



subjects are generally succinct, important laws often being given in a sentence or two. The book as a whole is quite short: the full English translation occupies seventy pages.

3. Contents: Although the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* is often referred to as Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws, this is misleading, especially to a reader unfamiliar with Islamic law and the Qur'an. First, much of the content deals with other matters--notably ethical exhortations and addresses to various individuals, groups, and places. Second, it is not a systematic legal treatise. Subjects are dealt with seemingly at random. While a few subjects are dealt with in detail, notably inheritance and marriage, other topics of comparable importance are treated only briefly, and Bahá'u'lláh's statements about them are scarcely comprehensible without reference to Islamic and Babi law and to other works of Bahá'u'lláh. Third, the *Aqdas* contains religious law in the Islamic sense.

Much

attention is given to matters that might not be considered law at all, such as obligatory prayer and fasting, while other topics, such as contract law, central to secular legal systems, are not mentioned at all. Finally, many of the specific legal statements are simply abrogations of particular Islamic and Babi laws and customs. Thus, the *Aqdas* is less like a code of religious law than a constitution, with many laws stated succinctly in the text of the *Aqdas* and developing greatly and sometimes in unexpected ways in later Bahá'í literature and practice. In style and content the *Aqdas* is to be compared to the Qur'an, a work in which legislation is often alluded to rather than expounded and in which disparate topics are placed together without obvious logic. In the case of the Qur'an, this may be because it is pieced together from many distinct revelations, some very short. The *Aqdas* follows the stylistic conventions of the Qur'an, and thus is not bound to a rigid outline, but it may also have been shaped by similar factors. While there is no detailed description of the composition of the *Aqdas*, it is known to have been written over a period of time (see above), and Bahá'u'lláh alludes in the text to letters from believers asking about laws (KA 98:55-6). It seems possible that the text grew gradually from a nucleus of the initial section (KA 1-17:19-25), a self-contained text beginning with a general discussion of religious law and laying down the regulations of obligatory prayer and fasting, two laws which Bahá'u'lláh links in his writing and on which he places special emphasis. According to this theory, Bahá'u'lláh would gradually have added material, probably often in answer to specific questions asked by believers. It is difficult otherwise to explain why the law of marriage and divorce should be followed by a prohibition of slave trading, a condemnation of strife and murder, and a clarification of the laws of ritual purity (KA 72:45ff). It is difficult likewise to explain why particular Babi and Islamic laws, some rather obscure, should have been chosen for specific abrogation except on the assumption that Bahá'u'lláh was asked about them. The laws of the *Aqdas* somewhat resemble those of Islam and the Bab, but the personal laws are considerably less rigorous than either. The *Aqdas* tends to replace specific ordinances with general spiritual and moral principles. Except in certain

specific areas--notably prayer, fasting, marriage, and inheritance--much of the legislation of the Aqdas relates to the community as a whole or is of a relatively general character, while many of the more specific ordinances either abrogate older laws or prohibit specific offensive practices.

### Subjects

discussed in the Aqdas may be categorized under the following headings:

#### The

station of religious law: The Aqdas begins with a proclamation of the inseparable duties of recognizing the Manifestation of God (q.v.) for the age and obedience to his laws. Bahá'u'lláh mentions related topics often in the Aqdas, notably in a passage on liberty and obedience to divine law (KA 122-25:63-4).

Establishment of Bahá'í administrative institutions: Almost all the major Bahá'í administrative institutions are at least foreshadowed in the Aqdas. Bahá'u'lláh indicates in the Aqdas that he would appoint one of his sons as his

successor and his interpreter (KA 121:63, 174:82; see "Covenant"). The guardianship (q.v.) is foreshadowed in the role given to his descendants in the administration of charitable endowments (KA 42:34-5). He instructs the Bahá'ís

to establish a House of Justice in each city where there are at least nine believers (KA 30:29). Bahá'u'lláh seems to refer to a House of Justice that is

the supreme authority over the Bahá'í community (KA 42:34-5), an institution explicitly referred to in a later text (KA 91). The Huququ'llah (q.v.), the religious tax that is a major source of the revenue of the Universal House of Justice, is also established in the Aqdas (KA 97:55); its details are found in Questions and Answers. The Nineteen Day Feast (q.v), which in modern Bahá'í communities is the most important community gathering, is also a development of a practice mentioned briefly in the Aqdas (KA 57:40).

