God. The Bahá'í scriptures powerfully support the importance of the sacrifice of Christ. (GWB 36:85-86) The covenantal relationship for Bahá'ís, however, involves both belief and obedience to the law of God on the part of humanity (see below).

The Qur'an conveys a close parallel to the description of the covenant in the Bahá'í scriptures, depicting that it is concerned with God's guidance to humanity through a succession of messengers of God. (Q 3:80-85)

The Báb's writings are full of references to the covenant, and in particular to the messianic figure "He whom God shall manifest" (q.v.): "Thus, should the followers of the Bayán (the Bábís) observe the precepts of Him Whom God shall make manifest at the time of His appearance, and regard themselves and their own works as stars exposed to the light of the sun, then they will have gathered the fruits of their existence...". (Persian Bayán 8:1; SWB 97) "Bear Thou witness that, through this Book, I have covenanted with all created things concerning

the mission of Him Whom Thou shalt make manifest, ere the covenant concerning My own mission had been established." (GPB 30) To one of his most illustrious followers, Vahíd (q.v.), the Báb is reported to have said: "Were I to be assured that in the day of His manifestation thou wilt deny Him, I would unhesitatingly disown thee.... If, on the other hand, I be told that a Christian, who beareth no allegiance to My Faith, will believe in Him, the same will I regard as the apple of My eye." (GPB 30)

As well as the greater covenant, the Bahá'í authoritative writings trace out the history of the lesser covenant in previous religions. Peter is acknowledged as the chief of the Apostles after Jesus and `Alí as the legitimate successor to the Prophet Muhammad (Momen 153-4, 157). However, the appointment of these was only made orally and was easily contested and disputed, in contrast to the written and clear appointment of the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, `Abdu'l-Bahá. (WOB 145)

## B. The Greater Covenant

The Greater Covenant (also referred to as "the general Covenant", WOB 137, and "the Eternal Covenant" SWA 227) concerns the promise on the part of God, given through one of the Manifestations of God, that He will not leave humanity without guidance and will therefore send a further Manifestation of God. Humanity's part of the agreement is that it will obey God's law as sent by the present Manifestation and will recognize and obey the next Manifestation when he comes. This covenant is most succinctly summed up by the Báb in the Persian Bayán: "The Lord of the universe hath never raised up a prophet nor hath He sent down a Book unless He hath established His covenant with all men, calling for their acceptance of the next Revelation and of the next Book; inasmuch as the outpourings of His bounty are ceaseless and without limit." (Persian Bayán 6:16; SWB 87)

`Abdu'l-Bahá describes the sequence of the covenants established by the successive manifestations: "His Holiness Abraham... made a covenant concerning His Holiness Moses and gave the glad-tidings of His coming. His Holiness Moses made a covenant concerning the Promised One, i.e. His Holiness Christ, and announced the good news of His Manifestation to the world. His Holiness Christ made a covenant concerning the Paraclete and gave the tidings of His coming. His Holiness the Prophet Muhammad made a covenant concerning His Holiness the Báb and the Báb was the One promised by Muhammad, for Muhammad gave the tidings of His coming. The Báb made a Covenant concerning the Blessed Beauty of Bahá'u'lláh and gave the glad-tidings of His coming for the Blessed Beauty was the One promised by His Holiness the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh made a covenant concerning a promised One who will become manifest after one thousand or thousands of years. (Tanyi 20-21)

Bahá'u'lláh claims to be the fulfillment of the covenant established by all of the prophets of the past concerning a great day in the future when all of God's promises will be fulfilled. "The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been acclaimed as the Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by virtue of the pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresistible bidding, been revealed unto men. The advent of such a Revelation hath been heralded in all the sacred Scriptures." (GWB 3:5)

Humanity's part of the covenantal arrangement from the viewpoint of the Bahá'í teachings can best be summed up in the opening sentence of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring 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... 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. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration. (SCK 11)

Bahá'u'lláh continued the greater covenant into the future by stating that in due time another Manifestation of God would arise but that this would not occur for at least one thousand years: "Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying impostor." (WOB 132)

### C. The Lesser Covenant

The Lesser Covenant (also referred to as "the specific Covenant" WOB 137) refers to the agreement between a Manifestation of God and his followers regarding the continuation of authority in his religion. Although there are considered to have been precedents for this in the previous religions (see section 1 above), Shoghi Effendi asserts that in no previous religion has the question of the succession been of such importance nor the appointment of the successor been so clearly made. The fact that the succession in authority and the central institutions of the Bahá'í Faith were established by written documents so that they could not later be

questioned is emphasized by Shoghi Effendi as a "distinguishing feature" of the religion of Bahá'u'lláh. (WOB 21-22)

While the Tablet of the Branch, composed in the Edirne period had clearly signaled a high station for "the Branch of Holiness" and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has specified that this high station involved leadership of the Bahá'í community after Bahá'u'lláh's passing, it was only with the unsealing of the Kitáb-i-`Ahd (the Book of the Covenant, q.v.) after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh (see "Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of") that it was confirmed that the Branch referred to was indeed `Abdu'l-Bahá. So decisive and clear-cut was this nomination that even Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí, who came out in rebellion against `Abdu'l-Bahá's authority, never questioned the fact that `Abdu'l-Bahá had been appointed the successor of Bahá'u'lláh. He only disputed `Abdu'l-Bahá's manner of functioning as leader.

