**AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS**

**IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE BAHA’I WORLD FAITH**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of

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in Partial Fulfillment of the

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of

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by

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**ABSTRACT**

AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

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The Baha’i World Faith, originating in Persia in 1844 and now

extending around the world, has undergone extraordinary changes in its

evolution to its present stage of development. Baha’is freely acknow-

ledge the evolutionary character of their religion, which results in

periodic outdating of previous teachings and practice. Edward G. Browne,

Cambridge University, wrote in 1910 that “few religions have undergone

so rapid an evolution ….” No less spectacular have been the develop-

ments in the religion since Browne made that statement.

The dissertation focuses on the major transformations which have

occurred in the religion during the faith’s 130-year history with a view

toward ascertaining the religion’s character and its present slate of

development, giving particular attention to the opposition each transfor-

mation aroused, the tensions in the faith it produced, and the adjustments

it necessitated. These transformations were affected by the successive

leaders in the faith, and each transformation was of a critical nature,

producing a majority who accepted and a minority who rejected each

transformation. The study has particular relevance concerning the reli-

gion’s claim that, unlike other religions, it is protected from schism.

Briefly defined, the transformations dealt with are the following:

(1) Baha’u’llah’s transformation of the Babi religion into the Baha’i faith;

(2) ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s transformation of the faith into a more Western and

socially oriented religion with Christian overtones; (3) Shoghi Effendi’s

transformation of the religion from its loosely organized, inclusive, and

universal character into a tightly organized, exclusive, and narrowly defined

religions and (4) a final transformation from a religion under the guardian-

ship of an appointed, living descendant of Baha’u’llah to a religion directed

by a body of nine elected officials whose term of office is temporary.

The study is divided into three parts. Part I deals with introduc-

tory matters, a general introduction (Chapter I) and a review of previously

written histories on the Babi-Baha’i movement to which references are made

in later sections of the dissertation, giving attention to the different

perspectives from which they are written and their relative values in pro-

viding accurate information about the faith’s history (Chapter II). Part II

on the birth and early history of the Babi-Baha’i movement covers the minis-

tries of the Bab (Chapter III), Baha’u’llah (Chapter IV), and ‘Abdu’l-Baha

(Chapter V) and the transformations of the faith effected within their

ministries. Part III deals with “modern Baha’i,” the faith as an institu-

tionalized religion, treating the ministries of Shoghi Effendi (Chapter VI)

and the Universal House of Justice (Chapter VII) and their transformations.

Appended to the dissertation are two letters discovered in the

course of the research, both dated March 31, 1901, from Muhammad ‘Ali and

Badi‘u’llah to the recently formed “Society of Behaists” and to the “presi-

dent of the House of Justice.”

To Dee

in appreciation for your

love, faith, and sacrifice

during the years of graduate study

**PREFACE**

My first awareness of the Baha’i World Faith was in reading a

question and answer section of the *Catholic Digest* (“What Would You Like

to Know about the Church?”) in the January, 1964, issue while I was a

student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. A reader had asked

how the Baha’i religion compared with Roman Catholicism, particularly in

their views of revelation. Included in the answer was a brief statement

of the history and teachings of the Baha’i faith. I immediately was

impressed with the faith’s broad concept of revelation that God had

revealed himself successively through the founders of most of the major,

living religions. I made no further inquiry into Baha’i, however, until

I enrolled in the graduate program in religion at Baylor University and

again encountered the religion as one of a number of religious movements

treated in a course I took in the spring, 1965, taught by Dr. James K.

Wood. Jr., who became my major professor. With Dr. Wood’s encouragements,

I began research into the Baha’i faith.

My first meeting with Baha’is was in the home of Mr. and Mrs.

Gordon Dobbins, Fort Worth, Texas. I later visited the Baha’i temple in

Wilmette, Illinois, on my way to and from a session at Davison Baha’i

summer school, Davison, Michigan (August 15-19, 1966). These were the

first of various personal contacts with Baha’is. I also attended the

Bridgeport Baha’i summer school, near Fort Worth, in the summer, 1970.

As research into the faith progressed, the need for deciding on

a particular topic of inquiry concerning the faith became more pressing.

The subject of the present dissertation on the transformations in the

faith’s evolution has undergone its own evolution. I first planned to write

on “the Baha’i Concept of Unity” and even prepared a “pilot study” for a

class on this projected topic. I felt later that I should narrow this sub-

ject to “the Baha’i Concept of the Unity of Mankind.” But the more I studied

the religion the more fascinated I became with its history and with an emerg-

ing pattern in the religion’s development. I became aware of a series of

“transformations” which had occurred in the religion. The most obvious was

Baha’u’llah’s transformation of the Babi movement into the Baha’i religion,

but J. R. Richards, who wrote a book on Baha’i in 1932, spoke also of a

transformation under ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Baha’u’llah’s son and successor. A

study of the religion’s later history revealed that transformations also

had taken place in the latter two stages of the religion’s evolution. I

proposed at this point to write on “Critical Transformations of the Baha’i

Religion through Its Successive Leadership.” To define more the nature of

the dissertation and to give more emphasis to the evolutionary aspect of

the faith, I finally decided on the present topic, which was approved by

the faculty of the department of religion.

In the meantime, my major professor, Dr. Wood had accepted a

position as executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public

Affairs, Washington, D.C., and Dr. James Leo Garrett, Jr., became editor

of *Journal of Church and State* at Baylor and assumed other responsibili-

ties previously held by Dr. Wood. Dr. Garrett also assumed responsibility

as director of the present dissertation.

To both Dr. Wood and Dr. Garrett is due appreciation, to Dr. Wood

for encouragements and directing of the dissertation during the research

stage and to Dr. Garrett for directing the dissertation during its actual

writing. The other dissertation committee members, Dr. Bruce C. Cresson

and Dr. E. H. Duncan, with Dr. Garrett made various suggestions for the

correcting and improvement of the written text.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to numerous Baha’is whom I have

met who have aided me in some way in the research and in understanding the

religion which they espouse. The Gordon Dobbins family holds a special

place in my memory and appreciation for arranging my first meeting with

Baha’is. Mrs. Dobbins, especially, always most kind, offered various

encouragements and leads in the research.

The Baha’is whom I met at Davison Baha’i summer school provided me

with stimulating insights into their faith. Among those I met at the Davi-

son school, I owe particular gratitude to Albert James, member of an auxi-

lary board to the hands of the cause, Kathleen Javid, who lectured on the

life of Baha’u’llah at the school, and to Dr. S. P. Raman, each of whom read

my original “pilot study,” offering their corrections and comments, and with

whom I held a number of enlightening discussions.

Appreciation is due also to Florence Mayberry, a member of the

continental board of counselors for North America, for her lectures and

discussions at the Bridgeport school, to Stanwood Cobb, a Baha’i author,

for letters of explanation; to the National Spiritual Assembly for informa-

tion; and especially to Tarazu’llah Samandari, hand of the cause, with whom

I was granted an interview in Fort Worth in January, 1968, during his North

American teaching tour. Samandari was present at Bahji with Baha’u’llah,

the Baha’i prophet after whom the religion is named, before his “ascension”

(death) in 1892. Samandari fell ill during his teaching mission and passed

away in his ninety-third year on September 2, 1968.

For much of the information in Chapter VII, derived from letters

and materials, I am indebted to Mason Remey, regarded by his followers as

the faith’s second guardian, who passed away February 4, 1974; to Charley

O. Murphy, Remey’s associate in the United States; to Joel B. Marangella,

who claims the third guardianship; to A. S. Petzoldt; and to the National

Bureau of the Orthodox Baha’i Faith of the United States and Canada through

its secretary, Franklin D. Schlatter.

Last but by no means least, I mention my great debt to William

McElwee Miller, author of a new took on Baha’i, which is a revision and

updating of his earlier volume published in 1931. Rev. Miller served from

1919 to the end of 1962 an a Presbyterian missionary in Iran, where Baha’i

originated. Rev. Miller read my original “pilot study,” offered helpful

comments, loaned me some materials from his personal library, and provided

leads for further research. During the course of writing the dissertation,

he also kindly made available to me the manuscript of his new book, which

was therefore accessible to me as I wrote the latter chapters. Some

references to Miller’s new book were inserted in the revisions of the

earlier chapters.

To all of the above mentioned persons, whose kind assistance

helped make possible the present dissertation, and to numerous other

unnamed persons who aided directly or indirectly in the research and

production of the dissertation, I offer my sincere gratitude.

To avoid confusion, mention should be made that the reader will

encounter in the dissertation various spellings of names and terms due

to differences among writers in transliterating Persian and Arabic words.

For example, Baha’u’llah is written variously as Beha Ullah, Baha Ullah,

Baha-O-Llah, Baha’o’llah, Bahaullah, etc.

Baha’is today follow a uniform system of transliteration. This

system is given in Marzieh Gail’s *Baha’i Glossary*, which I have followed

for the most part in transliterations in the text of the dissertation.

In quotations from other material, however, I have spelled words as they

appear in the texts being quoted. I refer in the bibliography to Mirza

Abu’l-Fadl as Abul Fazl since the latter spelling appears on the title

page of his work, but in the text of the dissertation the former spelling

is used since it is the preferred spelling by Baha’is today.

To be consistent with this transliteration, ‘Akka and Tihran are

so spelled in the text rather than with more familiar spellings as Acre

and Tehran or Teheran. The reader will discover other variations between

words spelled in the dissertation’s text and as spelled in quoted material,

especially in quotations from earlier literature.

A few comments concerning style may be necessary. The dissertation

follows as a general guide Kate L. Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers of Term*

*Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, third edition, revised (1967), which

was specified for use when I began composing and typing the dissertation.

On points not explicitly covered in Turabian’s *Manual*, as in the capitali-

zations of words, the dissertation follows the University of Chicago’s

*A Manual of Style*, twelfth edition, revised (1969).

Quotations from the Qur’an are from Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall’s

*The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* unless otherwise indicated.

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**PART I**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE BAHA’I FAITH**

**CHAPTER I**

**INTRODUCTION**

Geoffrey Parrinder, in his book *The Christian Debate: Light*

*from the East*, makes this surprising comment:

Christian theology teaches that the Incarnation is unique, in

the sense that Christ came ‘once for all’. But the Epistle

to the Hebrews which invented this phrase, places Christ firm

in the succession of prophets and angelic messengers. …

And according to the New Testament, the human life of Christ

is not the only time that he will appear. … It could at

least be suggested that at his next coming Christ will be as

hard to recognize as he was before.1

The Baha’is maintain that this is precisely what has happened. Christ,

they say, has returned! The ancient message which the early Christians

proclaimed across the known world of their time, that the long awaited

Messiah had come, is being reasserted with all its original fervor in

the Baha’i announcement that the expected Christ of the Christian faith

has now appeared. Baha’is insist, moreover, that Christians, by their

denial of Baha’u’llah, are making the same mistake, and often for similar

reasons, which the Jews made in refusing to accept Jesus Christ.

Baha’is not only say that Baha’u’llah is the returned Christ of

the Christian faith but also make the astounding claim that their pro-

phet, Baha’u’llah, is the expected deliverer hoped for in all the revealed

religions; he is the expected Lord of Hosts of the Jewish religion, the

Fifth Buddha of Buddhism, the Shah Bahram of Zoroastrianism, the “Great

Announcement” of Islam, and the return of Krishna for the Hindus.2

Since Baha’u’llah fulfills the hopes of all the world’s true religions,

Baha’is believe that the adherents of the diverse religions may at last

be united in Baha’u’llah by one common devotion.

The Baha’is claim is be a uniting influence among the diverse

peoples of the world finds some verification in actual practice, for

is Baha’i gatherings one may find converts from Judaism, Christianity,

Islam, Hinduism, and other religions, worshipping and serving together

in their common loyalty to Baha’u’llah.

If Baha’u’llah is the return of Christ, if he is the expected

deliverer of all the world’s religions, if he is the hope for world

peace and unity, then his appearance in the world is an event of

unsurpassed importance, and to ignore him would be tantamount to a

betrayal not only of one’s own religious heritage but of all humanity.

The present study will examine the new religion which centers

around Baha’u’llah and which is named after him—the Baha’i faith—in

as attempt to trace its historical development at the points of its

major alterations from previous forms, to clarify certain issues and

focus on others which need clarification, and hopefully to lay the

basis for profitable dialogue between Baha’is and non-Baha’is and in

particular between Baha’is and Christians.

Certain preliminary questions will be dealt with in this

introductory chapter: What is the Baha’i faith, why study this new

religion, and why study the particular aspect of the faith selected

for the present inquiry?

DEFINITION OF THE BAHA’I FAITH

Since the word “Baha’i” is not frequently used in many

vocabularies, and since the present study will deal almost in its

entirety with the Baha’i religion, some definition of Baha’i, it would

seem, is in order, and one of the best definitions of the faith by a

Baha’i is that given by Arthur Dahl:

The Baha’i World Faith is a new independent universal

religion, whose goal is to revitalize mankind spiritually, to

break down the barriers between peoples and lay the foundation

for a unified society based upon principles of justice and love.3

Each of the four words at the beginning of Dahl’s definition—“new

independent universal religion”—is important.

The Baha’i faith is a *new* religion. It originated a little

more than a hundred years ago, in 1844, in Persia (or Iran), the

birthplace of another great religion, Zoroastrianism, as well as of the

lesser known movements of Manichaeism and Mazdakism.

The faith is an *independent* religion. Sometimes Baha’i is

treated as a sect of Islam. It originated out of Shi‘ah Islam in Persia,

as Christianity originated within the context of Judaism and Buddhists

within the framework of Hinduism, but as these religions in time

became distinguished from their parent religions, so the Baha’i faith

may now be distinguished from its parent faith, Islam. The Baha’i

religion claims to be independent of Islam, and Islam refuses to

recognize the Baha’i faith as having any connection with it.

Therefore, it is best to see the Baha’i faith as the independent

religion it claims to be and which, in fact, it is. Edward G. Browne,

a leading authority on the early Babi-Baha’i movement, remarks:

The Babis are Muhammadans only in the sense that the Muhammadans

are Christians or the Christians Jews; that is to say, they recog-

nize Muhammad (Mohomet) as a true prophet and the Qur’an (Koran)

as a revelation, but they deny their finality.4

Samuel Graham Wilson, in one of the earlier extensive studies on the

Baha’i faith, argued that the Baha’i faith is a distinct religion from

Christianity and further maintained: “It is not even a sect of Islam.

It abrogates and annuls it.”5 Hamid Algar, in a more recent study, holds

similarly that “Babism, at all stages of its doctrinal development, was of

necessity opposed to Islam, for its claim to validity presupposed the

supersession of Islam.”6 The Baha’i faith, which arose out of the Babi

movement, should be seen properly as an independent religion.

The Baha’i faith, moreover, is a *universal* religion. It calls

itself the Baha’i *World* Faith, and it has a right to this designation for

at least three reasons: (1) it is located in centers around the world;

(2) it concerns itself with world issues, as the equality of the sexes,

international language, education for all; (3) and it has a world vision,

aspiring to unify all races, nations, and creeds of men into one world

brotherhood.7

The Baha’i faith is a *religion*. Some have seen the faith as

being basically a social, ethical, or humanitarian movement and have

failed to regard it as a religion. For example, John C. Wishard, who

served as the director of the American Presbyterian Hospital in Tihran,

says of the Baha’i faith: “It is an ethical teaching, and not a reli-

gion.”8 That the faith inculcates high ethical principles within its

members cannot be denied, and that the religion has definite social

aims is clearly evident in the following Baha’i principles which are

set forth as Baha’u’llah’s teachings for this new age:

1. The oneness of mankind

2. Independent investigation of truth

3. The common foundation of all religions

4. The essential harmony of science and religion

5. Equality of men and women

6. Elimination of prejudice of all kinds

7. Universal compulsory education

8. A spiritual solution of the economic problem

9. A universal auxiliary language

10. Universal peace upheld by a world government9

These principles which are put forth as Baha’u’llah’s essential teachings,

however, express only the outward, social form of the faith’s concerns

and do not reveal the inner religious side of the faith, which is built

around Baha’u’llah as God’s spokesman for the modern age. Marcus Bach,

sympathetic interpreter of the faith, appropriately maintains that the

Baha’i concept of mankind’s reconciliation to God through Baha’u’llah

“places a much deeper perspective and implication on the Baha’i movement

than a mere socially activistic program for world union.”10 Alessandro

Bausani, professor of Persian literate and Islamistics at Rome Univer-

sity, and himself a Baha’i, writes:

The Baha’i Faith declares itself a religion. Though its

doctrines are so simple that some have taken it for a philoso-

phical or humanitarian movement, the history of its founding

and of its first historic period belies such an interpretation.11

The early history of this faith is bathed in the blood of some 20,000

martyrs who gave themselves in utter devotion to the Bab, the martyr-

prophet, who foretold the coming after him of a greater one, whom Baha’is

identify with Baha’u’llah. The Baha’i faith, indeed, in a religion which

centers in devotion to a person believed to be God’s manifestation for

the modern age; it demands unreserved acceptance of his person as God’s

latest revelation to the world and requires absolute submission to his

every word and command.

Dahl’s definition of the Baha’i faith is good, inasmuch as it

touches the points elaborated on above and as it focuses on the religion’s

aims. For one, however, who has no prior acquaintance with the religion,

and in the light of the above discussion, the following definition may be

given: The Baha’i faith is a world religion founded in Persia in the

middle of the nineteenth century A.D. which centers around the Persian

seer, Baha’u’llah, as God’s manifestation for the modern age and which aims,

by being obedient to Baha’u’llah’s teachings, to bring about the unity of

all races, nations, and creeds of men in one world government and one

common faith.

REASONS FOR STUDYING THE BAHA’I FAITH

After the definition of Baha’i, a second question emerges: Why

study the Baha’i faith? Is the religion worthy of the time and effort

required for the writing of a doctoral dissertation on it? Could not one

spend his time more profitably on some other subject? Actually, rather

than being a subject on the periphery of vital concerns, it may be regarded

as a subject of central importance, not only for the student of the history

of religions but for anyone interested in world problems and proposals for

their solution. Ernst Klienki, president of the Esperanto Society of

Germany, said in his address delivered in Danzig in Esperanto on July 30,

1927:

Because of their cultural principles alone, Baha’u’llah and

‘Abdu’l-Baha are worthy to be regarded among the highest Lights

of all times, even by those who are not able to accept the

religious part of their teachings.12

That the Baha’i faith is worthy of extensive study may be seen for the

following reasons.

Its Imposing Claims

The Baha’i faith, first of all, “by its stupendous claims compels

attention.”13 It claims that the prophets of all true religions of the

past have foretold the coming of Baha’u’llah and the golden age which

would be ushered in by his coming. This claim is based on the word of

Baha’u’llah himself, who declared:

The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been ac-

claimed as the Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God,

and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by

virtue of the pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresis-

tible bidding, been revealed unto men. The advent of such a

Revelation hath been heralded in all the sacred Scriptures. Be-

hold how, notwithstanding such an announcement, mankind hath

strayed from its path and shut out itself from its glory.14

Baha’is maintain that, as the Jews were blinded from accepting Jesus as

the Messiah because of their preconceived ideas about the Messiah and

about how the prophecies concerning him were to be interpreted, Christians

are guilty of rejecting Baha’u’llah as the returned Christ because of

preconceived interpretations of New Testament prophecies concerning

Christ’s return and the events connected with his coming. If Jesus has

returned in Baha’u’llah, then that event is the most singularly important

event since the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, and for Christians to fail

in recognizing him would be their most grievous sin.

William S. Hatcher, who was converted to the Baha’i faith while

a student in the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University, testifies:

I met Baha’i for the first time as a freshman in college.

During these four years of search I, like almost every other

Christian, refused to consider seriously the claims of Baha’u’-

llah as the Promised One. The truly frightening thing is that

Christian leaders simply refuse even to consider the claims of

Baha’i. They are willing to study for years the detailed as-

pects of the Bible, historical and contemporary theological

literature, and the history of the Christian church; yet they

refuse to consider even the possibility that the claims of

Baha’u’llah might be true.15

Hatcher mentions his study in the thought of such philosophers and

theologians as Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul

Sartre, Richard Niebuhr, Nels Ferré, and Paul Tillich and refers to his

having been privileged “to know and talk with some of the greatest

leaders of Christianity in the United States and, to some extent, in

the world,”16 through his college experience and through participation

is religious activities, but he confesses:

In all of my activity, I have found nothing which is in any

way comparable to the Baha’i Revelation either in the dynamic

qualities of the Spirit or in the satisfaction of the intellect.

When one finds such deep and lasting satisfaction in an age so

fraught with error and anxiety, he can do nothing else but follow

it. Indeed, he would be a fool to do otherwise! I pray that I

may be able to say, as other Baha’is have said, “And it some-

thing else comes along which is more satisfying than this, then

I will follow it.” This is indeed the spirit of truth.17

Baha’is claim not only that Baha’u’llah is Christ returned but

that in him is to be found the solution to the world’s ills. When men

put into action his teachings, then the world’s millennium will become

a reality, peace in the world will be achieved, and men will be able to

live in harmony and unity with one another in one great world brotherhood.

The religions of the world, moreover, will become united under the banner

of Baha’u’llah. George Craig Stewart exclaims: “Of all the fantastic

dreams that men have ever dreamed this religion is the most ambitious.”18

Certainly, other religious have had great dreams and other

religious figures have claimed to be the return of Christ, but

Baha’u’llah’s claims are not so easily dismissed. The faith has

proved to some extent its ability to unite in its cause the members

of various religions creeds and backgrounds, and this diversity in

unity is evident in many Baha’i gatherings. Part of the Baha’i

success is due to the fact that Baha’is accept other religions’

founders as true messengers of God and their sacred books as authentic.

Edward G. Browne, professor at Cambridge University who devoted a good

portion of his life to the study of the early history of the Babi-Baha’i

movement, related that he had often heard Christian ministers express

wonder at the extraordinary success of Babi missionaries, as contrasted

with the almost complete failure of their own”19 in Muslim lands, Browne

believed the reason for this was that Western Christianity is “more

Western than Christian, more racial than religious,”20 but also because

the Babi propagandist admitted, while the Christian missionary rejected,

the prophetic function of Muhammad and the divine inspiration of the

Qur’an.21 What Browne observes as true of the Babi propaganda among

Muslims is true also of the Baha’i approach to other religions of the

world. The Baha’i accepts the divine founding of each religion, denies

only its finality, and points to its fulfilment in the Baha’i revelation.

The Baha’i faith is not to be classed with the fad or freak

religion which arise from time to time, gaining a small following

among a certain class but having no real rootage and failing to make

any lasting impression. The Baha’i faith has demonstrated its vitality

and its seriousness by inspiring its members to suffer martyrdom by the

thousands, to leave family and friends in fostering the faith in

distant lands, and to work courageously and tirelessly against difficult

odds, and it has been successful in attracting to its banner a large

host of men and women from a variety of cultural and religious back-

grounds, social standings, and intellectual capacities.

Various persons testify to the strange power of the Baha’i

spirit when it is encountered. Professor Browne, mentioned above,

made two trips to Persia and was in intimate contact with the members

of the movement. He wrote:

Persian Muslims will tell you often that the Babis bewitch or

drug their guests so that these, impelled by a fascination

which they cannot resist become similarly affected with what

the aforesaid Muslims regard as a strange and incomprehensible

madness. Idle and absurd as this belief is, it yet rests on a

basis of fact stronger than that which supports the greater

part of what they allege concerning this people. The spirit

which pervades the Babis is such that it can hardly fail to

affect most powerfully all subjected to its influence. It

may appal or attract: it cannot to ignored or disregarded.

Let those who have not seen disbelieve me if they will; but,

should that spirit once reveal itself to them, they will

experience an emotion which they are not likely to forget.22

E. S. Stevens, who spent six months among the Baha’is, refers to how

“this strange enthusiasm, this spiritual hashish … sent men to

martyrdom with smiles on their faces and joyous ecstasy in their hearts.”23

Its High Praise by Non-Baha’is

Another reason the Baha’i faith is worthy of study is

the high praise lavished upon the new faith by non-Baha’is. The adherents

of a religion might naturally praise it highly and see great prospects

for its future, but when non-Baha’i, many of distinguished merit, speak

of the Baha’i faith in the terms they do, one’s attention may properly

be aroused.

Robert E. Speer, for some forty-six years the secretary of the

Board of Foreign Missions, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., a world

traveller familiar with religious currents of the time, said of the Babi

religion: “It is one of the most remarkable movements of our day.”24

Edward G. Browne, who translated various Baha’i works into English, called

the Babi-Baha’i movement ‘the greatest religious movement of the century”25

and a system “whatever its actual destiny may be” which “is of that stuff

whereof world-religions are made.”26

Herbert A. Miller of the sociology department, Ohio State Univer-

sity, wrote: “What will be the course of the Baha’i Movement, no one can

prophesy, but I think it is no exaggeration to claim that the progress is

the finest fruit of the religious contributions of Asia.”27 A Christian

theologian. Nels F. S. Ferré, admits: “I have been surprised at the depth

and devotional character of the best in Baha’i scriptures as presented, for

instance, in Townshend’s *The Promise of All Ages*.”28

Marcus Bach, formerly a professor of comparative religion, Univer-

sity of Iowa, an authority on numerous small or little known religious

groups, says of the Baha’i religion: “Wherever I have gone to research

the faith called Baha’i, I have been astonished at what I have found.”29

He mentions his astonishment when he visited the Baha’i World Center in

Haifa, Israel, and stood on Mt. Carmel in the shadow of the golden-domed

Shrine of the Bab and his equal astonishment at the Baha’i “Nine Year Plan”

projected for the years 1964-1973. He then says:

But most of all. I am continually intrigued by the Baha’i

people, close to a million of them representing the basic cultural

and ethnic groups around the world and embracing obscure and

little known localities in far-flung lands where even Christianity

has barely gone. … I have met they in the most unexpected

places, in a war-torn village in southeast Asia, in African cities,

in industrial Mexico, in the executive branches of big industry in

Iran, in schools and colleges on foreign campuses, in American

cities and villages, wherever people dream of the age-old concept

of the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God, somewhere in

the unfolding rapture of the phrase, the Baha’is are there.30

Although the Baha’is are a small and sometimes unnoticed presence

amid the fast-moving, technological currents of the modern world, the

historian, Arnold Toynbee, suggests something of the potential of the

Baha’is when he observes how the Christian faith went largely unobserved,

and little esteemed, by the cultured elite when it was only a century old:

In a Hellenizing World early in the second century of the

Christian Era the Christian Church loomed no larger, in the sight

of an Hellenically educated dominant minority, than the Baha’i

and Ahmadi sects were figuring in the sight of a corresponding

class in a Westernizing World mid-way through the twentieth century.31

Toynbee feels that “syncretistic” religions constructed artificially from

elements of existing religions have little chance of capturing mankind’s

imagination and allegiance because such attempts are made partly for

utilitarian rather than religious reasons, such as the Emperor Akbar’s

attempt in India and the Roman Emperor Julian’s attempt, but Toynbee says:

At the same time, when I find myself in Chicago and when,

travelling northwards out of the city, I pass the Bahai temple

there, I feel that in some sense this beautiful building say be

a portent of the future.32

Such recognitions by non-Baha’i scholars of the importance and

possible destiny of the Baha’i faith as a significant religious influence

in the modern world require that the faith be given careful attention.

Baha’is claim that an American president, Woodrow Wilson, “was

well read in the writings of Baha’u’llah and ‘Abdu’l-Baha, whose books

he frequently perused at his bedtime reading hour.”33 Stanwood Cobb

asks:

Was his League of Nations, so similar to the plan of Baha’u’llah,

derived from these readings in the Baha’i literature? Or was there

already a plan forming in his own soul which these writings con-

firmed and strengthened?34

Marcus Bach reports that his students

were not unwilling to accept the Baha’i claim that Woodrow Wilson

in his plans for the League of Nations was influenced by Baha’u’llah,

that the steps toward world understanding might be the result of

Baha’u’llah’s mystical presence, and that the development of the

United Nations might be the substance of the imposing shadow cast by

the Persian seer.35

Such recognition accorded to the faith by non-Baha’is is of a quality to

indicate that the Baha’i story is deserving of serious study.

Its Approximation to Christianity

Another reason for studying the Baha’i faith, particularly for

Christians and those in the Western part of the world, is its approxima-

tion to Christianity. “No religion,” one writer observes, “shows more

strange parallels to Christianity.”36 William A. Shedd, Christian mis-

sionary in Persia, reported: “For the most part the ethical ideals are

Christian.”37 When Edward G. Browne visited Persia in 1887-88, he was

“much touched by the kindliness”38 of the Baha’is. When he mentioned this

to his Baha’i companion, the latter responded by saying that the Baha’is

were nearer in sympathy to Browne than were the Muslims:

To them you are unclean and accursed: if they associate with

you it is only by overcoming their religious prejudices. But

we are taught to regard all good men as clean and pure, what-

ever their religion. With you Christians especially we have

sympathy. Has it not struck you how similar were the life

and death of our Founder (whom, indeed, we believe to have

been Christ Himself returned to earth) to those of the Founder

of your faith? … But besides this the ordinances enjoined

upon us are in many respects like those which you follow.39

Browne observed that few of the Muslims were conversant with the Chris-

tian Gospels, whereas the reverse was true of the Baha’is, many of whom,

he noted, “take pleasure in reading the accounts of the life and death

of Jesus Chrisf.”40

Unlike many Muslims who believe that the Qur’an teaches that

Jesus did not die on the cross,41 Baha’is accept the Gospel accounts

of Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross, and whereas Muslims refuse

to regard Christ as more than merely a prophet or teacher from God,

Baha’i profess him to be indeed the Son of Cod, a perfect manifestation

of deity.

Regarding the similarities between the ministry of Jesus Christ

and that of the Bab, Shoghi Effendi, great-grandson of Baha’u’llah,

elaborated an follows:

The passion of Jesus Christ, and indeed His whole public ministry,

alone offer a parallel to the Mission and death of the Bab, a

parallel which no student of comparative religion can fail to

perceive or ignore. In the youthfulness and meekness of the

Inaugurator of the Babi Dispensation; in the extreme brevity

and turbulence of His public ministry; in the dramatic swift-

ness with which that ministry moved towards its climax; in

the apostolic order which He instituted, and the primacy which

He conferred on one of its members; in the boldness of His

challenge to the time-honored conventions, rites and laws which

had been woven into the fabric of the religion He Himself had

been born into; in the role which an officially recognized and

firmly entrenched religious hierarchy played as chief instigator

of the outrages which He was made to suffer; in the indignities

heaped upon Him; in the suddenness of His arrest; in the inter-

rogation to which He was subjected; in the derision poured, and

the scourging inflicted, upon Him; in the public affront He

sustained; and, finally, in His ignominious suspension before

the gaze of a hostile multitude—in all these we cannot fail to

discern a remarkable similarity to the distinguishing features

of the career of Jesus Christ.42

In the distorted reports of their teachings and activities,43 in the

persecution to which they were subjected, in their religion’s power

to effect progressive social change and to inspire its followers to

self-sacrifice and martyrdom, the Babi movement reminds one of essen-

tial features of early Christianity.

Early Christian appraisals of the Babi-Baha’i movement saw it as

a stepping stone in reaching the Muslims with the Christian gospel.

An early notice in *The Missionary Review of the World* reported that the

new teaching

has opened the door to the Gospel as nothing else has done.

Bible circulation is almost doubled every year. It is com-

puted that in many towns and villages half the population

are Babis. This is a clear indication that the people of

Persia are already, in large measure, wearied with Islam,

and anxious for a higher, holier, and more spiritual faith.

Almost all through the country the Babis are quite friendly

to Christians. The rise of this faith is in a large measure

due to the spread of the Gospel, the best of their doctrines

are borrowed from it, while they openly reverence our Scrip-

tures and profess to be ready to reject any opinion they may

hold when once proved to be contrary to the Bible.44

As late as 1925 Jules Bois wrote: “It is quite possible that Bahaism

has a mission to pacify and spiritually quicken races and tribes which

we have so far been unable to evangelize.”45 If Muslims could be won

to an acceptance of the mission of Jesus as a divine revealer of God,

perhaps they could eventually be won to a full acceptance of Christianity.

This expectation, however, seems to have been premature, for instead of

the winning of Baha’is to the gospel, Baha’is began winning converts from

Christianity. Robert P. Richardson, a strong critic of the Baha’i

religion, observed that “although so recent, this religion has spread

from its birthplace, Persia, to the furthest ends of the earth”46 and

noted with alarm that “Christians by the thousands have deserted the

banner of Jesus for that of Baha’u’llah.”47

Christian converts to Baha’i, however, do not feel that they

are deserting Jesus for Baha’u’llah but are reaching out to Jesus in

his second coming. Just as Christians believe that if the Jews had

actually believed Moses they would have believed in Jesus (John 5:46),

so Baha’is believe that true Christians will accept Jesus in his

returned form in Baha’u’llah. The Baha’i faith thus becomes, in Baha’i

thought, a truer form—the modern form—of Christianity. Firuz Kazem-

zadeh, an eminent Baha’i and a professor of history at Yale University,

in a recorded commentary on one of Baha’u’llah’s writings, says: “The

Baha’i Faith … encompasses all the previous faiths and is organically

linked with them. … The Baha’i Faith is Christianity today; the Baha’i

Faith is Islam today.”48 Because of the Baha’i approximation to Chris-

tianity, Samuel G. Wilson, Christian missionary to Persia, felt it

necessary to stress that the Baha’i faith is “a distinct religion” from

Christianity.49 Since the Baha’i ethics also are similar to those in

Christianity, the switch to Baha’i is an easy transition for some

Christians. Be that as it may, the Baha’i approximation to Christianity

affords another reason for studying this remarkable religion.

Its Appeal to the Modern Age

A further reason for studying the Baha’i faith is its appeal

to many people in the modern age. Charles W. Ferguson, in his book

*The Confusion of Tongues*, wrote that “no cult bears a gospel better

suited to the temper of our times than the Baha’i.”50 Indeed, Baha’is

believe that the Baha’i message is God’s word to the present age just

as his word through prophets of the past was directed in a special

way to the people of those former ages. Part of God’s message through

previous prophets, such as the requirement of love to God and man and

the °Golden Rule,” is eternal and is restated by succeeding prophets.

But another part of the prophet’s message is directed to the special

needs of the time. It is at this point that the prophet employs his

divine authority to annul previous laws and to issue new ones commen-

surable with the requirements of the new age. Baha’is feel, therefore.

that in Baha’u’llah’s teachings are to be found those divine laws,

principles, and requirements which speak with special force to the

present, modern age. Whether or not one subscribes to this religious

philosophy, it is true that many of the Baha’i teachings deal with

burning issues of the time, and this explains in part the Baha’i appeal

to the modern age.

The Appeal to Modern Issues

The Baha’i teaching concerning race speaks to the current racial

problem. The Women’s Liberation Movement finds a friend in the Baha’i

teaching of the equality of the sexes. The threat of nationalism, the

problem of war, the hope for a durable peace, the efforts at inter-

national cooperation and arbitration by a “United Nations” tribunal,

the modern friction between science and religion, the language barrier,

the problem of poverty, the scandal of religious plurality—all of

these burning issues of the modern period are dealt with (and the

Baha’is would say, find their solution) in the Baha’i revelation.

No religion has addressed itself in such specific manner to so

many of the major problems and issues of the age than has the Baha’i

World Faith. Arthur Dahl explains:

The Faith recognized that the major problem of our age is

the resolution of a series of deeply ingrained conflicts which

are interrelated and penetrate various levels of society: con-

flicts between ideologies, nations, religions, races and classes.

Such conflicts, when combined with the weapons of annihilation

our age has produced, threaten the future of civilization as we

know it. They .redirect the efforts of science and technology

at a time when man is on the verge of discovering the mysteries

of interplanetary space and harnessing new sources of power.

They consume an inordinate proportion of our productive energies,

and divert attention from the conquest of our natural enemies:

ignorance, disease, hunger.51

Dahl continues:

What is needed is a new spiritual approach which will at once

reconcile the basic contradictions in major religions beliefs,

be consistent with modern scientific and rational principles,

and offer to all peoples a set of values and a meaning to life

that they can accept and apply. To meet this need the Baha’i

World Faith presents a challenging set of teachings, founded

on the concept of progressive revelation.52

At a time when Christians are seeking ways to make the gospel more

relevant to the modern world, Baha’is feel they have already a gospel

which speaks relevantly to the modern age in God’s latest revelation

to the world. Why, the Baha’is ask, should one seek to make a reve-

lation which was directed to a previous age applicable to a later

period, when God already has vouchsafed to modern men and women his

new message which is specifically designed for the new age? Baha’is

have for years been directing their energies toward certain modern

problems which some segments of the Christian church, for example,

are only now confessing their guilt in having encouraged.53 This

helps explain the appeal today of Baha’i over against more traditional

forms of religious expression in the West.