Bahá'í religious practices: The major Bahá'í religious practices are enjoined in the Aqdas. Obligatory prayer (q.v., salat) and fasting (q.v.) are commanded in the Aqdas. Although the Aqdas does not contain the texts of the obligatory prayers, it does contain many regulations relating to them, such as specifying those on whom they are binding and the conditions of ritual purity (q.v.). Other practices such as pilgrimage (q.v., hajj), communal morning prayers (mashriqu'l-adhkar, q.v.), funeral laws (q.v.), and the religious calendar (q.v.) are also commanded in the Aqdas with more or less detail. Several Bahá'í holy days are established or endorsed.

Laws of personal status: The Aqdas deals in detail with marriage (q.v.), divorce (q.v.), and inheritance (q.v.). These are matters that in Islamic countries fell under the authority of religious rather than civil law. In each of these areas, Bahá'u'lláh's laws are modifications of those of the Bayan (q.v.).

Criminal law: Punishments for the crimes of murder, manslaughter, arson, theft, and adultery are specified (see Crime and Punishment.3").

Miscellaneous laws and abrogations: Many of the laws in the Aqdas repeal Islamic, Babi, and occasionally Christian laws and customs--for example, the Aqdas prohibits muttering prayers in the streets, using the public pools in Iranian baths, destroying books, and kissing hands as a sign of respect. While many of these topics may seem incongruous to a modern western reader, they undoubtedly represent practices offensive to Bahá'u'lláh or are responses to questions that had been raised by Bahá'ís.

Ethical exhortations: Except for certain areas such as obligatory prayer, Bahá'u'lláh clearly prefers general ethical principles to specific regulation--in contrast to the Islamic law of his day, which included precise rules for every aspect of life. Thus there are many passages in the Aqdas urging virtues such as truthfulness, courteousness, tact, perseverance, and the like (see "Ethical Teachings"). Sometimes, abrogations of specific laws are accompanied by exhortations to virtuous behavior--thus replacing a specific religious law with an ethical principle. For example, the Islamic prohibition on listening to music is abolished and the question of music is brought under the general principle of moderation and temperance.

Social principles: Some social principles are given in the Aqdas-- the command to show friendship to those who believe in other religions, the stress on the education of children, and the command to have a useful occupation and to study useful arts and sciences. Further social and political principles can be inferred from the addresses to kings and rulers and perhaps from the details of laws such as those of marriage, education, and the division of inheritance.

Addresses to individuals, groups, and places: The Aqdas was written at about the same time as Bahá'u'lláh's tablets to kings and rulers and contains passages addressed to humanity, kings, parliamentarians, and ecclesiastics in general. It also contains passages addressed to the Kaiser of Germany, the Emperor of Austria, and the leaders of the American republics. It addresses the Azali Babis and Bahá'u'lláh's brother Azal (q.v.) in particular. It apostrophizes several places, including Constantinople, Tehran, Germany, Khurasan, and Kirman. A number of other individuals are also alluded to in various passages.

Prophecies: Prophecies are made in the book that Istanbul will fall; that the "Banks of the Rhine" will be "covered with gore, inasmuch as the swords of retribution were drawn against you"; that this will occur twice and the "lamentations of Berlin" will be heard; and that Tehran will be blessed with "one who will rule with justice."

4. Related works: The laws of the Aqdas are supplemented by the Questions and Answers, which consists of 107 questions submitted to Bahá'u'lláh by Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin (q.v.) concerning the application of the laws of the Aqdas and Bahá'u'lláh's replies to those questions. The social principles of the

Aqdas are amplified by a series of major tablets revealed in Akka (collected as Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh). A great many tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Baha and letters of Shoghi Effendi clarify and supplement specific points in the Aqdas.

5. Significance and influence: The Aqdas is the most important Bahá'í book and the basis for almost every distinctive feature of the Bahá'í community. Bahá'u'lláh himself refers to it as the "source of true felicity," the "Unerring Balance," the "Straight Path," and the "quickener of mankind" (GPB 215). Evidently, many Bahá'ís were anxious to implement the laws of the Aqdas, for in several tablets dated soon after its release, Bahá'u'lláh cautioned against doing so unwisely. In the West the Aqdas appeared in a manuscript translation by Anton Haddad in about 1900 and seems to have been an important source of early American Bahá'í administrative practice and understanding of Bahá'í teaching, especially before contact with `Abdu'l-Bahá became routine (Stockman, Bahá'í Faith in America, vol. 2, forthcoming). The question of the degree to which the laws of the Aqdas are currently binding on Bahá'ís is discussed under "Law, Bahá'í."

6. Manuscripts, editions, translations, and related texts: Bahá'u'lláh, `Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice each discouraged indiscriminate circulation of the Aqdas. Thus, apart from two early editions printed in India, the Aqdas has never been published by the Bahá'í community in Arabic and only recently has it become available in full translation in English. Translations into other languages are presently being undertaken.