The lesser covenant was extended by `Abdu'l-Bahá in his Will and Testament (q.v.) by the appointment of Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. In this document, `Abdu'l-Bahá also affirms the authority of the Universal House of Justice, thus confirming the other Bahá'í institution upon which leadership has been conferred by the processes of the Bahá'í Covenant. Shoghi Effendi writes of the Will and Testament as being the result of the "mystic intercourse" between Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá. "The creative energies released by the Law of Bahá'u'lláh, permeating and evolving within the mind of `Abdu'l-Bahá, have, by their very impact and close interaction, given birth to an Instrument which may be viewed as the Charter of the New World Order..." (WOB 144, cf GPB 325-6). Apart from the function of leadership of the Bahá'í community, the Covenant confers upon `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi the position of being the sole authorised interpreters of the Bahá'í scripture. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh states: "Refer ye whatsoever ye understand not in the Book to" `Abdu'l-Bahá (KA 174). Similarly `Abdu'l-Bahá states that Shoghi Effendi is "the expounder of the words of God" (WT 11).

The authority of the Universal House of Justice is also derived from the evolution of the covenant.

The following is from its Constitution:

The provenance, the authority, the duties, the sphere of action of the Universal House of Justice all derive from the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh, which, together with the interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and of the Guardian of the Cause--who, after `Abdu'l-Bahá, is the sole authority in the interpretation of Bahá'í Scripture--constitute the binding terms of reference of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation. The authority of these Texts is absolute and immutable until such time as Almighty God shall reveal His new Manifestation to Whom will belong all authority and power." (CUHJ 3-4)

#### D. Purpose of the Covenant

The purpose of the covenant is explained in a number of places in the Bahá'í writings. Since the purpose of religion itself is held to be the establishment of unity and concord amongst humankind (TB 6:63-4, 129-30; GWB 101:206), Bahá'u'lláh warns, in his Book of the Covenant: "O servants! Let not the means of order be made the cause of confusion and the instrument of union an occasion for discord..." The covenant established in this book was specifically to forestall such a development. `Abdu'l-Bahá confirms that the central purpose of the covenant was to prevent schism and dissension:

Inasmuch as great differences and divergences of denominational belief had arisen throughout the past, every man with a new idea attributing it to God, Bahá'u'lláh desired that there should not be any ground or reason for disagreement among the Bahá'ís. Therefore, with His own pen He wrote the Book of His Covenant, addressing His relations and all people of the world, saying, "Verily, I have appointed One Who is the Center of My Covenant. All must obey Him; all must turn to Him; He is the Expounder of My Book, and He is informed of My purpose. All must turn to Him. Whatsoever He says is correct, for, verily, He knoweth the texts of My Book. Other than He, no one doth know My Book." The purpose of this statement is that there should

never be discord  
and divergence among the Bahá'ís but that they should always be unified and  
agreed. (PUP  
322-323, also PUP 382, 455-6, SWA 209)

The specific mission of Bahá'u'lláh relates to world unity. Since it would be  
impossible for the  
Bahá'í Faith to unite the world if it were itself disunited, the role of the  
covenant as the guarantor  
of the unity of the Bahá'í community becomes inextricably linked with the  
goal of world unity: "It  
is evident that the axis of oneness of the world of humanity is the power of  
the Covenant and  
nothing else." (TDP 49, cf GPB 239, SWA 208-9).

Shoghi Effendi also refers to the covenant as the means of directing and  
controlling the spiritual  
power unleashed by the coming of Bahá'u'lláh: "to direct and canalize these  
forces" and "to insure  
their harmonious and continuous operation after His ascension." (GPB 237) He  
refers to its  
purpose as being to "perpetuate the influence of [the] Faith, insure its  
integrity, safeguard it from  
schism, and stimulate its world-wide expansion..." (GPB 244-5)

#### E. Power of the Covenant

Because it is the focal point of unity both for the Bahá'í community and  
ultimately for the world  
and is also the channel for the spiritual energies released by Bahá'u'lláh,  
the Covenant is described  
in the Bahá'í writings as being possessed of power. Indeed it is seen as the  
motivating force behind  
all the positive forces at work in the world: "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."  
(GPB 239)

#### F. Firmness in the Covenant

The institution of the covenant being so central and vital a component of the  
Bahá'í Faith,  
firmness in the covenant is considered in the Bahá'í texts as one of the main  
religious virtues. In its  
more general sense, this means carrying out the laws and teachings of the  
Bahá'í Faith:

...ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a center of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world... Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God. For He hath, through irrefutable Texts, entered into a binding Covenant with us all, requiring us to act in accordance with His sacred instructions and counsels. (SWA 71)

In a more specific sense, firmness in the covenant refers to the inner conviction by the individual Bahá'í that the guidance of the center of the Bahá'í Faith (whether `Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi in the past or the Universal House of Justice at present) represents the will of God: "Whatsoever they decide is of God." (WT 11) Shoghi Effendi relates the success and progress of the Bahá'í Faith to this:

Neither the administration, nor the general teaching work of the Cause... will progress, or be able to accomplish anything, unless the believers are truly firm, deep, spiritually convinced Bahá'ís.... once a Bahá'í has the profound conviction of the authority from God, vested in the Prophet, passed on to the Master, and by Him, to the Guardians, and which flows out through the assemblies and creates order based on obedience--once a Bahá'í has this, nothing can shake him. (LDG2:83-4)

#### G. Covenant-breaker, Covenant-breaking

In Bahá'í terminology, internal opposition to the center of the Faith is known as "Covenant-breaking" and those who do this are known as "Covenant-breakers" (being the translation of the two terms Naqd-i-`Ahd and Náqidín respectively). This terminology at once indicates what is deemed to have been the transgression of these internal opponents: they have broken the Covenant--considered to be the greatest spiritual crime that a person can commit. It is, however, only in relation to the "lesser covenant" (see "Covenant") that this term is used (i.e. the covenant made by

the Manifestation of God, q.v., about his immediate successor and the subsequent chain of succession). Those who refuse to accept the validity of the claim of a Manifestation of God may be said to be breakers of the "greater covenant" but this is not the usual Bahá'í usage.

### G.1. Definition of Covenant-breaking

In trying to arrive at a definition of Covenant-breaking, a number of points need to be born in mind: those who merely oppose the Bahá'í Faith or its head (such as the many Muslim religious leaders who have done so) are not considered Covenant-breakers; those who leave the Bahá'í Faith because they have lost faith are similarly not considered Covenant-breakers; and those who commit minor infractions of of Bahá'í law may lose their administrative rights (see "Community, Bahá'í.4"), but are not considered Covenant-breakers. It is those who remain within the Bahá'í community, professing loyalty to the Bahá'í Cause and yet oppose the authorized leadership of the Bahá'í Faith or actively try to split the Bahá'í community by setting up an alternative center of leadership who are considered Covenant-breakers.

`Abdu'l-Bahá writes: "These do not doubt the validity of the Covenant but selfish motives have dragged them to this condition. It is not that they do not know what they do-- they are perfectly aware and still they exhibit opposition" (SWA 215-216). Thus a cardinal factor in Covenant-breaking is considered by `Abdu'l-Bahá to be willful and conscious opposition to the divine will as manifested in the Covenant.

A further insight into `Abdu'l-Bahá's views can be gained from his commentary upon the Biblical verse: "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him . . ." (Matthew 12:31-2). `Abdu'l-Bahá states that there are two aspects to the Manifestations of God. There is the physical form and personality, which `Abdu'l-Bahá likens to the lamp, and the Holy Spirit that dwells within, which `Abdu'l-Bahá

likens to the light. If one turns away from a particular lamp, this act can be forgiven as it may be that one is mistaken or unaware of that from which one has turned away and one may yet be led to the light. But if a person hates the light itself and rejects it, then that person cannot be guided and is unreceptive to the mercy and forgiveness of God (SAQ 31:127-8).

It should be noted that according to Bahá'í teaching, Covenant-breaking is something that is not confined to the Bahá'í Faith. It is a general religious phenomenon that has existed in every religion although, since the lesser covenant was less clearly defined and less central in other religions, the phenomenon has also been less clear cut and less important.

From this it would appear that a definition of Covenant-breaking would be: "willful opposition to the authorized center of the Bahá'í Faith (or any other religion), despite a conscious knowledge and understanding of the spiritual station of that center."

This definition explains, for example, the position of Mírzá Yahyá Azal (q.v.), who was never a follower of Bahá'u'lláh, but who is stated to be a Covenant-breaker. Similarly, some apostates who have attacked the Bahá'í Faith are referred to in terms that resemble those used to refer to Covenant-breakers.

The question of who has a "conscious knowledge and understanding" must inevitably involve a degree of judgment; this may be the reason why the decision to declare someone a Covenant-breaker can only be taken by the center of the Bahá'í Faith and is never delegated.

## G.2. The history of Covenant-breaking.

One of the most interesting features of Bábí and Bahá'í history is the manner in which the phenomenon of opposition from within the ranks of the believers to the established head of the religion has recurred in every generation since the founding of the religion over a hundred years ago.