The Appeal is a Modern Ecumenical Age

The Christian Ecumenical Movement of the twentieth century

has been widely acclaimed as a tread which future historians may

recognize as “the most significant event of the twentieth century.”54

Henry P. Van Dusen, long time president of Union Theological Seminary

in New York and a leader in the Ecumenical Movement, notes that

for eighteen centuries the Christian Church affirmed the ideal of the

unity of the church but contradicted that ideal in practice, that only

in recent times has the church fulfilled Christian profession by actively

working for Christian unity, and that it is in this latter sense that

the Ecumenical Movement is a new and significant modern event.” Van

Dusen further notes that the church actually was somewhat slow in

responding to centripetal forces in the world at large, but he then

observes that

the centripetal forces in the world’s life were superficial and

ineffectual. Their end product is two global conflicts and

humanity mortally lacerated and impotent. As I have earlier

ventured to suggest, future historians may single out as one

of the most significant features of this age the fact that,

while the centripetal trends within Christendom originated in

part from broader centripetal tendencies within the general

culture, they *continued* with even more determined effort and

significant result *after* the general cultural drift had suffered

radical reversal and more powerful centrifugal forces than the

earth had ever before witnessed were loosed upon mankind. It

has been precisely while the nations have been falling apart

that the leadership of the Christian churches of the world has

been drawing closer and closer together.56

The Ecumenical Movement within Christianity no doubt has been one of

the major events of modern times, but Floyd H. Ross says: “The great

issue of the hour is not Christian ecumenism but *human* ecumenism.”57

It is to this larger ecumenism that the Baha’i faith addresses itself.

The Baha’is are concerned not simply with union within the existing

religions but with the union of all the religions in one faith and the

union of all people in one universal brotherhood. The Baha’is, thus,

represent a gigantic ecumenical movement. In an age when the distances

which separate peoples and cultures of the world grow smaller every

day, when events in one part of the world dramatically affect the entire

globe, when the threat of total annihilation endangers all life forms on

earth, and when man constantly searches for better and more effective

means toward world understanding and cooperation, the worldwide Baha’i

ecumenical program marks one more reason for this faith’s appeal to men

and women of the modern age.

The Appeal to Today’s Religiously Disenchanted

The modern world is justly described as a “post-Christion” and

“secular” world.58 However much some Christians may think these descrip-

tions have been overplayed, the reality remains. Edmund Perry writes:

Respect for the Church is no longer axiomatic in the West and

the norms of Christian behavior do not as formerly dictate the

morals of Western culture. Indeed, Christian faith, the Church

and Christian behavior have become quite unacceptable to the

vast majority of folk in the West. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin

has aptly characterized this loss of the Church’s power and

influence in the West by the phrase “the breakdown of Christen-

dom.”59

Not only has the secular man outside the church deemed the church irre-

levant but a number of notable persons within the Church have left it

in recent times because of its irrelevance to modern man. James Kavanaugh,

the “modern priest” who took a look at his “outdated church”60 and later

decided to leave it, noted that “the most significant religious experiences

are taking pleas outside or in spite of the institutional Church.61

It is too hard to convince an irrelevant institution that the

world finds it intransigent and obsolete. It is hard to “go

through channels” when the “channels” are more a vested

interest than a reflection of an honest search for faith. A

man can only abandon the institution and search for God on his

own or with a few friends.62

Without arguing for or against the merits of Kavanaugh’s evaluation of

the institutional church, it is sufficient for the present purpose to

point out that the search for God outside the institutional church, of

which Kavanaugh speaks, is being carried on by an increasing number of

modern men and women, from the youthful “Jesus freaks” to experienced

churchmen and trained theologians.63

Kavanaugh’s indictment of the institutional church is quite

similar to what the Baha’is are saying, but instead of looking at only

one segment of the modern religious world—the Roman Church, as Kava-

naugh did—the Baha’is have taken a look at Christianity as a whole

and also at Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and other religions and find

them all outdated and irrelevant to the modern age.

In Baha’i thought, all religions go through an inevitable

process of development and deterioration. For a time each religion

continues to develop and to make a significant impact on the world

but eventually begins to depart from the pure teachings of its founder

and thus starts a decline in which it continuously loses its spiritual

power and its relevance to the world. At an appropriate point, God

sends a new revelation to renew and revitalize the religion and to

make it better applicable to the religious and social needs of the time.

This revelation of God is continuous and progressive, determined

by the world’s needs and by man’s ability to receive new revelation.

The various religions are created because the followers of one revela-

tion refuse to accept the succeeding one and continue instead to adhere

to the prophet who brought the revelation with which they are familiar.

To the Baha’is, therefore, since God has sent his latest revelation

through Baha’u’llah, all previous revelations and the religions which

have been built around them have become obsolete, except for the eternal

laws which deal with matters such as love, kindness, justice, and humility,

and these are restated in the Baha’i revelation. The messages of previous

prophets relating to religious institutions (rituals, .sacraments, ordi-

nances, religious laws pertaining to prayer, fasting, and pilgrimages) and

laws directed to social needs are superseded.

To the person of the modern day who has grown weary of seemingly

empty religious practices and teachings designed only to perpetuate the

religious establishment regardless of whether or not it makes any mean-

ingful contribution to society, the Baha’i faith, which claims to have

no clergy or ordinances and a minimum of dogma but an important social

message, makes a definite appeal. Marcus Bach points out that the “many

Americans” who “were ready to accept Baha’u’llah as the mouthpiece of

God” were “not people whom the churches had passed by; some of them had

passed up the churches, feeling that creeds and sects were narrow and

confing.”64

Its Fertility for Insights into Religious Development

Another important reason for studying the Baha’i faith is the

insight it may provide in studying other religions, in tracing and

understanding the developments which religions experience. To focus

today on the birth and rise of a world religion which is so close

to one’s own day at such an early stage in its development may reveal

in no small way important insights into the origin and development of

religions of the past. James T. Bixby remarks:

To understand the source and nature of our own Christian

religion there is no light so priceless as that which is

supplied by studying at close range the rise and develop-

ment of a new faith in our own age and among these Oriental

peoples, where the Gospel of Christ originated.65

To be sure, each religion is unique in some respects, so that one could

not always conclude that what is true of one is necessarily true of all

others; but every religion as an historical and social phenomenon also

shares certain common features with other religions, else one could not

speak of the general category of “religions.” Every religion, for

example, originates within a particular historical context, and it

passes through certain stages of development and disintegration. Every

religion possesses a body of “sacred” literature, which is regarded by

the religion’s adherents as set apart from other literature in a special

way. Scholars seek, in making critical investigations into religious

development, to distinguish in a religion’s literature the various levels

of tradition. Information on the development of the literature, dogma,

and practices from a religion of such recent origin could provide

valuable insights into developments which have taken place in older

religions.

One thing which has made the study of religious origins

difficult is a lack of unamended or unaltered material written in the

earliest stage of the religion’s development. Existing documents were

written almost always at a later stage in the religion’s development

when later reflection and interpretation has already begun. The

assurance that a document portrays the original events and doctrines

of a religion is difficult to obtain, and Edward G. Browne says

that it

can only be obtained in its most satisfactory form when the

early records pass within a short time after their compilation

into the hands of strangers, who, while interested in their

preservation, have no desire to alter them for better or worse.

That this should happen at all obviously requires a very unusual

combination of circumstances. So far as my knowledge goes, it

never has happened save in the case of the Baha’i religion; and

this is one of the facts which invest the history of this reli-

gion with so special an interest.66

The Babi-Baha’i movement provides the historian of religion with

invaluable sources for studying its origin and development as with

no other religion. There are at least two reasons for this. First,

the religion is the most recent world faith. Other religions began

hundreds and thousands of years ago. Of the so-called eleven major,

living religions of the world, only Islam (seventh century A.D.) and

Sikhism (sixteenth century A.D.) are centuries old; the others—Hin-

duism, Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Zoroastrianism,

Judaism, and Christianity—date back into the thousands of years. The

Baha’i faith originated only in the last century (1844 A.D.), and only

since 1963 has it reached possibly the last phase of its formative

development, which incidentally makes the present time most appropriate

for making a study of that development. The Baha’i faith is, thus, a

religion of modern times and is naturally more accessible for study

and understanding.

A second reason that this faith is an excellent subject of study

is because its origin coincided with the development of interest by

Western scholars in the scientific and critical study of religion.

James Arthur Gobineau and Edward G. Browne were two scholars who took

an academic and scientific interest in the religion, and the material

they collected and their observations of the movement have placed all

succeeding students of the faith in tremendous debt to them. Edward

Browne, for example, had a number of interviews with Baha’u’llah, him-

self, the founder of Baha’i. He, moreover, talked with and corresponded

with a number of leaders and laity in the movement and gained much

valuable information.67

In spite of these researches, a number of important questions

regarding the origin and early development of the movement remain

unresolved, but the information which is available is considerably

more than is available concerning the rise of any other major religion.

As such, the Baha’i faith is important not only for its own significance

but for the insights it say provide in understanding the manner in which

other religions are born and develop.

Its Remarkable Growth

The Baha’i faith, moreover, deserves study because of its

remarkable growth and extension around the world. Since its birth in

1844, the faith has spread from Persia to all parts of the world and is

called quite appropriately today the Baha’i *World* Faith. The faith is

reporting spectacular successes in more recent years. When William

Miller wrote his first book on Baha’i, published in 1931, he said:

All impartial observers of Baha’ism in Persia are agreed

that here in the land of its birth this religion, which once

showed promise of capturing all Central Asia, is now steadily

losing ground. Few converts are being made, many of the

Baha’i leaders of yesterday have openly proclaimed their de-

fection from the movement, and some have written able books

exposing the errors which they formerly laboured to propa-

gate. It is only a matter of time until this strange move-

ment, like Manichaeism and Mazdakism before it, shall be known

only to students of history.68

That description was written in the early 1930s. Much has happened

since then. Miller, himself, was to note later, in 1940, that the

number of Baha’i spiritual assemblies and the number of voting members

had doubled in the decade from 1926 to 1936.69 John Elder, in a review

of Iran’s spiritual situation, wrote in 1948:

Another movement that shows surprising vitality is the Baha’i

movement. When, some twenty years ago, one after another of their

own leaders turned against the faith, and wrote devastating expo-

sés of the intellectual fallacies and moral perversions that

characterize the movement, there were many of us who felt that

Bahaism was in its death throes.70

But Elder notes that the year 1944, the centennial of the Bab’s decla-

ration, was the signal for increased propaganda and that many Baha’is

at great personal sacrifice obeyed Shoghi Effendi’s call to scatter

forth in evangelistic efforts.71 Edward B. Calverly, in 1955, remarked:

“The Baha’i cause two decades ago was decreasing in influence in Iran,

but is, at present, experiencing remarkable vitality.”72 Frank S. Mead

reported that “since 1963, there has been a marked growth in member-

ship.”73

Baha’is do not give statistics of their worldwide membership,

but they do publish periodically information on the number of countries

opened to the faith, the number of spiritual assemblies and Baha’i

groups around the world, and other information. A look at the mis-

sionary extension of the Baha’is in countries and territories during

the periods of the faith’s successive leaders reveals the rapidly

developing outreach of Baha’i influence. During the Bab’s ministry

(1844-1850), Babis could be found in Persia and Iraq. By the end of

Baha’u’llah’s ministry (1892), Baha’is had penetrated into fifteen

countries, and when ‘Abdu’l-Baha passed away (1921), an additional

twenty countries had opened to the faith.74 The period of

spectacular extension, however, began under the able administrative

direction of Shoghi Effendi, guardian of the faith from 1921 until

his death in 1957. At the time of Shoghi Effendi’s passing, Baha’is

had penetrated into 254 countries and dependencies.75 Most of this

extension occurred after 1953, when Shoghi Effendi launched the “Ten

Year International Baha’i Teaching and Consolidation Plan.” Achieve-

ments during this decade (1953-1963) included the following: the num-

ber of countries and territories where Baha’is reside more than doubled

(from 128 in 1953 to 259 in 1963); the addition of 220 languages into

which Baha’i literature is translated and printed more than tripled the

previous figure; the number of national spiritual assemblies (the

national governing bodies) quadrupled (forty-seven were formed in this

period); seven new Baha’i publishing trusts were established; three

new Baha’i temples were built (in Frankfurt, Germany; Sydney, Australia;

and Kampala, Uganda, Africa);76 and the acquisition of forty-six new

temple sites more than quadrupled the original goal of eleven.

This Ten Year World Crusade was climaxed in 1963 by two impor-

tant events: (1) the election by the members of fifty-six national

spiritual assemblies convened at the Baha’i World Center in Haifa,

Israel, of the first Universal House of Justice, composed of nine men,

forming the highest administrative body in the Baha’i faith, and (2)

the convening of the first Baha’i World Congress in London, in England,

where more than 6,000 Baha’is from around the world gathered for the

formal celebration of the “Most Great Jubilee” (April 21-May 2),78

commemorating the centenary of Baha’u’llah’s declaration of his

mission.79

The Universal House of Justice launched in 1964 the “Nine

Year Plan” to be concluded in 1973. Goals for this period, which

were set for the world Baha’i community and for each of the national

assemblies, included raising the number of national spiritual assemblies

from the sixty-nine in 1964 to a total of 108, increasing the number of

local assemblies to over 13,700, raising the number of localities where

Baha’is reside to over 54,000, adding four new Baha’i publishing trusts

(one each in Brussels, Belgium; Rome, Italy; Karachi, Pakistan; and

Tunis, Tunisia) to the then existing number of eight; and increasing

the number of languages into which Baha’i literature is translated by

133 more languages, bringing the total to around 500 languages.80 Goals

for the continental United States (excludes Alaska) included establish-

ing 600 new local assemblies and 3,000 additional localities in which

Baha’is reside.81

The reported growth of Baha’i membership in the United States

within this period is fantastic. The 62nd annual National Baha’i

Convention held in Wilmette, Illinois, April 29-May 2, 1971, for

example, reported that Baha’i membership doubled within the past

one-year period. Some 20,000 new believers, mostly blacks in the

rural South, were recruited, as well as hundreds of Spanish-speaking

people and a good number of American Indians.82 In a one-south period,

9,000 converts were won in a thirteen-county “teaching conference”

based in Dillon, South Carolina. *The Christian Century* observed that

most of these converts are blacks but noted that “young whites, too,

are attracted to the Baha’i religion, which emphasizes peace and

eradiation of racial prejudice.”83

From the few hundred centers in thirty-five countries in which

Baha’is could be found when ‘Abdu’l-Baha passed away in 1921, the Baha’i

faith has expanded today to more than 46,000 centers in more than 300

countries, islands, and territories of the world. The remark made by a

Protestant minister to Marcus Bach that “if these Baha’is ever get going,

they may take the country by storm” may be coming true today.84 Such

remarkable expansion of the Baha’i faith requires that it be given dili-

gent attention.

REASONS FOR STUDYING THE BAHA’I TRANSFORMATIONS

Various facets of the Baha’i faith might be written about, but

the present study will focus on the Baha’i transformations. Why write on

the Baha’i transformations, and what is meant by the expression “Baha’i

transformation”? Although the term “transformation” has been used in

reference to a few major changes which have occurred in the religion,

and although it is acknowledged by both Baha’is and non-Baha’is that great

changes have taken place within the religion over the years, the expres-

ion “transformation” is not generally used in discussions and, thus,

requires some definition or explanation.

The term “Baha’i transformations” will be used to refer to those

changes in the Baha’i faith which have significantly altered previous

forms of the faith. The thesis of the present work is that the Baha’i

faith has undergone a “transformation” within the ministries of each

succeeding head of the religion. Each successive leader of the movement

has had to face and overcome opposition to him by those who charged him

with overstepping his legitimate authority and introducing changes in

the religion contrary to its essential character. To whatever extent

these charges are true or false, whether the succeeding leaders actually

contrived to produce alterations in the faith or resigned themselves to

an unavoidable cadence of events, the end result was that within each

successive leader’s ministry there occurred in the religion a transfor-

mation of a highly *critical* nature, producing inner turmoil, causing

notable—if not schismatic—departures from the new authority, and neces-

sitating new adjustments by the faith’s adherents.

Baha’i transformations are important for at least three reasons:

(1) because they fora a characteristic feature of the Baha’i faith,

(2) because they provide a key to a proper understanding of the religion,

and (3) because they throw light on some subsidiary questions in the study

(4) of the faith.

Characteristic Feature of the Faith

All religions to some extent go through dramatic alterations

in the course of their history. Kirtley F. Mather, Harvard University

professor, once wrote:

The history of every great religion shows a definite develop-

ment and modification of the theological and philosophical concepts

which it cherishes, because no great religion could possibly be

stationary. It must be moving forward, keeping abreast of the

ever-moving current of human thought.85

Christianity, for example, has undergone great changes in the course of

its almost 2,000-year history. Its earliest form was radically different

from its form after it became an established religion within the Roman

Empire. Likewise, the nature of Christianity after the Reformation was

significantly altered from its previous form, The Ecumenical Movement,

the Jesus Revolution, the modern charismatic revival, the church’s efforts

to minister in a secular society are all important trends which could

dramatically alter tomorrow’s form of the Christian faith.

Although all great religions undergo evolutionary alterations,

both in their theologies and institutional structures, the Baha’i faith

in particular has experienced extraordinary changes within a short

130-year span, in its evolution to its present stage of development, so

much so that this evolutionary development marks a characteristic feature

of the faith. Edward G. Browne, writing in 1910, said: “Few religions

have undergone so rapid an evolution in the course of sixty-six years

(A.D. 1844-1910) as that founded by Mirza ‘Ali Muhammad the Bab.”86 No

less spectacular have been the developments in the religion since Browne

made that statement in 1910.

Prefaces to revised Baha’i literature aptly illustrate the Baha’i

awareness and acknowledgment of this evolutionary process. The Preface

to the 1937 edition of J. E. Esslemont’s popular introduction to the

faith, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, first published in 1923, calls

attention to the fact that “the author’s views, some of them written

prior to 1921 [when Baha’u’llah’s son and successor in the faith,

‘Abdu’l-Baha, passed away] no longer on certain aspects of the subject

correspond to the evolutionary character of the Faith.”87 The Preface

to the 1970 revised edition of that same work is not overstating the

case when it mentions that since the 1937 edition “the diffusion and

development of the Baha’i Faith … have been tremendous.”88 The

Preface to the 1966 edition of Horace Holley’s *Religion for Mankind*,

first published in 1956, indicates:

For the sake of preserving the integrity at the author’s

work, no alterations in his text have been introduced, but the

reader will be able to appreciate, by reference to this editorial

note, the continuing evolution and dynamic growth of the Faith of

Baha’u’llah since 1956.89

The Preface points out that Holley died on July 12, 1960, before many

of the new developments had taken place.90 The year 1963, when the

first Universal House of Justice was elected, marked a new epoch in

the faith’s history.

These prefaces all point up the significant fact of the faith’s

evolutionary character. Each stage in this development is connected

with the ministries of the faith’s succeeding leaders. Shoghi Effendi,

Baha’u’llah’s great-grandson and successor to ‘Abdu’l-Baha, speaks of

the four major periods of the Baha’i era’s first century, corres-

ponding to the ministries at the Bab, Baha’u’llah, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, and

the development of the Administrative Order, as “progressive stages in

a single evolutionary process.”91 These stages are characterized by

transformations of the religion, and their consistent reappearance

in each stage marks a significant feature of the Baha’i faith.

Key to Understanding the Faith

The Baha’i transformations actually provide an important key to

understanding the Baha’i religion. Without a clear perception of the

issues involved in the transformations and their effects upon the

religion, one runs into various problems and seemingly irreconcilable

features in his study of the faith. With such a characteristic evolu-

tion occurring in the religion, literature on the faith—both Baha’i

and non-Baha’i—soon becomes obsolete on certain matters. While perhaps

giving an accurate picture of the faith at the time it was written,

earlier literature often gives a totally misleading or inaccurate

presentation of the faith from the standpoint of its present teachings

and policy. For exempla, often repeated statements that a Baha’i may

be a member of the Baha’i community while retaining his membership in

another religious faith or denomination, which earlier was a prime,

non-Baha’i criticism of the faith, is totally inaccurate concerning

present-day Baha’i policy, which requires complete severance from one’s

previous religious affiliation.

The problem of studying and properly understanding the

Baha’i faith is increased by the reprinting and revising today of

books originally published during earlier stages of the faith’s

evolution. Samuel Graham Wilson’s *Bahaism and Its Claims*, for example,

reproduced in 1970 by AMS Press, New York, while having some merits

recommending its reproduction today, was nevertheless first published

in 1915, while ‘Abdu’l-Baha was still alive, and therefore reflects an

early stage of Baha’i development. To take one instance, Wilson’s

statement that “to all intents and purposes, the Bab is as much as

obsolete prophet as Mani or Babak”92 is quite inaccurate of modern

Baha’i. Revisions by Baha’is of popular Baha’i books, as noted above,

run into difficulties and require notice in the prefaces about the

continuing evolution of the faith. In spite of these notices and in

spite of revisions in the texts, these volumes give evidence of having

been composed in the atmosphere of previous periods in the faith’s history.

Knowledge of the Baha’i transformations enables one to study the

literature on the faith with a minimum of confusion. The reader may assign

the various books and articles to their respective periods in the faith’s

evolution and evaluate then from the standpoint of the total evolutionary

process. The literature thus becomes important in depicting the state of

the faith at the time of its writing without being regarded as descriptive

of the faith’s present development. Awareness of the Baha’i transforma-

tions thus helps the student avoid possible confusion caused by contradic-

tions between earlier and later written material and between literature

which takes the transformations into account and literature which does not.

Illumination on Subsidiary Questions

The Baha’i transformations, moreover, throw light on some sub-

sidiary questions is the study of Baha’i. For one thing, they help

explain some tensions which presently exist in the faith, tensions

which have resulted from the transformations. The reason for these

resulting tensions is that Baha’is sometimes carry over into the next

evolutionary stage teachings and attitudes from a previous period which

contradict the teachings or policies of later periods. Tensions exist,

for instance, in defining the relationship between the Bab and Baha’u’-

llah. Is the Bab primarily a forerunner of Baha’u’llah or primarily an

independent prophet? Does the Baha’i faith begin with the Bab or with

Baha’u’llah? Are the Babi and Baha’i religions distinct faiths or are

they different stages of the same religion? Tensions exist, moreover,

between broad and narrow definitions of what constitutes being a Baha’i.

May one who has never even heard the name of Baha’u’llah be a Baha’i

because he is a lover of humanity, or is no one entitled to this name who

is not an enrolled member of the Baha’i organization? The Baha’i trans-

formations help answer these questions and explain other Baha’i tensions.

Another question the study of Baha’i transformations helps to

illuminate is whether or not schism has occurred in the Baha’i religion.

A conflict within the religion has occurred in connection with each

transformation the religion has undergone. Non-Baha’i observers and

critics often speak of schism within the movement, yet Baha’is con-

tinuously insist that conflicts have occurred in the faith but not schism

and that the Baha’i religion, unlike all other religions, is divinely

safeguarded from schism by the unique provisions vouchsafed to the reli-

gion by its inspired leaders. The question is immensely important, for

the Baha’i religion claims to be God’s instrument to bring about the

ultimate unity of mankind. But if the faith cannot maintain unity and

harmony within its own household, how can it expect to bring peace and

unity to the whole world? Does the Baha’i religion present modern man

with the paradox—if not the irony—of a religion aspiring to unify

the whole of mankind which itself has split into various contending

factions? A study of the Baha’i transformations, the conflicts they

aroused in the religion and the effects they produced, will help to

clarify this important question.

PLAN OF WORK

The purpose of the present study will be to trace and analyze

the basic transformations which have occurred in the Baha’i World Faith

in its short 130-year history with a view toward ascertaining the

character of the religion and its present state of development and

clarifying and explaining various matters which remain confusing and

contradictory without a clear understanding of the Baha’i evolutionary

transformations. The study’s primary concern will be neither to prove

nor disprove the faith’s claims and teachings, neither to condemn nor

to exonerate, but to present a statement of those issues which, for

good or bad, have shaped the religion over the years into its present

stage of development.

The work will be divided into three parts: part one dealing with

introductory matters; part two treating the period of the faith’s three

central figures—the Bab, Baha’u’llah, and ‘Abdu’l-Baha—a period called

by the Baha’is the “Heroic Age”; and part three focusing on what Baha’is

call the “Formative Age,”93 when the faith’s administrative order

unfolds. The distinction between these two periods of the faith’s

history is so marked that the faith in the latter period will be

referred to in this study as “modern Baha’i,” the form of the faith as

organized and defined by Shoghi Effendi. The religion’s doctrinal

statement, historical understanding, and organization structure as

established by Shoghi Effendi remain basically intact today, except

for the important modification discussed in Chapter VII. The term

“modern Baha’i” is appropriate, therefore, in designating the faith today

as heir to the labors and literature of Shoghi Effendi.

So distinct is modern Baha’i from the faith’s previous forms

that literature on the faith by both Baha’is and non-Baha’is written before

Shoghi Effendi’s transformation or which fails to take into account that

transformation is presenting a now outdated, pre-modern form of the religion

and should not be regarded as descriptive of present-day Baha’i teaching

and policy. For example, most of the major non-Baha’i books, as those of

Samuel Graham Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims* (1915, reproduced 1970), John

R. Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is* (1932), and Edward G. Browne,

published in the late 1800s and the early 1900s, as valuable as they

may be for treating the faith’s early development, were written before the

modern Baha’i period or during its early phases and thus do not take into

account the complete Shoghi Effendi transformation nor far-reaching develop-

ments since Shoghi Effendi’s passing in 1957. William McElwee Miller’s new

volume, *The Baha’i Faith: Its History and Teachings* (1974), revises and

updates his earlier study, *Baha’ism* (1931), thus helping to meet a need

from the non-Baha’i perspective far a modern statement of Baha’i

faith and practice. These earlier works should be read and evaluated in

the light of the later transformations in the religion.

In Parts Two and Three, covering the faith’s history, a chapter

will be devoted to each period of the faith in which a major transform-

tion occurs. Since the transformations were affected by the various

leaders in the faith during their successive ministries, the chapters

thus will be divided according to the ministries of the religion’s

leaders.

The chapters will deal basically with three concern:

(1) the respective leader’s life. (2) the leader’s teachings, and

(3) the transformation in the religion which the events of that life

and those teachings effected, with emphasis on the opposition it aroused,

the tensions in the faith it produced, and the adjustments it necessi-

tated. These concerns will not always be clearly distinguished in the

discussions since they overlap at points. Some of the Bab’s teachings,

for example, have a direct bearing on the events of his life, and these

events, such as his trial and execution, cannot be understood fully

without recourse to his teachings. Similarly, the transformation

effected by Baha’u’llah cannot be separated from his teachings which

constitute the essence of much of that transformation. The three con-

cerns, therefore, are not entirely exclusive and will not always be

distinguished but will be in the background of thought as the discussions

progress.

Briefly defined, the transformations to be dealt with in the

present study, growing out of the transforming character of the Babi

religion (Chapter III), are Baha’u’llah’s transformation of the Babi

religion into the Baha’i faith (Chapter IV); the transformation of

the Baha’i faith into a more Western and socially oriented religion,

as effected by ‘Abdu’l-Baha, son and appointed successor of Baha’u’llah

(Chapter V), the transformation of the faith from a small, loosely

knit, inclusive religion into a tightly organized, precisely defined,

exclusive world faith, as effected by Shoghi Effendi, grandson and

appointed successor of ‘Abdu’l-Baha (Chapter VI), and the latest trans-

formation from a religion under the guardianship of an appointed, living

descendant of Baha’u’llah to a religion directed by a body of nine elected

officials whose term of office is temporary (Chapter VII).

Although all the major periods in the faith’s history will be

dealt with in discussing the successive transformations, the work, almost

needless to say, will not attempt to give a complete history of the Baha’i

religion. Various important, historical matters which do not touch on the

development of the Baha’i transformations, as important or interesting as

they may be to a full understanding and appreciation of Baha’i history, will

fall outside the scope of the present study. Nor will a full or systematic

statement of Baha’i teaching be attempted. The treatment of such history

and teachings as have bearing on the Baha’i transformations, however, should

enable the reader to gain a basic grasp of Baha’i history and teachings so

that he can explore with profit and understanding further aspects of the

truly amazing religion of Baha’i.

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41 The Muslim belief that Jesus did not die on the cross is

based on an interpretation of a passage in the Qur’an which reads:

“They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them; and

lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have

no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not

for certain, but Allah took him up unto Himself” (4:157-58). Various

interpretations of these verses are given today by both Muslims and

Christians. The traditional Muslim view is that some substitute, Judas

Iscariot or some other, actually died on the cross in the “appearance”

of Jesus. The more probable interpretation is that the Qur’an is deny-

ing any Jewish victory in Jesus’ crucifixion since Jesus willingly laid

down his life. Geoffrey Parrinder calls attention to a possible

parallel to these verses in Surah 8:17 in reference to the Muslims

who were taking credit for victory at Badr: “Ye (Muslims) slew them

not, but Allah slew them” (Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an*, New York:

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“gathered” (3:55; 5:117) Jesus to himself. Cf. Julius Basetti-Sani, “For a Dialogue between Christians and Muslims,” *The Muslim World*, LVII, No. 3 (July, 1967), p. 192.

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were infanticide, cannibalism, and incest (see Henry Bettenson, ed.,

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or distortion of the Lord’s Supper. Similarly, among charges against

the Babis were that they held their wives and possessions in common,

allowed the drinking of wine and other immoralities forbidden in Islam,

asserted that a woman could have nine husbands, and gave

enchanted dates or tea to those visiting them which caused them to

become Babis (see Edward G. Browne, ed. and trans., *The Tarikh-i-Jadid*

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Hamadan [Cambridge University Press, 1893], p. 25 and Appendix II,

p. 322). The charge that the Babis allowed a woman to have nine

husbands was based erroneously on Babi-Baha’i numerology which assigned

a special importance to the numbers nine and nineteen.

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53 The more recent Chicago “Declaration of Evangelical Social

Concern,” as one case in point, confesses the failure of evangelicals

to demonstrate “the love of God to those suffering social abuses,”

deplores the historic involvement of the church in America with

racism and the conspicuous responsibility of the evangelical community

for perpetuating the personal attitudes and institutional structures

that have divided the body of Christ along color lines,” urges the

promotion of a “more just acquisition and distribution of the world’s

resources,” acknowledges the need to “resist the temptation to make

the nation and its institutions objects of near religious loyalty,” and

acknowledges “that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and

women to irresponsible passivity” (For the text of the “Declaration,”

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issued by Christian denominations over the past seven or eight years.

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57 Floyd H. Ross, “The Christian Mission in Larger Dimension,”

in *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. by Gerald H. Anderson

(New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1961), p. 214.

58 See, for example, Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization*

*and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (rev, ed.; New York: The

MacMillan Co., 1966), Lesslie Newbigin, Honest Religion for Secular Man

(London, SCM Press Ltd., 1966); Colin William, Faith in a Secular Age,

Fontana Books (London: Collins, 1966).

59 Edward Perry, *The Gospel in Dispute: The Relation of Chris-*

*tian Faith to Other Missionary Religions* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday

and Co., Inc., 1958), p. 1.

60 Kavanaugh is the author of *A Modern Priest Looks at His Out-*

*dated Church* (New York, Trident Press, 1967). Since leaving the insti-

tutional church, Kavanaugh has written *The Birth of God* (New York: Tri-

dent Press, 1969) in which he takes an additional step and looks at

“the entire religious tradition of the Western World” and finds that

“the religious phenomenon has affixed itself to our entire culture and

has deprived man of the freedom that is his right and the maturity that

is the hope of the world” (p. 8).

61 James J. Kavanaugh, *The Struggle of the Unbeliever* (New York:

Trident Press, 1967), p. viii.

62 ibid.

63 Among notables who have left the institutional church or its

ministry are the following:

(1) Charles Davis, Britain’s leading Roman Catholic theolo-

gian, for sixteen years Professor of Dogmatic Theology at St. Edmund’s

College in England, author of *Theology for Today* (New York: Sheed and

Ward, 1961) and other works, editor of *The Clergy Review*, who candidly

presents his reasons for leaving the Church in his volume *A Question of*

*Conscience* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967). Borrowing a

phrase from Harvey Cox, Davis has chosen and suggests for all Christians

an attitude of “creative disaffiliation” (*A Question of Conscience*,

p. 266, citing Cox, *The Secular City*, p. 230), which in Davis’ thought

may or may not entail renunciation of one’s denominational membership

but does require a recognition that “existing social structures of the

Churches are inadequate and obsolete,” that they are “limited in func-

tion, relative in value and essentially changeable” (*A Question of Con-*

*science*, pp. 266-67).

(2) The controversial Bishop James A. Pike, whose career

included serving as head of the Department of Religion at Columbia

University, Dean of New York City’s Cathedral of St. John the Divine,

and Bishop in the Diocese of California, the author of numerous books,

staff member of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions,

for some ten years chairman for the California Advisory Committee to the

U.S. Civil Rights Commission, and a teacher in three law schools and

three theological seminaries, was the focus of heresy proceedings in the

Protestant Episcopal Church (see William Stringfellow and Antony Towne,

*The Bishop Pike Affair: Scandals of Conscience and Heresy, Relevance and*

*Solemnity in the Contemporary Church* [New York: Harper & Row, 1967]),

later resigned as Bishop of California, and established the Foundation

for Religious Transition, renamed alter his death the Bishop Pike

Foundation, to aid others leaving the ministry of the institutional

church. Bishop Pike held that “the growing disenchantment with the

Church does not mean diffidence toward questions about ultimate meaning,”

for he notes that the “more people conclude—rightly or wrongly—that

the Churches have been “tried and found wanting,” the greater is the

extent of searching via extra-ecclesiastical avenues” (Pike, *If This Be*

*Heresy* [New York: Harper & Row, publishers, 1967], p. 21).

(3) An ordained Methodist minister and author of the highly

humorous *How to become a Bishop without Being Religious* (Garden City,

N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1965), Charles Merrill Smith served for

many years in Bloomington, Illinois, and later as minister of the First

Congregational Church, Montclair, New Jersey. His humorous spoof at

the religious profession turned out to be more serious than he may have

intended, for Smith has since left the ministry, devoting himself now

to writing and lecturing. In a section entitled “Do You Blame Me for

Quitting the Ministry?” (addressed to God) in his book *How to*

*Talk to God when You Aren’t Feeling Religious*, (New York: Bantam Books,

1973: first published by Ward Books, Waco, Texas, 1971), he confesses

his frustration in serving as a minister, his sense of futility, and

his growing conviction that what he was doing was not very important

anymore. “When a fellow feels this way,” he says, “the only honest

thing to do is quit” (p. 134, Bantam edition). He compares the churches

as now organized to a 1932 Duesenberg. It was and still is, he says, a

handsome automobile, comfortable to ride in, mechanically way ahead of

the times, but it was expensive to buy, the upkeep was horrendous, and

it was awfully big. Smaller and cheaper automobiles drove the Duesen-

berg out of business. Today a Duesenberg is not bought for its original

purpose of transportation but as a status symbol, an expensive toy.

Smith says: “My suggestion is to let the people who want Duesenberg

religion and are willing to pay for it go right on playing with the

expensive Christian toy. After all, it’s a free country, and they can’t

hurt anybody very much. But please send a revelation to some new Amos

or Isaiah to call the community of faith to its true vocation” (pp. 45-.6).

Baha’is believe that these searches for God outside of the tra-

ditional religious structures can end in Baha’u’llah, in whom God has,

as Smith prays for, sent another revelation in a new prophet.

64 Marcus Bach, *They Have Found a Faith* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-

Merrill Co., 1946), pp. 190-91.

65 James T. Bixby, “What Is Behaism?,” *The North American Review*,

Vol. 196, No. DCLXXIX (June, 1912), 835.

66 Edward G. Browne, ed. and trans., *The Tarikh-i-Jadid or New*

*History of Mirza ‘Ali Muhammad the Bab*, by Mirza Husayn of Hamadan (Cam-

bridge: University Press, 1893), pp. xi-xii.

67 Browne’s information is scattered through a number of impor-

tant articles in journals and encyclopedias and in his introductions,

notes, and appendices to his translations of Baha’i literature and in

other material. No one has attempted to systematize Browne’s material.

