

**Herald of the Covenant  
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The *HERALD OF THE COVENANT* is a publication of the Orthodox Bahá'í Faith. Its title is derived from the unique and peerless Covenant bequeathed to the Bahá'í world by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation—a Covenant designed to shield His Cause from man-made interpretations which in the history of all of the great religions of the past have been such a cause of schism and divisiveness.

The Editors of the *HERALD OF THE COVENANT* hope that this publication will bring to both the Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í reader a fuller comprehension and a deeper appreciation of the meaning, significance and implications of the mighty Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and the divinely conceived System for the regulation of men's affairs on this earth to which It gave birth.

Written especially for this issue by Joel B. Marangella, Third Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith





# THE TREE OF THE COVENANT OF BAHÁ'U' LLÁH

The world's extant religions have without exception fallen prey to sectarianism and schism that have preoccupied and divided their followers to such an extent that the true spirit of the Teachings of the Authors of their respective Revelations has been so obscured that the spiritual effect which these Teachings have had on the hearts of men has been progressively weakened. Sectarianism and schism have stemmed from differences over interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and the introduction into the original Teachings of man-made dogmas and rituals. Had the Founders of the past great religions made specific provisions concerning the matter of succession; that is, had they formally designated a successor or established a system whereby a successor or series of successors would have been endowed with unequivocal authority to interpret Holy Writ, there would have been no basis for the divisive interpretations that have sundered these Faiths ,even in early Christendom, the institution of the Papacy and hierarchy of the Church had as the sole basis for its authority their interpretation of the meaning of a verbal statement that Christ had made to His Apostle, Peter. While this authority remained unchallenged for centuries during which time the Church remained united, it was ultimately challenged by the Protestant

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movement with the result that today Christianity finds itself divided into hundreds of sects.

The distinguishing characteristic of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is a Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh made with His followers to preserve and safe-guard the Faith, following His Ascension, from the divisive and baleful effect of varying interpretations which, as discussed above, have plagued the religions of the past and destroyed the unity of their followers. This Covenant embodied in a specific written Testament designated by Him as the Book of His (Covenant (Kitáb-i-'Ahd) has no parallel in the Scriptures of any previous Dispensation. In this unique Document, Bahá'u'lláh conferred the mantle of authority upon His Ascension on the shoulders of His son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Whom He designated as the Center of His Covenant and **"The Most Great Branch"** Further in the Most Holy Book of His Revelation (Kitáb-i-Aqdas) He proclaimed: **"When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your Faces towards Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root."** Lest there be any misunderstanding as to the intent of the above quoted passage, Bahá'u'lláh clarified it in the Book of His Covenant in these Words: **"The object of this sacred verse is none other except the most Mighty Branch ('Abdu'l-Bahá)"** Again in His Tablet of the Branch (Suriy-i-Ghusn). Bahá'u'lláh declares: **"There hath branched from the Sadratu'l-Muntahá (a reference to the Manifestation) this sacred and glorious Being, this Branch of Holiness."** And Bahá'u'lláh declares in this same Tablet: **"Verily the Limb of the Law of God hath sprung forth from this Root which God hath firmly implanted in the Ground of His Will and whose Branch hath been so uplifted as to encompass the whole of creation."**

The first Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith in his work entitled The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh describes the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the following terms: **"He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh'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 Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God."**

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The Ancient Root referred to in the above quoted passages is the Manifestation of God in this Dispensation, Bahá'u'lláh. This Root is ancient for it applies to all of the Manifestations or Prophets of God Who have been appointed by Him down through the ages to be His chosen Intermediary or Mouthpiece, and Who have revealed to mankind those Laws and Teachings requisite to its needs at the time According to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh all of these Prophets are seated upon the same throne and voice the one eternal Word of God. Therefore, in reality, They are One. The only difference between these divine Luminaries has been in the measure of God's Revelation They have imparted to mankind in accordance with His Will and in the differing social Laws They have prescribed based on the exigencies of the time.

In analogical terms, the Cause of God brought by These Manifestations may be likened to a Tree. This Tree of the Cause of God has sprung from the Ancient Root in each Dispensation. This Tree has been the Tree of Life to those who have accepted the Manifestation in every age, and therefore these believers may be considered as The branches, leaves and fruits of this Tree from which they have derived their spiritual life and sustenance In past Dispensations, with the passage of time, this Tree has invariably fallen into a state of decay due to the blight of man-made interpretations, accretions and institutions that have sapped its vitality and corrupted its essence. Thus the followers of the Manifestations of God in each of their successive Dispensations have found themselves deprived of the pure spiritual nourishment flowing from the Ancient Root. Unlike the Dispensations of the past, the Tree of Bahá'u'lláh's Cause has been forever protected from the spiritual diseases that have ultimately consumed the Tree of the Cause of God in those Dispensations. For Bahá'u'lláh made a specific, clear, and binding Covenant with His followers concerning the matter of Succession. Fidelity to this Covenant has been made identical with faithfulness to His Cause. Therefore, the analogy of the Tree of the Cause of God may be applied to the Covenant and in this case the Tree of the Cause becomes synonymous with the Tree of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh (the student will find many references to the Tree of the Covenant in the Bahá'í Writings). With this understanding of the significance of the Tree of the Covenant, such terms as the "**Most Great Branch** " and the "**Limb of the Law of God**"

