



AYĀDĪ-E AMR ALLĀH

AYĀDĪ-E AMR ALLĀH, “Hands of the Cause of God” (sing. also *ayādī*, normally preceded by the reverential term *ḥaẓrat*), term used in Baha’ism to designate the highest rank of the appointed religious hierarchy. In early Babism, an attempt was made to establish a hierarchical system based on eighteen groups of nineteen believers under the overall authority of a nineteenth group consisting of the **Bāb** and his first eighteen disciples, the Letters of the Living (*ḥorūf al-ḥayy*) or Foregoers (*sābeqūn*); but there is no evidence that, apart from the latter group, this system was ever made effective. Later Bābi writings such as the Persian *Bayān* and *Panj ša’n* speak of “mirrors” (*marāyā*), “glasses” (*bolūrīyāt*), “guides” (*adellā*), “letters” (*ḥorūf*, *ḥorūfāt*), and “witnesses” (*šohadā*) (see *Panj ša’n*, pp. 34, 63, 102, 120, 128, 131, 134-35, 136, 149, 163, 176, 184-85, 193, 200, 209, 235, 247, 257, 280; *Bayān-e fārsī*, pp. 82, 89, 90, 91, 165, 180); but no systematic attempt seems to have been made to create an organized structure based on any of these groupings. In the 1850s, Mīrzā Yaḥyā Šobḥ-e Azal, as the generally-recognized successor of the Bāb, did attempt to organize a system of agents, to whom he gave the title *šohadā*, but this never developed into a permanent leadership cadre. With the emergence of Baha’ism in a context of conflicting claims to leadership within the Bābi community, any attempt to formalize a hierarchy was abandoned. In reinforcement of his own claim to be the messianic fulfillment of Babism, **Bahā’allāh** argued that the Bāb had abrogated the rank of successor (*waṣī*) and that in the *Bayān* only “letters” and “mirrors” had been named, the latter being “unlimited” (*mārāyā rā ham maḥdūd na-farmūda-and*; *Lawḥ-e serāj*, p. 40). As the new movement developed, however, it became necessary to delegate



certain essential religious functions to various individuals and, towards the end of Bahā'allāh's life, two small groups emerged as possible nuclei for a more developed hierarchical structure. These were known as Names of God (*asmā' Allāh*; e.g., *esm-Allāh al-mīm*, *esm Allāh al-jamāl*) and Hands of the Cause of God. The latter group consisted of four individuals: Ḥājji Mollā 'Alī-Akbar Šahmīrzādī, Ḥājji Mīrzā Moḥammad-Taqī Abharī (Ebn Abhar), Mīrzā Moḥammad-Ḥasan Adīb-al-'olamā', and Mīrzā 'Alī-Moḥammad (Ebn Ašdaq). Their functions seem to have been to promulgate Baha'ism, to organize the community of believers in Iran, to advance arguments against opponents (particularly against the Azali Bābis), and to preserve doctrinal unity.

On the death of Bahā'allāh in 1892, the rank of *esm Allāh* seems to have fallen into desuetude (partly through defection), but the four Hands continued to function under the direction of Bahā'allāh's son and successor 'Abd-al-Bahā'. The latter referred in writing to a number of individuals as *ayādī*, but made no formal appointments to this position. He did, however, define their functions more clearly in his Will and Testament (*Alwāḥ-e waṣāyā*), where he also indicated that his successor, the future Guardian of the Cause (*walīy-e amr Allāh*), was to appoint such individuals and direct their activities. In effect, these Hands were to form a religious aristocracy under the leadership of the head of the faith. Shoghi Effendi, who succeeded to the position of *walī* in 1921, made only eight posthumous appointments, for the most part westerners, between then and 1951. In that year, he appointed twelve living Hands, three each in Israel, Iran, America, and Europe. In 1952 the number was raised to nineteen, a figure maintained by new appointments following the deaths of several individuals until 1957, when the total was again raised to twenty-seven. On the death of Shoghi Effendi in November, 1957, it was the Hands as a whole rather than the International Bahā'i Council in Haifa which assumed interim control of the affairs of the religion. Following a Conclave in Haifa in late November, it was announced that Shoghi Effendi had left no will and no heir and that there could be no succession. A body of nine Hands, designated Custodians of the Faith, remained in Israel to direct Bahā'i affairs internationally; these include Mason Remey, president of the International Bahā'i Council, who in 1960 claimed to be the "Second Guardian" of the faith, as a result of which he was excommunicated by his fellow Hands. Further Conclaves of the entire body of Hands were held annually (except for 1962) until 1963, when the election of the first Universal House of Justice (*bayt al-'adl al-a'zam*) took place. This latter body now took overall charge of the Bahā'i community, including the direction of the work of the Hands which was now



concerned principally with the areas of propagation and protection of the faith. Significantly, the authority to excommunicate or reinstate dissidents continued to rest with the body of the Hands, subject to the approval of the House of Justice.

In 1968 an important development occurred when the House of Justice, seeking to overcome the problems raised by the fact that they could not, technically, appoint further Hands (something only another Guardian could do), established eleven Continental Boards of Counselors (*hay'āt-e mošāwerīn-e qārrā'ī*) in order to extend the functions of the Hands into the future. This new institution has since grown in numbers and influence, with responsibility for regionally-appointed Auxiliary Boards (*hay'āt-e mo'āwenat*, originally created in 1954 to assist the Hands), themselves now seconded by Assistants (*mosā'edān*) in individual localities. An International Teaching Center (*dār al-tablīg-e bayn-al-melalī*), composed of Hands and Counselors and based in Haifa, was created in 1973. As the surviving Hands die out, the influence and authority of the Counselors appear to grow.

It is of interest to note how this increased administrative complexity has been interpreted in official Bahā'ī pronouncements. The Universal House of Justice, National Assemblies, and Local Assemblies together constitute the rulers (*omarā'*) of the community (and, of course, of the predicted Bahā'ī World State), while the Hands, Counselors and Auxiliary Board Members (with their Assistants) are the learned (*'olamā'*). Thus, although according to the prescriptive theory Baha'ism is without a formal clergy, there does, in fact, exist a hierarchical organization which differs from the clergy of other religions only to the extent that one clergy does from another. Trained scholars for the purpose, however, are conspicuous by their absence from the ranks of the Bahā'ī *'olamā'*, a fact of sociological significance. Although the members of this hierarchy have little official power, they do, in fact, wield considerable influence within the Bahā'ī community and are treated with considerable deference.

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