He would often correct or add to previously given information. H. M.

Balyuzi, an eminent Baha’i, whose father was one of Browne’s correspon-

dents, has written a significant study from the Baha’i standpoint of

Browne and his writings and activities pertaining to the faith.

66 William McElwee Miller, *Baha’ism: Its Origin, History and*

*Teachings* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1931), p. 9.

69 William McE. Miller, “The Bahai Cause Today,” *The Moslem*

*World*, XXX (Oct., 1940), 389.

70 John Elder, “The Spiritual Situation in Iran,” *The Muslim*

*World*, XXXVIII (April, 1948), 107.

71 ibid.

72 Edward B. Calverly, “Baha’ism,” *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia*

*of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Lefferts A. Loetscher (Grand Rapids: Baker

Book House, 1955), I, 104.

73 Frank S. Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*

(4th ed.; New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 32.

74 Hands of the Cause Residing in the Holy Land, comp., *The Baha’i*

*Faith 1844-1963: Information Statistical & Comparative Including the*

*Achievements of the Ten Year international Baha’i Teaching and Consolidation*

*plan 1953-1963* (Printed in Israel, n.p., n.d.), p. 9.

75 *Baha’i World*, XIII, 342.

76 The Baha’i temple in Wilmette, Illinois, was dedicated on May 2,

1953.

77 Hands of the Cause, *The Baha’i Faith 1844-1963*, pp. 7-8.

78 This twelve-day period is the Baha’i Feast of Ridvan, which

annually commemorates Baha’u’llah’s declaration of his mission.

79 D. Thelma Jackson, comp., *Your Role in the Nine Year Plan*

(Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1909, p. 12; and J. E. Esslemont,

*Baha’u’llah and the New Era* (3rd ed., revised; New York: Pyramid Books,

1970), p. 234.

80 Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance: Messages*

*1963-1968* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1969), pp. 22-27.

A letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United

States through its secretary, Glenford B. Mitchell, September 19, 1974, to

the author provides some information on present Baha’i growth, “… there

has been a tremendous increase in the number of National Spiritual Assemblies,

localities where Baha’is reside and in the number of Baha’i schools and other

institutions during the past year. For example, the number of National Spiri-

tual Assemblies now totals 115 with 16 more to be established within the next

five years.”

81 Jackson, *Your Role in the Nine Year Plan*, p. 18.

82 “Baha’is Report Increased Assemblies, Doubling of Membership in

the U.S.,” *The Christian Century*, LXXXVIII (May 19, 1971), 616.

83 “Baha’i Faith Makes Gains among Rural Blacks in Southern U.S.,”

*The Christian Century*, LXXXVIII (March 24, 1971), 368.

84 Bach, “Baha’i: A Second Look,” p. 449.

85 Kirtley F. Mather, *Science in Search of God* (New York: Red

Label Reprints, 1918), pp. 34-35.

86 Edward G. Browne, ed., *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu’l-Kaf, Being the Earliest*

*History of the Babis Compiled by Hajji Mirza Jani of Kashan between the years*

*A.D. 1850 and 1852* (Leiden: E. J. Brill; London: Luzac & Co., 1910),

p. xlvii.

87 Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, 3d ed., revised, p. v.

This edition contains the Prefaces to the 1937 and 1950 editions.

88 ibid., p. ix.

89 Holley, *Religion for Mankind* (1st American ed.: Wilmette,

Ill.; Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1966), p. 6. The first edition of this work

was published in 1956 by George Ronald, London, England.

90 ibid.

91 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. xv.

92 Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims*, p. 15.

93 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. xiii.

**CHAPTER II**

**STUDIES ON THE BABI-BAHA’I MOVEMENT**

Various studies on the Babi-Baha’i movement will be referred

to in the present work. Since these studies are written from differing

standpoints and since their relative value to the subjects under discus-

sion must be judged in part by the perspectives from which they are

written, the reader from the outset should have some orientation to them.

GOBINEAU’S HISTORY

The first significant book by a European scholar to deal

extensively with the Persian Babi movement is Joseph Arthur Gobineau’s

*Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l’Asie Centrale*, first published

in 1855.1 Gobineau served in the French Legation in Tihran, the capital

of Persia, from 1856 to 1858 as secretary, and from 1862 to 1863 as

minister plenipotentiary.2 Count Gobineau while in Persia had taken

a keen interest in the Babi movement, which was then in early stages

of its development, and collected a number of early Babi manuscripts,

of which some of the more significant were acquired after his death

at auction by the British Museum and the National Library in Paris.3

Although Gobineau’s account of the Bab and his followers forms

only part of a larger discussion, it occupies more than half of his

volume. While having a significance in its own right, the book is

also significant for being the volume which inspired Professor Edward

G. Browne of Cambridge University to undertake his travels in Persia

and to begin his extensive research into the Babi-Baha’i cause. Browne

speaks of the volume as the work

which first inspired my interest in and enthusiasm for the Babis,

and which contains what must still be regarded as one of the best,

most picturesque and most original accounts of the Bab and his

disciples yet written.4

Browne elsewhere says:

I personally owe more to this book than to any other book about

Persia, since to it, not less than to an equally fortunate and

fortuitous meeting in Isfahan, I am indebted for that unravelling

of Babi doctrine and history which first won for me a reputation

in Oriental scholarship.5

As highly as Browne praises Gobineau’s work, he was nevertheless

conscious that the volume, which traces Babi history to A.D. 1852, needed

to be supplemented by an appendix detailing more recent events.6 That

observation is even more applicable today in the light of developments

since Browne’s time, but rather than an appendix a major study is

required to outline the major transformations in the religion since

Gobineau’s work.

The history by Gobineau deals with the earliest stage of the

Babi religion, before Baha’u’llah declared his mission, and therefore

reflects a situation which was radically changed even by the time Browne

began his travels in Persia and which caused him no little distress in

attempting to study the movement. Browse relates in the book which

describes his travels in Persia in 1887-88:

It was the Bab whom I had learned to regard as a hero, and whose

works I desired to obtain and peruse, yet of him no account

appeared to be taken. I questioned my friend about this, and

learned (what I had already begun to suspect at Isfahan) that

such had taken place amongst the Babis since those events of

which Gobineau’s vivid and sympathetic record had so strangely

moved me. That record was written while Mirza Yahya, *Subh-i-Ezel*

(“the Morning of Eternity”) was undisputed vicegerent of the Bab,

and before the great schism occurred which convulsed the Babi

community.7

The significance of Gobineau’s work, therefore, is that it puts on record

an account of the earliest phase of the Babi-Baha’i movement as that

movement made its impression upon an objective non-Baha’i. Baha’is

have some reservations regarding Gobineau’s account from the standpoint

of what they believe was the actual state of affairs within the movement,

but Gobineau’s work reveals how the religion was seen by an outsider in

Persia at that early stage in its development.

HISTORIES EDITED BY E. G. BROWNE

The Babi-Baha’i histories translated and/or edited by the Cam-

bridge Orientalist Edward Granville Browne are in a class by themselves.

Both Baha’is and non-Baha’is studying the faith acknowledge their debt

to this distinguished scholar, who was the only Western historian to

attain the presence of Baha’u’llah, founder of the Baha’i religion, and

who in later years carried on a correspondence with Baha’u’llah’s son

and successor in the religion, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, and with other leading

Baha’is.

Robert P. Richardson, an outspoken critic of the Baha’i

religion, refers to Browne as “the highest authority on the history

of Babism and Baha’ism, and one who errs, if at all, only by a too

sympathetic treatment of Baha.”8 Praise of Browne’s works is repeated

in succeeding non-Baha’i studies of the religion, and dependence

upon him is freely acknowledged and clearly evident in these studies.

Correspondingly, H. M. Balyuzi, an eminent Baha’i, in his volume *Edward*

*Granville Browne and the Baha’i Faith* writes:

No Western scholar has ever equalled the effort of Edward

Granville Browne in seeking and preserving for generations to

come the story of the birth and the rise of a Faith which was

destined, as he foresaw at the onset of his distinguished career,

to have a significance comparable to that of the other great reli-

gions of the world. The Comte de Gobineau’s classical work was

gathering dust when Edward Browne took up his pen to write of a

dawning Faith with zest and admiration. Many, there must have been,

particularly in academic circles, on both sides of the Atlantic,

who made their first acquaintance with that thrilling story in the

writings of Edward Browne.

Baha’is undoubtedly owe to Edward Granville Browne a deep debt

of gratitude. … Despite some mistaken views, his well-merited

fame is enduring.9

Browne’s writings manifest a curious mixture of glowing praise

and stringent criticisms of the Babi-Baha’i movement. Baha’is is are fond

of quoting his words of praise and appreciation and Christian apologists

his comments which put the faith in questionable light. Balyuzi’s study

of Browne attempts from the Baha’i standpoint to deal with some of the

problems raised in Browne’s works concerning the faith. Balyuzi thus

introduced Baha’is who had not read widely in Browne’s works to some of

Browne’s more critical statements and opinions regarding the faith.

Farhang Jahanpur, in a review of Balyuzi’s book, comments that “there

are few Baha’is is who have not heard” of Edward Browne but that “what is

not widely realized [among Baha’is],10 however, is that some of Browne’s

writings were uncomplimentary to the Baha’i Faith.”11 This statement

reflects the previous Baha’i focus only on Browne’s favorable references

to the faith.

If Baha’is in the past have avoided Browne’s critical statements,

non-Baha’is likewise have often avoided his tributes to the religion.

Part of the reason for this mixture of praise and criticism in Browne’s

writings is the fact that he was uncompromising in searching for truth

and fearless in recording all points of view which he felt were perti-

nent to the subjects of his study.12 This aspect of Browne’s writings

invests them with a special value for the objective student of the

Baha’i religion.

The first three histories translated and/or edited by Edward

G. Browne are called by him “the three chief histories composed in

Persian by members of the sect.”13 They will be discussed in the order

in which they were published by Browne.

The *Traveller’s Narrative*

The first Baha’i history published by Browne was *A Traveller’s*

*Narrative*, which appeared in 1891 in two volumes. Volume I contains

the Persian text and Volume II the English translation and notes. Browne

was given a copy of the *Traveller’s Narrative* during his second journey

to Persia in the spring of 1890 by the Baha’is at Bahji, where Browne

had interviewed the founder of the faith, Baha’u’llah.14

Browne’s Reasons for Publishing the “*Traveller’s Narrative*”

As a scholar of Persian literature, Browne was conscious that

many important Persian works remained unpublished, in the East as well

as in Europe, and thus felt constrained to offer some explanation as

to why he would publish so recent a Persian work, especially when the

author was not even known. Browne felt that these reasons against the

book’s publication were inherent in the book’s very nature and character.

It was recent in origin because it dealt with an important new movement

in Persia, and it was anonymous because of the persecution directed

against the movement.15

Browne also saw the movement as having an importance to

various disciplines of study:

Now it appears to me that the history of the Babi movement

must be interesting in different ways to others besides those

who are directly engaged in the study of Persian. To the student

of religious thought it will afford no little matter for reflec-

tion; for here he may contemplate such personalities as by lapse

of time pass into heroes and demi-gods still unobscured by myth

and fable; he may examine by the light of concurrent and indepen-

dent testimony one of those strange outbursts of enthusiasm,

faith, fervent devotion, and indomitable heroism---or fanaticism,

if you will—which we are accustomed to associate with the earlier

history of the human race; he may witness, in a word, the birth of

a faith which may not impossibly win a place amidst the great

religions of the world. To the ethnologist also it may yield

food for thought as to the character of a people, who, stigmatized

as they often have been as selfish, mercenary, avaricious, ego-

tistical, sordid, and cowardly, are yet capable of exhibiting

under the influence of a strong religious impulse a degree of

devotion, disinterestedness, generosity, unselfishness, nobility,

and courage which may be paralleled in history, but can scarcely

be surpassed. To the politician, too, the matter is not devoid

of importance; for what changes may not be effected in a country

now reckoned almost as a cypher in the balance of national forces

by a religion capable of evoking so mighty a spirit? Let those

who know what Muhammad made the Arabs, consider well what the Bab

may yet make the Persians.16

The “paramount interest” which Browne had in the movement, however,

and which he thought would be true of most others, lies, he said, in

this:

that here is something, whether wise or unwise, whether tending

towards the amelioration of mankind or the reverse, which seems

to many hundreds, if not thousands, of our fellow-creatures

worth suffering and dying for, and which on this ground alone,

must be accounted worthy of our most attentive study.17

Author of the *Traveller’s Narrative*

The *Traveller’s Narrative* is written anonymously, and at the

time of its publication Browne did not know who the author was, but he

learned later that the author was Baha’u’llah’s eldest son, ‘Abdu’l-Baha,

who became Baha’u’llah’s successor after his death in 1892.18 Baha’is

acknowledge that ‘Abdu’l-Baha is the author.19

Date of the *Traveller’s Narrative*

Because of a statement in the *Traveller’s Narrative* that “for

nigh upon thirty-five years no action opposed to the government or

prejudicial to the nation has .emanated from this sect,”20 Browne dates

the work as having been written probably in the year 1886.21 Elsewhere,

he gives the date of writing as “in or about the year A.D. 1886.”22

Browne counts thirty-five years from Shavval, A.H. 1268 (Muslim date

corresponding to August, A.D. 1852), when a few Babis made a notorious

and unsuccessful attempt on the life of the Persian shah, which action

plunged the Babis into dire persecution. Thirty-five years from that

date began in July, 1886.23 The year 1886 may be accepted as the

approximate date for the writing of the *Traveller’s Narrative*.

Characteristics of the *Traveller’s Narrative*

The *Traveller’s Narrative* is the first Baha’i history to give

prominence to Baha’u’llah and to the events connected with his dispen-

sation as over against the Bab and his epoch, which are the focus of

the earlier written *Kitab-i Nuqtatu’l-Kaf and the New History*, to be

discussed below. Although the *Traveller’s Narrative* acknowledges that

the Bab advanced the claim of being the *Mihdi* (or *Mahdi*), the Muslim

expected deliverer,24 it emphasizes his role as the *Bab* (“Gate”), the

title he had earlier assumed and by which he is generally known today.

It, moreover, presents his “Bab-hood” as meaning that “he was the channel

of grace from some great Person still behind the veil of glory, who was

the possessor of countless and boundless perfections,”25 evidently meant

by the writer to refer to Baha’u’llah, though unnamed. The writer sees

the Bab as having “laid no claim to revelation from an angel,”26 as

Muhammad had received the Qur’an from the angel Gabriel. Whether

intentional or not, no mention is made of the Bab’s *Bayan*, his book

of laws to govern his dispensation as the Qur’an had governed Muhammad’s.

The Bab is presented, therefore, as a kind of John the Baptist, a fore-

runner preparing the way for the great revelation to come.

Mirza Yahya, whom Gobineau had regarded as the Bab’s successor,27

and who became Baha’u’llah’s rival, is portrayed in contrast to Baha’u’-

llah’s courage, judgment, and leadership ability.

A conciliatory attitude is taken toward the shah of Persia,

who is exonerated from complicity in the persecutions against the

Babis, and the Babi resistance to the government is explained on the

basis of self-defense and ignorance of the Bab’s true teachings by his

followsrs.28

In the fashion of the earlier *New History*, the author, whom

Baha’is acknowledge is ‘Abdu’l-Baba, describes himself as a “traveller”

(hence the title, *A Traveller’s Narrative*) in all parts of Persia, who

has sought out from those within and without the movement, from friend

and strangers, the facts of the case regarding the Bab and his religion

and who proposes to set forth briefly those points of the story upon

which the disputants are agreed.29 Actually, the history is a Baha’i

apology setting out the new state of affairs in the Babi community

after Baha’u’llah’s declaration, defending his claims, and presenting

the present policy regarding the Persian government, as against the

prevailing attitude toward the movement by the government and by those

outside the Baha’i division.

Baha’i and non-Baha’i estimates of the *Traveller’s Narrative*

have varied. Baha’is, of course, highly esteem the *Traveller’s Narra-*

*tive* since it is written by no less an authority in the Baha’i religion

than Baha’u’llah’s own son and successor. Non-Baha’is have tended to

approach the volume with some caution, taking into account its evident

purpose of establishing the Baha’i claims as over against the

original Babi position and against Mirza Yahya, the Bab’s own nominee

for the leadership in the movement after his death. The importance of

the *Traveller’s Narrative*, however, as reflecting Baha’i doctrine and

outlook at the time of its composition by one at the forefront of the

movement cannot be overstressed.

The *New History*

The first Baha’i history written by a member of the religion

after Baha’u’llah’s declaration of his mission is the *Tarikh-i-Jadid*,

or *New History*, of which Browne published an English translation in

1893. The *New History*, however, focuses on the Bab and his dispensa-

tion rather than on Baha’u’llah, and this is one reason which necessi-

tated the writing of the later Baha’i history, the *Traveller’s Narra-*

*tive*.

Author of the *New History*

The work was written anonymously by one who describes himself

as a traveller going to “all parts of Europe and India and observing

the races and religions of those regions” and having “chanced to visit

Persia,”30 where he met some members of the persecuted Babi sect. He

denies being of the Persian nation31 and thanks God that be is not

a Persian.32 He speaks of Europeans as “my compatriots”33 and refers

to the French language as “my own language.”34 He portrays himself as

being neither a Muslim nor a member of the Babi religion and in one

place refers to some acquaintances who “invited me to exchange the

Christian faith for the religion of Muhammad.”35

Having become “fully cognizant of the history and doctrines

of the Babis,” during his travels in Persia, the author says he felt

“impelled by sympathy and common humanity to compose this book”36 to

dispel misconceptions about the Babis so that persecution of them might

cease.37

Edward Browne, not knowing for sure who the author was, wrote

in 1891:

Whoever the author or authors may have been the information set

forth is so detailed and so minute that it must have been derived

for the most part from persons who had conversed with actual eye-

witnesses of the events described, if not from eye-witnesses them-

selves.38

During his first journey in Persia, Browne was told of the *New History*,

and when he asked for the author’s name, Haji Mirza Hasan replied:

“I know it but it is a secret which I am not entitled to

divulge, though, as the writer is dead now, it could make little

matter even were it generally known. I may tell you this much,

that he was one of the secretaries of Manakji Sahib of Teheran.

When he began to write he was quite impartial, but as he went on

be became convinced by his investigations of the truth of the

matter, and this change in his opinions is manifest in the

later portion of the work. …”39

Browne was later given information on the authorship and

production of the *New History*. In responding to a number of questions

asked by Browne, Mirza Abu’l-Fadl composed a treatise entitled *Risaliy*-

*i-Iskandariyyih* (the Epistle of Alexander, or the Alexandrine Tract),40

named in honor of a long time friend to whom it is dedicated, Alexander

Toumansky of the Russian Artillery, a noted Orientalist, author, and

the translator of Baha’u’llah’s *Kitab-i-Aqdas* into Russian. Four copies

were written in Abu’l-Fadl’s hand—one the author kept himself; one he

sent to Toumansky; one to Baha’u’llah; and one to Browne. Abu’l-Fadl,

in answering the question concerning the authorship of the *New History*,

relates.

The writer and author of the *Tarikh-i-Jadid* was the late Mirza

Huseyn of Hamadan. … The aforesaid author, in consequence of

the calligraphic and epistolary skill which he showed in drafting

letters, was at first secretary to one of the ministers of the

Persian Government. At the time of His Majesty Nasiru’d-Din

Shah’s first journey to Europe he too visited those countries in

the Royal Suite. … After his return to Persia, he was amongst

those imprisoned in consequence of the troubles of the year A.H.

1291 (A.D. 1874). …

After his release from the prison of Teheran, he obtained

employment in the office of Manakji the Zoroastrian, well known

as an author and writer. Manakji treated him with great respect,

for had he not become notorious an a Babi, he would never have

engaged in this work.41

Manakji, zealous in collecting books, would urge his acquaintances

who were capable of writing books or treatises to compose works on

suggested subjects. One night he, according to Abu’l-Fadl, “begged Mirza

Huseyn to compile a history of the Babis.42 Abu’l-Fadl continues:

Mirza Huseyn came to the writer [Abu’l-Fadl, the writer of the

Tract] and asked his assistance, saying, ‘Since hitherto no full

and correct history has been written treating of the events of

this Theophany, to collect and compile the various episodes thereof

in a fitting manner is a very difficult matter. …

To this I replied, ‘There is in the hands of the Friends a

history by the late Haji Mirza Jani of Kashan, who was one of the

martyrs of Teheran, and one of the best men of that time. But he

was a man engaged in business and without skill in historiography,

neither did he record the dates of the years and months. At most

he, being a God-fearing man. truthfully set down the record of

events as he had seen and heard them. Obtain this book, and

take the episodes from it, and the dates of the years and months

from the Nasikhu’t-Tawarikh and the appendices of the Rawzatu’s-

Safa; and, having incorporated these in your rough draft, read

over each sheet to His Reverence Haji Seyyid Jawad of Kerbela

(whose name has been repeatedly mentioned in these pages, for

he, from the beginning of the Manifestation of the First Point

[*i.e*. the Bab] until the arrival of His Holiness Baha’u’llah in

Acre, accompanied the Friends everywhere in person, and is

thoroughly informed and cognizant of all events. Thus diligently

correct the history, in order that this book may, by the will of

God, be well finished, and may win the approbation of the learned

throughout the world.”43

Abu’l-Fadl indicates that Musa Husayn asked him to write the introduc-

tory preface and thus open for him the path of composition, so Abu’l-

Fadl, agreeing to this, wrote two pages at the beginning of the work,

containing exhortations to strive after the truth.44 Mirza Husayn

intended to write two volumes, but his death in A.H. 1299 (A.D. 1881-

1882)45 prevented his writing the second volume. Mirza Husayn’s

first volume, according to Abu’l-Fadl’s testimony, was not completed

in the manner suggested by Abu’l-Fadl but was subjected to revision

by Manakji:

Manakji’s custom was to bid his secretary write down some matter

and afterwards read the rough draft over to him. So first of all

the secretary used to read over to him the rough draft which he

had made in accordance with his own taste and agreeably to the

canons of good style; and then, after Manakji had made additions

here and excisions there, and had docked and re-arranged the

matter, he used to make a fair copy. And since Manakji had no

great skill or science in the Persian tongue, the style of most

of the books and treatises attributed to him is disconnected and

broken, good and bad being singled together. In addition to

this defect, ignorant scribes and illiterate writers have, in

accordance with their own fancies, so altered the *Tarikh-i-Jadid*

that at the present day every copy of it appears like a defaced

portrait or a restored temple, to such a degree that one cannot

obtain a correct copy of it, unless it were the author’s own

transcript; otherwise no copy can be relied upon.46

The bulk of the *New History* purports to be the narrative of

a Babi acquaintance whom the author met in Persia. Browne attributes

the introductory and concluding sections of the history, before and

after this narrative, to Manakji, the Zoroastrian agent in Tihran.47

The statements about the author’s not being a Persian, nor Muslim, nor

Babi, and about the Persian language not being his mother-tongue, state-

ments which occur in these sections, certainly would be true of

Manakji.48

A reference to “a certain illustrious Seyyid,” described as

bring a ‘holy and *beneficent* [translation of *javad* or *jawad*] being”49

may be a reference to Haji Siyyid Javad of Karbila, to whom Abu’l-Fadl

suggests that Mirza Husayn take the text of the *New History* for final

review and correction50 and may supply internal evidence of Haji Siyyid

Javad’s having some part in the production of the *New History*.51 Browne

originally questioned Siyyid Javad’s having had a share in the produc-

tion of the *New History* because of the ascription to Siyyid Javad of

the authorship of the *Hasht Bihisht* (Eight Paradises), which has strong-

ly marked Azali proclivities,52 and because of Mirza Yahya’s assurances

to Browne that Siyyid Javad was one of his staunchest followers.53

Browne obtained a copy of the *Hasht Bihisht*, which he calls “a hitherto

unknown Ezeli controversial work,”54 from “a learned Ezeli resident in

Constantinople,”.55 to whom Browne refers in his writings as “Sheykh

A\_\_\_,”56 identified as Sheykh (or more preferably, Shaykh) Ahmad of

Kirman (called Ruhi),57 who was one of Mirza Yahya’s sons-in-law and

who was put to death in Tabriz in 1896.58

Shaykh Ahmad told Edward Browne that the *Hasht Bihisht*

represented

the teachings and sayings of the illustrious Haji Seyyid Jawad

of Kerbela, who was of the “First Letters of the Living,” the

earliest believers. … But, inasmuch as during his latter

days the strength of that illustrious personage was much

impaired and his hands trembled, he was unable to write, where-

fore he dictated these words, and one of his disciples wrote

them down, but in an illegible hand and on scattered leaves.

In these days, having some leisure time in Constantinople, I

and this person exerted ourselves to set in order these dis-

ordered leaves. In short the original spirit of the contents

is his [*i.e*. Seyyid Jawad’s], though perhaps the form of words

may be ours. Should you desire to mention the name of the

author of these two books it is Haji Siyyid Javad.59

Browne later did mention the authorship of the *Hasht Bihisht*, saying

that he had lately learned that “Aka Seyyid Jawad of Kerbela, a promi-

nent member of the clergy at Kirman” was “the author of both volumes

of the *Hasht Bihisht*.”60 Browne notes, however, that Abu’l-Fadl had

categorically denied that Siyyid Javad was a follower of Mirza Yahya,61

and if not an adherent of Mirza Yahya, his authorship of the *Hasht*

*Bihisht* would be highly unlikely. In his article for the *Encyclopaedia*

*of Religion and Ethics*, Browne identifies the author of the *Hasht*

*Bihisht* as Shaykh Ahmad.62 Still later, however, Browne says in

reference to the *Hasht Bihisht*:

To Shaykh Ahmad-i-*Ruhi* of Kirman we are indebted, at any

rate so far as the final recension is concerned (far as to the

original authorship some doubt prevails), for the only attempt

with which I am acquainted to elaborate a comprehensive philo-

sophy of the Babi doctrine, both theoretical and practical.63

Browne goes on to confess that “the book deserves a more detailed

and systematic study than I have yet been able to give it,” but says,

“I am disposed to think that the author has imparted into it a system

and a number of ideas peculiar to himself and foreign to the Bab’s

thought.”64 It is possible, then, and perhaps probable, if Siyyid

Javad is not the author of the *Hasht Bihisht*, that he had some part

in the production of the *New History*, as internal evidence may imply.

The evidence would seem to indicate, therefore, that at least

four known persons had a share in the production of the *New History*:

Mirza Abu’l-Fadl, who wrote the opening two pages and suggested its

method of composition; Mirza Husayn of Hamadan, author of the book in

its original form; Siyyid Javad, who may have helped in some revision;

and Manakji, largely responsible for the opening and closing sections

which enclose the historical narrative and for the overall form. But

the *New History* as it exists today gives evidence of even further

revision and interpolation.

The Two Manuscripts Collated by Browne

Browne admitted that two manuscripts of the *New History* which

he collated for publication had a “multitude of variants and diver-

gences.”65 Browne was informed by Sidney Churchill on December 14,

1887, that he had obtained a manuscript of the *New History* for the

British Museum Library and invited Browne to examine it on his return

to England. Browne next heard of the existence of this history at

Shiraz on March 30, 1888, from some of his Babi acquaintances.66 He

was given eventually a copy of the history while in Persia by the

Babis (actually Baha’is) in Shiraz. Browne returned to England in

the autumn of 1889 and made considerable use of the history in his

two articles on the Babis for the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic*

*Society*.67 Browne made another trip to Persia in the spring of 1890

before examining the British Museum Library copy of the *New History*.

On this second experience in Persia, Browne had been admitted into the

presence of Baha’u’llah and had acquired also a copy of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s

*Traveller’s Narrative*, the publication of which upon his return to

England occupied most of his life. He did manage, however, to go to

London for three weeks during the Easter vacation of 1891 and examined

for the first time the text of the British Museum Library’s copy of the

*New History*. He then detected the many variants between this copy and

his own copy and several long episodes not in his manuscript. The work

of collating the two manuscripts thus proved more laborious than

he had intended. Browne also made a more careful effort to be as accu-

rate as possible with the English translation of the *New History* because,

due to costs, he did not plan to publish the Persian text as he had with

the earlier published *Traveller’s Narrative*.68

In the published translation of the *New History*, material

found only in the British Museum Library copy (which Browne labels L.

for London Codex) is enclosed in single square brackets, and material

found only in his copy (which he labels C. for Cambridge Codex) is

enclosed in double square brackets. Browne speaks of the London Codex

as “superior in accuracy, neatness, and calligraphy” to his own copy,69

and since it was transcribed in Rajab A.H. 1298 (June, 1881), it was

written during Mirza Husayn’s lifetime and, Browne believes, possibly

under his supervision.70

The fact that each of the two manuscripts contains material

peculiar to itself reveals that at least two additional revisers have

interpolated material into the original text. Browne holds that, whereas

in the case of classical or ancient texts, which are principally of literary

interest, scholars detecting interpolations by ingenious copyists over the

ages would excise such additions to produce a more accurate, text, rather

in the case of interpolations in the *New History*, which has an interest

more historical than literary,

the interpolations may be just as valuable as the original text,

for no one but a Babi would copy the book, and such an one might

well add from his own knowledge new and important facts of which

the authors were not cognizant. Indeed, as a matter of fact,

some of the most interesting portions of the *Tarikh-i-Jadid* are

evidently interpolations of this sort, several of them being

actually introduced by the words “thus says the reviser of this

history,” or “thus says the transcriber.”71

In one passage in C., “the reviser of this history” even identifies

himself by name as “Nabil, a native of Alin.”72

Date of the *New History*

As to the date of the *New History*’s original composition,

Browne writes:

The allusion to the Ikan73 on p. 26 proves that the *New History*

was written subsequently to that work, which was composed in

A.D. 1858; the allusion to Baha’u’llah’s “Manifestation” on

p. 64 carries the date down to A.D. 1866;74 while the reference

to the Shah’s tour in Europe (presumable the first)75 on p. 181

brings it down to A.D. 1873. This last date would in any case

be the earliest admissible, for on p. 174 the Babis are said to

have endured nearly *thirty years* of persecution, while on p. 321

this number is raised to *thirty-five* by one manuscript.76

Since the London Codex was transcribed in June, 1881, the *New History*

had to have been written no later than that date and, according to Browne,

no earlier than September 6, 1873, when Nasiru’d-Din Shah returned from

Europe, to which the writer refers. According to Abu’l-Fadl, it was written

after Mirza Husayn’s release from the imprisonment due to the troubles

in A.H. 1291 (A.D. 1874) and after his employment in the office of

Manakji, who urged Mirza Husayn to write his history.77 Also according

to Abu’l-Fadl, after Mirza Husayn had completed the first volume of the

projected two volumes of his history, “fate granted him no further

respite, for he died in the city of Resht is the year A.H. 1299 [= A.D.

1881–2).77 Browne assigns 1880 as the date for the writing of the

*New History*.79

Characteristics of the *New History*

The *New History* is the first Baha’i history written by a

follower of Baha’u’llah after Baha’u’llah’s declaration of his mission.

The history, however, gives no prominence to Baha’u’llah and events

connected with his ministry as does the later written *Traveller’s*

*Narrative*. The focus of the *New History* is on the Bab and his dispen-

sation, covering events from before the Bab’s declaration through the

Bab’s martyrdom and the retrieval of his mutilated body by his followers.

A few references to Baha’u’llah occur in which he is portrayed in an

exalted light, but mention is made that “the mystery of whose real

nature was still hidden within the veils of the divine Wisdom.80

The author does indicate his intention of writing a second

volume, and Mirza Abu’l-Fadl believed that he intended the first

volume to center on events connected with the Bab’s ministry and

the second to focus on the circumstances of the Most Holy and Most

Splendid Dawn,”81 that is, on Baha’u’llah. According to the author’s

account, however, the planned second volume was to present

particulars of their [the religion’s] principles and observances,

explanations of certain points of transcendental philosophy,

and a detailed description of their virtues, their ethics and

and rules of conduct, and the sincerity and singleheartedness,

which I have myself observed in them.82

The second volume seems, therefore, to have been contemplated not as a

continuation of the history but as a volume of Babi-Baha’i principles,

philosophy, and ethical requirements to serve evidently as a companion

volume to the historical account.

The *New History* was sent to the Baha’i chiefs in ‘Akka but failed

to win their full approval, partly because, whether it was due to

the principal author’s death or otherwise, the volume cuts short the

history at the point of the Bab’s martyrdom and thus does not cover

what Baha’is consider the more important events connected with the

later manifestation of Baha’u’llah. One of the Baha’is whom Browne

met in Persia said of the *New History*:

It is not altogether good. The author devotee too large a

portion of his work to abuse of the Muhammadan doctors and

reflections on the Persian Government, while, on the other

hand, he omits many events of real importance. Besides that,

I do not like his pretence of being a French traveller; for

we all know, and indeed anyone who reads his book can see,

that be was not a European.83

Haji Mirza Hasan added the comment that the book was sent to the

Supreme Horizon [to Baha’u’llah at ‘Akka], but was not altogether

approved there, and I believe that another and more accurate history

is to be written. However, you will learn a good deal from this one.”84

The history being prepared to replace the *New History* is, of course,

the *Traveller’s Narrative*.

Since the *New History* did not meet the complete approval

of Baha’i leaders in ‘Akka, who proceeded to prepare another volume,

the *New History* should not be regarded as official Baha’i teachings

and outlook, and criticism against the Baha’is because of the tenor

of the *New History* is not fully justified. The volume, however,

does have value in throwing light an various historical events and in

enabling the student of Baha’i history better to trace the developing

tradition.

The *Kitab-i Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*

Browne knew of the existence of an older Babi history from

reading the *New History*, which contains numerous quotations from

the earlier work. After repeated disappointments trying to obtain a

copy or to learn if any copies still existed, Browne finally concluded

that the work probably was no longer extant.85 While on a short stay in

Paris during the Easter vacation of 1892, however, Browne examined five

Baha’i manuscripts acquired by the Bibliothèque Nationale which had once

been owned by Count Gobineau, whose study of Central Asian religions and

philosophies, as noted above,86 had first inspired Browne’s interest

in the Babi religion. One of the manuscripts, identified in the National

Library as *Suppl. Persan 1071*, was a history of the Babi religion, and

another of the manuscripts, *Suppl. Persan 1070*, contained the *Persian*

*Bayan* and the first third of the same history with no break between the

end of the *Bayan* and the beginning if the history.87 Browne sent a

description of the five manuscripts to Mirza Yahya (Subh-i-Azal) and

regarding the history, Mirza Yahya wrote on May 3, 1892, that “the

history to which you allude must by certain indications, be by the

uplifted88 and martyred Hajji [Mirza Jani],89 for none but he wrote

[such] a history.”90

Browne considered the *Kitab-i Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* (the Book of the

Point of K) to be unsurpassingly important to an accurate understanding

of the origin and development of the Babi religion. He calls the work

“perhaps the most important document which exists for the history of

the early Babis,” being “the oldest and most authentic account of the

stirring events of the years A.D. 1844-1851 or 1852, presented from

the Babi point of view, which we possess.”91 Elsewhere Browne calls

it “the most interesting book, perhaps, in the whole range of Babi

literature.”92

Browne did not discover the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* until his translation

of the *New History* was already completed and arrangements made for its

publication, but Browne believed the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* to be the much more

important book. Browne now came to believe that it was “a most fortu-

nate circumstance” that the Syndics of University Press, Cambridge, were

reluctant to incur the great expense of publishing the text of the *New*

*History* when accepting the English translation,93 for Browne was now

more eager to publish the Persian text of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* than that

of the *New History*. Browne published the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* in 1910 as

Volume IV of the E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, consisting of impor-

tant and rare Turkish, Persian, and Arabic works.

By comparing the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* with the *New History*, Browne

believed that he had caught the Baha’is, apparently to his own shock

and disappointment, in a grand scheme of “suppression and falsifica-

tion of evidence.”94 The *New History*, he discovered, omitted and

altered sections of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* which were detrimental or

unfavorable to the changes being effected under Baha’u’llah’s leader-

ship. With all pertinent material of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* being trans-

ferred into the *New History* by quotation or restatement, Browne

believed the Baha’is then conspired to suppress and destroy completely

the original history. He writes:

This fact is very instructive in connection with the history of

other religions, for it is hard for us, accustomed to a world of

printed books and carefully-guarded public libraries, to realize

that so important a work as this could be successfully suppressed;

and equally hard to believe that the adherents of a religion evi-

dently animated by the utmost self-devotion and the most fervent

enthusiasm, and, in ordinary every-day matters; by obvious honesty

of purpose, could connive at such an act of suppression and falsi-

fication of evidence. The application of this fact, which, were

it not established by the clearest evidence, I should have regarded

as incredible, I leave to professional theologians, to whom it may

not be devoid of a wider significance. Of this such I am certain,

that the more the Baha’i doctrine spreads, especially outside

Persia, and most of all in Europe and America, the more the true

history and nature of the original Babi movement is obscured and

distorted.95

The importance which Browne attached to the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* is fully

justified if the document is the history of Mirza Jani, who was mar-

tyred in 1852, because it then would give the earliest account of

the Babi community which is available and would reveal those features

of the faith prior to the rivalry between Baha’u’llah and Subh-i-Azal.

