

corrupting that plan by electing a legislature to govern instead of abiding by the succession of guardians prescribed by the founding prophet.

The mainstream Bahá'ís have responded with a lawsuit to bar the orthodox from calling themselves Bahá'í and from sharing the "The Greatest Name," a sacred and trademarked symbol. Bahá'ís believe they are not only safeguarding their identity, they are defending the truth with a capital T.

The orthodox say that is not a matter for the courts to decide.

The Bahá'ís first took breakaway believers to court in 1966 after a tumultuous time internally. Nine years earlier, Shoghi Effendi, guardian of the faith and a direct descendant of the founding prophet, had died unexpectedly and allegedly without tapping a successor.

Leaders decided that a Universal House of Justice envisioned by Effendi would oversee the faith. But shortly after the leaders announced their solution, one of them declared that Effendi actually had intended for him to be the next guardian. Charles Mason Remey, then in his 90s, said Effendi had addressed him in letters as his son or spiritual descendant.

The National Assembly of France and about 100 others followed Remey. But the rest of the Bahá'í community expelled him from the faith and successfully sued his followers, barring them from calling themselves Bahá'í and using the sacred symbol. Remey's group disbanded, but orthodox believers reorganized and continued to maintain the guardianship.

Thirty years later, Jeffrey Goldberg, a Bahá'í in Barrington, Ill., came upon the splinter group on the Internet. He became convinced that he had been duped by the mainstream Bahá'ís. Goldberg quietly resigned from the community — with no explanation, because he knew the consequences. When Bahai's are declared covenant-breakers, they are shunned or ostracized.

But Janice Franco wouldn't let Goldberg go that easily. She insisted on knowing why he left. After plunging herself into Bahá'í literature, Franco decided Goldberg might have a point.

Both Goldberg and Franco were declared covenant-breakers and shunned. Goldberg's wife was encouraged to divorce her husband.

In 2006, the mainstream Bahá'ís filed a lawsuit, accusing the orthodox believers of violating the court order issued 40 years earlier.

The Orthodox Bahá'ís insist they aren't the same group. They also say a religious denomination can't trademark truth. The term Bahá'í refers to a follower of Bahá'u'lláh. That applies to them, they say.

Though the mainstream denomination would not explain why it waited four decades to enforce the court ruling, experts say modern missionary methods might be the reason. Barring the orthodox believers from using the name "Bahá'í" would keep them from popping up in a Google search.

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