



## AQDAS

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**AQDAS**, more fully *al-Ketāb al-aqdas* (Pers. *Ketāb-e aqdas*), “The Most Holy Book,” written in Arabic by Bahā’allāh, the founder of the Bahā’ī religion. Bahā’allāh wrote it soon after he was released from imprisonment in the barracks of Acre (Palestine) and transferred to the house of ‘Ūdī Ḳammār (ca. 1873). Among Bahā’allāh’s writings this book is particularly venerated as the essential formulation of Bahā’ī law. The text amounts to no more than fifty pages in Arabic script; in style it is somewhat similar to the monotheistic scriptures, especially the Qur’ān. A non-Bahā’ī reader may be struck by the apparent lack of order in the sequence of precepts, exhortations, and warnings. The provisions of the *Aqdas* cover three basic areas: 1) the function of Bahā’allāh’s son and successor ‘Abbās Effendi ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ as “infallible interpreter” of the holy scripture; 2) the Bahā’ī administrative order structure in a pyramid of “Houses of Justice” (*boyūt al-‘adl*) elected by the believers; 3) civil, penal, moral, and religious laws to be integrated with authoritative interpretation and administrative function. In addition, there are religious exhortations to all believers in general and to particular rulers of the age.

Concerning civil and religious laws, the *Aqdas* prescribes obligatory prayers (*ṣalāt*, Pers. *namāz*); designates the time and period of fasting (nineteen days before *Nowrūz*, i.e., 2-21 March); prohibits congregational prayers other than those for the dead; fixes the *qebla* (direction of prayer) toward Acre; institutes the *ḥoqūq Allāh* (“rights of God,” a part of one’s income voluntarily given to the common funds); formulates laws for inheritance; ordains the institution of *mašreq al-aḏkār* (Bahā’ī houses of worship, of which there are now five in



various parts of the world); confirms the calendar of nineteen days each (plus four or five intercalary days) given by the *Bāb*; establishes festivals; abolishes the institution of priesthood; prohibits slavery, asceticism, mendicancy, monasticism, penance, the use of pulpits, and kissing of hands; condemns cruelty to animals, idleness, sloth, backbiting, and calumny; forbids gambling and the use of opium and wine and other intoxicating drinks; specifies the punishments for murder, arson, adultery, and theft; imposes the obligation of practicing some trade or profession; emphasizes the necessity of providing for the education of children and confers upon every person the duty of writing a testament and strictly obeying the government of the time. Bahā'allāh also exhorts his followers to embrace the adherents of all religions with amity and concord; warns them to guard against fanaticism, sedition, pride, dispute, and contention; and encourages cleanliness, truthfulness, chastity, trustworthiness, hospitality, fidelity, courtesy, forbearance, justice, and fairness. He dwells on the instability of human affairs and declares that true liberty consists in human submission to God's commandments. Finally, the *Aqdas* contains a summons to the presidents of the republics of the American continent to champion the cause of justice; an injunction to the members of the parliaments throughout the world to an auxiliary universal language and script; warnings to Wilhelm I of Prussia, the conqueror of Napoleon III; reproofs to Franz Joseph, emperor of Austria; and the condemnation of the "throne of tyranny" established in Constantinople, while predicting the extinction of its splendor.

The general religious inspiration of the *Aqdas* is monotheistic. As the first verse clearly states, even good works, if separated from the channel of the positive Revelation, have a limited value: "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 represents the Godhead in both the kingdom of His cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieves this duty has attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof has gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed."

According to a general evolutionary principle that can be seen to underlie Bahā'ī teachings, the *Aqdas* constitutes an energetic impulse rather than a rigid canonical code. It foresees the future abrogation of its own dispensation, but "not before a thousand years." Laws that are not specified in the *Aqdas* may be promulgated by the Universal House of Justice and changed, if necessary, in response to historical conditions. Subsidiary ordinances



designed to supplement the provisions of the *Aqdas* appear in other works by Bahā'allāh, including the Persian *Questions and Answers (So'āl wa ĵawāb)*, which constitutes an appendix to the *Aqdas*.

There is at present no complete authorized translation of the *Aqdas* in any European language. In 1973 the Universal House of Justice issued an annotated summary with an introduction and selected translations by Shoghi Effendi (d. 1957), the former Guardian of the Bahā'ī Cause (Bahā'ī World Centre, *A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitāb-i-Aqdas of Bahá'u'lláh*, Haifa). The English translation by the Christian missionaries E. E. Elder and W. M. Miller (*Al-Kitāb al-Aqdas or The Most Holy Book*, London, Royal Asiatic Society Oriental Translation Fund, N.S., 38, 1961) is complete but not always correct, especially in the notes. The older Russian version is more reliable (Arabic ed. and Russian tr. A. Tumanskiĭ, *Zapiski Imp. Akademii Nauk*, Hist.-Phil. Class, ser. 8, VI, St. Petersburg, 1899).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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See also Shoghi Effendi, *God passes By*, Wilmette, Ill., 1950 (with summary of the contents of the *Ketāb-eAqdas* from a Bahā'ī viewpoint).

(A. Bausani)