The gravity of the question is all the more apparent in the

consideration that non-Baha’i studies have followed Browne in regard-

ing the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* as the earliest history of the Babi movement and

it is used as a basis for attacking the character of the later

developing Baha’i movement, which is then seen as being engaged in

suppression and falsification of evidence which the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* has

brought to light. J. B. Richards, for example, writes:

The discovery by the late Prof. E. G. Browne, of a copy of the

“Nuqtatu’l-Kaf” in the National Library, Paris, in the spring

of 1892 was an event of far-reaching importance to all students

of Baha’ism. It is to this discovery that we owe the fact that

to-day we are in a position to trace the development of the

Babi-Baha’i movement from its very beginning. The writer of

the book was Mirza Jani, a native of Kashan in Persia, who was

himself martyred in the year 1268 A.H. (A.D. 1852), two years

after the death of the Bab. He had been acquainted with all

the leading Babis, including Mirza Yahya Subh-i Ezel, Qurratu’l-

‘Ayn, Baha’u’llah and the Bab himself, and was therefore well

qualified to write the history of the movement. Writing at a

time when Babism was as yet undivided, and suppression of the

truth was unnecessary, Mirza Jani is our one authority for the

history of the movement up to the death of the Bab, and the

events of the two years that immediately followed. Its impor-

tance cannot be exaggerated, for … the histories which suc-

ceeded it so alter and amend the facts that they cannot be

regarded as histories, and must be classed as polemical works.96

The Position of H. M. Balyuzi

H. M. Balyuzi, in his study on Edward G. Browne, attempts to

rescue the Baha’i reputation by maintaining that the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*

“was not what it was supposed to be, and what Browne believed it to

be.” Browne’s “outlook was profoundly affected,” he says, once Browne

convinced himself of the book’s supreme importance and uniqueness, and

“on the basis of that conviction he built a monumental and impressive

case.”97 But Balyuzi questions whether the manuscript discovered by

Browne was actually the Mirza Jani history and raises some other

questions concerning the manuscript and the importance Browne attached

to it. Since one’s understanding of the character and early history of

the faith will be largely determined by their answers, the questions

raised by Balyuzi require some attention.

The Question of Authorship: The first question Balyuzi raises

is whether the manuscript Browne found in the National Library is “the

same chronicle” as that written by Mirza Jani of Kashan, who was

martyred in 1852.98 Balyuzi admits that Mirza Jani wrote a history of

the faith and repeatedly stresses that no one has questioned, denied,

or ever tried to conceal this fact. He notes that the *New History*

refers to Mirza Jani’s book, that Mirza Abu’l-Fadl clearly stated that

the *New History* was based on Mirza Jani’s work, and that Mirza Abu’l-

Fadl had even added information concerning where it was written, in

Shah ‘Abdu’l-Azim,99 five or six miles south of Tihran. ‘Abdu’l-Baha,

in a tablet addressed to the hands of the cause, Balyuzi indicates,

states that “the martyr, Haji Mirza Jani, had written a few chapters,

brief and incomplete, on the history of the Faith.”100 But Balyuzi

says, after Browne published the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* in 1910, Mirza Abu’l-

Fadl in a treatise “unhesitantly condemned it as a forgery.”101 Abu’l-

Fadl, according to Balyuzi, maintained that the title *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*

(the Point of K, for Kashan, the home of Mirza Jani) was selected to

mislead in identifying the real author.102

Balyuzi maintains that Mirza Abu’l-Fadl’s pronouncement after

the publication of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* that it is a forgery “carries

weight” because “Mirza Abu’l-Fadl must have personally seen both the

histories” of Mirza Jani and Mirza Husayn, for he admits that the *New*

*History* is based on Mirza Jani’s history and “had also pointed out

that Manakji had shaped Mirza Husayn’s history to his own liking, and

copyists had introduced their own embellishments.”103

The Question of the *History*’s Value: “The crucial point,”

Balyuzi believes, “is not the authorship of *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, but the

value that Edward Browne attached to it.”104 Balyuzi asks whether or

not the work merited such high consideration. He points out that

Mirza Jani was “a man of the mart, not closed cloisters,”105 or in

Mirza Abu’l-Fadl’s words, as translated by Browne, “a man engaged

in business and without skill in historiography.”106 Balyuzi writes:

A chronicle composed by a merchant who was neither a

historian, nor a scholar and man of letters, and whose associa-

tion with the Founder of the Faith was confined to a matter of

days, could not be the sole document to preserve a valid doc-

trine and tradition.107

Balyuzi here refers to the Bab’s stay in the home of Mirza Jani in

Kashan for two days and nights,108 and he implies that the history

fell into oblivion, not because of any overt acts at suppression, as

Browne charges, but simply because its quality was not such as to

guarantee its preservation.

The Question of Tampering with the Text: Another question

Balyuzi raises is whether someone may have tampered with the original

Mirza Jani history. He points out that Mirza Jani had two brothers,

one of whom, Haji Muhammad-Isma‘il known as Dhabih, was a staunch

follower of Baha’u’llah, but the other, Haji Mirza Ahmad, was a

supporter of Subh-i-Azal and was eventually murdered by an Arab

in Baghdad. Balyuzi asks:

Did this Haji Mirza Ahmad, involved as he was with the

supporters of Subh-i-Azal, have a hand in tampering with the

text of the fragmentary history written by his martyred brother

[Mirza Jani]?109

Balyuzi then acknowledges: “One can pose this question, but to find an

answer is well-nigh impossible. No documentary evidence exists,”110

Balyuzi’s Summations: Balyuzi gives a summary statement of

his theory to account for some of the problems and questions which he has

discussed:

To sum up, there have been two books—one an incomplete

history by a devout and courageous merchant who perished in the

savage massacre of 1852, the second a distortion ascribed to the

same devoted man whose voice had already been silenced when the

*Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* was given the stamp of his name.111

Since the value one attaches to the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* in giving an accurate

description of conditions in the Babi community prior to the Baha’i-Azali

division will be determined largely by their answers, the questions Balyuzi

raises and his theory require some response before proceeding to the his-

torical sections of the present work.

Response to Balyuzi’s Position

Balyuzi’s study on Edward G. Browne marks the first extensive

attempt to deal critically with issues presented in the writings of Edward

G. Browne, whose conclusions non-Baha’is generally have accepted. Balyuzi’s

approach from the Baha’i perspective, therefore, is to be commended, for

wrestling with such issues as Balyuzi has done will be necessary to any

profitable dialogue between Baha’is and non-Baha’is. Balyuzi has made

some corrections in Browne’s information, noted some inconsistencies, and

pointed to some of his weaker arguments. A response to all of Balyuzi’s

findings is beyond the scope of the present study, but his questions

regarding the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* are crucial to the study of the faith’s early

history.

Author of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*: Balyuzi’s theory that the

*Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* published in 1910 is a distortion of an earlier work

written by Mirza Jani is an attempt to reconcile statements that

Mirza Jani had in fact, written a history, which ‘Abdu’l-Baha

describes, according to Balyuzi, as “a few chapters, brief and incom-

plete” with Mirza Abu’l-Fadl’s pronouncement that the 1910 published

history is a forgery.112

Balyuzi does not indicate the context in which ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s

statement is made, nor does he indicate the date of the statement,

whether made before or after Browne’s publication of the *Nuqtatu’l-*

*Kaf*; he merely indicates that it appears in a tablet addressed to

the hands of the cause, high ranking defenders of the faith, and

presumably a tablet not available to the public. Nor does Balyuzi

identify the treatise in which Abu’l-Fadl’s pronouncement is made.

His theory rests largely on these two statements.

Admittedly, Mirza Jani’s history would be incomplete from the

Baha’i perspective in not covering the later events connected with

the ministry of Baha’u’llah, but what evidence is there that Mirza

Jani’s history was *complete* from the standpoint of covering Babi

history to its date of writing? First, there is the testimony of

Abu’l-Fadl, himself, who tells how the *New History* came into being.

When Mirza Husayn came to him saying, “Hitherto no full and correct

history has been written treating of this Theophany,” Mirza Abu’l-

Fadl calls his attention to the fact that “there is in the hands of

the Friends a history by the late Haji Mirza Jani of Kashan” and

advises him to use that history as the basis for his own. He does not

speak of Mirza Jani’s history as being incomplete but refers only to the

fact that Mirza Jani had not dated the events of his history. He indicates,

therefore, that Mirza Husayn would need to get the dates for the events

from other sources.113

But added to this is the testimony of the author of the *New*

*History* (evidently in this instance, Mirza Husayn, who may be taken as

largely responsible for the historical narrative within the *New History*),

who had seen the Mirza Jani history, for he used it as the basis of his

own work. These are his words:

The late Haji Mirza Jani, one of the most respected of the

inhabitants of Kashan, who was remarkable for his self-devotion,

virtue, and purity of heart, who had with his own eyes witnessed

all the most important events of the Manifestation, and who for

his zeal finally suffered martyrdom (whereof he foretold all the

circumstances some while before their occurrence to certain of

his acquaintance), wrote a book describing the course of events

and setting forth arguments in support of the faith. In the work

he recorded all that he was able to ascertain [from first to last,

by diligent enquiries most carefully conducted,] about each of the

chief disciples and believers.114

The statement that Mirza Jani “wrote a book” in which he “recorded all

that he was able to ascertain about each of the chief disciples and

believers” sounds as if the history was a rather full account.

As to Mirza Abu’l-Fadl’s pronouncement after the publication

of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* in 1910 that it was a forgery, one wonders with

what copy Mirza Abu’l-Fadl was making his comparison with Browne’s

edition, for few copies purporting to be Mirza Jani’s history have

been produced. Since Mirza Jani did write a history, as is known,

the burden of evidence would be upon those who deny that the history

which Browne discovered in the Paris National Library is the lost

history. The *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* is not in the class of those works which

sometimes appear pretending to give reality to fictitious or legendary

works. Mirza Jani had written a history. Various persons testify to

this. The *New History* is based upon it. The manuscript Browne dis-

covered had for many years been out of circulation, first in Count

Gobineau’s possession and then in the holdings of the National Library,

and thus escaped the oblivion which, for whatever reason, overtook

nearly all the other copies.

Manuscripts of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* at an earlier period were

extremely rare, even Subh-i-Azal’s supporters, as Balyuzi points out,

seemingly possessed no copy of the history,115 which Browne maintains

supplied them with “a most powerful weapon not of defence only, but

of attack” against the Baha’is,116 and Mirza Abu’l-Fadl, himself,

although aware of the history’s existence, had no copy to make

available to Mirza Husayn, for he tells him to “obtain this book”

(sometime prior to 1881 or 1882, when Mirza Husayn died),117 and he

also indicates, when writing in October, 1892, in the Alexandrine

Tract, that he still had no copy:

But of this history I, the writer, cannot now procure a copy;

for from Samarkand to Teheran is very far, and fortune frowns

on the People of Baha, and is beyond measure jealous of them.118

When Abu’l-Fadl pronounced the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* of 1910 a forgery, was

he, therefore, drawing upon recollections of even earlier years when

the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* was more available? Much had happened in the Babi-

Baha’i movement between the time when Mirza Jani wrote his history

(A.D. 1651) and when Browne published the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* (1910) to

cause changes in one’s perspective.

Value of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*: But even if the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*

is the Mirza Jani history, Balyuzi questions whether it would merit

the high value which Browne places upon it. Balyuzi does not think

Mirza Jani was qualified to write a chronicle which might preserve

a valid doctrine and tradition, for he was “neither a historian, nor

a scholar and man of letters” and his “association with the Founder

of the Faith was confined to a matter of days.”119

If Mirza Jani is the author, as Browne believed, he would

according to Browne be well qualified to write such a history:

He appears to have been personally acquainted not only with the

Bab, Subh-i-Ezel, and Baha’u’llah, but with Haji Suleyman Khan,

Mulla Muhammad ‘Ali of Zanjan, Seyyid Yahya of Darab, Mulla

Sheykh ‘Ali “*Jenab-i-‘Azim*,” Kurratu’l-‘Ayn, “*Hazrat-i-Kuddus*,”

and almost all the early apostles of the Babi religion. Finally,

in company with twenty-seven of his co-religionists, he suffered

martyrdom for the faith at Teheran on September 15th, 1852. he

was therefore heart and soul a Babi; he had the best possible

opportunities for obtaining detailed and accurate information

about every event connected with the movement during the first

eight years of its existence (A.D. 1844-1852); and he enjoyed

a high reputation for truthfulness, intelligence, and integrity.120

The author of the *New History*, as indicated above, stated that

Mirza Jani “had with his own eyes witnessed all the most important

events of the Manifestation,”121 and Mirza Abu’l-Fadl said, although

indicating that Mirza Jani had no skill in historiography, which

meant especially that he had not recorded dates of events, that “he,

being a God-fearing man, *truthfully* set down the record of events

as he had seen and heard then.”122

The difference in evaluating the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* between

Balyuzi and the others quoted above is due in part to a difference

in approach to the history. Balyuzi is stressing that the work would

present no valid statement of Babi doctrine and tradition, and one

must concede that the history does not now receive, and perhaps has

never received, any stamp of official recognition or approval by the

Babi or Baha’i communities. But as an historical record of events

by a member of the Babi religion who, although being no professional

or experienced historian, was, according to published testimony, an

eyewitness to most of the events connected with the Babi dispensation,

who, as a devout member of the movement, knew personally many of the

leading personages in that drama, who held a high reputation for

integrity, and who, it is said, truthfully recorded what he had seen

and heard, and as a document, if written by Mirza Jani, would neces-

sarily date from a very early period in the movement’s history, it

would hold a certain fascination for the historian and would likely

be highly valued by him.

Further, if that historian believes, as Browne did, that

the Baha’is attempted to destroy completely all trace of the

history and that only by a remarkable coincidence of events had it

been preserved and by chance discovered in a European library, its

believed value would be heightened.

Whether the Baha’is actually contrived so to suppress the

history, as Browne maintains, perhaps cannot be answered. All that

can be said with certainty is that (1) Mirza Jani had, according to

various testimony, composed a history before his martyrdom in 1852;

(2) the *New History*, according to Mirza Abu’l-Fadl’s testimony, was

at his suggestion based upon the Mirza Jani history, to which it

refers and often quotes, (3) Edward G. Browne “made many enquiries

amongst the Babis in different parts of Persia for Mirza Jani’s his-

tory” but “found no trace of its existence,” and the Babis (Baha’is)

whom he met even “generally feigned complete ignorance of the very

name and existence of Subhh-i-Azal;”123 (4) not even Subh-i-Azal’s

followers seem to have had a copy; (5) Browne discovered in the Paris

National Library a history bearing the title of *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* in the

spring of 1892; (6) based on Browne’s description, Subh-i-Azal identi-

fied the work as Mirza Jani’s history; (7) the manuscript had once

belonged to the Comte de Gobineau, who was stationed in Tihran from

1856 to 1858 and later from 1862 to 1863, and after his death was

acquired by the National Library in 1884; (8) by comparing the *Nuqta-*

*tu’l-Kaf* with the *New History*, Browne observed that, although much

material from the former is transferred into the latter, certain

material is omitted or substituted for other material in the *New*

*History*, thus giving Browne the basis for the theory he advances;

(9) after the publication of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* in 1910, Mirza Abu’l-

Fadl, a Baha’i scholar, condemned it as a forgery, according to H. M.

Balyuzi; (10) Balyuzi believes two works existed, Mirza Jani’s history,

brief and incomplete, and the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, a distortion of the

former.

The differences which Browne detected between the

*Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* and the *New History* he summarizes under four headings:

(1) the former contains “a much less metaphysical and more rationalistic”

introduction than that in the latter; (2) the former’s conclusion,

which deals with Subh-i-Azal and events immediately following the

Bab’s death, does not occur in the latter; (3) all mention of Subh-i-

Azal in the former is omitted in the latter; (4) “incidents and

expressions not in accordance with later Baha’i sentiment or calcu-

lated to create an unfavourable impression on the general reader” are

“toned down or suppressed” in the latter.124

Browne, believing the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* to be Mirza Jani’s history,

advanced the view that the Baha’is set out to suppress Mirza Jani’s

history by the production of the *New History*:

To suppress it and withdraw it from circulation, at any rate

while those on whom had been thrown the glamour of the young

Shirazi Seer and of the beautiful Kurratu’l-‘Ayn, the martyred

heroine and poetess of Kazvin, constituted the majority of the

faithful, was almost impossible; to let it continue to circu-

late in its present form would be disastrous. Only one plan

offered any chance of success. Often in the literary history

of the East has the disappearance and extinction of works both

valuable and of general interest been brought about, either

accidentally or intentionally, by the compilation from them of

a more concise and popular abridgement which has gradually

superseded them. As the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad

composed by Ibn Is-hak was superseded by the recension of

Ibn Hisham, so should Mirza Jani’s old history of the Bab

and his Apostles be superseded by a revised, expurgated,

and emended “NEW HISTORY” (*Tarikh-i-Jadid*), which, while

carefully omitting every fact, doctrine, and expression

calculated to injure the policy of Beha, or to give offence

to his followers, should preserve, and even supplement with

new material derived from fresh sources, the substance of

the earlier chronicle.125

Balyuzi challenges Browne’s hypothesis on the point of when the

suppression is supposed to have happened:

Let us note the date at which this covert suppression by

recasting is supposed to have taken place: at least a quarter

of a century later, By then there would have been no need at

all for such a stratagem. The Babi community almost in its

entirety had recognized Baha’u’llah as the Manifestation of

God Whose Advent the Bab had foretold.126

Balyuzi notes that “the *New History* was composed not earlier than 1877

and not later than 1880.”127

In Browne’s view, however, the need for such a suppression

would not have arisen until after Baha’u’llah’s public declaration of

his mission (1866) and the division of the Babis into Baha’is and

Azalis. Admittedly, by the time the *New History* was written, most of

the Babis had become Baha’is. The Baha’i effort to win over the

remaining Babis, however, had by no means ceased, as evidenced, for

example, by Baha’u’llah’s admonitions in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* (written

sometime between 1873 and 1888) to the “multitude of al-Bayan” (be-

lievers in the Bab’s *Bayan*, i.e., the Babis) to accept his manifes-

tation. A footnote on this passage reads: “One gets the impres-

sion that there were many unbelieving Babis.”128 Browne writes in

the *Traveller’s Narrative*, published in 1891, in reference to Subh-i-

Azal: “Even now the number of his followers, though small in com-

parison to the Beha’is, is considerable.”129 Balyuzi mentions “a

number of Babis who had refused to give their allegiance either to

Baha’u’llah or Subh-i-Azal” who “called themselves Bayanis, after

the Book revealed by the Bab,” saying “to this day there are remnants

of these—passive, aloof and disinterested.”130

The date for writing the *New History*, some eleven to fourteen

years after Baha’u’llah’s public declaration, would fit within the

period when the Baha’is is were attempting to win over the remaining

Babis to the cause of Baha’u’llah, and the destruction of an early

history which gave Subh-i-Azal an importance contrary to Baha’u’llah’s

claims and the subsequent writing of a history from the Baha’i perspec-

tive would not be so strange within this period.

In favor of the Baha’is, however, is the information of

Mirza Abu’l-Fadl, which Browne accepted, about the manner in which

the *New History* came into being. Oddly enough, Browne quotes Abu’l-

Fadl’s information in the same introduction in which he outlines his

view concerning the Baha’i suppression of Mirza Jani’s history. Browne

not only accepts Abu’l-Fadl’s information and uses it in identifying

Mirza Husayn as the author of the *New History* on the title page of

his English translation of that work but regrets that Mirza Abu’l-

Fadl, who was

capable of writing so clear, succinct, and pertinent a statement

had not a larger share in the compilation of the *Tarikh-i-Jadid*,

which would undoubtedly have gained much more from the co-opera-

tion of Mirza Abu’l-Fadl than it has from that of Manakji,130

Mirza Abu’l-Fadl’s information may be accepted as essentially correct,

for it helps explain some internal problems in the text of the *New*

*History*, and it was written in October, 1892, before the publication

of Browne’s views of the Baha’i recasting of Mirza Jani’s work into the

*New History*, which views appear in the Introduction to the *New History*

(1893). Abu’l-Fadl’s treatise, therefore, would not have been written

as a reaction or refutation of Browne’s thesis.

If Mirza Abu’l-Fadl’s statement is correct, and Browne

accepted it, then the Baha’i chiefs—Baha’u’llah and those closely

connected with him in ‘Akka—had nothing to do with instigating the

writing of the *New History*. Rather, the *New History* was written at

the imploring of the non-Baha’i Zoroastrian agent in Tihran, Manakji,

and rather than being composed from the desire to recast the Mirza

Jani history, its writing was proposed first and its being based on

Mirza Jani’s history was at the subsequent suggestion of Mirza Abu’l-

Fadl, to whom Mirza Husayn came for assistance. Not only did the

Baha’i chiefs not instigate the writing of the *New History*, but when,

having been sent a copy, they did not fully approve of it and set

about to produce a history, in Browne’s words, “more in accordance

with the views entertained by those chiefs.”131

The Text of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*

If the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* is the Mirza Jani history, then the

value attached to it in providing information about the earliest

stages of the Babi-Baha’i movement is justified, but Balyuzi also

questions whether the text of that original history may have been

tampered with and suggests one possible candidate, the Azali brother

of Mirza Jani, Haji Mirza Ahmad.

It the supporters of Subh-i-Azal had had the book in their

possession to tamper with it for purposes of undermining Baha’u’llah’s

authority, though, surely they would have taken care to preserve it.

Balyuzi noted, however, that seemingly “even the supporters of

Subh-i-Azal did not have a copy of this book,”131 and he says of

Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ruhi, one of Subh-i-Azal’s sons-in-law, that if any-

body could have had a copy of that book and would have carefully

preserved it, it would have been that inveterate antagonist of

Baha’u’llah.”132 Moreover, Balyuzi observes that divergences are

very noticeable,”133 between the *Hasht Bihisht*, of which Shaykh

Ahmad is the “full or part author,” and the Nuqtatu’l-Kaf, which in

Balyuzi’s view is the distorted account of Mirza Jani’s history. He

notes, further, that Mirza Abu’l-Fadl

pointed to one particularly glaring case of inconsistency: the

claim made for Subh-i-Azal, which flatly contradicted the thesis

of his supporters, as quoted by Edward Browne in his Introduction.

Azalis had always insisted that ‘He Whom God shall make manifest’

would not appear before the expiration of a long period of time

which might extend from 1511 to 2001 years, whereas on page 244

of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* it was emphatically stated, ‘By He Whom God

shall make manifest to come after Him [the Bab] His Holiness Azal

is intended, and none but him, because two Points there cannot be

at the use time’.134

The *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* evidently, then, was not produced by the Azalis,

who seem not to have possessed a copy, nor the text tampered by them,

for the text contradicts their viewpoints. The *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* gives

evidence of having been written at a time distant from the Baha’i-

Azali confrontations.

The Date of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*

More important actually than the question of who wrote the

*Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* is when was it written. Even though knowing that Mirza

Jani was not a skilled historian, Browne attached great importance to

the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, believing it written by Mirza Jani.135 The

importance of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, evidently written by a Babi, is due

to the fact that, if written by Mirza Jani, who was martyred in 1852,

it would have had to have been composed prior to that date and would,

thus, supply the student of Babi-Baha’i history a very early record

of events and viewpoints pertaining to the Babi movement by a member

of the Babi community. If Mirza Jani did not write it, an early

date for its composition would still render it highly valuable as a

source of information and insights into the Babi movement at an early

stage in its development.

When was the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* written? A clue to this question

occurs in a passage in the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* which reads “To day, when

one thousand two hundred and seventy-seven years have elapsed since

the <commencement of the> Mission of God’s Apostle …,” and Browne

points out “the Babis generally date not from the *hijra* or Flight of

the Prophet, but from his Call (*ba‘that*), which they place ten years

earlier,” so that “this date corresponds to A.H. 1267,”136 or A.D. 1850-

1851. The date of the Bab’s declaration, for example, is generally

given in the *Bayan* as the year 1270 of Muhammad’s manifestation.137

William McElwee Miller, a former Presbyterian missionary in Persia,

claims that he “saw a manuscript copy of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* in the

library of Dr. Sa‘id Khan of Teheran” which was “dated A.H. 1268

[A.D. 1852], the very year in which the author died for his faith in

Teheran.”138

The passage in the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* to which Abu’l-Fadl points

indicates that the history was not the product of the Azalis, with whose

position it is inconsistent; nor would the Baha’is have produced the

history; it bears traces of having been written at a different time

of Baha’i history. H. M. Balyuzi, who maintains that the *Nuqtatu’l*-

*Kaf* “could not have been the original work of Haji Mirza Jani,”139

nevertheless, speaks of the work as bearing traces of the period when

Mirza Jani is said to have written his history. Balyuzi says:

The *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* is a reflection of the anarchy of the darkest

days of the Babi Faith, and bears the indelible mark of that

nihilism which did for a time overtake the community of the Bab.140

He points out that

Edward Browne himself had written that extravagant speculation

‘threatened, especially during the two or three years succeeding

the Bab’s martyrdom (1850-1853), to destroy all order and disci-

pline in the young church by suffering each member to become a law

unto himself, and by producing as many “Manifestations” as there

were Babis.’ The *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* is the mirror of that menace.141

Balyuzi maintains:

The speech attributed to Quddus in the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* is by itself

a clear reflection of the confused thoughts of the Babi community

in the years immediately following the martyrdom of its Founder.142

That the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, whether or not written by the martyred Mirza

Jani, reflects the state of the Babi church in the years immediately

after the Bab’s martyrdom, therefore, is acknowledged. Part of the

*Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*’s value is in helping the student of the religion to

trace the phases through which the religion has passed. One would

also expect that the Babi author of such an early written document

would be able to give information and insights which would be lost

at later stages in a rapidly developing religion. That the *Nuqtatu’l*-

*Kaf* appears to be a far cry from present-day Baha’i thought is

part testimony to the extensive transformations the religion has

undergone. The book, however, was written at a rather chaotic time

in the history of the faith and should be approached, therefore, with

some caution, but as a testimony by an individual Babi at an early

stage of Babi-Baha’i history the volume has an indispensable value.

Summary of the Three Chief Histories

The three histories treated above have been discussed in the

order in which they were published by Edward G. Browne. This order is

exactly the opposite to the order in which these histories were originally

written. So that the reader might understand better how these histories

are related to one another in the context of Babi-Baha’i history, a summary

of the major points thus far discussed concerning the histories will be

given in the order in which the histories were written. A brief statement

will then be given concerning the basis upon which the present study will

proceed regarding the reliability and relative values of these three works.

The *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* was written sometime in the years immediately

following the Bab’s martyrdom (1850), and if written by Mirza Jani, would

have been written before 1852 when he suffered martyrdom. It reflects

conditions in the faith at a rather unstable period in its history.

This history assigns an important position to Subh-i-Azal,

Baha’u’llah’s rival, whom the author regards as not only the Bab’s succes-

sor but as “Him whom God shall manifest,” whose coming the Bab heralded

and who Baha’u’llah later claimed to be.

No English translation of this work has yet been made, but Browne

edited and published the Persian text in 1910. The English reader, however,

may gain some familiarity with the essential features of this work from

Browne’s extensive English introduction (pages xiii-liii) to the Persian

text and from Appendix II of Browne’s publication of the *New History* (pages

327-96), where Browne discusses the history with special reference to pas-

sages suppressed or modified in the *New History*. Included in this Appendix

is a full translation of the important section pertaining to the Bab’s

nomination of Subh-i-Azal as his successor and of Subh-i-Azal’s relations

to his half-brother, Baha’u’llah (pages 374-82).

The *New History* (*Tarikh-i-Jadid*) was written sometime between

1877 and 1880. Browne assigns 1880 as the date. According to Abu’l-Fadl,

the *New History* was written by Mirza Husayn of Hamadan with Abu’l-Fadl’s

assistance and under the supervision of Manakji, the Zoroastrian agent in

Tihran. The two manuscripts collated by Browne for publication also give

evidence that a number of revisers had added material. By comparing the

earlier *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* with the New History, Browne observed that the

introduction to the *New History* is “less metaphysical and more rational”

than the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*’s introduction and that all mention of Subh-i-Azal

is omitted from the *New History* except in one clearly interpolated passage

in the London Codex (L.).141

The *New History* did not win the full approval of the Baha’i

chiefs in ‘Akka, probably because of its abuse of the Muslim clergy,

certain reflections about the Persian Government and the Persian people,

its length, and especially because its focus is on the Bab and his dispen-

sation rather than on Baha’u’llah and events of the later era, which Mirza

Adu’l-Fadl believes was intended to have been included in a second

volume of the *New History* which Mirza Husayn was prevented from

writing because of his death in the city of Rasht in A.H. 1299

(A.D. 1881-1882).

Like the *New History*, the *Traveller’s Narrative* is written

anonymously by one who describes himself as a traveller in Persia

who desires to set forth an account of the Bab and his religion.

Browne was informed after the publication of the *Traveller’s Narrative*,

and Baha’is now acknowledge, that the author is ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Baha’u’-

llah’s son and successor in the religion. Unlike both the earlier

histories, the *Traveller’s Narrative* gives its major attention to

Baha’u’llah, his words, and events connected with his ministry as

over against the Bab and his epoch; and unlike the *New History*, which

makes no mention of Subh-i-Azal, it takes note of this rival to Baha’u’-

llah but depicts his as having enjoyed only a nominal supremacy, dis-

parages his courage and judgement, and contrasts him in these respects

with Baha’u’llah. The Bab is set forth as a harbinger of Baha’u’llah

and a more favorable attitude is taken toward the Shah of Persia. The

*Traveller’s Narrative* was written in or around 1886.

Of these three histories, non-Baha’is generally have considered

the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, the earliest written, as having more credence in

presenting an unbiased record of the religion’s earliest stages and have

regarded the two latter histories, especially the *Traveller’s Narrative*,

as “manufactured” histories to give more favor to Baha’u’llah. Baha’is

however, give special importance to the *Traveller’s Narrative*, since it

was written by one whom they regard as essentially infallible, and look

upon the earlier histories as unofficial and the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* in

particular as having been written during a confused period of the

faith, as possibly having been tampered with, and as essentially

unreliable. This difference in perspective helps explain the wide

divergences often found between Baha’i and non-Baha’i accounts of the

faith’s earlier history.

For the reasons stated above in this chapter, the present

study will proceed on the basis that the three histories, written by

members of the Babi or Baha’i communities, have each a respective value

in enabling the student of the religion to trace the stages of its

development. The *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, whether or not written by Mirza Jani,

reflects conditions and viewpoints in the faith in the years immediately

following the Bab’s martyrdom as observed or understood by one member

of that faith. The possibility of its having been tampered with by

Subh-i-Azal’s supporter’s is minimal, since it shows divergences from

their thought and, according to Abu’l-Fadl, is inconsistent with their

position regarding “Him Whom God Shall Manifest,” and since the manu-

script discovered by Browne was out of circulation for a long number

of years, its chances of having been tampered with are greatly lessened.

The *New History*, since it did not meet with the full approval

of the Baha’i chiefs, should not be given such importance as presenting

the official Baha’i viewpoint, but it does have some value, excluding

those features mentioned earlier as probably reasons for its lack of

full approval, in throwing light upon over all trends within the

movement. The *Traveller’s Narrative*, although it should be approached

with some caution due to its evident purpose, is nevertheless highly

important as an official statement of the Baha’i position at the

time of its writing by a recognized leader of the religion.

Mirza Javad’s Historical Epitome

In Edward G. Browne’s last book on the Baha’i faith, *Materials*

*for the Study of the Babi Religion*, consisting of materials which con-

tinued to flow into Browne’s hands, appears his English translation of

a short historical epitome of Babi and Baha’i history, written originally

in Arabic by Mirza Muhammad Javad (or Jawad) of Qazvin (or Qazwin). The

original manuscript was sent by the author to Browne for his investiga-

tion. Browne never met the author, but his son, Mirza Ghulam’llah,

visited Browne at Cambridge for several days in January, 1901, on his

way to the United States. Browne gives a good summary of what can be

learned about the author from the text of the history:

From incidental remarks in the narrative we learn that the author,

Mirza Muhammad Jawad, was at Baghdad (p. 15) about 1862 or a little

earlier, shortly before the removal of the leading Babis thence to

Adrianople; that he was with them at Adrianople (pp. 25, 27, 28)

for rather more than a year before Baha’u’llah was transferred

thence to ‘Akka in August, 1868; that he was Baha’u’llah’s fellow-

passenger on the steamer which conveyed him from Gallipoli to

Haifa (p. 32); that he was at ‘Akka in January, 1872 when Sayyid

Muhammad of Isfahan and the other Azalis were assassinated (pp.

54-5) and also at the time of, or soon after, Baha’u’llah’s death

on May 28, 1892, when he was one of the nine Companions chosen by

‘Abbas Efendi ‘Abdu’l-Baha to hear the reading of the “Testi-

ment” or “Covenant,” (p. 75). We also learn (pp. 35-6) that he

was one of several Babis arrested at Tabriz about the end of 1866

or beginning of 1867, when, more fortunate than some of his com-

panions, he escaped with a fine. This is the only mention he

makes of being in Persia, and it is probable that from this date

onwards he was always with Baha’u’llah, first at Adrianople and

then at ‘Akka, where … his son Mirza Ghulamu’llah was born

end brought up.142

As to the date of the narrative’s composition, in one place

the author speaks of twelve years having passed since Baha’u’llah’s

“ascension” (death) in A.H. 1309 (May 28, 1892),143 which would place

the date about 1904, and at the end of the narrative, these words occur:

“Finished in the month of Safar, A.H. 1322 (April, 1904), written and com-

piled by Muhammad Javad of Qazvin, the Persian, at ‘Akka.”144 Yet, in

another place, the author refers to an event in Safar, A.H. 1326 (March,

1908)145 and speaks of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s message “proclaimed in public in

America,”146 which would be in 1912. The author, therefore, evidently

wrote portions of the history at different times or did some revision

before sending the manuscript to Browne.

The author belonged to a section of Baha’is who after Baha’u’-

llah’s death refused to give their allegiance to Baha’u’llah’s appointed

successor, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, and who style themselves “Unitarians” but are

called by their opponents “Covenant-breakers.” The term “Covenant-

breakers,” however, is not restricted to them.

This history is important for the numerous dates it gives and

for covering later events not included in the earlier histories, but

most important for setting forth the position of those who refused to

accept ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s leadership and thus for throwing light on the con-

flicts between ‘Abdul-Baha and his brothers after the “ascension” of

Baha’u’llah.

CHRISTIAN APOLOGIES

Around the turn of the century, Baha’i influence began to

be felt in the West and was given wide publicity during ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s

travels in Egypt, Europe, and the United States (1910-1913) after

his release in 1908, when, because of the Young Turk Revolution,

all religious and political prisoners in the Ottoman Empire were set

free. Between 1915 and 1932, three Christian apologetical works by

missionaries in Persia made their appearance.

Wilson’s *Bahaism and Its Claims*

Samuel Graham Wilson, a missionary of the Presbyterian Board

of Foreign Missions, U.S.A., was for thirty-two years resident in

Persia and in close contact with members of the Babi-Baha’i movement.

In 1915, Wilson’s *Bahaism and Its Claims* was published, much of which

had originally appeared in various magazines and journals. A repro-

duction of Wilson’s book, long out of print, was made available by

AMS Press, New York, in 1970.

The relationship between the Babi religion and the Baha’i

faith was not clearly defined. Even Browne continued to speak often

of Baha’is as Babis and in his Introduction to Myron H. Phelps’ *Life*

*and Teachings of Abbas Effendi* refers to “the Babi (or, if the term be

preferred, Beha’i) faith.”147 Wilson, however, drew a sharp distinc-

tion between the Babi and Baha’i religions, feeling that “the term

Babi is not appropriate to the religion of Baha nor to his followers.”