### a. The Báb (1844-1850):

The immediate antecedents of the religion of Bahá'u'lláh lie of course in the Bábí movement. Probably owing to the intense external opposition, there appears to have been very little internal opposition to the Báb in the Báb's own lifetime.

Some few persons, such as Mullá Javád Baraghání, Mullá `Abdu'l-`Alí Hirátí, and Mírzá Ibráhím Shírízí became followers of the Báb and then split away and began to attack the Báb, eventually joining up with Hájí Mírzá Karím Khán Kirmání (q.v.), the Shaykhí leader who was vehemently opposed to the Báb. According to Nabíl, these three persons were compared in the Báb's writing with Sámirí who, according to Islamic tradition, produced the calf for the Israelites to worship, and with Jibt and Tághút (DB 162)--language very similar to that later used by Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá with regard to the Covenant-breakers (SoW 1922, 13:20-22).

b. After the Martyrdom of the Báb and during Bahá'u'lláh's lifetime (1852-92):

Most sources, whether Bahá'í or otherwise, are agreed that some form of leadership or successorship was vested in Mírzá Yahyá Azal (q.v.) by the Báb (TN 62-3; GPB 163). The successorship was not, however, clear, nor was it undisputed. A number of person laid claim to various positions of leadership, and there was much schism and contention. `Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have stated that as many as twenty-five persons laid claim to the leadership of the community (GPB 125). None of these except for Azal is, however, regarded as a Covenant-breaker because they all put forward their claims at a time when there was no clear authority in the religion. Many of them became followers of Bahá'u'lláh once he put forward his claim. Only Azal opposed and worked to undermine the position of Bahá'u'lláh. Estimates put the number of Azalís remaining in Iran at no more than 5,000. They have no organization. (see "Azal, Azalís").

It is interesting that Bahá'u'lláh's own actions with regard to Azal were to set the pattern of relationships with those designated as Covenant-breakers. Once it was clear that no reconciliation was possible with Mírzá Yahyá, Bahá'u'lláh gave instructions that all of the furniture and other effects in the house should be divided and half be given to Azal. Thereafter he severed all connections with his half-brother. He withdrew, moreover, from the company of the other Bábís

in Edirne for two months, instructing them to decide whether they intended to follow him or Azal (GPB 167).

c. During the period of `Abdu'l-Bahá's leadership:

In the Book of the Covenant (q.v.), Bahá'u'lláh designates `Abdu'l-Bahá as his successor and the interpreter of his writings with a subordinate position being assigned to Mírzá Muhammad `Alí (q.v.), the half-brother of `Abdu'l-Bahá (TB 15:221-2). Yet, within a short time of the death of Bahá'u'lláh, Mírzá Muhammad `Alí, at the instigation of his cousin Majdu'd-Dín (the son of Mírzá Músá Kalím, q.v.), challenged the leadership of `Abdu'l-Bahá. His main contention was that `Abdu'l-Bahá had over-reached his authority and was claiming to be a new Manifestation of God, a charge which `Abdu'l-Bahá explicitly and emphatically denied. Mírzá Muhammad `Alí called himself and his supporters the Muwahhidún (the Unitarians, Browne 77-82, 155).

The challenge of Mírzá Muhammad `Alí was at first very serious. He held control of the Mansion of Bahjí (q.v.) and had won over almost all of the family of Bahá'u'lláh (the exceptions were Bahiyyih Khánum and `Abdu'l-Bahá's immediate family), some of the family of the Báb (the Afnán, q.v.), as well as many of the Bahá'ís of the Haifa-Akka area and some leading figures in Iran. Gradually, however, the tide turned against Mírzá Muhammad `Alí. `Abdu'l-Bahá was at first reluctant to expose the division, but when Mírzá Muhammad `Alí himself had openly asserted his claim in 1896, `Abdu'l-Bahá announced that Mírzá Muhammad `Alí and his supporters were to be regarded as Covenant-breakers. Individuals such as Ibn-i-Abhar (q.v.) traveled to different communities to refute Mírzá Muhammad `Alí's claims.

There was another brief success for Mírzá Muhammad `Alí when, in about 1899, he succeeded in recruiting to his side Ibrahim Kheiralla (q.v.), who had been primarily responsible for propagating the Bahá'í Faith in the United States of America. Most of the American Bahá'ís remained loyal to `Abdu'l-Bahá, however, and there was little long-term advantage to Mírzá Muhammad `Alí's

position which went into a steady decline.

By the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá's journeys to the West, the threat from Mírzá Muhammad `Alí and his supporters had faded into insignificance in both Iran and America. In 1929 they were forced to evacuate the Mansion of Bahjí as they had allowed it to deteriorate to such a point that it was no longer habitable (PP 231). They remained in buildings surrounding Bahjí until 1957 (PP 233-4, MBW 120-21). A recent sociological study of the remnants of this group remarks that they are now outwardly indistinguishable from Muslims and proposes that they be called a "residual religious community," an ossified or fossilized remnant (Cohen 121, 132-3, 140).