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with which Bahá'u'lláh has designated 'Abdu'l-Bahá, now become clear and meaningful. If we consider the spiritual relationships that exist between the several parts of this Tree of the Covenant we find it unlike any Tree that has existed in past Dispensations. Of this unique and wonderful Tree, Bahá'u'lláh is the Ancient Root from which has sprung the Primal Branch or Greatest Branch; that is His appointed Successor and the Center of His Covenant, 'Abdu'l-Bahá “**a Branch**” that hath been so uplifted as to encompass the whole of creation” and the “**Most Mighty Branch of God.**” (“The Guardians of the Faith who have been endowed with the same interpretive authority as had been vested in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in accordance with the explicit provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, may be regarded (and, in fact, are so designated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá) as the youthful branches or twigs which are the offshoots of the Primal Branch while the mass of faithful believers are the leaves and fruits of this glorious Tree.

From the above analogy it becomes clear that through the instrumentality first of the Most Great Branch, and then in the continuity of the Guardianship of the Faith throughout the duration of the Bahá'í Dispensation in which these lesser or subordinate branches carry on uninterruptedly, the interpretive authority of the Word of God, the Tree of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is forever protected and shielded from man-made corruption. These Guardians of the Faith (each of whom is appointed by his predecessor in his lifetime in accordance with the explicit provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá) <sup>1</sup> — these offshoots of the Primal Branch of the Tree of the Covenant, as faithful ministers to this Covenant, will assure that the spiritual nourishment and sustenance that flows from the Ancient Root is safeguarded throughout the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh from the introduction of man-made substances (interpretations, institutions, etc.) such as those which have caused the decay of the Tree of the Cause of God in past Dispensations. It may now be understood why those professed believers who cease to be faithful to the Covenant (for example: rebel against the Guardian of the Faith), cut themselves off from this Tree and become fallen leaves whose inevitable fate is to spiritually wither and die.

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Already, in the short and turbulent history of the Faith there have been many instances of ambitious, proud, or self-seeking individuals who have become unfaithful to the Covenant and who have made efforts to put an axe, so to speak, to the Tree of the Covenant. These violators of the Covenant have invariably failed. The greatest and most flagrant example of violation of the Covenant in the history of the Faith took place but a few years ago, and it dealt the Faith an almost mortal blow. It would have succeeded in destroying completely the Tree of the Covenant had it not been for the protection vouchsafed the Faith in the Institution of the Guardianship. This massive violation, from which the Faith still suffers sorely today, struck the Bahá'í world suddenly and unexpectedly.

It had its genesis in the events surrounding the passing in 1957 of the first Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani. During his lifetime the believers had espoused their fidelity to the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and to the "Child of that Covenant" - the Will and Testament statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Largely through the copious writings of Shoghi Effendi, they had come to understand and had avowed their belief in the absolute essentiality of the guardianship of the Faith. Yet, when they were faced with the first great test of their faith in the Covenant they were found wanting, quickly renounced their beliefs and were blindly led astray from the Covenant. Contributing to their downfall, as it is viewed in retrospect, is the fact that the mass of believers held certain preconceived ideas and misconceptions concerning the matter of succession which were contrary to the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. But, more critically, they permitted their adulation of the widow of the first Guardian and a small band of believers who had but a few years before his passing been elevated to the highest spiritual rank in the Faith (Hands of the Cause), to blind them to the truth. These Hands of the Cause led by the widow of the Guardian had become intoxicated in their new found rank and the adulation of the Bahá'ís throughout the world. They instigated a rebellion against the second Guardian, labelled him an impostor, declared provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá dealing with the matter of succession null and void (a Document designated by Shoghi Effendi as supplementary to the Most Holy Book of Bahá'u'lláh - the Aqdas), abrogated unto themselves prerogatives belonging solely to the

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Guardian of the Faith and audaciously installed an emasculated system of Bahá'í government in place of the divinely conceived System prescribed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will. The majority of the believers throughout the Bahá'í world followed these Hands of the Cause in their violation of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. Thus these believers not only severed themselves from the Tree of the Covenant but have been working assiduously to put an axe to the Tree of the Covenant and destroy It. The fate of such believers is foretold by the prophetic Pen of Bahá'u'lláh in His Tablet titled Tablet of the Branch, in which we find these Words:

***"They who deprive themselves of the shadow of the Branch are lost in the wilderness of error, are consumed by the heat of worldly desires and are of those who will assuredly perish. "***

The following Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were addressed to those who would become ***"Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh"***:

***"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... Had the Covenant not come to pass, had it not been revealed from the Supreme Pen and had not the Book of the Covenant, like unto the ray of the Sun of Reality, illuminated the world, the forces of the Cause of God would have been utterly scattered and certain souls who were prisoners of their own passions and lusts would have taken into their hands an axe, cutting the root of this Blessed Tree. "***

The following additional extract from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is considered a fitting conclusion to this theme:

***"As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh - a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past - it is the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant. By this appointment and provision***

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**He has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for any one to create a new sect or faction of belief. To insure unity and agreement He has entered into a Covenant with all the people of the world including the Interpreter and Explainer of His teachings so that no one may interpret or explain the religion of God according to his own view or opinion and thus create a sect founded upon his individual understanding of the divine words. The Book of the Covenant or Testament of Bahá'u'lláh is the means of preventing such a possibility, for whosoever shall speak from the authority of himself alone shall be degraded Be ye informed and cognizant of this. "**





## Statement of Beliefs of the Orthodox Bahá'ís Under the Living Guardianship

1. The Báb was the Herald of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and an independent Manifestation of God in His own right.
2. Bahá'u'lláh is the Universal Manifestation of God for this Day and the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation. His Laws and Teachings embodied in His written Works are unreservedly accepted as the revealed Word of God.
3. Bahá'u'lláh made a binding and indestructible Covenant with His followers in a written Will and Testament (Kitáb-i-'Ahd), also designated by Him as the "**Book of My Covenant**" in which they were enjoined to turn to His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, **the "most great Branch"**, after His ascension. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station was further confirmed in the Tablet of the Branch (Súriy-i-Ghusn) penned by Bahá'u'lláh in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá was referred to as "**this sacred and glorious Being**".. "**this Branch of Holiness**" and the "**Limb of the Law of God**" By virtue of this divine appointment, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is recognized as the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, His vicegerent on earth, the Executive of His authority, the Interpreter of His mind, the Focal Point of His unerring guidance, the Exemplar of His Faith and the Architect of His World Order.

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4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's greatest legacy to posterity and the brightest emanation of His mind was His Will and Testament, the "**Child of the Covenant**", and Charter of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh - "**the mightiest instrument forged to insure the continuity of the three ages which constitute the component parts of His Father's Dispensation.**" This immortal Document is considered supplementary to the Most Holy Book revealed by Bahá'u'lláh (the Kitáb-i-Aqdas) and as such constitutes a part of the explicit Holy Text, inviolate and never to be abrogated or altered in any way during the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.
  5. The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá established the Guardianship of the Faith as the supreme Institution of the Faith for he was designated the "**expounder of the words of God**" and **all of the believers were enjoined to show their "obedience, submissiveness and subordination unto the guardian of the Cause of God."** This Document declared that "**The mighty stronghold shall remain impregnable and safe through obedience to him who is the guardian of the Cause of God.**" The Universal House of Justice was established as the supreme legislative organ of the Administrative Order and the Guardian appointed the "**sacred head and the distinguished member for life of that body.**" In the words of the Will and Testament: "**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 and under the shelter an unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One**".
  6. The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá confers sole authority upon the Guardian of the Faith to appoint his successor For this reason, it is an hereditary office and while the Will states that the Guardian will appoint his first born son if he possesses the spiritual prerequisites, in the event that he does not, he is authorized to appoint another individual. This appointment must be made by the Guardian during his lifetime and announced to the believers. Thus the continuity of the Guardianship is preserved in an unbroken chain of guardians each appointed by his predecessor in office throughout the duration of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.

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7. The first Guardian of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, prior to his passing, appointed Charles Mason Remey the President of the first embryonic Universal House of Justice (titled in this embryonic stage as the International Bahá'í Council), thus designating his successor, as Presidency of the Universal House of Justice and Guardianship of the Faith are synonymous. Upon the passing of Shoghi Effendi in November 1957, this embryonic Institution came into active life and Charles Mason Remey as its Head became the second Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith.
  8. The second Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Charles Mason Remey, appointed Joel B. Marangella President of the second International Bahá'í Council on 21, September 1964, a body that was activated and brought into functioning life in October 1965 with an announcement of same appearing in the official publication of the Bahá'ís under the Guardianship at the time (**The Glad Tidings.**) Additionally, the second Guardian confirmed his appointment of Joel B. Marangella as the third Guardian in a hand-written letter under date of 5 December, 1961 and directed him to tell the Bahá'í world of this appointment at a time to be decided by him. The third Guardian of the Faith assumed his responsibilities as a result of a proclamatory letter sent to the Bahá'ís under the guardianship on 12 November, 1969
  9. Avowed Bahá'ís who espouse views and doctrines at variance with the above statement are not orthodox Bahá'ís and have placed themselves outside the true Faith.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian will appoint in his own life-time his successor. He will be the first born son if he possesses the spiritual qualifications; otherwise the Guardian will choose another who then becomes a "**branch**" of the Tree of the Covenant. For as 'Abdu'l-Bahá

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has said: "*The Divine Gardener cuts off the dry or weak branch from the good tree and grafts to it a branch from another tree.*"