He says at the beginning of his study that Babism in reality “is dead

and I do not treat of it, except as it throws light on the history and

doctrines of Baha’ism.”148 To define better the relationship between

the Babi and Baha’i religions will be one of the concerns of the pre-

sent study.

Wilson also felt that H. H. Jessup’s comparison of the Baha’i

faith with the town clock in Beirut was very apt. The face towards

the Muslim quarter told the hour by Oriental reckoning whereas the

face towards the Christian quarter gave time in the European way.149

Wilson then says that his concern is with the Baha’i “face towards

the Christians” but adds that “historical facts are the same and the

main doctrines taught in the West have no essential difference from

those of Persian Baha’ism,”150 a viewpoint not shared by the following

two writers.

Wilson’s book is not strictly a history of the Baha’i faith,

although some of its chapters deal with historical matters. Its

primary focus is on the claims made by the faith and a refutation

of them from the standpoint of Christianity. As such, it is an able

refutation of some Baha’i claims still being made, but is, as might be

expected, far out of date on some matters from the standpoint of

present Baha’i belief and policy and of course has nothing to say

about the Shoghi Effendi administration and other important develop-

ments since it was written.

Miller’s *Baha’ism*

A number of significant events had occurred in Baha’i history

between the publication of Wilson’s volume (1915) and the appearance

of William Miller’s *Baha’ism: Its Origin, History, and Teachings* in

1911. ‘Abdu’l-Baha had died in 1921, and a young Oxford University

student, Shoghi Effendi, then only twenty-four years old, had become

the new authoritative head of the religion. William McElwee Miller

visited the newly appointed successor of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in 1923 and

gives a brief account of that visit in his book, describing the new

leader as “very pleasant and courteous” and “quite humble.”150

A number of defections from the faith also had occurred,

notably Niku, a Baha’i for fourteen years, who, after his defection,

published in two volumes his *Filsifa-i-Niku* (Philosophy of Niku) in

Tihran in 1928, attacking the faith, and ‘Abdu’l-Husayn Avarih, a

respected Baha’i historian, the author of *Al Kavakebu’d-Durriyih* (1923),

considered for a time as official Baha’i history, who after leaving the

faith published his *Kashfu’l-Hiyal* in 1928, in which he gives an account

of his life as a Baha’i and his reasons for leaving the faith.151 Miller

makes use of these works, especially the latter, in his assessment and

descriptions of the faith’s character.

William McElwee Miller, a missionary of the Presbyterian

Church, U.S.A., was stationed at Mashhad, Persia, the capital of

Khurasan, and a great shrine city, where he was daily in contact

with Shi‘ah Muslims visiting the shrines of Gauhar Shad and of the

Imam Rida, the eighth Imam of the Ithna-‘Ashariyyih sect of Shi‘ah

Islam, predominant in Persia. Travelling over northeastern Persia,

he also inevitably came in contact with Baha’is, whose teachings and

practices came under his study and observation.

Some four years before Miller wrote his book, he was in

Geneva, Switzerland, and, while looking in the show window of an

attractive bookstore, was surprised to see a large, beautiful scroll

enumerating the Baha’i principles and a number of Baha’i books and

magazines for sale. After having had a pleasant conversation with

the bookstore’s owner, who was inclined toward the Baha’i faith,

believing that “in Baha’u’llah the Spirit of Christ had again

appeared on earth,” Miller read in *The Baha’i Magazine* that he had

purchased about the owner of a well-known bookshop in Geneva being

attracted to the Baha’i cause, with this hope expressed: “Let it be

our earnest prayer that in this important world-centre the Divine

Oriflame may grow with increasing radiance.”153 The bookshop owner,

Miller says, admitted to him that she had not studied carefully Baha’i

history and asked his suggestions for some books she might consult.

Miller remarks that “it is not surprising” that she “knew nothing of

Baha’i history, for the Baha’is take but little interest in the history

of their ‘cause.’”154 What did seem strange to Miller and others in

Persia, he says, was to see people of the West taking up this Persian

religion.”155

This glimpse of “Baha’i propaganda while in Geneva” convinced

Miller of the need for a brief book on the Baha’i faith “which would

make available in a convenient form the scholarly researches” of Browne

and other writers.156 Miller proposed, therefore, to present the

results of his own investigations and supply his readers with material

concerning the faith from important out-of-print volumes.157 He also

drew upon the works of more recently published Persian works attacking

the faith.

Miller believed in 1931 that he was writing about “a dying

movement” and said that he would not have attempted to write about it

“were it not for the activity of the Baha’is in Europe and America

in carrying on their campaign of propaganda.”158 Miller, who now

lives in Pennsylvania, has completed a revision of his book, to be

published in the next few months.159

Richards’ *The Religion of the Baha’is*

In the year after Miller’s book appeared, *The Religion of the*

*Baha’is* by J. R. Richards, a missionary of the Christian Missionary

Society, stationed at Shiraz, Persia, was published. Miller and Richards

were good friends on their missionary field in Persia. Both had many

encounters with Baha’is in their missionary work, and both felt the

need of a brief non-Baha’i introduction to the faith for non-Baha’is.

Richards read the manuscript of Miller’s book while in its last stages

of publication, but, although sharing certain viewpoints, the two books

differ in their approach to the subject.

Whereas Miller is concerned about Baha’i propaganda in Europe

and America and desires to place before his readers, presumably pri-

marily interested persons in the West, the essential facts concerning

the Persian religion, Richards writes his book “with a view to the needs

of missionaries who are in dally contact with Baha’is” in the East.160

Unlike Miller who used Niko’s and Avarih’s volumes attacking

the faith, Richards avoids their use, saying:

The only books available in Persian are totally unfit to use,

consisting as they do of attacks on the personal lives and

characters of Baha’i believers. However much truth there say

be in these books, it is grossly unfair to argue from the par-

ticular to the general, and, in any case, no religion can be

judged by the lives of its adherents, unless we choose to judge

it by its best representatives, and even then our judgement will

not be fair. I have, therefore, ignored all such books, and

though the historical portion of this book must, and does, con-

tain narratives which show the Baha’i leaders in an unpleasant

light, I have sought to omit all but those that have a bearing

on the historical development of the movement.160

Unlike Wilson, who said that the “main doctrines taught in

the West have no essential difference from those of Persian Baha’ism,”161

Richards maintains that “Western Baha’ism is totally distinct from that

of the East.”162 Richards regards Eastern Baha’i as the authentic form

of the faith and Western Baha’i as a perverted form, bearing “a distinct

Christian influence.”163 This approach to the faith leads Richards to

conclude that certain teachings by Western Baha’is are not Baha’i

teachings. For example, Richards concludes from certain teachings

of ‘Abdu’l-Baha that ‘Abdu’l-Baha does not believe in a personal

God”164 and makes the sweeping statement later that “there is no

belief in a personal God in Baha’ism.”165 After quoting an American

Baha’i writer who in his discussion quotes words attributed to ‘Abdu’l-

Baha that “prayer should spring from love; from the desire of the person

to commune with God,” Richards comments: “If God is not a personal God,

then communion with Him is impossible, and this quotation in no way

represents the Baha’i teaching about prayer.”166 One who is wanting

a statement of Baha’i teaching as presented in the West, therefore,

should approach Richards with some caution, for he is concerned with

what he understands as original and authentic Baha’i as over against

later and Western expressions of the faith. The above conclusion,

however, would not only be unacceptable to Western Baha’is but to

modern Baha’is in both East and West.

As Miller had reported that the Baha’i faith in Persia was

“steadily losing ground” and would eventually “be known only to

students of history.”167 Richards maintains that “Baha’ism is on the

wane in Western countries, and census statistics show that its day is

past.”168 The expectation that trends would continue and that the faith

eventually would die, however, was not realized. The Baha’i faith is very

much alive today.

LATER BAHA’I HISTORIES

Of the Babi-Baha’i histories discussed earlier, only the *Travel*-

*ler’s Narrative* received any official sanction, although the *New History*

was used provisionally for a time. An edition of the *Traveller’s Narrative*

was published by the Baha’i Publishing Committee, New York, in 1930.

Baha’is later published two important histories, Shoghi Effendi’s transla-

tion of *The Dawn-Breakers* and Shoghi Effendi’s own history, *God Passes By*.

Nabil’s *The Dawn-Breakers*

In 1932, the year after Miller’s book in which he said that “the

Baha’is take but little interest in the history of their “cause,”169 (which

may have appeared to be the case at that time) was published, Baha’is in

the United States published the 685-page Shoghi Effendi translation of

*The Dawn-Breakers,* covering the early days of the movement up to Baha’u’-

llah’s expulsion from Persia.

Nabil’s history is the most extensive coverage of the Bab’s

ministry accepted by Baha’is as an accurate presentation of those early

days. Shoghi Effendi calls Nabil Baha’u’llah’s “Poet-Laureate. His

chronicler and His indefatigable disciple.”170 Balyuzi refers to him as

“the prime historian and chronicler of the Ministry of the Bab and of

Baha’u’llah.”171

Muhammad-i-Zarandi, who was given the title *Nabil-i-A‘zam*

by Baha’u’llah in a tablet addressed to him,172 was born in the village

of Zarand on the eighteenth of Safer, A.H. 1247 (July 29, A.D. 1831),

as he, himself, indicates in *The Dawn-Breakers*.173 He first heard of

the Bab in A.H. 1263 (A.D. 1847) and was led to recognize the new

revelation by Siyyid Isma‘il-i-Zavari’i, surnamed Dhabih, one of Mirza

Jani’s brothers, in A.H. 1265 (A.D. 1848), at the age of eighteen.174

He would have set out from Tihran with Siyyid Isma‘il for Mazindaran

to join the Babis in the struggle at the fort of Shaykh Tabarsi when

news arrived that the Babis there had been treacherously massacred.175

He just missed seeing the Bab when the Bab stayed for a few days in the

home of Mirza Jani and Siyyid Isma‘il in Kashan.176

After the Bab’s martyrdom in 1850. he was one of a good number

of Babis who advanced claims of being the one foretold by the Bab,177

but after Baha’u’llah’s declaration he became his devoted follower. Shoghi

Effendi says that he was throughout his life closely associated with

the leaders of the Cause.”178 He was a close friend for many years

of the Bab’s amanuensis, Musa Ahmad-i-Qazvini, and when beginning

his chronicle, had the personal assistance of Baha’u’llah’s brother

Mirza Musa, Aqay-i-Kalim. According to Shoghi Effendi, the manuscript

was begun in 1888 and completed in about a year and a half, and parts

were reviewed and approved by either Baha’u’llah or ‘Abdu’l-Baha.

The original work carries the history to Baha’u’llah’s death

in 1892, but the Shoghi Effendi English translation covers only the

first half of the original, ending with Baha’u’llah’s expulsion from

Persia.

The value Baha’is attach to Nabil’s chronicle can be seen in

statements by George Townshend, a former Christian minister, sometime

canon of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin, and archdeacon of Clonfert,

who became a convert to the Baha’i cause:

No detached observer or scholar, however inquisitive or indus-

trious, could be in so favourable a position as this trusted

Babi for collecting detailed and intimate information concerning

the early believers and their doings. He stood close to the

heart and centre of the Movement; he presented it with sympathy

and understanding.179

Amid the great and ever-growing library of works on the Bab,

the Chronicle of Nabil’s holds a most conspicuous place. …

It has in the fullest degree the character of a Babi Gospel. If

we possessed an authorised and large scale account of the Acts of

Jesus Christ written by one of the Twelve and preserved in the

form in which it came from the author’s pen, we would have a

Christian Gospel as authentic in its sphere as this of Nabil’s

is in its.180

Nabil, no doubt, as Townshend points out, was in a position to

gather much firsthand information which would not have been easily

accessible to one outside the faith. and as such it is a valuable record.

It is, however, a Baha’i—not a Babi—account and represents a later

stage in the developing tradition.

Mirza Yahya (Subh-i-Azal) is taken note of in the chronicle,

but the claims advanced for him are considered as ill-founded,181 and

Mirza Yahya himself is described as utterly unworthy of the position

claimed for him.182

As a record of Babi-Baha’i history as Baha’is today accept it,

Nabil’s chronicle is indispensable.

Shoghi Effendi’s *God Passes By*

In 1944. the centenary of the Bab’s declaration, there was pub-

lished Shoghi Effendi’s *God Passes By*, a review of the faith’s first cen-

tury. Although Peter Berger dismisses the volume as containing “nothing

new,”183 the importance Baha’is attach to it as an authoritative account

of Baha’i history written by ‘the Guardian of the Faith,” Baha’u’llah’s

great grandson and ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s appointed successor, is unexcelled.

Ruhiyyih Khanum refers to it as

that unique exhaustive and marvelous review of the highlights of

100 years of Baha’i history, in which every factor receives its

due importance in relation to every other, a labor no one but

the Guardian could ever be qualified to do.184

Amelia Collins speaks of it as “the finest flower of his [Shoghi

Effendi’s] mind,”185 and Horace Holley calls it “the authentic his-

torical survey of the evolution of the Faith from its origin.”186

Shoghi Effendi did not intend for the volume to be a detailed

history; rather it is a dramatized account of historical high points

up to Shoghi Effendi’s own ministry and of the beginnings of the

administrative order under his direction. The guardian intends to

give Baha’is the perspective from which the various events of their

history may be viewed. He stresses the evolutionary character of the

faith and delineates its major periods. In terms of literary beauty,

the history is a most masterful presentation, and as a statement of

Babi-Baha’i history as the Baha’is, themselves, understand it, the

volume is the prime source.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1 Joseph Arthur Gobineau, *Les Religions et les Philosophies*

*dans l’Asie Centrale* (2ème ed.; Paris: Didier et Cie, 1866).

2 William McElwee Miller, *Baha’ism: Its Origin, History, and*

*Teachings* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1931), p. 11 (hereinafter

referred to as *Baha’ism*); H. M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and*

*the Baha’i Faith* (London: George Ronald, 1970), p. 63 (hereinafter

referred to as *Browne*).

3 Edward G. Browne, ed., *Kitab-i Nuqtatu’l-Kaf, Being the*

*Earliest History of the Babis Compiled by Hajji Mirza Jani of Kashan*

*between the Years A.D. 1850 and 1852*, edited from the Unique Paris

Ms. Suppl. Persan 1071 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1910. London: Luzac &

Co., 1910), pp. xiii-xiv (hereinafter referred to as *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*).

4 ibid., p. xiii.

5 Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. IV:

Modern Times (1500-1924) (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 153.

6 Edward G. Browne, ed. and trans., *A Traveller’s Narrative*

*Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab,* Vol. II: English Trans-

lation and Notes (Cambridge: University Press, 1891), pp. x-xi (herein-

after referred to as *Traveller’s Narrative*).

7 Edward G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians* (3d ed.; London:

Adam and Charles Black, 1950), pp. 328-29 (hereinafter referred to as

*Year*). Browne’s last sentence regarding Mirza Yahya should be evaluated

in the light of later discussion in the present work. Regarding the

changed state of affairs, Browne says elsewhere: “It took me some time

fully to grasp this new and unexpected position of affairs, and perhaps

I should not have succeeded in doing so had it not been for the know-

ledge of the former state of things which I had obtained from Gobineau’s

work, and the acquaintance which I subsequently made in Kirman with five

or six persons who adhered to what I may call the ‘old dispensation’ and

regarded Mirza Yahya *‘Subh-i-Ezel*‘ as the legitimate and sole successor

of the Bab” (*Traveller’s Narrative*, p. xvi).

8 Robert P. Richardson, “The Persian Rival to Jesus and His

American Disciples,” *The Open Court*, XXIX (Aug., 1915), 467.

9 Balyuzi, *Browne*, pp. 121-22.

10 Brackets mine.

11 Farhang Jahanpur, “Setting the Record Straight,” review of

*Edward Grenville Browne and the Baha’i Faith*, by H. M. Balyuzi, in *World*

*Order*, V (Winter, 1970-71), 47.

12 See E. Denison Ross, “Edward Granville Browne, a Memoir,”

in Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, p. xv.

13 Edward G. Browne, “Bab, Bahia,” *Encyclopaedia of*

*Religion and Ethics*, ed. by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner’s

Sons, 1955), II, 300.

14 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. xlii.

15 ibid., pp. vii-viii.

16 ibid., pp. viii-ix.

17 ibid., p. ix.

18 Edward G. Browne, ed. and trans., *The Tarikh-i-Jadid or New*

*History of Mirza ‘Ali Muhammad the Bab*, by Mirza Husayn of Hamadan (Cam-

bridge: University Press, 1893), pp. xiv, xxxi (hereinafter referred to

as *New History*).

19 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 10, n. 1; and Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes*

*By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1957), p. 28.

20 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 67.

21 ibid., p. vii.

22 Browne, *New History*, p. xxxii.

23 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 67, n. 1.

24 ibid., p. 20.

25 ibid., p. 3.

26 ibid., p. 4.

27 See above, the quotation at top of p. 51.

28 Cf., Browne’s list of characteristics, *Traveller’s Narrative*,

pp. xlv-xlvi, and Wilson’s summary of Browne’s points (Samuel Graham Wil-

son, *Bahaism and Its Claims* [New York, Fleming H. Revell Co., 1915], p.

184, n. 2.

29 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 2.

30 Browne, *New History*, p. 3.

31 ibid., p. 23.

32 ibid., p. 17.

33 ibid.

34 ibid., p. 318.

35 ibid., p. 3.

36 ibid., p. 23.

37 ibid., p. 28.

38 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note A, p. 194.

39 Browne, *Year*, pp. 344-45.

40 Balyuzi, *Browne*, pp. 65-66; Browne, *New History*, p. xxxiv.

41 Browne, *New History*, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii. The last statement

about Mirza Husayn’s being a Babi (Baha’i) before beginning to write the

*New History*, which is more likely, contradicts Haji Mirza Hasan’s statement

to Browne (quoted above, p. 58) that the author was converted while engaged

is its writing.

42 ibid., p. xxxviii.

43 ibid., pp. xxxviii-xxxix.

44 Browne points out that according to Baron Rosen’s letter

cited in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great*

*Britain and Ireland*, Vol. XXI (1889), 442, Mirza Abu’l-Fadl’s portion

of the *New History*’s Preface extends from the beginning to line three of

page three of Browne’s English translation (*New History*, p. xl, n. 1).

45 Browne, *New History*, p. xl.

46 ibid., pp. xl-xli.

47 ibid., p. 313, n. 1.

48 See Browne, *New History*, p. 315, n. 1, and p. xxxvii, n. 3,

where Browne indicates that Manakji “appears to have come to Persia from

India in 1854 (cf. the author’s statements concerning travels in Europe

and India, *New History*, p. 3), that he had written an account of which

a Persian translation was published at Bombay in A.H. 1280 (A.D. 1863)

of his travels in Persia (cf. the author’s description of himself as a

traveller who had come to Persia), and that according to a footnote in

an article by F. Justi (Z.D.M.D., Vol. XXV [1881], p. 328n), “Manakji

acted for a while as French consul at Yazd” (cf. the author’s references

to the French language, *New History*, p. 318). If Manakji, who was not

a Baha’i, is the author of these opening and closing sections of the

*New History*, the force of Wilson’s criticism of the *Traveller’s Narrative*

and the *New History* is somewhat lessened. “We might excuse their being

anonymous, to avoid possible persecution, but to make pretense that the

authors are travellers who have come from afar ostensibly to investigate,

and into whose mouths are put praises of the religion, is but part of the

insincerity noticeable in other things” (Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims*,

pp. 82-83).

49 Browne, *New History*, p. 313; italics and brackets mine.

50 See above, quotation at top of page 60.

51 Browne, *New History*, p. 313. n. 1.

52 The Azalis were followers of Mirza Yahya (Subh-i-Azal),

Baha’u’llah’s rival.

53 Browne, *New History*, pp. xlii-xliii; Browne, *Traveller’s*

*Narrative*, p. 342, n. 2.

54 Browne, *New History*, p. 351.

55 ibid.

56 See, for example, Browne, *New History*, p. 421.

57 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 18, and Browne, “Bab, Babis,” 308.

58 Browne, “Bab, Babis,” 303.

59 Edward G. Browne, “Catalogue and Descriptions of 27 Babi

Manuscripts,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain*

*and Ireland*, XXIV (1892), p. 684, cited by Balyuzi, Browne, p. 20.

60 Browne, *New History*, p. 200, n. 4.

61 ibid., p. xxiv, n. 1.

62 Browne, “Bab, Babis,” 303.

63 Edward G. Browne, comp., *Materials for the Study of the Babi*

*Religion* (Cambridge: University Press, 1918), p. 225. This volume was

reprinted by Cambridge University Press in 1961 (hereinafter referred to

as *Materials*). Shaykh Ahmad, incidentally, was an accomplished scholar

and writer and was the translator into Persian of Morier’s *Hajji Baba*,

which Browne points out was widely used as a textbook for colloquial

Persian (*Materials*, p. 221).

64 ibid., pp. 225-26.

65 Browne, *New History*, p. xli, n. 1.

66 ibid., pp. xliii-xliv.

67 Edward G. Browne, “The Babis of Persia, I. Sketch of Their

History, and Personal Experiences amongst Them; II. Their Literature and

Doctrines,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and*

*Ireland*, XXI (July and October, 1889), 485-526, 881-1009.

68 Browne, *New History*, pp. xlv-xlvi.

69 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note A, p. 193.

70 Browne, *New History*, p. l (Roman numeral); Mirza Husayn died

in A.H. 1299 (A.D. 1881-1882).

71 ibid., pp. xlviii-xlix.

72 ibid., p. 293.

73 Baha’u’llah’s *Kitab-i-Iqan*, written before the “Manifestation,”

or declaration of his mission.

74 The date here refers to Baha’u’llah’s public declaration

Baha’is generally date Baha’u’llah’s declaration in 1863 when he privately

“announced to several of His followers” that he was the one foretold by

the Bab (J. E. Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era* [3d ed., rev.; New

York: Pyramid Books, 1971], p. 43).

75 Nasiru’d-Din Shah’s first journey to Europe extended from

April 20 to September 6, 1873 (*New History*, p. 181, n. 1).

76 Browne, *New History*, pp. xxx-xxxi.

77 See above, p. 59.

78 Browne, *New History*, p. xl.

79 ibid., p. xxxii.

80 ibid., p. 64.

81 ibid., p. xl.

82 ibid., pp. 318-19.

83 Browne, *Year*, p. 344.

84 ibid., p. 345.

85 Browne, *New History*, p. xxx.

86 See above, pp. 49-50.

87 Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, pp. xiv-xv.

88 In the phraseology of the early Babis “uplifted” or “elevated”

means “deceased.” It is, of course, only used of believers. (E.G.B.)

89 Brackets are Browne’s.

90 Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, p. xvi.

91 ibid., p. xix.

92 Browne, *New History*, p. xxviii.

93 ibid., pp. xxx-xxxi.

94 Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, p. xxxv.

95 ibid.

96 J. R. Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is* (London: Society

for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1932. New York: The Macmillan Co.,

1932), p. 12.

97 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 62.

98 ibid., p. 63.

99 ibid., p. 69; citing Browne, *New History*, p. xli.

100 ibid., p. 65.

101 ibid., p. 70.

102 ibid., p. 72.

103 ibid., p. 70.

104 ibid., p. 63.

105 ibid., pp. 65-66.

106 Browne, *New History,* p. xxxix; see above, p. 59.

107 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 71.

108 Browne, *New History*, p. 214.

109 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 64.

110 ibid., pp. 64-65.

111 ibid., p. 88.

112 See above, p. 72.

113 See above, pp. 59-60.

114 Browne, *New History*, p. 34; also quoted in Balyuzi, *Browne*,

p. 65. The material in single brackets is from the London Codex (L.).

115 Balyuzi, *Browne*, pp. 72, 77.

116 Browne, *New History*, p. xxviii.

117 ibid., pp. xxxix-xl.

118 ibid., xlii.

119 See above, p. 73.

120 Browne, *New History*, p. xv.

121 See above, p. 76. The truthfulness or accuracy of this

statement, however, is somewhat called into question by the fact that

elsewhere the author of the *New History* says that “Haji Mirza Jani gives

in his book a full description of all the wonderful things which they

witnessed in those two days and nights,” when the Bab stayed in the

house of Mirza Jani, whereas, as Browne points out all that Mirza Jani

actually records is that in Kashan he abode two days and two nights.

Wondrous and marvellous signs were shewn by that Sun of Truth. A full

description of these would form a book by itself” (Browne, *New History*,

p. 214 and note 1).

122 Browne, *New History*, p. xxxix, italics mine; see above, p.

76.

123 Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, p. xxxiv.

124 ibid., p. xxxvi; more detailed comparisons are given in

Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, pp. xxxvii-liii, and in Browne, *New History*, Appen-

dix II, pp. 327-56.

125 Browne, *New History*, p. xxix.

126 Balyuzi, *Browne,* p. 72.

127 ibid., p. 72, n. 1.

128 Earl E. Elder and William McE. Miller, trans. and ed.,

*Al-Kitab Al-Aqdas, or The Most Holy Book* by Mirza Husayn ‘Ali Baha’u’llah,

Oriental Translation Fund, New Series Vol. XXXVIII (London: Published by

The Royal Asiatic Society and sold by its Agents Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1961),

p. 71 and n. 1.

129 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note V, p. 350.

130 Browne, *New History*, p. xlii.

131 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 77.

132 ibid., p. 72.

133 ibid.

134 ibid., pp. 72-73.

135 Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, p. xix.

136 Browne, *New History*, p. xix, n. 3.

137 Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, p. lxxxiii; in Nicolas’ French trans-

lation of the *Bayan*, for example, the Bab refers to the date of his mani-

festation: “C’est cela ce que Dieu a promis dans le Qoran et le commence-

ment (de ce jugement dernier) est à deux heures onze minutes de la nuit du

5 Djemadi el ewel de l’année 1260 qui est l’année 1270 à dater du jour où

fut suscité Mohammed” (Seyyed Ali Mohammed dit le Bab, *Le Beyan Persan*,

traduit du Persan par A.-L.-M. Nicolas, [4 vols; Paris: Librairie Paul

Geuthner, 1911-1914], I, 69).

138 Miller, *Baha’ism*, p. 196, n. 28.

139 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 84.

140 ibid., p, 73.

141 Browne, *New History*, pp. 246-47.

142 Browne, *Materials*, p. ix.

143 ibid., pp. 61-62.

144 ibid., p. 112.

145 ibid., p. 90.

146 ibid., p. 77.

147 Myron H. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*,

Introduction by Edward G. Browne (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, the

Knickerbocker Press, 1904), p. viii.

148 Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims*, p. 15.

149 ibid., pp. 15-16; the reference is to Henry Harris Jessup,

“The Babites,” *The Outlook*, LXVIII (June 22, 1901), 456.

150 Miller, *Baha’ism*, pp. 150, 152.

151 See Miller, *Baha’ism*, pp. 163-64.

152 Miller, *Baha’ism*, p. 10.

153 ibid.

154 ibid., pp. 10-11.

155 ibid., p. 9.

156 ibid., p. 15.

157 ibid.

158 ibid., p. 9; see above, p. 25.

159 So indicated in a letter to the author from Rev. Miller, dated

March 22, 1974. This work now has been published.

160 Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is*, p. iv.

161 See above, p. 95.

162 Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is*, p. 186. A similar

statement by Richards appears on page 117.

163 ibid.

164 ibid., p. 123.

165 ibid., p. 186.

166 ibid., p. 187.

167 Miller, *Baha’ism*, p. 9; see above, p. 25.

168 Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is*, p. 117.

170 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 130.

171 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 44.

172 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 176.

173 Nabil-i-A‘zam (Muhammad-i-Zarandi), *The Dawn-Breakers:*

*Nabil’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Baha’i Revelation*, trans. by

Shoghi Effendi (London: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1953), p. 318.

174 ibid., p. 120.

175 ibid., p. 322.

176 ibid., p. 320.

177 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 357 and note 5.

178 Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. xxxiv.

179 George Townshend, *The Mission of Baha’u’llah and Other*

*Literary Pieces* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1952), p. 22.

180 ibid., pp. 40-41.

181 Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 317.

182 ibid., p. 323.

183 Peter L. Berger, “From Sect to Church: Sociological

Interpretation of the Baha’i Movement” (Ph.D. dissertation, New School

for Social Research, 1954), p. 56, n. 20.

184 Ruhiyyih Khanum, *Twenty-Five Years of the Guardianship*

(Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Committee, 1948), p. 24.

185 Amelia Collins, *A Tribute to Shoghi Effendi* (Wilmette, Ill.:

Baha’i Publishing Trust, n.d.), p. 10.

186 Horace Holley, *Religion for Mankind* (1st American ed.; Wil-

mette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1966), p. 60.

**PART II**

**THE ORIGIN AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE BAHA’I**

**WORLD FAITH**

**CHAPTER III**

**THE BAB AND THE ABROGATION OF THE**

**QUR’ANIC DISPENSATION**

Baha’is date the beginning of their faith from the Bab’s

declaration of his mission on May 22, 1844. The exact moment of that

declaration is preserved as two hours end eleven minutes after sunset

on the fifth day of Jamadiyu’l-Avval in the year A.H. 1260.1 To Baha’is,

this date, indeed the very hour, is of inestimable importance, for, as

Shoghi Effendi expresses it, “with this historic Declaration the dawn of

an Age that signalizes the consummation of all ages had broken,”2 marking

“the opening of the most glorious epoch in the greatest cycle which the

spiritual history of mankind has yet witnessed.”3 According to Nabil,

the Bab declared: “This night, this very hour will in the days to come

be celebrated as one of the greatest and most significant of all festi-

vals.”4

But to understand the significance of this declaration, the

excitement it aroused, and the context in which it was made requires a

lock at the religious background of the Babi-Baha’i movement.

THE RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE BAHA’I FAITH

Baha’is sometimes insist that their faith is not and has

never been a sect or offshoot of Islam or any other religion. John

Ferraby, for example, maintains that although the Babi and Baha’i faiths

originated in a Muslim country,

they constitute independent religions stemming neither from the

Muslim teachers of religion nor from the Prophet Muhammad himself,

but from God. They have no more and no less in common with the

teachings of Muhammad than with those of Jesus, or Moses, or any

other Founder of a great religion. They come from the same family

as all, they repeat the basic truths revealed by all, but they do

not belong to any one religion more than to anther; they are

independent.5

That the Baha’i faith is now an independent religion may be readily

acknowledged, but that it stemmed from no parent faith to which it is

more closely related than to other religions can hardly be maintained

in the light of historical facts.

Even if Ferraby’s contention that the Baha’i religion is “from

God” were granted, this would not necessarily mean that the religion had

no birth historically from another religion or that it arose in isolation

from a particular historical and religious milieu.

That the religion did in fact grow out of the parent religion

of Islam is confirmed by no less a Baha’i authority than Shoghi Effendi,

whose writings Baha’is believe are essentially infallible. Shoghi Effendi

speaks of the Baha’i faith as having “sprung from Shi‘ih Islam,”6 and

refers to Shi‘ih Islam as “its parent religion.”7 Shoghi Effendi else-

where charges those participating in their faith’s teaching campaign

throughout America and Canada to “strive to obtain, from sources that

are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and

tenets of Islam—the source and background of their faith.”8 If the

Baha’i faith is no more closely related to Islam than to any other

religion and if it does not share more common features with it than

with other faiths, then Shoghi Effendi’s charge to study in particular

the history and tenets of Islam would be without meaning. In the Foreword

to his *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi traces in one sentence the religious

pedigree of the Baha’i faith when he speaks of “these momentous happen-

ings” which “transformed a heterodox and seemingly negligible offshoot

of the Shaykhi school of the *Ithna-‘Ashariyyih* sect of Shi‘ah Islam into

a world religion.”9 In this one sentence, Shoghi Effendi traces the

Baha’i faith from its parent religion Islam through the *Shi‘ah* (or Shi‘ih)

form of Islam (as against the *Sunni* form), through the *Ithna-*‘*Ashariyyih*

division of Shi‘ah Islam (the “Twelver Sect” as against the Seveners”

and other divisions of Shi‘ites), through the *Shaykhi school* (one of the

schools or divisions of the “Twelver Sect”), and through a “heterodox …

offshoot of the Shaykhi school” (the Babi religion).

The Islamic Background of the Baha’i Faith

The Baha’i faith, springing from Islam, bears various recog-

nisable traces of its parent religion. The five basic Muslim doctrines

are belief in God, his angels, his prophets, the Scriptures, and the last

day, The doctrine of angels has little place in Baha’i thought, the

manifestations or prophets as the intermediaries of God having largely

removed their need, and the last day is given allegorical interpretations,

but the other three doctrines have indelibly stamped themselves in Baha’i

theology, with some distinctive modifications, so that the Baha’i teachings

on these three doctrines cannot adequately be understood without a know-

ledge of the Muslin background.

The Doctrine of God

The Muslim doctrine of God underscores God’s absolute unity

or singleness and his utter transcendence. Islam is radically monotheistic.

God is one; one in essence, having no peer nor second; one in attributes,

utterly insusceptible to division into parts. The greatest of all sins is

*shirk* (“association”), the giving to anyone or anything a share in God’s

sovereignty. The essential and absolute difference between Creator and

creature is unquestionably maintained. Islam, therefore, rejects not

only polytheism, idolatry, and all forms of nature worship but Christian

Trinitarianism as well, believing the concept of the Trinity to be a basic

infringement on God’s absolute unity.

The Baha’i faith is heir to this strong monotheistic emphasis

in Islam. Throughout Baha’u’llah’s writings references are made to the

“one true God.”10 “No God is there save Thee,” Baha’u’llah declares, “the

Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous.”11 “No God is there but Thee, the Most

Powerful, the Most Exalted, the Help in Peril, the Most Great, the One

Being, the Incomparable, the All-Glorious, the Unrestrained.”12 This

unrelenting emphasis on God’s unity, his incomparability, and his sove-

reign power is the direct contribution of Islam to the Baha’i faith.

The Prophets of God

Since God in his utter transcendence is beyond the comprehen-

sion of man, knowledge of God and of his laws, according to both Islam

and the Baha’i faith, must be communicated to man by revelation. In

Islam, this communication with man is made possible by a series of human

messengers, or prophets, to whom God makes known his will. The Qur’an,

the sacred book of Islam, declares emphatically: “There is not a people

but a warner has gone among them” (Qur’an XXXV:24; I:47). The exact

number of these prophets of God is not known, but they extend into the

hundreds of thousands. Less than thirty are called by name in the

Qur’an. The six greatest—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, ‘Isa (Jesus),

and Muhammad—brought new dispensations.12

Baha’is continue the Muslim belief that God has sent his

prophets among the various peoples of the world through the ages, but

they depart from traditional Muslim belief about the prophets on at

least three points: (1) whereas Muslims believe that God’s progressive

revelation ended with Muhammad, the last or “Seal of the Prophets,”

Baha’is believe that the stream of revelation continues through Muhammad

to the more recent prophets of the Bab and Baha’u’llah and will be con-

tinued in other prophets in the future; (2) modern Baha’is add to the

list of prophets Zoroaster and the Buddha; (3) whereas in Muslim thought

the prophets are merely human instruments chosen by God according to his

own inscrutable will, Baha’is allow for a certain sense in which the

Prophets, or “Manifestations,” as they also call them, may be spoken of

as divine, inasmuch as they “mirror” God to men and reveal his will. The

sharp Muslim distinction between God and his creatures is maintained in

Baha’i thought, for the manifestations are not incarnations of God’s

essence, yet to know them is to know God and to submit to them is to

submit to God, for they represent God among men.

The Doctrine of Scripture

Muslims believe that each of the major prophets brought a

book of his words, containing the laws for his dispensation. Thus,

Moses’ book was the *Taurat*, or Torah, the law; Jesus left the *Injil*,

or Gospel, the original of which is lost, but the teachings of which

remain, though not in pure form in the four Christian gospels. The

Qur’an charges Christians with altering the texts of their scripture

(II:75-78). Muhammad left the Qur’an, regarded by Muslims as the

climactic and perfect revelation. Muslims believe the Qur’an is the

only scripture with a pure text. It is word for word as it was given

to Muhammad, and the word “say” at the beginning of his revelations

indicates that he is merely reporting what he was told to say. The Qur’an

is regarded as the one outstanding miracle which proves the validity of

its contents. The challenge is put forward to any who doubt its divine

nature to produce any other book that can compare with it (Qur’an II:23).

The Qur’an’s conclusion is: “If men and jinn should combine together to

produce the like of this Qur’an, they could not produce the like of it” (XVII 88).