`Abdu'l-Bahá's method of dealing with Mírzá Muhammad `Alí's rebellion and other episodes, which was to become the standard approach to this problem, was three-fold. First, `Abdu'l-Bahá would refrain from making any public pronouncements while he communicated with the individual personally or through intermediaries to try to bring about a reconciliation. Second, once it became clear that this was not possible and that there was the possibility of damage to the community, he wrote general and individual letters to the Bahá'ís explaining the situation, identifying the individuals concerned, and instructing the Bahá'ís to sever all links with these persons. Third, `Abdu'l-Bahá would send special envoys to those areas most affected by the problem. The function of these envoys was to explain matters to the Bahá'ís and to encourage them to persevere in cutting all contacts with the Covenant-breakers. Often these individuals would have `Abdu'l-Bahá's authority to open up communications with the Covenant-breakers to try to persuade them to return to the fold. In Iran, such envoys were principally the four persons who had been named by Bahá'u'lláh as the Hands of the Cause (q.v.).

The other major episode of Covenant-breaking during the period of `Abdu'l-Bahá's leadership was of a different kind in that it involved direct disobedience of `Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions rather than any attempt to set up an alternative center of leadership. Dr. Amínu'lláh Faríd (Ameen U. Fareed)

was the nephew of `Abdu'l-Bahá's wife, Munírih Khánum (see "Nahrí Family"). He was educated in America and was one of `Abdu'l-Bahá's interpreters during the latter's journeys in the West. He disgraced himself, however, by importuning some of the wealthier American Bahá'ís for money. `Abdu'l-Bahá therefore insisted on his return to Haifa when he himself returned there. Faríd was not happy in Haifa and when, against `Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions, he left for America, `Abdu'l-Bahá expelled him from the Bahá'í Faith. Faríd took with him most of his immediate family and caused a few of the British Bahá'ís to leave the Bahá'í Faith, but few others were affected (SoW 1914, 5:237).

d. Episodes during the period of Shoghi Effendi's leadership:

The passing of `Abdu'l-Bahá caused the followers of Mírzá Muhammad `Alí briefly to rekindle their activities. They seized the keys of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and forced Shoghi Effendi to appeal to the authorities to have them returned. There were several other major episodes of "Covenant-breaking" during this period. The main features of these can be outlined thus:

i. Ruth White.

Shoghi Effendi's priority after becoming Guardian was to put in place the Bahá'í administration. As he pressed ahead with this goal, he faced the opposition of some Bahá'ís who were against the organization of the Bahá'í Faith. The first was Ruth White in 1926-29. She based her opposition on a report of some of `Abdu'l-Bahá's words that implied that the Bahá'í Faith could not be organized because it is the "Spirit of the Age" (SoW 1914, 5:67), and the report of a British hand-writing expert, who claimed that the hand-written Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá, upon which Shoghi Effendi's authority was based, was a forgery. The report was based on photographs and was only provisional pending a closer inspection of originals. Doubts about the authenticity of the Will and Testament were, however, refuted by those, such as the secretaries and close associates of `Abdu'l-Bahá, who were in the best position to judge both hand-writing and style; even Ahmad Sohrab after he became disaffected (see below) upheld the validity of the

Will. Ruth White's assertions had little impact on the American Bahá'í community. Only in Germany did they evoke a response when Wilhelm Herrigel, one of the earliest Bahá'ís, took up her case (Lerche).

ii. Ahmad Sohrab (1893-1958). In 1929 Ahmad Sohrab, who had been `Abdu'l-Bahá's secretary and interpreter, and Mrs. Julie (Lewis Stuyvesant) Chanler set up the New History Society in New York as an indirect way of spreading the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. Ahmad Sohrab refused, however, to allow the New York Spiritual Assembly any say in the way that the New History Society promoted the Bahá'í Faith. This led to a confrontation with the National Spiritual Assembly and to Sohrab's and Chanler's expulsion from the Bahá'í community.

The New History Society gave rise in 1930 to the Caravan of East and West, designed to prepare children and youth to join the New History Society. The Caravan outgrew its parent body and severed all remaining religious links with the Bahá'í Faith. It existed for a time as a worldwide pen-pal club with social ideals. The New History Society is now defunct and the Caravan maintains at a low level of local activity in New York under the name of Caravan House.

iii. Fái'iq (Faeg). After the death of Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygání (q.v), some of his pupils set up in Cairo, with the approval of `Abdu'l-Bahá, a society which they named "al-Jam`íyah al-`Ilmiyyah al-Adabiyyah" (The Scientific and Literary Society). After some years, this society under the leadership of a Bahá'í of Armenian background, Fái'iq, came into conflict with the Bahá'í administrative institutions in Egypt, and Fái'iq was expelled from the Bahá'í community. A few of the Egyptian Bahá'ís followed him and he also managed to convert some others, but many of these returned to the Bahá'í community eventually (GPB 327, RM 2:210-213).