Manuscripts: When `Abdu'l-Bahá was asked which manuscript of the Aqdas should be regarded as authoritative, he stated that the accurate text of the book is the one transcribed by Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin (q.v., AVK 1:11). A manuscript of the Aqdas in the hand of `Abdu'l-Bahá also exists (see frontispiece of RB3). Less authoritative manuscripts of the Aqdas are common.

Arabic editions: The Kitab-i-Aqdas was first published in Bombay in 1308/1891 on the instructions of Bahá'u'lláh. Since then there have been several other editions (Bombay, Cairo, Tehran: n.p., n.d., 187 pp.); Aqdas-i-Buzurg (Bombay: n.p., 1314/1896), containing several other important Arabic tablets. Non-Bahá'í editions include: Kitab-i-Aqdas, ed. Kh. A. Enayat (1st ed.; Baghdad: Maktabatu'l-Amrikaniyyah, 1349/1931); "Al-Aqdas," in `Abdu'r-Razzaq al-Hasani, Al-Babiyun wa'l-Bahá'iyun (Sidon, 1957, pp. 150-72).

The legal passages are collected with supplementary material from Questions and Answers and other tablets in Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjiniy-i-Hudud va Ahkam. The messages to kings and rulers may be found in Alvah-i-Nazilih Khitab bi-Muluk va-Ru'asay-i-Ard (Athar Qalam A`la). Several pages of one manuscript are reproduced in Miller, The Bahá'í Faith.

Partial and non-Bahá'í Translations: Shoghi Effendi translated most of the passages of general interest, comprising perhaps a third of the whole in works such as *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* and *Promised Day is Come* (see SCK 11-28). A number of short passages were later translated under the auspices of the Universal House of Justice. Anton Haddad's translation was never published though it enjoyed considerable circulation in typescript in the early American community and is still occasionally found. Non- Bahá'í translations include Earl E. Elder and William McE. Miller, *Al-Kitab al-Aqdas* or the Most Holy Book (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1961), 74 pp., reprinted in Miller, *The Bahá'í Faith*, and a Russian translation by Alexander Tumanski, *Kitabe Akdes* (*Zapiski Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk S. Peterburg* [Mmoires de L'Acadmie Impriale des Sciences de St Petersburg] 8th ser., Vol. 3, No. 6, 1899) prepared with the help of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani (q.v.).

Full authorized English translation: In 1986 the Universal House of Justice made the publication of a full annotated translation of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* a goal of the Six Year Plan (see "Plans"). A task force was established at the Bahá'í World Centre to undertake the project. The lead translator was Mark Hellaby, a British Arabist employed at the World Centre. The appearance of the translation in March 1993 was a major event in the Bahá'í world. Copies were sent to many non-Bahá'í intellectuals in order to elicit reviews. The translation was the most sophisticated edition of a piece of Bahá'í scripture produced up to that time. The full translations of *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and *Questions and Answers* occupied less than half the volume. The remaining contents included an introduction to the text by the Universal House of Justice, several shorter supplementary texts, the outline synopsis first published by the Universal House of Justice in 1973, extensive explanatory notes to the various texts, a glossary, and an analytical index. The text employed a system of paragraph numbering intended to facilitate reference to the text independent of language and edition.

Related Works: As a preliminary to a full annotated translation of the *Aqdas*, Shoghi Effendi had begun work on a synopsis and codification of the laws of the *Aqdas*. On the basis of his outline and preliminary notes, the House of Justice completed the work and published it as *A Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitab-i-Aqdas* in 1973 in fulfillment of a goal of the Nine Year Plan (see "Plans"). This work contains all the passages translated by Shoghi Effendi, a detailed outline of the contents of the *Aqdas* and *Questions and Answers*, and explanatory notes. It is now incorporated into the authorized translation of the *Aqdas*.

## Bibliography

For detailed summaries of the contents of the *Aqdas* see GPB 213-16, SCKA (both reprinted in KA 12-16, 141-64), and RB 3, chap. 13-17. Kamran Ekbal, "Kitab-i-Aqdas: redating its beginning," unpublished paper. An excellent account of the place of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* in the writings and thought of Bahá'u'lláh is "Kitab-i-Aqdas: Its Place in Bahá'í literature," *Bahá'í World*

Centre Publications, reprinted in *The American Bahá'í*, Kamal 150/1 August 1993, pp. 12-13. Other works include: *Badí`u'llah Farid, Maqalih dar Mu`arifiy-i-Kitab-i-Aqdas*, 2nd ed. Wilmette, Ill.: Persian American Affairs Office, National Spiritual Assembly of United States, 1993.

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