Baha’is follow in this tradition, holding that each prophet

of the past revealed a book of law for his dispensation. The Bab added

his *Bayan* and Baha’u’llah his *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. The same claim is advanced

that the verses themselves are their own verification. The Bab, especially,

appealed to his “verses” as the one irrefutable proof of his mission, the

‘idea being that no mere human being could produce words of such compelling

power and beauty, that such words would have to flow from a divine source

using the human agent as a mere channel or instrument for their outpouring.

The Babis and Baha’is also looked upon the speed of composition and the

quantity of output of the verses as further signs of their divine charac-

ter. Various converts to the Bab—as Siyyid Yahya-i-Darabi (Vahid)13 and

the *Imam-Jum‘ih*—became convinced of the Bab’s mission by his speed of

producing verses.14

The stamp of the Islamic background on the Baha’i faith is

never more clearly seen than in Shoghi Effendi’s appraisal of the Qur’an

as being “apart from the sacred scriptures of the Babi and Baha’i Reve-

lation … the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely

authenticated Repository of the Word of God.”15

The Shi‘ah Islamic Background of the Baha’i Faith

The Baha’i faith, however, is a product not simply of Islam

but of the Shi‘ah form of Islam, which is predominant in Persia. In his

Introduction to *The Dawn-Breakers*, Shoghi Effendi speaks of “the shi‘ahs

out of whose doctrines the Babi Movement rose.”16

When Shoghi Effendi refers to “the illegitimacy of the institu-

tion at the Caliphate, the founders of which had usurped the authority of

the lawful successors of the Apostle of God,”17 he is expressing a judg-

ment and joining sides with Shi‘ah Islam in a contention which split

Islam into two rival factions after the death of Muhammad, the founder of

Islam. That God sent his succeeding revelation through the Bab, who was

himself a descendant of the Imams of Shi‘ah Islam, is to Shoghi Effendi

the evident demonstration of the error of Sunni Islam, which in refusing

to recognize Muhammad’s rightful successors produced such & grievous

schism in Islam from the very beginning.18

The issue which divides Islam into the Sunnis and the Shi‘ahs

pertains to Muhammad’s successor. Muhammad had no son, and so, according

to the Shi‘ahs, appointed as his successor his cousin, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib,

who was also his son-in-law by marriage to Fatimih (or Fatima), Muhammad’s

daughter. The Shi‘ahs believe that ‘Ali’s rightful place was usurped in

turn by Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthman—the first three Caliphs (or rulers)

in Islam after Muhammad. ‘Ali was finally elected Caliph after ‘Uthman

but was assassinated after a short and troubled reign of five years.

‘Ali’s eldest son, al-Hasan, regarded by the Shi‘ahs as the second right-

ful successor to Muhammad (the second “Imam”), abdicated his reign five

or six years after his father’s death to the contender for leadership,

Umayyad Mu‘awiya, The third Imam, al-Husayn, the younger brother of

al-Hasan, tried unsuccessfully to regain the leadership and perished in

October 10, 680 A.D., a day celebrated with weeping in Shi‘ah communities,

especially in Persia. None of the remaining Imams ever regained the

leadership, although they were highly revered among the Shi‘ahs.

Unlike the Caliph, whose authority was given to him by the

consent of the Muslim community and who needed not be a descendant of

Muhammad, the Imam was a descendant of Muhammad, each one appointed by

his predecessor.19

According to the Shi‘as, they have had virtues and attributes

which have been superior to those of anyone in their times they

were endowed with greatness and the ability is perform miracles;

they were infallible and innocent; each one was introduced by

the previous Imam as his immediate successor.20

The Imam, in other words, functioned for the Shi‘ahs much as the prophet

Muhammad did in his day; he was the divinely appointed voice of God to

whom all the Shi‘ahs looked for infallible direction. This infallible

guidance was guaranteed because each Imam was appointed to his position

by the divinely guided Imam who preceded him, and the line went all the

way back to the Prophet Muhammad himself, who had appointed ‘Ali as the

first Imam.

The Shi‘ahs, moreover, rejected entirely the principle or

doctrine of *ijma* (“Consensus of the Community”), whereby Traditions

could be established, holding to the contrary that only the Imams

could rightly decide on questions of Muslim Law.21

The Ithna-Mashariyyih Sect of Shi‘ah Islam

With the passage of time, Shi’ites divided into various groups

over the number and identification of the Imams.

The Zaidites

The Zaidi sect considers Zaid as the fifth Imam rather than

Muhammad al-Baqir and through him trace a line of Imams which continues

to the present. The Zaidis believe that the fourth Imam forfeited the

imamate for failing to fight against the Umayyads. They more closely

approximate the Sunnite position than other Shi‘ite sects and have main-

tained a dynasty in Yemen (South Arabia) since the ninth century.22

The Isma‘ilis

The Isma‘ilis acknowledge seven Imams, holding that the seventh

and last was Isma‘il, brother of Musa al-Kazim, whom the Ithna-‘Asha-

riyyah sect regards as the seventh Imam. Isma‘il was the first son of

Ja‘far-i-Sadiq, the sixth Imam, and was designated by his father as the

next Imam, but the Ithna-‘Ashariyyih sect (the “Twelvers”) believes that

he disqualified himself as Imam when he was charged with drunkenness.

The Isma‘ilis refuse to believe the accusation, holding that since he

was the Imam-designate, he was already infallible and sinless and could

not have been guilty of drunkenness. The Isma‘ilis were excited further

by the report that Isma‘il had died (760 A.D.) five years before his

*father (765 A.D.), and therefore could not have been Imam in succession*

*to his father*. The doctrine developed among the Isma‘ilis that Isma‘il

was not dead, but only hidden, and that he would return one day as the

Mihdi. Some Isma‘ilis admitted that he had died but said that he had

left a son, Muhammad ibn-.Isma‘il, who “disappeared” in India, and he

would return as Mihdi. The concept of a “hidden Imam” who would reveal

himself one day as the Mihdi, or Qa’im (“he who ariseth”), was later

employed usefully by the Twelvers Sect.

The Ja‘faris

The most important of the Shiite sects is the Ithna-‘Ashariyyt

sect, or the Ja‘faris, named after the sixth Imam, Ja‘far-i-Sadiq, who

provided the basis of much of the Shi‘ah law. This is the sect ‘Abdu’l-

Baha refers to in the *Traveller’s Narrative* as “the Church of Ja‘far.”24

The Ja‘faris are characterized by their belief in twelve Imams,

beginning with ‘Ali, Muhammad’s son-in-law, and ending with Muhammad

al-Muntazar. The twelfth Imam mysteriously disappeared shortly after

his father’s death in 874 A.D. (260 A.H.). Refusing to believe that the

divinely instituted line of Imams had come to a close (the twelfth Imam

having left no issue, being himself only about five years old), the

Twelvers maintain that the twelfth Imam “disappeared” or “withdrew” into

“concealment” (in the cave of the great mosque at Samarra) from whence,

at the appointed time, he will emerge as the Mihdi and will usher in a

period of justice in all the earth prior to the end of the world and

the last judgment.25

A development important to the study of the Babi-Baha’i

movement occurred with the disappearance of the twelfth Imam in 260 A.H.

Unwilling to believe that God’s guidance through the appointed Imams

bad come to an end with the disappearance of the twelfth Imam, the

Ja‘faris believed that the twelfth Imam still continued to communicate

his word to his followers through an agent known as a *bab*, meaning a

“gate” or “door” and indicating that the way of communication between

the Imam and his followers was still open. The first *bab* was appointed

by the eleventh Imam as the regent or guardian of his son, the twelfth

Imam. Three other *babs* followed in succession, each being appointed by

his predecessor. The fourth *bab*, however, refused to appoint a successor,

saying that the matter was now in the hands of God, and thus introduced

a period of silence known as the “Major Occultation,” when there is no

*bab* to a communicate the twelfth Imam’s message to his followers.26

The Shaykhi School of Shi‘ah Islam

The two outstanding figures of the original Shaykhi school are

Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsa’i (d. A.H. 1242 = A.D. 1826-1827), the founder, and

his disciple, Siyyid Kazim-i-Rashti (d. A.H. 1259 = A.D. 1843-1844), who

had attained such eminence that upon the death of the former he was

unanimously recognized as the new leader of the Shaykhi school

The Shaykhis are distinguished from other Shi‘ites in that

they reduced the Shi‘ah’s five “Supports,” or essential principles of

religion, to only three and added to these a “Fourth Support” not included

in the original five. As explained to Edward G. Browne by Mulla

Ghulam Husayn, a Shaykhi doctor of Kirman with whom be conversed

in June, 1888, the five “Supports” of Shi‘ah Islam are (1) belief in

the unity of God; (2) belief in the justice of God; (3) belief in

prophethood; (4) belief in the Imamate; (5) and belief in the resurrec-

tion. But the Shaykhis believed that principles two and five are included

in number three, for if one believes in the prophet he believes in his

“book” which sets forth belief in the apostles of God, as well as the

mercy, wisdom, power and other attributes of God, and belief in the resur-

rection. To the remaining three principles, the Shaykhis added a “Fourth

Support,” namely, that there must always be among the Shi‘ahs a “Perfect

Shi‘ite” to serve as “a channel of grace”‘ between the absent twelfth Imam

and his followers. Since four supports are necessary for stability, more

than these are unnecessary 27

The “Fourth Support” which as explained above is a principle or

doctrine, became a tern far the “Perfect Shi‘ite,” at least outside of

the Shaykhs circle among the Babis and other Shi‘ites.28 ‘Abdu’l-Baha in

the *Traveller’s Narrative* refers to “some divines of the Sheykhi party”

who were “ever seeking for some great, incomparable, and trustworthy

person” whom they called the “Fourth Support.”29

Before Siyyid Kazim died, according is the author of the *New*

*History*, he began to speak of his approaching death and of “the Truth”

that should appear after his pasing.30 When he died, his disciples

scattered in search of the expected one who would be the “channel

of grace” between the hidden Imam and his people. For some of the

Shaykhis, this search ended when ‘Ali Muhammad declared in 1844 that

he was the *Bab*, ‘the Gate of the hidden Imam.”31 A considerable number

of Shaykhis, however, refused to accept ‘Ali Muhammad’s claims, following

Instead Haji Muhammad Karim Khan of Kirman, and became the Babis bitterest

opponents. Several Shaykhis were among those who heaped insults on

the Bab at his first .examination in Tabriz and who ratified his death-

warrant two years later. The Bab stigmatized Karim Khan as “the Quin-

tessence of Hell-fire,” and the latter wrote at least two treatises,

one entitled “The Crushing of Falsehood,” denouncing the Babi doctrines.

Edward G. Browne testifies to the “bitter enmity” existing between the

Shaykhis and the Babis which he observed during the two months he spent

at Kirman in the summer of 1888.32 The conflict between the Bab and

Karim Khan is only a foreshadowing of conflict to follow in Babi-Baha’i

history. The future, however, belonged not to Karim Khan’s followers

but to the Babis who centered around ‘Ali-Muhammad.

‘ALI-MUHAMMAD, THE BAB

Siyyid ‘Ali Muhammad, who later assumed the title of the “Bab,”

was born in Shiraz, Persia, on the first of Muharram, in the year—accord-

ing to ‘Abdu’l-Baha in the *Traveller’s Narrative*—A.H. 1235,33 which would

be October 20, 1819. He was a *Siyyid*, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

His father, a merchant in Shiraz, died when ‘Ali Muhammad was quite young,

and he was placed in the care of his maternal uncle, Haji Siyyid ‘Ali.

The Bab’s Education

One question arising from the Bab’s early years is whether or

not he received a formal education. ‘Abdu’l-Baha says:

It was universally admitted by the Shiites that he had never

studied in any school, and had not acquired knowledge from any

teacher, all the people of Shiraz bear witness to this. Never-

theless, he suddenly appeared before the people, endowed with

the most complete erudition.34

The Bab, himself, however, refers in the *Bayan* to “Muhammad” his “teacher,”

and J. E. Esslemont was to admit later that “in childhood He learned to

read, and received the elementary education customary for children,”

and Esslemont on this point quotes in a footnote “a historian” who

remarks:

The belief of many people in the East, especially the believers in

the Bab (now Baha’is) was this that the Bab received no education,

but that the Mullas, in order to lower Him in the eyes of the people,

declared that such knowledge and wisdom as he possessed were accounted

for by the education he had received. After deep search into the

truth of this matter we have found evidence to show that in child-

hood for a short time He used to go to the house of Shaykh Muhammad

(also known as ‘Abid) where He was taught to read and write in Persian.

It was this to which the Bab referred when He wrote in the book of

Bayan: “O Muhammad, O my teacher! …”

The remarkable thing is this, however, that this Shaykh, who

was his teacher, became a devoted disciple of his own pupil.35

The view that neither the Bab nor Baha’u’llah had formal educations, or

that they received little training, is to be seen against the background

of the Muslim belief that Muhammad was an illiterate. Baha’u’llah, in

the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* uses this expression in reference to himself: “We

have not entered schools. We have not perused the arguments. Hear that

by which this Illiterate One (*al-ummi*) calls you to God.”36

The Muslim belief that Muhammad was illiterate is based on

a passage in the Qur’an when Muhammad is referred to as “*al-nabi*

*al-ummi*” (VIII, 156-57), “the illiterate Prophet,” as rendered by Sale

and Palmer,37 traditionally understood by Muslims to mean that Muhammad

could not read nor write, and thus translated freely by Pickthall in

his “explanatory translation” as “the Prophet who can neither read nor

write.’38

Modern studies, however, have called into question the tradi-

tional understanding of this expression, as Pickthall points out: “Some

modern criticism, while not denying the comparative illiteracy of the

Prophet, would prefer the rendering ‘who is not of those who read the

Scriptures’ or ‘Gentile.’”39 Rodwell explains in a footnote in his

translation of the Qur’an.

The word *ummyy* is derived from *ummah*, a nation, and means Gentile;

it here refers to Muhammad’s ignorance, previous to the revelation

of Islam, of the ancient Scriptures. It is equivalent to the Gr.

*laic*, *ethnic*, and to the term *gojim*, as applied by the Jews to

those unacquainted with the Scriptures.40

The verse, then, referring to Muhammad as *al-nabi al-ummi* would not be

referring to an inability to read and write but to the fact of his being

a Gentile and unversed in the Jewish scriptures, illiterate in reference

to previous holy books. This understanding is supported by other verses

in the Qur’an, as where reference is made to “*unlettered* folk who know

the Scripture not except from hearsay” (II, 78). Their illiteracy has

special reference to their not having read the scripture. Muhammad is

addressed in one verse of the Qur’an with these words:

Thou (O Muhammad) wast not a reader at any scripture before it [the

Qur’an], nor didst thou write it with thy right hand, for then might

those have doubted, who follow falsehood.41

This verse is denying that Muhammad had read or copied any portions of

the books of previous revelations, which would then lessen the miracle

of the Qur’an and cause these who “follow falsehood” to deny the

originality or authenticity of Muhammad’s revelation.

A better rendering than “illiterate” for *ummi* in these verses

in its context would be “unversed.”

Baha’u’llah’s use of the word in reference to himself would

seem to be for the purpose of placing himself in the same category with

Muhammad, and the Baha’i interest in claiming that the Bab and Baha’u’-

llah had little formal education seems to stem from the traditional

Muslim belief that Muhammad was illiterate and the philosophy that

such a view strengthens the claim that their revelations proceeded

from divine rather than human wisdom. But although the claim of the

basic illiteracy of the Bab and Baha’u’llah stem from the Muslin belief

in Muhammad’s illiteracy, the Baha’i claim has undergone a modification.

It does not mean that the Bab and Baha’u’llah could not read nor write,

for both were able to read and write, and Baha’is preserve to this day

tablets written in their own handwriting; it does not mean that they were

unversed in previous Scriptures, for Baha’u’llah’s writings in particular

give evidence of his being well versed in the Qur’an, the *Bayan*, and the

Christian gospels; nor does it mean that they had no formal education, for

as noted above, the Bab received an elementary education customary for

Persian children of his time. What then is meant? Seemingly, simply

that the Bab and Baha’u’llah received no *extensive* formal education. The

same Muslim desire to signify the prophets revelation by contrasting it

with the prophet’s “illiteracy” reasserts itself in the claim made for

the Bab and Baha’u’llah, but the Baha’i claim no longer signifies what the

Muslim claim means.

The Bab’s Later Youth

At the age of seventeen, the Bab moved from Shiraz to Bushihr,

where he engaged in business pursuits with his uncle and later on his

own. The Bab was so engaged for five years.42 At about age twenty-two,

the Bab married, and from this union one child was born, named Ahmad, who

died in 1843.42

The Bab increasingly gave himself to religious devotions, and

according to the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* spent about a year in the neighborhood of

Karbila and Najaf (important Shrine sites),44 about three months of

this time at Karbila, occasionally attending the lectures of Siyyid

Kazim. The author, however, explains that his visits were not for the

purpose of study, for Siyyid Kazim was “helped” by time presence of the

Bab.45 Babi-Baha’i sources indicate that Siyyid Kazim made some indica-

tions that ‘Ali Muhammad (the Bab) could be his successor. The *Nuqtatu’l-*

*Kaf* gives the testimony of one of Siyyid Kazim’s disciples, who said:

“One day we were in the company of the late Seyyid Kazim when some

one asked about the manner of the Manifestation which was to succeed

him. “After my death,” replied he, “there will be a schism amongst

my followers, but God’s affair will be clear as this rising sun.”

As he spoke he pointed to the door, through which streamed a flood

of sunlight, and, at that very moment, Mirza ‘Ali Muhammad crossed

the threshold and entered the room. “We did not, however,” continued

the narrator, “apprehend his meaning until His Holiness was mani-

fested”.46

A variation of this story appears in *The Dawn-Breakers*, making it even

more emphatic that ‘Ali Muhammad was intended by Siyyid Kazim. According

to this account, the Bab:

sat close to the threshold, and … listened to the discourse of

the Siyyid. As soon as his eyes fell upon that Youth, the Siyyid

discontinued his address and held his peace. Whereupon one of his

disciples begged him to resume the argument which he had left un-

finished. ‘What more shall I say?’ replied Siyyid Kazim, as he

turned his face toward the Bab. ‘Lo, the Truth is more manifest

than the ray of light that has fallen upon that lap!’ I immediately

observed that the ray to which the Siyyid referred had fallen upon

the lap of that same Youth whom we had recently visited. … I Saw

the Siyyid actually point out with his finger the ray of light that

had fallen on that lap, and yet none among those who were present

seemed to apprehend its meaning.47

According to the testimony of Mirza Husayn-i-Bushru’i, the first

to believe in the Bab, as quoted from Mirza Jani’s history by the author of

the *New History*, Mirza Husayn was one of Siyyid Kazim’s followers who

observed the Bab during his few months stay in Karbila.48 If Siyyid Kazim

did give some indications to his followers that ‘Ali Muhammad (the Bab)

was to be his successor, it would explain why Mulla Husayn and other of

Siyyid Kazim’s followers after his death set out for Shiraz in search of

‘Ali Muhammad. It is likely, however, since the sources quoted above

indicate that Siyyid Kazim’s disciples did not originally apprehend his

meaning in reference to ‘Ali Muhammad that they did not see ‘Ali Muhammad

as the new leader until after his declaration. Still, ‘Ali Muhammad appears

to have been a very impressive and winsome figure, and he understandably may

have attracted some of the late Shaykhi leader’s followers to himself and

to Shiraz in their search for the new leader. According to Mirza Jani’s

account as quoted in the *New History*, Mulla Husayn upon reaching Shiraz

sought out the abode of ‘Ali Muhammad because of their previous friend-

ship.49 According to Babi-Baha’i accounts, Mulla Husayn was the first

to hear the Bab’s declaration of his mission and the first to believe in

the Bab.

The Bab’s Declaration of His Mission

The Bab’s declaration of his mission on May 22, 1844, as noted

earlier, cannot be overstressed: for this moment marks for the Baha’i not

only the beginning of the faith with which he stands identified but the

beginning of a new prophetic era, for which all previous dispensations

were merely preparatory and before which the glory of all past ages fades

into a pale glimmer.

The Date of the Declaration: A little confusion exists concern-

ing the date of the Bab’s declaration. Sometimes the date is gives as

May 23, 1844, and sometimes as May 22, 1844. Baha’is list the anniversary

date as May 23,50 yet the actual date by the Gregorian calendar, as Baha’is

sometimes point out, would be May 22, 1844. The reason for this con-

fusion is a difficulty in transferring the date from the Muslim calendar

into the Gregorian system. The Bab in the *Bayan* gives the date of his

declaration as the fifth of Jumadiyu’l-Avval, which corresponds for the

most part with May 23, 1844, The Muslim day, however, began at sunset

rather than at midnight, and the Bab’s declaration by his own testimony

was made two hours and eleven minutes after sunset on the fifth of Juma-

diyu’l-Avval.51 The Bab’s declaration thus was made on a day the begin-

ning hours of which overlap with the closing hours of the previous day

by the Gregorian system, in other words, the Bab made his declaration

on the fifth of Jumadiyu’l-Avval, which with the exception of the few

hours from sunset to midnight, corresponded with May 23 of that year,

but the declaration was made during those evening hours, which by the

Gregorian calendar, would to the evening of May 22.

There is some indication that the Bab, even before May 22,

1844, was accorded a high station by some acquaintances. Richards

points out that Avarih claims that he discovered in the course of his

research a letter written by the Bab to his uncle, bearing the date of

1259 A.H. (1843) in which he writes:

The Cause is not yet ripe (of age), and the moment has not yet

arrived, therefore should anyone attribute to me opinions contrary

to the usual doctrines and beliefs of Islam both I and my immacu-

late ancestors will be displeased with him, both here and in the

next world.52

Nabil quotes from one of the Bab’s writings in which he indicates that

in the year prior to his declaration he felt himself possessed of God’s

Spirit and enlightened on divine mysteries:

The spirit of prayer which animates My soul is the direct conse-

quence of a dream which I had in the year before the declaration

of My Mission. In My vision I saw the head of the Imam Husayn,

the Siyyidu’-sh-Shuhada’, which was hanging upon a tree. Drops

of blood dripped profusely from his lacerated throat. With feelings

of unsurpassed delight, I approached that tree and, stretching forth

My hands, gathered a few drops of that sacred blood, and drank them

devoutly. When I awoke, I felt that the Spirit of God had permeated

and taken possession of My soul. My heart was thrilled with the joy

of His Divine presence, and the mysteries of His Revelation were

unfolded before My eyes in all their glory.53

The Bab, however, did not declare his mission until May 22, 1844. The

year has special significance, for it was exactly 1,000 years from the

time of the twelfth Imam’s disappearance in A.H. 260.54 The year 1844

corresponds to the Muslim year A.H. 1260. The period of the Imam’s “Occul-

tation” was thus broken exactly 1,000 years from its commencement. The

Bab’s declaration in this year is seen as the fulfilling of Revelation

11:2 about the Holy City being trodden under foot for forty and two months

until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled (forty-two times thirty equals

1,260). The Millerites also had predicted, based on calculations from

the Bible, that Christ would return in 1844. Baha’is believe that the

Millerites were accurate as to the date but wrong as to the manner of

his coming.55

The Circumstances of the Declaration: Babi-Baha’i sources differ

in giving the particulars of the Bab’s declaration. The *Traveller’s Narra-*

*tive*, oddly enough, passes over this most important event with merely

stating that in 1260 A.H., at the age of twenty-five, the Bab “began to

speak and to declare the rank of Bab-hood” and gives a short statement of

the meaning of the term “Bab.”56 The earliest Babi-Baha’i account of the

declaration is Mirza Jani’s account. The author of the *New History*, when

coming to the Bab’s declaration, merely quotes the Mirza Jani account.

Although both the Mirza Jani account and Nabil’s account purport

to be based on the testimony of Mulla Husayn, to whom the Bab first

declared his mission,57 they differ on various points. A comparison of

these differences gives some insight into the developing tradition con-

cerning the Bab’s declaration. Baha’is today accept Nabil’s account as

the accurate record of the Bab’s declaration.

In Mirza Jani’s account, as quoted in the *New History*, Mulla

Husayn upon reaching Shiraz, to which he went from Karbila “in the hope

of benefiting a palpitation of the heart” which he suffered, seeks

out the abode of ‘Ali Muhammad (the Bab) because of their previous

friendship on a journey together to the Holy Shrines of Karbila and Najaf.

One reference is made to Mulla Husayn’s having not observed any special

signs of knowledge in ‘Ali Muhammad during his two months abode at Kar-

bila, indicating that he was in Karbila during the time that the Bab was

there. According to Nabil’s account in *The Dawn-Breakers*, however, Mulla

Husayn is portrayed as not knowing ‘Ali Muhammad and as being away on a

mission during the time that ‘Ali Muhammad was in Karbila. The circum-

stance of his being drawn to Shiraz is thus given a more miraculous

nature.

In Mirza Jani’s account, Mulla Husayn himself seeks out the

Bab’s abode, knocks on the door of his house, and ‘Ali Muhammad in person

opens the door. The L. Codex of the *New History* heightens the drama of

this event by inserting that before the Bab opened the door or had seen

Mulla Husayn, he calls out: “Is it you, Mulla Husayn?” This element of

having expected Mulla Husayn is heightened more so in Nabil’s account which

has the Bab meeting Mulla Husayn outside the gate of the city, embracing

him tenderly, and leading him to his house, where the Bab knocks upon

the door and is admitted entrance by an Ethiopian servant.

The time from Mulla Husayn’s arrival at ‘Ali Muhammad’s house

until his conversion, in Mirza Jani’s account, extends over a period of

some three or four days, whereas in Nabil’s chronicle Mulla Husayn is

converted on his first evening with the Bab. The dialogue between ‘Ali

Muhammad and Mulla Husayn in both accounts is similar, yet striking

differences occur. In the Mirza Jani account, ‘Ali Muhammad asks Mulla

Husayn whom the Shaykhis now recognized as their-master to “take the

place occupied by the late Seyyid Kazim?” Upon hearing that they as yet

recognized no one, ‘Ali Muhammad asks what manner of man he must be, and

after Mulla Husayn enumerates certain qualifications and characteristics,

he asks: “Do you observe these in me?” Mulla Husayn replies: “I see in

you none of these qualities.” These words, as might be expected, are

omitted by the later Nabil chronicle. Towards evening, in the Mirza Jani

narrative, several learned Shaykhis and merchants informed of Mulla Husayn’s

arrival in Shiraz come to see him. With ‘Ali Muhammad’s support, they succeed

in getting him to promise to deliver a lecture on the following day. But

when he attempted to carry out his promise the next morning, he found that

he was as though tongue-tied and so unable to speak. The same thing

happened the next day and again a third time. ‘Ali Muhammad then took

Mulla Husayn alone to his house, again asking him the sign by which his

master might be recognized, causing Mulla Husayn to wonder why ‘Ali Muhammad

so persistently introduced this topic. It was on this evening some days after

Mulla Husayn’s arrival in Shiraz that ‘Ali Muhammad began revealing verses

explaining various problems and questions in the mind of Mulla Husayn which

caused him to recognize the station of ‘Ali Muhammad. When ‘Ali Muhammad

finished revealing seventy or eighty verses, Mulla Husayn rose up to flee

as “some delinquent might flee from before a mighty king,” but ‘Ali Muham-

mad constrained him to sit down and remain, saying: “Anyone who should see

thee in this state would think thee mad.”

In *The Dawn-Breakers*, Mulla Husayn is converted during his first

evening with the Bab. ‘Ali Muhammad asks him: “Whom, after Siyyid Kazim,

do you regard as his successor and your leader?” He then asks for ‘the

distinguishing features of the promised One,” and after bring told charac-

teristics concerning his youth, physical features, and innate knowledge,

‘Ali Muhammad responds: “Behold, all these signs are manifest in Me!”

He then demonstrates how each of the signs is applicable to him. As soon

as he finishes speaking Mulla Husayn is seized with great fear. After

the Bab reveals the first chapter at his commentary on the Surih of Joseph,

Mulla Husayn begs permission to depart, but ‘Ali Muhammad says: “If you

leave in such a state, whoever sees you will assuredly say: ‘This poor

youth has lost his mind.’”

The first chapter of the Bab’s commentary on the Surih of

Joseph, in Nabil’s account, was revealed in the presence of Mulla Husayn

on the night at his declaration, the Bab writing down the words as he

recited them aloud to Mulla Husayn. In the earlier Mirza Jani account,

however, the Bab on a day following his declaration showed Mulla Husayn

his commentary on the Surih of Joseph which he had written in response

to Mulla Husayn’s question of some days previous on why this Surih is

called “the Best of Stories.” The Bab at that time had said that it was

not the proper time to answer his question and thus produced the written

commentary some days later, allowing the Bab time to reflect on the

matter. Perhaps to avoid any suggestion that the Bab reflected on

the matter, the later Baha’i history, *The Dawn-Breakers*, departed from

the account in the earlier histories by recounting that the Bab without

being solicited and seemingly without forethought recited the significant

first chapter of that commentary in the very presence of Mulla Husayn on

the evening of his declaration.59

Strangely enough, the Baha’i histories give no account of the

actual declaration of the Bab on May 22, 1844. The closest record of an

actual declaration is given in Nabil’s history of ‘Ali Muhammad’s words

to Mulla Husayn spoken on the following days “O thou who art the first

to believe in Me: Verily I say, I am the Bab, the Gate of God, and thou

art the Babu’l-Bab, the gate of that Gate.”60

The Content of the Declaration: Some uncertainty exists con-

cerning the meaning of the title “the Bab” which ‘Ali Muhammad assumed,

and probably some progression of meaning occurred from the time that

‘Ali Muhammad first called himself by this title. The word is used in

pre-Fatimid times, but its exact meaning as used then is uncertain.61

During the Fatimid period (910-1171 A.D.), Badr al Jamali, the

prime minister of the Imam Mustansir was designated his Bab, and al Musi-

yad sometime after his admittance to the court of al Mustansir in 439 A.H./

1648 A.D. rose to the rank of Bab, presumably after Badr al Jamali’s

death.62

Within the Isma‘ili community existed a well-organized hierar-

chy of religious teachers, which J. N. Hollister reconstructs as follows:

(1) Prophet, (2) Asas, (3) Imam, (4) Bab, (5) Hujjat, (6) Da’i al

madhun, (7) Da’i al mukasir, and (8) Da’i al mustajib. A da’i (Isma‘ili

missionary) could work up from the lowest position to that of a Bab.63

In the system of the Nusayri sect of northern Syria, God mani-

fested himself seven times in human form in the persons of Abel, Seth,

Joseph, Joshua, Asaph, Simon Peter, and ‘Ali, Muhammad’s son-in-law.

Each of these is called Maana, the reality of all things, and each has

associated with him two other figures called the *Ism*, the name or veil,

by which the *Maana* conceals its glory and by which it also reveals itself

to man, and the *Bab*, Gate or Door, by which entrance to the knowledge of

the former two is made possible. The seven Isms, respectively, are Adam,

Noah, Jacob, Moses, Solomon, Jesus, and Muhammad; and the seven Babs,

respectively, are Gabriel, Yayeel, Ham ibn Cush, Daw, Abdullah ibn Simaan,

Rezabah, Salman el Farizee. These form the seven trinities of the Nusayri

sect.64

The title of “the Bab” was also assumed by Abu Ja‘far Muhammad

(known as Ibn Abi Asakir), who was killed under the Khalifih (Caliph)

Ar-Radhi for taking the title and for teaching new and heretical doctrines.

As explained by one of his followers, Ibn Abdus, the title signified “the

door which led to the expected Imam.” The followers of Abu’l-Kazim

al-Husayn ibn Ruh, a contemporary of ash-Shalmaghani (d. 326 A.H./937-938

A.D.), regarded him as one of the “doors leading to the *Lord of the Age*,”

the *Sahibu’z-Zaman*.65

The more direct influence upon ‘Ali Muhammad in his use of the

title, however, would appear to be its use in Shi‘ah Islam in reference

to the four agents of the hidden twelfth Imam, discussed earlier.66

‘Ali Muhammad in the *Bayan* refers to the four *babs* who have returned

to the earth (I, 16-19),67 meaning evidently the four *babs* of the

twelfth Imam. Elsewhere in the *Bayan*, the Bab writes”

For God hath assimilated refuge in Himself to refuge in His

Apostle [Muhammad], and refuge in His Apostle to refuge in His

execution (i.e., the Imams), end refuge [in His executors to refuge]

to the Gates (*Abwab* or *Babs)*68 of His executors. … For refuge

in the Apostle is identical with refuge in God, and refuge in the

Imams is identical with refuge in the Apostle, and refuge in the

Gates is identical with refuge in the Imams.69

The persons intended as returns of the four gates may have been Shaykh

Ahmad-i-Ahsa’i and Siyyid Kazim-i-Rashti, referred to by ‘Ali Muhammad

in his commentary on the Surih of Joseph as the “two Gates, Ahmad and

Kazim” sent “in the former time,” ‘Ali Muhammad, himself, who took this

title, and Mulla Husayn (the Babu’l-Bab) upon whom ‘Ali Muhammad bestowed

his former title “the Bab” when he assumed the more lofty title of the

*Nuqta*, or “Point.”70

When the Bab was asked at his first .examination at Tabriz the

meaning of “Bab,” he replied that it meant the same as the word “Bab”

in the tradition where Muhammad says: “I am the City of Knowledge and

‘Ali is its Gate.”71 This may lend support to the view that ‘Ali

Muhammad claimed the full station of an Imam in his use of the title

“Bab,” since ‘Ali was the first Imam, or it may indicate some progression

of meaning in ‘Ali Muhammad’s own thought, but more likely in his use

of this tradition he was thinking not of identifying himself with the

Imam ‘Ali but of describing his function as the Bab. As ‘Ali was a

gateway to the knowledge of Muhammad, so he was a gateway to the hidden

Imam.

The Bab’s Advancing Claims

‘Ali Muhammad’s original meaning, therefore, in claiming to

be the Bab was that he was the “Gate” of the hidden twelfth Imam and

was thus the successor of Siyyid Kazim, the “Fourth Support,” for

whom the Shaykhis were searching. That ‘Ali Muhammad’s claim to be

the “Bab” was made to a member of the Shaykhi school is not without

significance, and in both the histories discussed earlier ‘Ali Muhammad

inquires of Mulla Husayn whom the Shaykhis regarded as the successor of

Siyyid Kazim and what his qualifications should be, with the aim of

getting Mulla Husayn to recognize in him those signs.72

‘Ali Muhammad, thus, was originally claiming to be merely the

new Shaykhi leader, the “Perfect Shi‘ite,” the channel of grace between

the hidden Imam and his people. During this early period of the Bab’s

ministry, he was still working within the framework of the religion of

Islam, but greater claims were forthcoming. ‘Ali Muhammad’s claims appear

to have gone through at least three stages: his claims to be (1) the Bab, (2)

the *Zikr* (“Reminder”) or *Mahdi* and *Qa’im*, expected deliverers, and (3) a

“manifestation” on an equality with the prophet Muhammad.

The *New History* indicates that the Bab first advanced his claim

of being the *Qa’im* while at Chihriq:

It was during his sojourn at Chikrik, too, that the Bab,

having due regard to the exigencies of the time, the dictates of

expediency, and the capacity of men, declared himself to be the

Ka’im; though some think that he made this declaration during the

latter days of his residence at Maku.73

This new claim appears to have been first publicly advanced by ‘Ali

Muhammad at his examination before the ‘Ulama at Tabriz toward the end

of 1847 or beginning of 1848.74

In ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s account of the Bab’s examination at Tabriz

in the *Traveller’s Narrative*, he says: “They asked him concerning the

claims of the Bab. He advanced the claim of Mahdi-hood; whereon a mighty

tumult arose.”75 The statement apparently means that he advanced a new

claim beyond his previous claim to Babhood and that it startled his

hearers. J. E. Esslemont, in his popular introduction to the Baha’i

faith, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, still highly regarded by Baha’is,

calls attention to the Bab’s advancing claims. At the age of twenty-five,

Esslemont points out, ‘Ali Muhammad claimed the station of Babhood, then

Esslemont says: “The hostility aroused by the claim of Babhood was

redoubled when the young reformer proceeded to declare that He was Himself

the Mihdi (Mahdi) Whose coming Muhammad had foretold.”76 Although Essle-

mont does not indicate when the second claim was made, he does allow for

a lapse of time between the claims for the development of hostility to

arise against ‘Ali Muhammad’s first claim. Esslemont then says:

But the Bab did not stop even with the claim of Mihdihood. He

adopted the sacred title of “Nuqtiyiula” or “Primal Point.” This

was a title applied to Muhammad Himself by His followers. Even

the Imams were secondary in importance to the “Point,” from Whom

they derived their inspiration and authority. In assuming this

title, the Bab claimed to rank, like Muhammad, in the series of

great founders of religion.77

According to these sources, then, ‘Ali Muhammad first claimed to be

(1) the Bab or gate to the hidden Imam, whom the Shi‘ahs identified

with the Mahdi, (2) then to be the Imam, or Mahdi, himself, (3) and

then to be the “Point” to whom even the Imams were secondary, thus

putting himself on an equality with the prophet Muhammad.