iv. Family of `Abdu'l-Bahá. Mírzá Muhammad `Alí's break with `Abdu'l-Bahá resulted in the expulsion of the majority of Bahá'u'lláh's descendants from the Bahá'í Faith. These were all the descendants of Bahá'u'lláh from his second and third marriages and included the daughter of the

third marriage Furúghiyih and her husband Sayyid `Alí Afnán. The children of this marriage did not, however, share in their parents expulsion, and in the early 1920s Sayyid `Alí Afnán himself turned to Shoghi Effendi and was accepted back into the Bahá'í community. All remained quiescent until the late 1930s when the case of the House of Bahá'u'lláh (q.v.) arose in Iraq. Shoghi Effendi asked Husayn Afnán (d. 1952), the son of Sayyid `Alí, to resign a high post that he held with the Iraqi government so that he would not be placed in the position of endorsing that government's actions in the case. Husayn refused and was expelled; one-by-one his brothers Faydí, Hasan, and Nayyir (Nayyir-`Alí, d. 1952) were also expelled.

Events then proceeded rapidly. A series of marriages, engineered, according to Shoghi Effendi (MB), by Nayyir, occurred, linking the grandchildren of `Abdu'l-Bahá with the expelled sons of Sayyid `Alí Afnán. Rúhangíz, Shoghi Effendi's elder sister, was already married to Nayyir himself; Thurayyá, cousin of Shoghi Effendi, married Faydí; and Mihrangíz, Shoghi Effendi's younger sister, married Hasan. Later, a daughter of Nayyir was married to Hasan Shahíd, cousin of Shoghi Effendi. This series of marriages disrupted the family of `Abdu'l-Bahá. Since the remaining members of the family refused to cut their links with the expelled members, they too were expelled. The marriage of one of Shoghi Effendi's brothers, Husayn, in 1949 against the wishes of Shoghi Effendi, and the links between another brother, Riyád, and Majdu'd-Dín completed, in 1951, the process whereby the entirety of the remaining descendants of `Abdu'l-Bahá except Shoghi Effendi himself had been expelled (UD149, CF87, MBW16, 24-4, 48). The family of `Abdu'l-Bahá have remained outside the Bahá'í Faith pursuing their own affairs.

v. Apostates. Although most individuals who leave the Bahá'í community because of loss of belief are not considered any differently from those who have never been Bahá'ís, there have been a small number of persons who left the community and then began to attack it maliciously and vehemently and whom Shoghi Effendi referred to in terms identical to those he

used of the Covenant-breakers. In the years immediately after the death of `Abdu'l-Bahá, one of the prominent Iranian Bahá'ís, Mírzá `Abdu'l-Husayn Taftí, known as Áváríh (1290/1873-1953), pressed for a position of leadership in the Bahá'í community. When he failed to obtain this, he withdrew from the Bahá'í Faith and began to denounce it publicly. He published a book called *Kashfu'l-Hiyal* (The Uncovering of Trickery) in three volumes. Under the name Áyatí, he went on to become fairly well-known as a literary figure, editing the magazine *Namakdán*.

Two persons who were much influenced by Áváríh and who eventually joined him in apostasizing from the Bahá'í Faith and attacking it publicly were Faydu'lláh Subhí, who had served as `Abdu'l-Bahá's secretary for a number of years, and Hasan Níkú, who had visited India as a Bahá'í teacher and also went to Haifa in 1923. The latter published a three-volume work (*Falsafiy-i-Níkú*) attacking the Bahá'í Faith.

e. After Shoghi Effendi (1957-)

The most important divisive episode after the passing of Shoghi Effendi was the claim by one of the Hands of the Cause, Charles Mason Remey (q.v.), to be the second Guardian. Although he had signed the 1957 declaration of the Hands of the Cause that Shoghi Effendi had left no Will and no successor, Remey advanced a claim to be the second Guardian, in April 1960. He based his claim on the fact that the Guardian would, according to the Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá, be the head of the Universal House of Justice, and Remey had been designated by Shoghi Effendi as President of the International Bahá'í Council (q.v.), the body which was the forerunner of the Universal House of Justice. This claim was rejected by most of the Bahá'í world since the same Will and Testament also made it clear that all Guardians would have to be descendants of Bahá'u'lláh. Remey succeeded in gathering a few supporters, mainly in the United States, France, and Pakistan, but the majority of Bahá'ís stood by the Hands of the Cause who expelled Remey as a Covenant-breaker.

The followers of Remey have decreased in importance over the years, especially

as they fragmented into contending factions. One faction split off under a "third Guardian" appointed by Remy, Donald Harvey. After his death in 1991, leadership of this group went to Jacques Soghomonian, a resident of Marseilles. In the United States, the Remy Society founded by Francis Spataro supports Harvey. Another group is led by Joel Marangella, who declared that Remy had originally appointed him as "Third Guardian" but had gone senile and then appointed Harvey. This group call themselves the Orthodox Bahá'í Faith and are based in Roswell, New Mexico. They number no more than one hundred (Chicago Tribune, 10 June 1988, section 1, p. 9). Another faction rejected all claimants to the Guardianship after Shoghi Effendi including Remy but stated that Rex King was regent pending the emergence of the second Guardian (hence this group call themselves the Orthodox Bahá'í Faith under the Regency). King died in 1977 and appointed four of his family as a council of regents. Lastly, Leland Jensen (whose group is called "Bahá'ís under the Provisions of the Covenant") achieved brief public notoriety when he claimed that the world would experience a nuclear catastrophe in 1980 (Balch et al.). Small Remyite groups are now confined to a few states in the United States.

In about 1964 an Iranian named Jamshid Ma`ání put forward a claim to be a third Manifestation of God after the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. He produced writings which he claimed were divine revelation and called himself "The Man" and "Samá'u'lláh" and organized his supporters into "Houses of Mankind." He had a few supporters in Pakistan, but his principal supporter in the United States, John Carre, based in Mariposa, California, later rejected him. Another Iranian, Jamshid Meghnot, also put forward a claim to be a prophet but is not thought to have any followers.

There have been a number of episodes of opposition to the Bahá'í administration. In Germany, Hermann Zimmer resurrected the claims of Ruth White in a small book published in 1971 (English translation in 1973), *A Fraudulent Testament devalues the Bahá'í Religion*

into Political

Shogism. In Switzerland, Francesco Ficicchia wrote a comprehensive attack aimed mainly at the

Bahá' administration, *Der Bah'ismus Weltreligion der Zukunft?* (Evangelische Zentralstelle für

Weltanschauungsfragen, Quell Verlag, Stuttgart, 1981) . Both of these works were financed and

distributed by Evangelical Protestant organizations in Germany. Charles Seeburger set up a

similar group in Philadelphia in about 1967. There were plans to form an Association of Free

Bahá'ís (or the World Union of Universal Religion and Universal Peace) but it is not certain that

this ever came into being.

### G.3. Links between the different groups of Covenant-breakers.

One of the remarkable features of

the phenomenon of Covenant-breaking has been the extent to which the three generations of

Covenant-breakers have been in contact with one another. By three generations is meant:

First generation: Followers of Azal in his opposition to Bahá'u'lláh.

Second generation: Followers of Mírzá Muhammad `Alí in his opposition to `Abdu'l-Bahá.

Third generation: Opponents of Shoghi Effendi, both from within the family of `Abdu'l-Bahá and

others, such as Ahmad Sohrab, who opposed the Bahá'í administration.

In theory, the second generation, who accepted Bahá'u'lláh, should have had nothing to do with

the first generation followers of Azal, the enemy of Bahá'u'lláh. Similarly, the third generation,

accounting themselves loyal followers of `Abdu'l-Bahá, should have had nothing to do with the

second generation who were vehement opponents of `Abdu'l-Bahá; even less should they support

the first generation. But in fact strong links formed between these generations.

The various marriages arranged between the grandchildren of `Abdu'l-Bahá and the sons of

Sayyid `Alí Afnán first established the links between the second and third generation. Jalál Azal,

who was a grandson of Mírzá Yahyá Azal and became a strong proponent of the Azalí position,

may be regarded as a representative of the first generation. He married `Ismat,

the daughter of Badî u'lláh, representing the second generation. These two, together with `Ismat's sister, Qamar, made a concerted effort to unite all three generations of Covenant-breakers. Peter Berger reported in 1953 that Qamar "is now trying to unite all dissident Bahá'ís, whether Abbasite or "Unitarian" in background, in opposition to Shoghi" (Berger 140, n. 4). Riyád, Shoghi Effendi's brother, was in contact with Majdu'd-Dín and others of the second generation and visited Jalál Azal in Cyprus on four occasions. Yvonne, a daughter of `Izzu'd-Din Wudúd, as well as Mírzá Jalál, the grandson of Mírzá Músá Kalím, both second generation opponents, collaborated with Ahmad Sohrab, the New History Society, and the Caravan of East and West, third generation opponents. (MBW 16, Azal's Notes, see letters dated 21 Jun. 1968, 7 Jan. 1969)

#### G.4. A classification of types of Covenant-Breaking.

From the historical survey, it would appear that there are four main types of Covenant-breaking:

- a. Leadership challenge. These are persons who disputed the authority and legitimacy of the head of the religion and advanced claims either for themselves or for another. The main examples of these are Azal, Mírzá Muhammad `Alí, and Remey.
- b. Dissidence. Those who disagree with the policies and actions of the head of the religion without, however, advancing an alternative claim for leadership. This group consists mostly of opponents of the Bahá'í administration such as Ruth White, Ahmad Sohrab, and Hermann Zimmer.
- c. Disobedience. Those who disobeyed a direct instruction from the head of the religion. Often the instruction was to cease to associate with a Covenant-breaker. Examples of this type include most of the descendants of `Abdu'l-Bahá during Shoghi Effendi's time.
- d. Apostates who maliciously attack the Bahá'í Faith. Examples include Ávárih and Níkú.