In this understanding, the claim to be Qa’im or Mahdi marked

a second stage in the Bab’s advancing claims. Some interpreters, however,

as Peter Berger, believe that the full meaning of the later titles was

involved in ‘Ali Muhammad’s claim to be the Bab and was so understood by

his followers.79 William McElwee Miller takes this position in his new

book on Baha’i. Support for this position is provided in *The Dawn-*

*Breakers*, for Nabil portrays Mulla Husayn as being on a search to find

the promised Qa’im, and Mulla Husayn believes that he has found him when

‘Ali Muhammad advances his claim to be the Bab. Possibly, however, Nabil

is reading back into the Bab’s first claim the meaning contained in the

Bab’s later claims.

Shoghi Effendi, in describing Mulla Husayn’s interview with the

Bab, says that the Bab by his replies to his guest “established beyond

the shadow of a doubt His claim to be the premised Qa’im.”80 This state-

ment would seem to indicate Shoghi Effendi’s belief that the meaning of

being the Qa’im was involved in ‘Ali Muhammad’s claim of being the Bab

which he made in the presence of Mulla Husayn. Yet, elsewhere Shoghi

Effendi says of ‘Ali Muhammad that he “did not content Himself with the

claim to be the Gate of the Hidden Imam” but “assumed a rank that excelled

even that of the Sahibu’z-Zaman.”81 Seemingly, Shoghi Effendi is saying

here that ‘Ali Muhammad did, in fact, first claim to be the Bab in the

traditional Shi‘ite sense of “the Gate of the Hidden Imam” but, not being

content with this claim, proceeded to advance even higher claims.

The matter is somewhat inconclusive, but the evidence is strong

that, whatever the Bab meant by his first claim of being the Bab, he pro-

ceeded to assume titles, which popularly understood, were advanced claims.

The *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* indicates that the Bab first announced himself

as the Qa’im in a letter to Mulla Shaykh ‘Ali (Jinab-i-Azim).82 Browne

notes, however, an inconsistency between the time when this letter is

supposed to have been written, after the death of Muhammad Shah, and

the accounts which indicate that the Bab advanced his claim of being

the Qa’im at his examination in Tabriz, which occurred during Muhammad

Shah’s lifetime.83 Though the time element may be wrong, the author of

the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* does reveal that the Bab’s claim to be Qa’im was made

subsequent to his claim of being the Bab. The *New History* and the

*Traveller’s Narrative* agree with the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* on that point.

One unusual feature of early Babi history is that, when ‘Ali

Muhammad assumed the title of “the Point,” he conferred his title of the

Bab on Mulla Husayn, who was formerly the Babu’l-Bab, Gate of the Gate.84

This would also seem to indicate that the meaning of the titles were

distinct, with the Point carrying a higher meaning than the Bab, yet ‘Ali

Muhammad still sometimes refers to himself in the *Bayan* by his former

title of the Bab but seems no longer to have been the exclusive holder

of it.

Later Events

Within a relatively short time the Bab gained the allegiance

of eighteen disciples, whom he called “Letters of the Living” (*Hurufat-*

*Hayy*) and whom he sent forth to proclaim his message. The Bab then set

out on a pilgrimage to Mecca, where he openly proclaimed himself. From

Mecca, the Bab proceeded to Bushihr, where he landed in August, 1845.

The movement was meeting with such success that by September, 1845,

measures to secure the Bab’s arrest were taken. The house of the Bab’s

uncle was broken into, and the Bab and his uncle were taken to Shiraz; the

governor examined the Bab, declared him to be a heretic, confiscated

his property, and committed him into the custody of the chief constable,

‘Abdu’l-Hamid Khan.

When a plague broke out in the city, the Bab either managed to

escape or, according to Baha’i sources, was released by ‘Abdu’l-Hamid Khan

after the Bab had miraculously saved the life of his son, who had been

attacked by the plague.85 The Bab proceeded to Isfahan, where he stayed

about a year under the protection of Manuchihr Khan, the governor of the

province. When, however, Manuchihr Khan died early in 1847, his successor

Gurgin Khan sent the Bab with mounted guards toward Tihran, the capital.

It is during this journey that the Bab is believed to have stopped for

two or three days in the house of Mirza Jani in Kashan. According to the

*New History*, after leaving Kashan, the Bab travelled to Khanlik, where he

was visited by many persons of note, among whom was Mirza Husayn ‘Ali,

known later as Baha’u’llah.86 Some Baha’is, however, maintain that no

definite evidence exists that Baha’u’llah ever met the Bab. *The Dawn*-

*Breakers* contains no record of this meeting but instead refers to a

messenger from Baha’u’llah who brought the Bab a sealed letter and certain

gifts from Baha’u’llah, which brought joy to the Bab, during the Bab’s

encampment near the village of Kulayn.87

Mohammad Shah seems to have desired to see the Bab, but the

minister, Haji Mirza Aqasi, perhaps fearing that if the Bab were brought

into the capital he might either win the shah’s support or incite the

populace to rebellion, prevailed upon the shah to have the Bab transferred

to the remote fortress of Maku.

The Bab remained at Maku for about six months and then was

transferred to stricter confinement at the fortress of Chihriq.

Various opinions of the Bab circulated. Some regarded him as

insane and considered his writings as the products of such madness.

Others, however, believed that ‘Ali Muhammad did not claim to be the

Bab, that Mulla Husayn was the actual claimant, and that the writings

in question issued from the pen of the latter.88 So the Bab was summoned

to Tabriz for a hearing to determine the matter. The Muslim and Baha’i

accounts of the proceedings, agreeing on some of the questions asked,

differ in presenting the Bab’s deportment. Muslim sources present the

Muslim clergy as getting the best of the Bab, asking him questions in the

areas of medicine, grammar, and rhetoric and the meaning of certain Muslim

traditions and picturing the Bab as unable to answer the questions. Baha’i

sources show that the Bab was the subject of ridicule but present him as

boldly meeting his adversaries.89

According to the account attributed to Amir Arslan Khan, maternal

uncle to Nasiru’d-Din Shah, who was at the time of the Bab’s interrogation

crown prince, the Bab at the conclusion of the interrogation “apologized,

recanted, and repented of and asked pardon for his errors, giving a sealed

undertaking that henceforth he would not commit such fault.”90 Browne

published in his *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion* a document

purporting to be the Bab’s recantation, which may or may not be the one

referred to above. This unsigned and undated document, which Browne says

“is apparently in the Bab’s handwriting,” declares:

Never have I desired aught contrary to the Will of God, and, if

words contrary to His good pleasure have flowed from my pen, my

object was not disobedience, and in any case I repent and ask

forgiveness of Him. This servant has absolutely no knowledge

connected with any [superhuman] claim. I ask forgiveness of God

my Lord and I repent unto Him of [the idea] that there should

be ascribed to me any [Divine] Mission. As for certain prayers

and words which have flowed from my tongue, these do not imply

any such Mission (*amr*), and any [apparent] claim to any special

vicegerency for His holiness the Proof of God91 (on whom be

Peace!) is a purely baseless claim, such as this servant has

never put forward, nay, nor any claim like unto it.92

Another account portrays the Bab as making a public recantation in the

Vakil mosque in Shiraz, saying: “What has been attributed to me is a

false accusation. Even if anything of the kind has emanated from me, I

now repent and ask for (God’s) pardon.” Having made this confession, he

kissed the hand of the Imam-Jum‘ih, chief of the Muslim clergy, and

descended from the pulpit.93

The Conference of Badasht: Far distant from where the Bab

was held in confinement, an important conference at Badasht was convened

by the Babi leaders. One purpose of this conference was to consider

means by which the Bab might be set tree from his confinement in

Chihriq.94 This objective was unsuccessful, but the meeting, which

oddly enough the *New History* and *Traveller’s Narrative* pass over in

silence, marks the open break by the Bab’s followers with the religion

of Islam. Nabil records that “each day of that memorable gathering wit-

nessed the abrogation of a new law and the repudiation of a long-estab-

lished tradition.”95 One dramatic sign of the new order of things,

which some of the Babis were unprepared to accept, was the appearance

of Qurratu’l-‘Ayn (“Consolation of the Eyes”), the only woman included

in the Bab’s “Letters of the Living,” with the veil removed from her

face. The Babis considered her the return of Fatimih, the Prophet

Muhammad’s daughter, “the noblest emblem of chastity in their eyes,”

and her appearance before them in such manner threw the meeting into

turmoil. One Babi, so gravely shaken, cut his own throat and fled

blood-stained from her presence.96

The Babis assembled at the Badasht Conference also took new

names. Mirza Husayn ‘Ali, who seems to have supported financially the

conference, took the title “Baha,” meaning “Glory” or “Splendour,”97 which

title was expanded later into “Baha’u’llah,” the Glory of God (Baha Allah).

Baha’is maintain that Baha’u’llah was actually the unobtrusive guide

behind the course of the entire conference,98 although, Nabil remarks,

“few, if any, dimly surmised that Baha’u’llah was the Author of the

far-reaching changes which were being so fearlessly introduced.’99

Babis in Arms: The king of Persia, Muhammad Shah, died on

September 4, 1848. The following months were to witness what Shoghi

Effendi calls “the bloodiest and most dramatic” period “of the Heroic

Age of the Baha’i Era.”100 A number of upheavals with Babis fighting

against the royalist forces occurred in various parts of Persia—in the

east at the fort of Shaykh Tabarsi, in the south in Nayriz, and in

Zanjan in the northwest. Baha’is today insist that the Babis were

merely protecting themselves against the efforts of the government to

suppress the movement after the Bab’s bold and open declaration at

Tabriz of being the promised Qa’im. The taking up of arms to over-

throw the secular government was, however, in the minds of the masses

an expected part of the awaited Mahdi’s program of establishing justice

in all the earth,101 and whether or not the Babis took up arms for this

purpose, as Browne points out,

in Khurasan, Mazandaran and elsewhere armed bands of his [the Bab’s]

followers roamed the country proclaiming the Advent of the .expected

Mahdi and the inauguration of the Reign of the Saints, and threaten-

ing those sanguinary encounters between themselves and their oppo-

nents which were at once precipitated by the king’s death and the

ensuing dislocation and confusion.102

The Bab envisioned a Babi state in Persia, and the letter written by

Quddus to the prince given in the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, which Browne notes is

“shorter and more forcibly worded” than the version in the *New History*,

gives some support to the view that the Babis intended taking over the

government. “We,” he writes, “are the rightful rulers, and the world is

set under our signet-ring,” and in the concluding passage of the letter,

be admonishes, “Be not thou, O Prince, misled by worldly glory and the

pride of thy youth; know that Nasiru’d-Din Shah is no true king, and

that such as support him shall be tormented in hell-fire.”103

The battles at Shaykh Tabarsi, which began in October, 1848,

lasted some eleven months before the Babis were subdued. Half of the

Bab’s “Letters of the Living,” including Mulla Husayn and Quddus, were

killed. The Zanjan battles also lasted for about a year. Some 3,000

Babis were engaged in the fighting, but the number was gradually reduced

by deaths or desertions until only 500 remained at the end. On the day

of their surrender, seventy-four were bayoneted to death, and four were

blown from cannons, and 150 or 200 persons, including some children seven

or eight years old, were imprisoned.104

The Bab’s Execution: While the Zanjan siege was in progress,

yet another Babi rising occurred in Nayriz. Although, as Edward Browne

points out, the Bab “could not, indeed, be considered as directly

responsible for the attitude of armed resistance assumed by his followers,”

the Persian government, nevertheless, regarded him as ‘the fountain-head

of those doctrines which had convulsed the whole Persian empire,”105 and

steps were taken to halt the movement by the execution of the Bab.

According to Nabil’s account, a regiment of soldiers ranged itself

in three files. Each file consisted of 250 men with rifles, awaiting the

order to fire. Nabil gives the time as noon, Sunday, the twenty-eighth

of Sha‘ban, A.H. 1266 (July 9, 1850).106 The Bab and one of his devoted

followers, Aka Muhammad ‘Ali, were led to the barrack square and suspended

by ropes before the gaze of a large multitude who had assembled to witness

the event. The order was given to open fire. Then occurred “a most

dramatic incident which came near contributing to history one of the most

astounding and best-accredited miracles in the annals of religion.”107

When the smoke from the rifles cleared, the Bab had not been hit. The

bullets only severed the rope which held him suspended, thus freeing him.

Sources, while agreeing on this point, differ as to whether Aka Muhammad

‘Ali also was unharmed. Some accounts record that the Bab’s disciple

was killed by the first volley of shots.108 The *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* and the

C. Codex of the *New History* indicate that the first volley was fired

only at Aqa Muhammad ‘Ali.109 In *The Dawn-Breakers*, which gives the

account of the Bab’s martyrdom as accepted by Baha’is today, both the

Bab and his disciple escaped the first shots unharmed.110

The Bab was again suspended, and this time the execution was

successful. The Bab’s body was riddled with bullets but his face was

unharmed, By a strange coincidence, the place where the Bab was killed

was called the Square of the *Sahibu’z-Zaman*, “the Lord of the Age.”111

The Babis managed to gain possession of his body, which was later trans-

ferred to Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, where today exists the beautiful

golden-domed Shrine of the Bab.

The Baha’i John Ferraby says that the account of the Bab’s

martyrdom might sound like legend, but he refers to document F.O. 60/153/

88 in the archives of the Foreign Office at the Public Records Office in

London, an official letter dated July 22, 1850, from Sir Justin Sheil,

Queen Victoria’s envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary in

Tihran to Lord Palmerston, secretary of state for foreign affairs, which

reads in part as follows:

The founder of the sect has been executed at Tabreez. He was

killed by a volley of musketry, and his death was on the point

of giving his religion a lustre which would have largely increased

his proselytes. When the smoke and dust cleared away after the

volley, Bab was not to be seen, and the populace proclaimed that

he had ascended to the skies. The balls had broken the ropes by

which he was bound …112

Some writers point out that, had the Bab asserted his claims in

the excitement following his unexpected deliverance, he might have rallied

the people behind him and been hailed as the Mahdi,114 but perhaps the

manner of his death has proved as advantageous, for he became a martyr

to his followers after the manner of Christ. Esslemont refers to the

event as “a second Calvary”;114 the *New history* calls him “that Jesus

of the age on the cross;”115 and Mary Hanford Ford writes: “He was

two years younger than Jesus when he gave his life in the same sacrifice

for the salvation of the world.”116

The impact of the Bab’s death in the West is referred to by

Jules Bois’ article in *The Forum* in 1925: “all Europe was stirred to

pity and indignation.” Bois recalls that “among the *litterateurs* of my

generation, in the Paris of 1890, the martyrdom of the Bab was still as

fresh a topic as had been the first news of his death.”117

THE TEACHINGS OF THE BAB

The Bab’s holy book, which in his dispensation corresponds

to the Qur’an of the Muhammadan era, is the *Bayan* (“Exposition” or

“Utterance”). The word refers in a general sense to all the Bab’s

writings, as the Bab, himself, acknowledges (Bayan III, 17). The Bab,

however, classified his writings according to certain grades, depending

on the style or nature of their writings, and preferred to restrict the

primary reference of *Bayan* to his *verses* (poetic utterances in the style

of the Qur’an); other forms were entitled to the word in the following

descending order: *supplications* (prayers), *commentaries*, *scientific*

*treatises*, and *Persian words* (discourses written in the Persian

language (III, 17).118 Subh-i-Azal, in a letter to Edward G. Brown,

said that, whereas the Bab’s earlier writings were given specific names,

all of his later writings were included under the designation of *Bayan*.119

The word *Bayan* as generally used refers to the Bab’s book of

laws. But there are at least two *Bayans*—an *Arabic Bayan*, written in

Arabic as a cogent proof of his mission for Muslims (II, 14),120 and a

*Persian Bayan*, the longer and more important of the two. The *Bayan* was

written while the Bab was a captive in the castle of Maku.121

The Bab proposed that the *Bayan* would have nineteen sections,

which he called *unities*, which in turn would divide into nineteen sub-

divisions called *babs*.122 The Bab, however, wrote only eleven of the

unities, leaving the remaining eight to be written by his successor.123

Browne wrote in 1910 that “part, but not the whole” of the remaining

unities “was written by Subh-i-Azal.”124

The following résumé of some of the teachings in the Persian

*Bayan* will give some idea of the Bab’s doctrines.125

The Abrogation of the Qur’an

The Bab declares: “Le Béyân est la balance de Dieu jusqu’au

jour du jugement dernier qui est le jour Celui que Dieu doit manifes-

ter.”126 Obedience is to be given to the *Bayan*, not the Qur’an (II, 6).

The Bab maintains that both the Qur’an and the *Bayan* are from the same

“Tree of Truth” (II, 7), and he laments the fact that men read the Qur’an

but fail in gathering its fruit, which is belief in the *Bayan* (III, 3).

The Bab, thus, sees his religion as a continuation of the revelation

given by God in Islam but a later stage in that revelation which super-

sedes Islam as Islam superseded Christianity. Of the Bab, Shoghi

Effendi writes:

He Who communicated the original impulse to so incalculable

a Movement was none other than the promised Qa’im (He who ariseth),

the Sahibu’z-Zaman (the Lord of the Age), Who assumed the exclusive

right of annulling the whole Qur’anic Dispensation.127

The *Bayan*’s Witness to Itself

Similar to the Qur’an’s statement that “if men and jinn should

combine to produce the like of this Qur’an, they could not produce the

like of it”(XVII, 88), the *Bayan* declares that all creatures working

together could not produce the like of the *Bayan* (II, 1). The *Bayan*’s

value is incomparable (III, 191; VI, 8), and it is identical in essence

with the Qur’an (II, 1) and the Gospel (II, 15).

The *Bayan*’s Witness to the Bab

A number of statements in the *Bayan* provide some factual infor-

mation about the Bab and set forth the Bab’s understanding of his own

mission, The *Bayan* indicates that the Bab was born in the “Land of

Fa,” i.e. Fars, or Shiraz (IV, 16; VII, 15; VII, 17) and claims that he

was devoid of formal learning (II, 1; IV, 10). He was twenty-four years

old when beginning his mission (II, 1), and the date of his manifestation

is given as the fifth of Jumada I, A.H. 1260 (II, 7), which was 12,210

years after the manifestation of Adam (III, 3) and 1,270 years after

that of Muhammad (II, 7).

On the one hand, the Bab calls himself God (II, 11), but on

the other hand, he claims to be only a “servant” and indicates that he

will die (IX, 1). He explains that as the manifested *Nuqta*, he has two

stations, that of Divinity and that of Servitude (IV, 1).

Verily I have created thee, and I have established two degrees

for thee. The first of those two degrees is that which belongs

peculiarly to me, and in this degree no one can see anything in

thee except myself. Therefore it is that thou sayest on my

authority, “I am God; there is no God beside me, the Lord of the

universe; in the second degree thou dost glorify me, praise me,

confess my unity, adore me, thou art of those who bow down before

me.128

The Bab claims to be identical with Christ, Muhammad, and all

preceding and succeeding prophets of God (II, 12, 15; III, 13; IV, 121;

VIII, 2). Salvation is obtained by faith in him (V, 11); whoever

approaches him approaches God (II, 1, 4), and whoever denies him and

declines to take refuge in him is destined for “the Fire” (II, 4).

He declares himself to be the promised Qa’im (I, 15), the

Mahdi (VIII, 17; II, 3), and the Prophet Muhammad (VIII, 2), and his

family is to be revered (IX, 6), similarly as Muhammad’s family is

revered by the Shi‘ahs.

God and His Manifestations

God is incomprehensible (III, 7; IV, 2; V, 17); nothing exists

but God and his names and attributes (IV, 4); God created all things by

his volitions, and his volitions by himself (III, 6). This volition is

identified with the *Nuqta* or “Point” (III, 13), which manifests itself

in the prophets of God. God neither begets nor is he born, and he alone

is worthy of all praise (VII, 19).

Since no one can directly encounter the most holy essence of

God, he manifests himself through a series of *Zuhurs*, or “Manifestations”

of the “Primal Volition,” (III, 9; IV, 2) or “Point” (III, 13). Each

manifestation is specially related to God in the sense that meeting with

God, knowledge of God, and refuge with God are equivalent, respectively,

with meeting the prophet, knowledge of the prophet, and refuge with the

prophet of the age (II, 4, 7, 17; III, 7; IV, 2; VI, 13).

As revelations of the Primal Point, the manifestations are

identical with one another: so Jesus is identical with Muhammad (II, 15;

III, 13), and the *Nuqta-i-Furqan* (Muhammad) is identical with the

*Nuqta-i-Bayan* (the Bab, himself) (I, 15; VIII, 2). The Bab compares

the successive manifestations with the same sun which arises day after

day (IV, 12; VII, 15; VIII, 1), an illustration often used in later

Baha’i writings. Previous revelations find their fulfilment in succeed-

ing ones, so that the gospel is perfected and fulfilled in Muhammad

(VI, 13) and the fruit of Islam is belief in the Bab’s manifestation

(II, 7). Former manifestations are revealed in succeeding ones; so the

Bab says that all the prophets are seen in Muhammad (IV, 6) and all

manifestations are created for the last one who appears (IV, 2). This

cumulative understanding of revelation is compared to a boy in advancing

stages of growth (III, 13, 15; V, 4; VIII, 2).

Those who truly believe in one manifestation believe also in

all preceding ones (III, 15) and in all succeeding ones (II, 9). The

belief of those, however, who accept an earlier revelation but reject a

subsequent one becomes null and void (IV, 2). The Bab says that Christians

who have not accepted the Qur’an have not actually believed in Christ

(II, 9).

The Doctrine of Return

Connected somewhat with the doctrine of the reappearing

manifestations is the doctrine of *raj’at* or “return.” The whole first

unity is devoted to the view that certain figures of the Islamic era

have returned to the world in the Bayanic dispensation. The doctrine

theoretically is distinguished from reincarnation, although Browne points

out that the doctrine did at times approach closely a concept of trans-

migration of souls, or metempsychosis, as when Siyyid Basir, according to

the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, refers on one occasion to a howling dog as the

“return” of a certain person whom God had punished for his sins.129

In the strict sense of the doctrine, however, the same individual does

not return but the type or qualities of that person. In this sense,

the eighteen “Letters of the Living” are the return of the “four Gates”

and the fourteen “Holy Souls” (Muhammad, Fatimih, and the twelve Imams)

and will reappear also in the manifestation of “Him whom God shall mani-

fest” (I, 1). The types of those who accept and who reject previous

manifestations also return in the ministries of succeeding manifestations.

Eschatology

Like the Shaykhis, the Bab denies that the resurrection means

the raising of the physical body. The resurrection is the appearance of

the new manifestation (II, 7; VIII, 3; IX, 3). From the external stand-

point the resurrection day is like any other day, it passes by with many

unaware of it. The Bab uses traditional eschatological terminology but

often gives an allegorical interpretation. Many, while trying to cross

the “Bridge of Sirat, will fall into “the Fire,” the Bab says, but he explains

that “the Bridge of Sirat,” which Muslims believe must be crossed success-

fully to enter Paradise, means God’s manifestations (II, 12), indicating

apparently that the manifestation of the age separates believers and

unbelievers by their response to him.

The Bab’s Attitude toward Christians

The Bab took a more positive approach to Christians than did

the Muslims of his day. The Bab applauds the cleanliness of Christians

and commends their clear and legible writing (VI, 2; III, 17). Gifts

from Christians are pure and Babis say accept them (V, 7). He compares

Christians to stars shining between the day of Christ and that of

Muhammad (VIII, 1), but when Muhammad appeared, they should have

believed in his (VII, 2), and he maintains that the true Christians did

believe in Muhammad (II, 9). But though Christians possess all good

qualities, they are of “the Fire” (IV, 4), and those who have not accepted

the Qur’an have not really believed in Christ (II, 9).

The Bab’s Laws

A manifestation in both Babi and Baha’i thought is a lawgiver.

Moses gave various moral, ceremonial, and civil laws to his people. Jesus

insisted that he had not come to destroy the law; and he, in turn, set

out certain commandments which his followers were to obey and which were

to be the test of their love for him. Muhammad, also, gave laws to govern

his people. Interspersed throughout the *Bayan*, the Bab sets forth the

laws for his dispensation.

Some of the Bab’s laws are quite radical. In one passage (IV,

10), the Bab prohibits the study of jurisprudence, logic, philosophy,

dead languages, and grammar (except as it is necessary for understanding

the Bayan). All Muslim books except the Qur’an are to be destroyed (VI,

6), and only those books which elucidate the *Bayan* may be studied (IV, 10).

The destruction of books and the prohibition against the study

of certain subjects say be seen in part against the Babi concept that all

the arts and sciences are as folly compared with the revelation of a

manifestation of God and that all true philosophy and science and, in

fact, all the advance of civilization are derived from the manifestation’s

influence upon his age and are his gifts to it. Why yearn for secular

knowledge when the higher divine knowledge has been given? The Babi

poet, Mirza Na‘im of Si-dih, expressed this feeling quite well in a poem

written in the spring of 1885:

Hearken not to the spells of Philosophy, which from end to end is

folly; the theses of the materialist and the cynic are all ignorance

and madness.

Behold manifest today whatever the Prophet hath said, but whatso-

ever the philosopher hath said behold at this time are discredited!

All their sciences are [derived] from the Prophets, but imperfectly;

all their arts are from the Saints, but garbled.130

Equally radical is the Bab’s stipulation that only believers

could inhabit the five Persian provinces of Fars, ‘Iraq, Azarbayjan,

Khurasan, and Mazandaran.131 European merchants and other Europeans with

useful trades and professions, but these only, may dwell in territories

of the believers (VII, 16). Kings who adopt the Babi religion are to

seek to spread the faith and to expel unbelievers from their lands (VII,

16; II, 2).

The Bab prohibited long and wearisome prayers (VIII, 19) and

does not allow congregational prayer except prayers for the dead at

funerals (II, 9; I, 9). The most acceptable worship, the Bab says, is

to make others happy (V, 19). Men are to worship God not from fear

nor hope but out of pure love (VII, 19). The Bab also forbids selling

and buying in the precincts of the House of God (IV, 17).

A number of laws relating to the dead are established. The

dead may not be transported to distant shrines (IV, 8). Stone coffins

must be used (V, 12). Rose water should be used, when possible, to

wash the dead for burial (VIII, 11). Rings with a specified inscription

written on them are to be placed on the hand of the departed (VIII, 11).

Every believer is to leave to his heirs nineteen rings inscribed with

the names of God (VIII, 2).

Other laws are that children are to honor parents (IV, 19).

Marriage is obligatory for all believers (VIII, 15), but marriage with

unbelievers is unlawful (VIII, 11). Unbelievers are to be treated justly

and are not to be killed (IV, 5), but their property may be confiscated

(V, 5; VIII, 15). Men are allowed to speak with women (VIII, 10). Women

may not go on pilgrimages but may go to the mosque for their devotions at

night (IV, 18, 19). Forbidden is the use of wine (IV, 8), tobacco (IV, 7),

and opium (IV, 8). Merchants, however, may sell opium and alcohol to those

in need of them (II, 8). Animals are to be treated kindly, not injured

(V, 14) and not overworked (VI, 6).

The Bab’s laws extend to a number of minute personal matters.

The hair of the body is to be removed by depilatories every four, eight,

or fourteen days (VIII, 6). Letters are not to be read without permis-

sion, and they are to be answered (VI, 18, 19). One is to wash completely

every four days, and bathing should be by pouring water, not by plunging

into a tank (VI, 2).

“He Whom God Shall Manifest”

An important part of the Bab’s teachings, especially for

understanding the subsequent development of the Baha’i movement, pertains

to the person whom the Bab designates as *Man yuz-hiruhu’llah*, “He whom

God shall manifest.” As noted earlier, the *Bayan* is authoritative until

the time of “He whom God shall manifest.” Interspersed throughout

the *Bayan* in the context of various subjects are references to this

coming figure. The following are some of the teachings about him.

The *Bayan* revolves around the Word of “Him whom God shall

manifest” (II, 19). All men are to embrace his religion when he appears

(VII, 5). Only God knows the day of his advent (IV, 5; VI, 3; VII, 10),

although the Bab gives some indications of when he will appear, which

will be discussed in the next chapter. To understand one of his verses,

the Bab says, is better than knowing the entire *Bayan* (IV, 8). One of

his verses is better than a thousand *Bayans* (V, 8; VI, 6; VII, 1). Belief

in God without belief in him avails nothing (III, 15). Repentance can be

made only before God or before “Him whom God shall manifest” (VII, 14).

He is intended by every good name in the *Bayan* (II, 5), add he

is the origin of all the names and attributes (II, 9). Children are not

to be beaten so as not to grieve him (VI, 11). A vacant place is to be

reserved in every assembly for him (IV, 9). The Bab maintains that no

one could falsely claim to be “Him whom God shall manifest” (VI, 8) and

points out that there will be other manifestations to follow “Him whom

God shall manifest (IV, 9). The eighteen “Letters of the living” will

be raised up by him in the time of his manifestation (II, 11). All pre-

vious manifestations were created for him (IV, 8).132 The first month of

the Babi calendar is named *Baha* in honor of him (V, 3).

THE TRANSFORMING CHARACTER OF THE BABI RELIGION

The later far-reaching transformations in the Baha’i religion

are based in and are, in a sense, the continuation of the radical trans-

forming character of the Babi movement. The Bab’s religion was, as

Browne correctly observed, “nothing less than the complete overthrow

of Islam and the abrogation of its ordinances.”133 The Bab understood

his ministry as superseding that of Muhammad as Muhammad’s ministry

had superseded Christ’s. In the *Bayan*, he sets out his laws which are

to replace those of the Qur’an. Although basic attitudes and other

traces of Muslin influence may be detected in the Babi religion, the

Bab saw his faith, at least in its latest stages of development, not

as a reformation of Islam by a sect within it but as the next manifes-

tation of the one evolutionary religion which was to supersede Islam.

This does not mean that the Bab saw his movement in competition with or

necessarily opposed to Islam, for Islam and the other religions were true

for their day and were authentic expressions of the one true religion.

But for the Bab, Islam’s day was past.

This basic abrogation of Islam was the central thrust of the

Babi movement, but the religion contained also many radical subsidiary

characteristics. The Bab’s commend to burn all Muslim books except the

Qur’an, his prohibition against reading books of logic and philosophy,

and his depreciation of the sciences were calculated in effect, if not

in intent, to produce an iconoclastic spirit among his followers. In

this sense, the nature of the Babi movement itself contributed the basic

transforming impulse to the various phases in the succeeding Baha’i

religion.

Not only did the radical character of the Babi religion contri-

bute to its own supersession but within the movement were planted the

seeds for its near immediate supersession. A major part of the Bab’s

message concerned the future, incomparable figure of “Him whom God shall

manifest,” whose ministry and glory would far surpass the Bab’s own

ministry. The Bab urged his followers to watch for him, and if they

entertained any doubts about him, the Bab insisted, it would be better

to accept him than to reject him. He maintained that no one could falsely

claim to be “Him whom God shall manifest.” These teachings left the door

wide open for the supersession of the Bab’s own religion in the near

future, awaiting only some majestic figure who could put forward that

claim. The overwhelming allegiance given to Baha’u’llah after he claimed

to be “Him whom God shall manifest,” may be explained by Baha’u’llah’s

charisma, coupled with the Bab’s extensive efforts to prepare his disciples

for the expected coming. How could those who were so loyal to the Bab

have so soon turned from the Bab to Baha’u’llah? Only because in turning

to Baha’u’llah, the Babis saw themselves as obedient to the Bab’s teachings

about accepting the awaiting manifestation when he appeared. In their

thinking, they were not deserting the Bab for Baha’u’llah but were being

the more faithful to the Bab in accepting Baha’u’llah.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1 Persian *Bayan* II, 7; see above p. 111, n. 137.

2 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Pub-

lishing Trust, 1957), p. 7.

3 ibid., p. 5.

4 Nabil-i-A’zam (Muhammad-i-Zarandi). *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil’s*

*Narrative of the Early Days of the Baha’i Revelation*, trans. by Shoghi

Effendi (London: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1953), p. 42.

5 John Ferraby, *All Things Made New* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i

Publishing Trust, 1960), p. 22.

6 Shoghi Effendi, *The Faith of Baha’u’llah* (Wilmette, Ill,:

Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1959), p. 6.

7 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. xii.

8 Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, Ill.:

Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1963), p. 41.

9 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. xii.

10 *Baha’i World Faith: Selected Writings of Baha’u’llah and*

*‘Abdu’l-Baha* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1556), pp. 9,

10 16, *etc*.

11 ibid., p. 82.

12 See J. N. D. Anderson, ed., *The World’s Religions* (Grand

Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), pp. 50-51.

13 Edward G. Browne, ed. and trans., *The Tarikh-i-Jadid or*

*New History of Mirza ‘Ali Muhammad the Bab*, by Mirza Huseyn of Hamadan

(Cambridge: University Press, 1893), p. 112 (hereinafter referred to

as *New History*).

14 ibid., pp. 208-9.

15 Shoghi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 41.

16 Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. xxvii.

17 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* (Wilmette,

Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1965), p. 178.

18 ibid.

19 Kenneth W. Morgan, ed., *Islam—The Straight Path: Islam*

*Interpreted by Muslims* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1958), pp. 124-25.

20 ibid., p. 201.

21 H. A. R. Gibb, “Islam,” in *The Concise Encyclopaedia of*

*Living Faiths*, ed. by R. C. Zaehner (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1964),

p. 182.

22 John B. Noss, *Man’s Religions* (3d ed., New York: Macmillan

Co., 1967. London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1967), pp. 769-64; Morgan,

*Islam—The Straight Path*, p. 229.

23 Noss, *Man’s Religions*, pp. 765-66.

24 Edward G. Browne, ed. and trans., *A Traveller’s Narrative*

*Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab*, Vol. II: English Trans-

lation and Notes (Cambridge: University Press, 1891), pp. 24, 26 (herein-

after referred to as *Traveller’s Narrative*).

25 See Noss, *Man’s Religions*, p. 765.

26 See Richard N. Frye, “Islam in Iran,” *The Muslim World*, XLVI,

No. 1 (Jan., 1956), pp. 6-7; Edward G. Browne, “Bab, Babis,” *Encyclopaedia*

*of Religion and Ethics*, ed. by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scrib-

ner’s Sons, 1955), II, 300; Dwight M. Donaldson feels that the fourth

*Bab* may have thought that the Imam was about to appear as a reason for

not appointing a succeeding *Bab*, or he may have become disillusioned with

his own position (*The Shi‘ite religions: A History of Islam in Persia*

*and Irak* [London: Luzac and Co., 1933], p. 257). Mahzood Shehahi states

that the fourth *Bab* was given in a letter news of the twelfth imam’s

bodily death and that the Imam would have no *Bab* after his death (Morgan,

*Islam—The Straight Path*, p. 201). The “Minor Occultation” extends from

the disappearance of the twelfth Imam to the death of the fourth Bab.

The “Major Occultation” began with the fourth Bab’s death.

27 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative,* Note E, pp. 242-43.

28 ibid., pp. 243-44.

29 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 4.

30 Browne, *New History*, p. 31.

31 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 10.

32 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative,* Note E, pp. 241-42. One of

Karim Khan’s treatises was written allegedly at the request of Nasiri’d-

Din Shah (see Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 91, and Hamid Algar, “Babism,

Baha’ism, and the Ulama,” Chapter VIII of *Religion and State in Iran*

*1785-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* [Berkeley: Uni-

versity of California Press, 1969], pp. 149-50).