#### G.5. Dealing with Covenant-breaking.

Both `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi were quite emphatic as to the attitude that should be taken by Bahá'ís towards Covenant-breakers:

". . . one of the greatest and most fundamental principles of the Cause of God is to shun and avoid entirely the Covenant-breakers, for they will utterly destroy the Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past" (WT 20). Covenant-breakers were described as persons who had an infectious spiritual disease and it was necessary therefore to avoid all contact with them (SoW 1921, 12:233) This spiritual quarantine could only be broken by the head of the Faith or on his instructions.

It is of interest that there has only been a gradual implementation of the sanctions against Covenant-breakers and those continuing to associate with them. Many of Bahá'u'lláh's writings contain passages instructing the Bahá'ís to avoid contacts with the Covenant-breakers (see passages quoted by `Abdu'l-Bahá in SoW 13:19-25). Despite this, Bahá'u'lláh seems to have made little effort to enforce such a teaching. During the whole of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry, there appear to have been extensive contacts between Bahá'ís and Azalís. In the first few years after Bahá'u'lláh put forward his claims, there was a series of open discussions between the two groups in various towns, each attempting to win the other over. Such meetings are known to have occurred in Baghdad, Tabriz, Qazvin, Shiraz, and Isfahan at least. There is some evidence that meetings were held and letters passed backwards and forwards between the two groups until a comparatively late date.

It was `Abdu'l-Bahá who moved the question of the Covenant to the forefront of the attention of the Bahá'ís and introduced the concept of Covenant-breaking. He expressed very strongly his wish that the Bahá'ís should break all contacts with the Covenant-breakers and sent envoys to try to encourage the Bahá'ís to do this. He rarely, however, imposed any sanctions upon those who maintained links.

The principal change that Shoghi Effendi introduced in the method of dealing with Covenant-breaking was to enforce the policy that whoever maintained links with Covenant-breakers himself

or herself became a Covenant-breaker. It was also Shoghi Effendi who established the institutional forms for dealing with Covenant-breaking when he designated this as one of the responsibilities of the Hands of the Cause in conjunction with the National Spiritual Assemblies, although the final decision always lay with him (MBW 122-3).

At present the institutions of the Bahá'í Faith are primarily responsible for dealing with any episodes of Covenant-breaking that arise, in particular the Hands of the Cause, the Continental Board of Counselors (q.v.), and their Auxiliary Boards. Individual Bahá'ís may take no action other than reporting any concerns they have to these institutions. These then investigate the matter but the final decision lies with the Universal House of Justice.

#### H. Summary

The concept of the covenant in the Bahá'í Faith may be divided into two. The greater covenant involves recognizing the Manifestation of God and obeying his laws and teachings: "...according to the irrefutable texts, He [Bahá'u'lláh] has taken from us a firm covenant that we may live and act in accord with the divine exhortations, commands and lordly teachings." (TAB 1:42) This greater covenant also relates to the promise of a further Manifestation of God in the future: "Bahá'u'lláh made a covenant concerning a promised One who will become manifest after one thousand or thousands of years." (BWF 358) The second or lesser covenant relates to the succession in authority within the Bahá'í community first to `Abdu'l-Bahá then to Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. "He [Bahá'u'lláh] likewise, with His Supreme Pen, entered into a great Covenant and Testament with all the Bahá'ís whereby they were all commanded to follow the Center of the Covenant after His departure . . ." (BWF 358) `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi were given, under the provisions of this Covenant, the authority to give authoritative interpretation of the Bahá'í scripture; the Universal House of Justice has been given the authority to legislate in any areas which are not already covered by the Bahá'í scriptures.

Since the eventual aim of the Bahá'í Faith is to unite the world, it is clear that this could not be achieved if the Bahá'í Faith itself were divided. One of the most striking of the claims made by the Bahá'í Faith is that the religion is divinely protected from schism (PUP 455-6, WOB 145). Clearly this statement does not mean that it is impossible to set up a group that rejects the authority of the head of the religion since that has happened on numerous occasions. What it appears to mean is that, although it is possible for some to set up an independent group and to call themselves Bahá'ís, that group is like a branch that has been cut off from a tree--although it may appear alive and verdant, eventually, because it is cut off from its source of life, it will wither and die.

The main mechanism for this protection from schism is stated to be, first, the fact that the Covenant made by Bahá'u'lláh and his successors is clear and in writing; and second, through the methods established for dealing with Covenant-breakers.

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