33 ‘Abdu’l-Baha in the *Traveller’s Narrative* gives the Bab’s

birth as the first of Muharram, A.H. 1235 (October 20, 1819), which date

the Baha’is is accept as accurate; Edward G. Browne believed, however, that

the date must be the first of Muharram, A.H. 1236, rather than A.H. 1235,

because of passages in the Bab’s writings where the Bab refers to his age

at the time of his manifestation on the fifth of Jamadiyu’l-Avval (May 22,

1844). In one passage in the *Bayan* (II, 1), the Bab refers to himself as

“one from whose life [only] twenty-four years had passed,” and in the

*Seven Proofs*, he describes himself as “of an age which did not exceed

five and twenty.” Browne reasoned from this that the Bab was “over

twenty-four and under twenty-five years of age.” Subh-i-Azal, also, told

Browne that the Bab at the beginning of his mission was “twenty-four and

entering on his twenty-fifth year” (Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note C,

pp. 219-21). If the Bab was twenty-four in A.H. 1250, then be would have

been born in A.H. 1236 (the first of Muharram is the first day of the

Muslin year). The first of Muharram, A.H. 1236, would be October 9, A.D.

1820. Nabil, however, records that “twenty-five years, four months and

four days had elapsed since the day of His birth, when he declared his

mission (*The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 51).

34 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, collected and trans-

lated by Laura Clifford Barney (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust,

1964), p. 30.

35 J. E. Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era* (3d ed., revised;

New York: Pyramid Books, 1970), p. 27 and note 1.

36 *Earl* E. Elder and William McE. Miller, trans. and ed.,

*Al-Kitab Al-Aqdas or The Most Holy Book*, by Mirza Husayn ‘Ali Baha’u’llah,

Oriental Translation Fund, New Series Vol. XXXVIII (London: Published by

The Royal Asiatic Society and sold by its Agents Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1961),

p. 52.

37 George Sale, trans. *The Koran: Commonly Called the AlKoran*

*of Mohammed* (New York: American Book Exchange, 1880), p. 94; E. H. Palmer,

*The Koran (Qur’an)*, “The World’s Classics,” 328 (London: Oxford University

Press, n.d.), pp. 140-41.

38 Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious*

*Koran,* A Mentor Religious Classic (New York and Toronto: The New Ameri-

can Library; London: The New English Library Limited, n.d.), p. 133.

39 ibid., p. 133, n. 1.

40 J. M. Rodwell, trans., *The Koran*, “Everyman’s Library,” No. 380

(London: Dent; New York: Dutton, n.d.), p. 307, n. 1.

41 Qur’an XXIX, 48, in Pickthall translation, p. 287.

42 Browne, *New History*, Appendix II, p. 344.

43 See J. R. Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is* (London:

Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York: Macmillan Co.,

1932), pp. 17-18; and Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 52-53.

44 Karbila is the site of the martyrdom and sepulchre of the

Imam Husayn, and Najaf, to the south of Karbila, is one of the Shi‘ah’s

two holiest shrines (Marzieh Gail, *Baha’i Glossary* [Wilmette, Ill.:

Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1957], pp. 25, 38).

45 Browne, *New History*, Appendix II, pp. 342-43.

46 ibid., pp. 340-41.

47 Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 21-22.

48 Browne, *New History*, p. 35.

49 ibid., p. 34.

50 Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, p. 187; and Ferraby,

*All Things Made New*, p. 251.

51 See above, p. 111, n. 137.

52 Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is*, p. 17, citing Avarih,

*Al-Kavakebu’d-Durriyyih* (Cairo, 1923), p. 36.

53 Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p.177.

54 See above, p. 124.

55 Thornton Chase, *The Baha’i Revelation* (New York: Baha’i Pub-

lishing Committee, 1919), p. 31. For a Baha’i evaluation of the Millerite

movement, see Billy Rojas, “The Millerites: Millennialist Precursors of

the Baha’i Faith,” *World Order*, IV, No. 1 (Fall, 1968), pp. 15-23.

56 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 3.

57 Mirza Jani bases his account on Mulla Husayn’s testimony as

related to him by ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab of Khurasan, who had enquired after the

manner of his conversion (*New History*, p. 34); Nabil’s account is based

on Mulla Husayn’s testimony as given to him by Mirza Ahmad-i-Qazvini,

the martyr, who on several occasions heard Mulla Husayn telling the early

believers of his historic interview with the Bab (*The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 38).

58 The Surih of Joseph is the twelfth Surih, or chapter (entitled

“Joseph”), of the Muslim Qur’an.

59 The above comparisons are drawn from Browne, *New History*, pp.

34-39, and Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 38-43.

60 Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 44.

61 B. Lewis, “Bab,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. by H. A. R.

Gibb, et al. (London: Luzac and Co., 1960), I, 832.

62 ibid., and John Noreen Hollister, *The Shi‘a of India* (London:

Luzac and Co., Ltd., 1953), p. 249. The term *Bab al abwab* (Gate of Gates)

also was used early in the Fatimid period for the chief da’i, noting his

superiority over all other dais (Hollister p. 249); the title which ‘Ali

Muhammad conferred on Mulla Husayn was *Bab’ul-Bab* (Gate of the Gate),

which in this case, however, indicated one inferior to the Bab.

63 Hollister, *The Shi‘a of India*, p. 260.

64 Henry Harris Jessup, “The Babites,” *The Outlook*, LXVIII, No. 8

(June 22, 1901), p. 452. A condensed version of this article appears in

*The Missionary Review of the World*, XV, No. 10 New Series (Oct., 1902),

pp. 771-76.

65 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note D, p. 229.

66 See above, p. 125.

67 See Browne, Traveller’s Narrative, Note D, p. 232, and Seyyed

Ali Mohammed dit le Bab, *Le Beyan Persan*, traduit du Persan par A.-L.-M.

Nicolas (4 vols; Paris: Librairie Paul Gauthner, 1911-1914), I, 29-30.

68 *Abwab* technically is the plural of *Bab*.

69 Browne’s translation from the *Bayan* (*Traveller’s Narrative*,

Note D, pp. 233-34).

70 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note E, pp. 232-331; Browne,

New History, Appendix III, p. 398 and Appendix II, pp. 335-36.

71 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note M, p. 280 and n. 1.

72 See above, pp. 136-37.

73 Browne, *New History*, p. 241. This passage is quoted by

Browne in the *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note N, p. 292.

74 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note N, p. 291.

75 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 20.

76 Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, p. 29.

77 ibid., p. 30.

78 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 10.

79 Peter Ludwig Berger, “From Sect to Church: A Sociological

Interpretation of the Baha’i Movement” (Ph.D. dissertation, New School

for Social Research, 1954), pp. 9-10.

80 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 5.

81 ibid., p. 10.

82 Browne, *New History*, Appendix II, pp. 368-69.

83 ibid., p. 368, n. 4.

84 ibid., pp. 335-36.

85 See Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 142-43.

86 Browne, *New History*, pp. 216-17.

87 Browne, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 161-62.

88 Browne, *New History*, p. 285. ‘Ali Muhammad, as noted earlier,

had bestowed upon Mulla Husayn his former title of the Bab.

89 See the Muslim accounts in Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*,

Note M, pp. 277-90, and Edward G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of*

*the Babi Religion* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: University Press, 1961), pp.

249-55 (hereinafter referred to as *Materials*); for Baha’i accounts,

see Browne, *New History*, pp. 285-88 and Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp.

229-31.

90 Browne, *Materials*, p. 255.

91 i.e., the Twelfth Imam or Imam Mahdi (E.G.B.)

92 Browne, *Materials*, p. 258.

93 Khan Bahadur Agha Mirza Muhammad, “Some New Notes on

Babiism,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain*

*and Ireland*, Series 3 (July, 1927), p. 454.

94 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 31.

95 Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 211.

96 ibid., pp. 212-13. See also Browne, *New History*, Appendix

II, pp. 355-60.

97 Marzieh Gail, *Baha’i Glossary* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i

Publishing Trust, 1957), pp. 11, 54.

98 John Ferraby, *All Things Made New*, p. 193, and Shoghi Effendi,

*God Passes By*, p. 68.

99 Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 211.

100 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 35.

101 George Foot Moore, *History of Religions*, Vol. II, *Judaism,*

*Christianity, Mohammedanism*, International Theological Library (Edinburgh:

T. and T. Clark, 1920), 243.

102 Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. IV.

*Modern Times (1500-1924*) (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 151.

103 Browne, *New History*, Appendix III, p. 362.

104 See Edward G. Browne, trans., “Personal Reminiscences of

the Babi Insurrection at Zanjan in 1850, Written in Persian by Aqa ‘Abdu’l-

Ahad-i-Zanjani, and Translated into English by Edward G. Browne, M.A.,

M.R.A.S.,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and*

*Ireland*, XXIX (1897), pp. 761-827.

105 Edward G. Browne, “Babiism,” in *The Religious Systems of*

*the World* (London, Swan Sonnenschein and Co., Limited, 1905), p. 343.

106 The C. Codex of the *New History* gives the Bab’s execution

as Thursday, the twenty-seventh Sha‘ban (July 8, 1850), which, Browne

correctly points out, fell, however, on a Monday. Browne also says

Subh-i-Azal’s statement corroborates the *New History* (Browne, *New History*,

p. 307 and note 1). Subh-i-Azal’s statement in Appendix III of the *New*

*History* (p. 411) gives, however, the twenty-eighth of Sha‘ban as the date

of the Bab’s martyrdom. Both ‘Abdu’l-Baha in the *Traveller’s Narrative*

(Vol. I, p. 57; Vol. II, p. 44) and Nabil give the twenty-eighth of

Sha‘ban as the date, and this date is followed by Baha’is today. A

footnote in Esslemont’s *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, however, gives the

twenty-eighth of Sha‘ban as a Friday rather than a Sunday as Nabil has

it. Both are wrong. The twenty-eighth of Sha‘ban (July 9, 1850) was a

Tuesday.

107 James T. Bixby, “What Is Behaism?” *North American Review*,

Vol. 196, No. DCLXXIX (June, 1912), 845.

108 Edward G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians* (3d ed.; A.

and C. Black, 1959), p. 69; Browne, “Babiism,” in *Religious Systems of*

*the World*, p. 346; Mary Hanford Ford, *The Oriental Rose, or the Teachings*

*of Abdu’l-Baha which Trace the Chart of “the Shining Pathway”* (Chicago:

Baha’i Publishing Society, 1910), p. 55; M. Clément Huart, *La Religion,*

*de Bab: Réformateur Persan du XIXe Siècle*, Bibliothèque Orientale Elzé-

vireinne, Vol. LXIV (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1889), pp. 3-4; A.-L.-M.

Nicolas, *Seyyed Ali Mohammed dit le Bab* (Paris: Dujarric et Cie, 1905),

p. 375; and Subh-i-Azal’s testimony in Browne, *New history*, Appendix III,

p. 412.

109 Browne, *New History*, p. 301 and n. 1.

110 Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 375.

111 Browne, “Babiism,” *Religious Systems of the World*, p. 346.

See also Ford, The Oriental Rose, pp. 54-55.

112 Ferraby, *All Things Made New*, p. 199.

113 See Browne, “Babiism,” *Religious Systems of the World*, p. 346;

and William McElwee Miller, *Baha’ism: Its Origin, History and Teachings*

(New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1931), p. 53.

114 Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, p. 31.

115 Browne, *New History*, p. 303.

116 Ford, *The Oriental Rose*, p. 57.

117 Jules Bois, “The New Religions of America: Babism and

Bahaism,” *The Forum*, LXXIV (July, 1925), 4.

118 See also Bayan VI, 1; for Browne’s translation and discussion

of these passages, see *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note U, pp. 344-45.

119 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 345.

120 Seyyed Ali Mohammed dit le Bab, *Le Béyân Arabe: le Livre*

*Sacré du Bâbysme de Seyyèd Ali Mohammed dit le Bab*, traduit de l’arabe

par A.-L.-M. Nicolas (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1905).

121 Abul Fazl, *Hujaj’ul Behayyeh (the Bahai Proofs)*, trans. by

All Kuli Khan (New York: J. W. Pratt Co., 1902), p. 43; Browne, *Travel-*

*ler’s Narrative*, pp. 230, 274, 292.

122 The standard collection of Muslim hadiths (traditions) of

al-Bukhari is divided into ninety-seven “books” subdivided into 3,450

Chapters called *babs* (H. A. R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey*,

Mentor Books [New York: New American Library, 1955], pp. 65-66).

123 Edward G. Browne, ed., *Kitab-i Nuqtatu’l-Kaf, Being the*

*Earliest History of the Babis Compiled by Hajji Mirza Jani of Kashan*

*between the Year’s A.D. 1850 and 1852*, edited from the Unique Paris Ms.

Suppl. Persan 1071 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1910. London: Luzac & Co.,

1910), pp. xix, xxxi; Browne, *New History*, Appendix II, p. 381; Browne,

*Traveller’s Narrative*, Note W, p. 353.

124 Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, p. xcv.

125 The following résumé is based on Browne’s Index to the *Bayan*,

published in the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, pp. liv-xcv, and Nicolas’s French transla-

tion of the Persian *Bayan*. For a more detailed coverage, see Samuel Graham

Wilson, “The Bayan of the Bab,” *The Princeton Theological Review*, XIII,

(Oct., 1915), 633-54.

126 Mohammed, *Le Béyan Persan*, I, 65. Baha’is believe the

person here referred to is Baha’u’llah. See below, the section on

“He Whom God Shall Manifest.”

127 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 4.

128 Moore, *History of Religions*, II, pp. 513-14.

129 Browne, *New History*, Appendix II, p. 338.

130 Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, IV, p. 211.

131 These provinces are designated as (1) the Land of Fa,

(2) the Land of ‘Ayn, (3) the Land of Alif, (4) the Land of Kha, (5)

and the Land of Mim.

132 This, in a sense, could be said of any one of the mani-

festations after the first one.

133 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note A, p. 187.

**CHAPTER IV**

**BAHA’U’LLAH AND THE SUPERSESSION OF THE**

**BABI DISPENSATION**

The period from the Bab’s martyrdom to the “ascension” (death)

of Baha’u’llah (1850-1892) is marked at various stages by terrible perse-

cution, intrigue, rivalries, suppression and distortion of literature, and

even murder. This troublesome period witnesses the gradual transformation

of the Babi religion into the Baha’i faith. The scene of action shifts

from Persia to Baghdad, Constantinople, Adrianople, and to the penal colony

at ‘Akka, Syria. The period divides distinctly into two sub-periods: (1)

before Baha’u’llah’s declaration of his mission and (2) after Baha’u’llah’s

declaration.

THE PERIOD BEFORE BAHA’U’LLAH’S DECLARATION

What was actually taking place within the period before Baha’u’-

llah’s declaration of his mission is somewhat obscure because of the dis-

torted literature and the different claims and interpretations advanced.

Edward G. Browne calls this time the period of Subh-i-Azal’s supremacy1

and sees it as a period when Baha’u’llah gradually wins over the faithful

to himself by subverting the legitimate authority of Subh-i-Azal. This

interpretation is followed generally by non-Baha’i studies of the faith.

Baha’is generally maintain, however, that Subh-i-Azal held only a

nominal authority and that Baha’u’llah, even in this period before his

declaration, was the true, though veiled, leader of the movement.

The Question of the Babi Successor

The issue revolves largely around the question of whether

or not the Bab appointed Subh-i-Azal as his successor, and if so, for what

purpose, that either Subh-i-Azal might actually serve as the leader of the

movement or serve merely as a blind for Baha’u’llah. Baha’is, on the

one hand, refer to “the pretensions of Subh-i-Azal,” how “in Baghdad he

tried to get the friends to acknowledge him as their leader” but “they

paid scant attention to him, and just laughed at his haughty airs.”2

John Ferraby charges Mirza Yahya with “corrupting the text of the Bab’s

writings to make it appear that the Bab had named him as successor.”3

H. M. Balyuzi, on the other hand, says that “the Baha’is have never

questioned the fact that immediately after the execution of the Bab,

leadership, even it nominal, was accorded to Mirza Yahya,” and quotes

Shoghi Effendi that Mirza Yahya was the “recognized chief of the Babi

community.”4 Shoghi Effendi also refers to Mirza Yahya as “the nominee

of the Bab Himself,”5 presumably, the Bab’s nominee as his successor.6

But elsewhere, Shoghi Effendi speaks of “Mirza Yahya, who claimed to be

the successor of the Bab.”7

Were the claims of Mirza Yahya (Subh-i-Azal) mere pretentious

and was he attempting to wrest the leadership of the movement from Baha’u’-

llah, or was he in fact the Bab’s appointed successor and the recognized

leader of the Babi community until Baha’u’llah declared himself as He

whom God shall manifest”? The answer to this question will throw much

light on the period between the Bab’s martyrdom and Baha’u’llah’s declara-

tion.

Edward G. Browne’s Position

Browne was certain that the Bab had appointed Subh-i-Azal as

his successor:

In my opinion it is proved beyond all doubt that the Bab ere his

death chose him as his successor, … and that during the period

which elapsed from the Bab’s death till the advancement of Baha’u’-

llah’s claim …, he was recognized by all the Babis as their

spiritual chief.8

Brown’s conviction was based on a number of considerations. First, early

European accounts of the Babi movement portray Subh-i-Azal as the Bab’s

successor. Gobineau, for example, says that Mirza Yahya was recog-

nized as divinely designated as the Bab’s successor and that all the Babis

acknowledged his election.9 Second, Baha’is whom Browne met during his

first visit to Persia in 1887-88 admitted to him that the Bab, shortly

before his martyrdom at Tabriz, had designated Mirza Yahya as his succes-

sor and that his supremacy was acknowledged, at least nominally, by the

Babis during the eleven years of the Baghdad period.10 Third., the early

written *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, which Browne discovered in the Paris National

Library in 1892, contains a section on Subh-i-Azal prior to the account

of the Bab’s martyrdom in which the author speaks of the “rising of the

Moon of Ezel” as “the Sun of ‘the Reminder’” (the Bab) began to decline.

The account also indicates that the Bab before his death “wrote a testa-

mentary deposition, explicitly nominating” Subh-i-Azal as his successor,”

admonished him to write the eight unwritten *Vahids* (Unities) of the

*Bayan*, and sent to him “his own personal effects, as his pen-cases, paper,

writings, his own blessed raiment, and his holy rings.11 Fourth, Browne

believed that a passage in Baha’u’llah’s *Kitab-i-Iqan*, written during the

Baghdad period, showed that Baha’u’llah in this period was submissive to

the authority of Subh-i-Azal.12 This point will be discussed later in

this chapter. And fifth, Browne was given a copy of the actual document

in the possession of Subh-i-Azal which Azal claims is the Bab’s nomination

of him as his successor. This document reads as follows:

God is Most Great with the Uttermost Greatness.

This is a letter on the part of God, the Protector, the

Self-Existent, to God, the Protector, the Self-Existent.

Say, “All originate from God.” Say, “All return unto God.”

This is a letter from Ali before Nabil, God’s Reminder unto

the Worlds, unto him whose name is equivalent to the Name of the

One [Wahid = 28 = Yahya, Subh-i-Azal’s name], God’s Reminder unto

the Worlds.

Say, “Verily all originate from the Point of Revelation.”

O Name of the One, keep what hath been revealed in the Bryan,

and what hath been commanded, for verily thou art a Mighty Way of

Truth.13

Balyuzi, in commenting on this tablet, says: “The question is not whether

this Tablet is genuine or not. The point is that nowhere in this document

is there any mention of successorship.”14 Balyuzi raises a pertinent ques-

tion. Does this document prove or support Subh-i-Azal’s claim of being

the Bab’s appointed successor? That Subh-i-Azal was early regarded as

the Bab’s successor is clearly evident from the first European accounts

of the Babi movement; the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* reports that the Bab nominated

Subh-i-Azal as his successor; if the Bab sent a letter of nomination to

Subh-i-Azal, the latter would likely have carefully preserved it.

Had Mirza Yahya manufactured the document, he likely would have

made the appointment—as strategic as it was to his claim—more explicit

in the text. Browne saw no reason to question its authenticity, and he

examined the original document during his second journey to Persia.15

Balyuzi admits that a recently published facsimile of the document is in

a handwriting “closely resembling the handwriting of the Bab.”16

Admittedly, the document seems to contain no explicit reference

to the succession, but why should Subh-i-Azal and Edward G. Browne give

such importance to the document as proving Azal’s claims? Is there some-

thing in the document which escapes notice on the first reading, something

which would not escape the notice of one familiar with the character of

the early Babi movement?

Likely, the answer to this question lies in the cryptic style of

Babi writings and in the concepts of succession as held by the Shaykhi

school and other divisions of Shi‘ah Islam. In such concepts, the holder

of a title, as “Imam” or “Bab,” before his death nominated a successor

who would carry on his ministry. One might naturally expect, therefore,

that the Bab would continue in this tradition of appointing successors,

as was practiced in the later developing Baha’i religion. As to the

cryptic nature of the Babi writings, Browne, in the introductory section

of Appendix IV of his edition of the *New History*, in which appendix is

found the Bab’s latter of nomination and three other letters, writes:

Almost all Babi writings, save those intended for circulation

beyond the limits of the Babi church, are sore or leas obscure.

This obscurity, especially in the case of their Arabic writings,

arises in part from a certain want of dexterity in the manipulation

of the language, but it is in large measure intentional, and is

designed to prevent the uninitiated reader from penetrating the

true sense of the words he reads. In the case of letters such as

those which I now publish the difficulty is enormously increased

by our total ignorance of the particular circumstances under which

they were written; for whereas a general epistle would presumably

at least be comprehensible to any learned Babi, a private letter

might easily contain expressions and allusions which none could

understand save the person addressed, or such as were intimately

familiar with his condition and circumstances.17

Although the circumstances of the Bab’s letter of nomination are better

known than those concerning the other three letters in this section,

the veiled character is noticeable in the letter to Mirza Yahya, for

the sender identifies himself as “‘Ali before Nabil” and the recipient

of the letter is identified as “the Name of the One.” What is involved

in these identifications is a cabalistic practice, known as *gematra*,18

which consists of converting letters of words into their numerical equiva-

lents and substituting for them other words of the same value. The words

Nabil and Muhammad each total ninety-two in the *abjad* system, so that

*‘Ali before Nabil* means *‘Ali Muhammad*, the Bab’s name. Similarly, the

numerical value of *Wahid* (“One”) is twenty-eight, which is also the value

of *Yahya*, so “the Name of the One” means Mirza Yahya, or Subh-i-Azal.

Are there other cryptic meanings in this letter to throw light

an the question of the successorship? One may notice throughout the

letter that the Bab equates Mirza Yahya with himself. The first equation

is an equation of *identity*, “a letter on the part of God … to God.”

The words “all originate from God. … All return unto God,” suggest

a transfer of “all” things from God (‘Ali Muhammad) to God (Mirza Yahya).

The second equation is an equation of *position*. The sender of the letter

who has been known as “God’s Reminder unto the Worlds” now designates

Mirza Yahya as “God’s Reminder unto the Worlds.” In the following sen-

tence, the Bab avoids calling Subh-i-Azal the “Point” since in Babi

doctrine two “Points” cannot exist at the same time, but the statement

“all originate from the Point of Revelation,” paralleling the earlier

statement that “all originate from God” and “return unto God,” suggests

that upon the Bab’s death Mirza Yahya will become the new “Point.” The

writer of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* understood that Mirza Yahya had become the

“Point” because he uses the argument that there cannot be two “Points”

at the same time to uphold Mirza Yahya’s claim as against any other

claimants.19 In this cryptic manner, the Bab seems to commission

Subh-i-Azal to become after his “God’s Reminder unto the Worlds” and

“the Point.”

Browne believed also that Mirza Yahya was the “fourth in the

Babi hierarchy,” consisting of the Bab and his eighteen “Letters of the

living.” The Bab held first rank; next came Mulla Muhammad ‘Ali of Bar-

furush (Quddus), the last to be enrolled in the “Letters” but who held

primacy among them; third was Mulla Husayn, the first to believe in the

Bab; and fourth was Mirza Yahya, according to his testimony. Browne

believed that after the deaths of Quddus and Mulla Husayn and the martyr-

dom of the Bab, himself, Mirza Yahya then became automatically “the chief

of the sect.”20 Baha’is, however, deny that Mirza Yahya was one of the

“Letters of the Living.”21 Nabil’s list of the names of the “Letters of

the Living” does not include the name of Mirza Yahya.22 Either the Baha’is

have effaced the name of Mirza Yahya, “the Judas of Baha’i history,”23

from the names of the Bab’s disciples or Mirza Yahya gave false informa-

tion to Edward Browne. The question of whether or not Mirza Yahya was

the fourth in the Babi hierarchy is a minor question, however, for other

evidence is strong apart from this that the Bab in fact did appoint

Subh-i-Azal as his successor, and Baha’i writings give evidence that

he was accorded a high station.

The Baha’i Position

When Edward G. Browne visited Persia in 1887-88, he expected

to find Mirza Yahya, if still alive, in the leadership of the movement,

but he says “the Babis whom I met generally feigned complete ignorance

of the very name and existence of Subh-i-Azal.”24 The Baha’is whom Browne

met at Shiraz, however, indicated to him that at the time Baha’u’llah took

up residence in Baghdad, Mirza Yahya was “recognized as the Bab’s successor,

having been designated as such by the Bab himself, shortly before he suf-

fered martyrdom at Tabriz,” that “his supremacy was recognized, at least

nominally, by all the Babis during the eleven years’ sojourn of their

chiefs at Baghdad,” but that “even then Beha took the most prominent part

in the organization of affairs.”25 Browne, puzzled by the fact that the

Baha’is in Shires regarded Mirza Yahya as then having little importance,

asked for an explanation. Haji Mirza Hasan responded:

Yes, it’s true that he was one of the early believers, and

that at first he was accounted the successor and vicegerent of the

Bab. But he was repeatedly warned not to withhold his allegiance

from “Him whom God shall manifest,” and threatened that if he did

so he would fall from the faith, and become as one rejected. In

spite of these clear warnings of his Master, he refused to acknow-

ledge the new manifestation when it came; wherefore he is now regarded

by us as of no account.26

According to this account, then, the Baha’is admit that Mirza Yahya was

at first regarded as the Bab’s successor but that he lost his position

in the movement when he refused to admit Baha’u’llah’s claim to be

“He whom God shall manifest.”

The above view gives some indication of how the Baha’is

regarded Mirza Yahya prior to the publication of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s

*Traveller’s Narrative*, since the Baha’is in Shiraz inform Browne that

another history (the *Traveller’s Narrative*) is being prepared to replace

the earlier New History.27 The *New History* ignores Mirza Yahya, except

in one clearly interpolated passage.28

‘Abdu’l-Baha in the *Traveller’s Narrative* advances a view which

world place Baha’u’llah in the leadership of the movement from the Bab’s

death. The high position accorded to Mirza Yahya is seen as due to

arrangements made in part by Baha’u’llah himself. In this account,

because of agitation among the doctors, the aggressiveness of most of

the people of Persia, and the irresistible power of the Amir-Nizam, by

which the Bab and Baha’u’llah were in danger, it was considered expedient

that “some measure should be adopted to direct the thoughts of men toward

some absent person, by which Baha’u’llah would remain protected from the

interference of all men.”29 The choice fell on Baha’u’llah’s brother

(actually half-brother), Mirza Yahya.

By the assistance and instruction of Baha’u’llah, therefore,

they made him notorious and famous on the tongues of friends and

foes, and wrote letters, ostensibly at his dictation, to the Bab.

And since secret correspondences were in process the Bab highly

approved of this scheme. So Mirza Yahya was concealed and hidden

while mention of him was on the tongues and in the mouths of men.

And this mighty plan was of wondrous efficacy, for Baha’u’llah,

though he was known and seen, remained safe and secure, and this

veil was the cause that no one outside [the sect] fathomed the

matter or fell into the idea of molestation.30

According to this view, then, the high position accorded to Mirza Yahya

was a blind for the protection of Baha’u’llah, so that he might adminis-

ter the affairs of the faith unhindered and unmolested.

This view, however, runs into certain problems. For one thing,

it opens Baha’u’llah to the charge of exposing his own brother to danger

to insure his own safety.31 Bahijyih Khanum, Baha’u’llah’s daughter,

attempts to meet this problem by saying that it was Subh-i-Azal’s “own

arrogance which prompted him to seize the leadership” and “moreover, he

could be relied upon to hide himself very effectively when danger

threatened, till it should be overpast!”32 Subh-i-Azal’s adeptness in

running from danger, however, would still provide no real excuse for

exposing him to such danger. The view is also somewhat out of character

with the Baha’i picture of Baha’u’llah’s always boldly advancing to meet

danger when it threatened and needing no one to shield him from it.

Baha’u’llah, who in his prayers welcomes “however calamitous, the pains

and sorrows” he is made to bear; who delights in his afflictions; who

thanks God that he has offered him up “as a sacrifice” in his path; who

acknowledges that there is “no protection” except God’s protection33

seems inconsistent with a Baha’u’llah who arranges to screen himself from

danger by setting up his brother as a blind for him.

The Baha’i scholar, Mirza Abu’l-Fadl, seemed to have some

difficulty with this view. He writes:

Some believe that the appointment of Mirza Yahya as a successor,

had been decided between the Bab and Beha-Ullah; because, in the

beginning of Nasser’Ud-Din-Shah’s reign, the object of Mirza-Taki-

Khan was to arrest the original source of this movement, and stop

the water at the fountain-head. Therefore, after consulting

together, they made Ezel appear as the Bab’s successor, through

Mirza-Abdul-Karim of Kazwin, who was employed to manage and for-

ward the Epistles of the Bab. In this manner they preserved the

Center of the Cause, Baha-Ullah, from the interference of Mirza

Taki-Khan.34

Then Abu’l-Fadl indicates:

But-according to the author’s belief, it was the appearance

of different claimants from various places which kept Him from

being recognized as the Center of the Community, and protected Him

from the interference of the Prime Minister; and that thus the

source of this movement was concealed.35

The account in the *Traveller’s Narrative* also seem to place

the Baha’is in the awkward position of berating Mirza Yahya, as they are

fond of doing, for slipping into hiding when danger was near, yet holding

that such concealment was according to the plan and approval of the Bab

and Baha’u’llah to effect Baha’u’llah’s unmolested leadership in the move-

sent. Historically, the view runs into the problem of portraying Baha’u’-

llah before the Bab’s death as arranging for his protected leadership in

the faith before he receives his call, which according even to Baha’i

sources did not occur until Baha’u’llah’s imprisonment in the Siyah-Chal

in 1852.36

One passage in the *Traveller’s Narrative* inadvertently adds

support to the view that Yahya was the Bab’s successor, ‘Abdu’l-Baha

quotes certain “mischief-makers” as inciting Yahya with these words:

“You are really the chief support and acknowledged successor: act

with authority, in order that grace and blessing may become apparent.”37

‘Abdu’l-Baha, admittedly, is not himself calling Mirza Yahya the Bab’s

successor but is quoting Yahya’s supporters as not urging him to make

a claim but chiding him for not acting with authority in *view of his*

*acknowledged successorship*.

Shoghi Effendi, expressing the modern Baha’i viewpoint, acknow-

ledges Mirza Yahya’s being “the nominee of the Bab, and the recognized

chief of the Babi community.”38 This would appear at first to be an

admission that Mirza Yahya was the Bab’s nominated successor, the expres-

sion “nominated successor” or “appointed successor” meaning basically the

same thing, as when Browne says that “the Bab, before his death (9th July

1850), had nominated as his successor a youth nineteen years of age named

Mirza Yahya, and entitled Subh-i-Azal (“the Dawn of Eternity”).”39 The

document Browne published in Appendix IV of the *New History* on which

Mirza Yahya based his claim to being the Bab’s successor is entitled

by Browne: “Nomination of Subh-i-Azal as the Bab’s Successor.”40 Yet

Shoghi Effendi elsewhere explicitly denies that the Bab nominated a

successor:

A successor or viceregent the Bab never named, an interpreter

of His teachings He refrained from appointing. So transparently

clear were his references to the Promised One, so brief was to be

the duration of His own Dispensation, that neither the one nor the

other was deemed necessary. All he did was, according to the testi-

mony of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in “A Traveller’s Narrative,” to nominate, on

the advice of Baha’u’llah and of another disciple, Mirza Yahya, who

would act solely as a figure-head pending the manifestation of the

Promised One, thus enabling Baha’u’llah to promote, in relative

security, the Cause so dear to his heart.41

Shoghi Effendi apparently is attempting to maneuver through a delicate

matter, wanting to affirm on the one hand that Mirza Yahya became after

the Bab’s death “the recognized chief of the Babi community,” for which

the historical evidence is strong, yet seeking to avoid admitting that

the Bab had appointed his as successor. By calling Mirza Yahya the Bab’s

“nominee,” Shoghi Effendi is admitting that some kind of deputation took

place, whereby, at least to outward appearance, Mirza Yahya became the

new chief of the community.

This leadership of the community fell to Mirza Yahya upon the

Bab’s death. Shoghi Effendi refers at one point to the Bab who had

succumbed “to the volleys of a firing squad leaving behind, as titular

head of a well-nigh disrupted community, a mere figurehead,” meaning, of

course, Mirza Yahya. But although Mirza Yahya became “the recognized

chief of the Babi community,” Baha’is maintain that Baha’u’llah was

“the real Leader.”42 Elsewhere, Shoghi Effendi speaks of Mirza Yahya’s

“mounting jealousy” over “the ever deepening attachment of the exiles

to Baha’u’llah and of their amazing veneration for him” and of how

Baha’u’llah’s “popularity had risen in Baghdad.”43

This rise in Baha’u’llah’s popularity during the Baghdad period

is important to underscore and helps place in proper perspective the

probable flow of events in the transition of leadership in the new reli-

gion from Mirza Yahya to Baha’u’llah. Mirza Yahya, although nominated

by the Bab as the next Babi chief, largely secluded himself and left

the more practical, organizational aspect of the faith to his elder half-

brother, Baha’u’llah. The latter moved more openly among the Babis,

manifesting those qualities of leadership which were not as evident

in Mirza Yahya, and increasingly rose in the esteem of the exiled

Babis.

That Mirza Yahya was at first the recognized chief of the Babis

after the Bab’s death is given strong support for the reasons which led

Browne to that conclusion44 and is admitted by the Baha’is themselves.

Since the writing of the *Traveller’s Narrative*, however, Baha’is follow

the view advanced by ‘Abdu’l-Baha that the position conferred by the

Bab upon Mirza Yahya, by which he became famous both within and without

the Babi community, was in name only and that Baha’u’llah was the real

leader behind the scenes. This view, however, encounters various problems,

as noted earlier,45 finds no confirmation outside of Baha’i writings them-

selves, and apparently was introduced into Baha’i thought after the Baha’i-

Azali controversy as a way of undermining the position as Babi chief pre-

viously held by Subh-i-Azal and making Baha’u’llah’s leadership in the

community retroactive from the time of the Bab’s death.

The question of the successorship to the Bab, however, is not

determinative for the Baha’i position, for Baha’u’llah claimed to be

“He whom God shall manifest,” the next manifestation, and Baha’u’llah

thus assumed an authority which would be immensely greater than any inter-

mediary authority between the two manifestations. That the Bab intended

Mirza Yahya’s authority to be only provisional until the manifestation of

“Him whom God shall manifest” is confirmed in the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, which

indicates that, when the Bab nominated Mirza Yahya as his successor, he

added, “Write the eight [unwritten] *Vahids* of the Beyan,” showing that

the Bab considered Mirza Yahya’s ministry as falling within the Bayanic

or Babi dispensation, and admonished him to abrogate the *Bayan* “if ‘He

whom God shall manifest’ should appear in His power in thy time,”46

showing that Mirza Yahya’s ministry was to be in force only until the

coming of the greater dispensation. This passage of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*

clearly is not an interpolation into the text after Baha’u’llah’s declara-

tion by Azal’s supporters, else the stipulation to abrogate the *Bayan* upon

the coming of “Him whom God shall manifest’ would not have been quoted,

for this would have only strengthened the Baha’i position. The Bab’s

admonition to Mirza Yahya to abrogate the *Bayan* should “He whom God shall

manifest” appear in Mirza Yahya’s lifetime apparently indicates that the

Bab, himself, did not identify Mirza Yahya with the coming manifestation.

That the author of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* makes that identification does not

suggest that he is advancing a counterclaim to Baha’u’llah’s claim but

reveals that he also was caught up in that spirit which overtook the Babi

community for a time after the Bab’s death when so many Babis advanced

claims of being the promised manifestation. Gobineau’s early history

indicates that some Babis thought that Azal was “He whom God shall mani-

fest” and others thought he was a “return” of the Bab.47

The Question of Baha’u’llah’s Call

Related to the question of the Bab’s successor is the question

of when Baha’u’llah began to conceive of himself as the one foretold by

the Bab. Two views may be distinguished. One view would see Baha’u’llah

as functioning as a loyal Babi, submissive to Mirza Yahya’s authority, and

deciding only at a later stage to put forward a claim of his own and

thereby take full control of the movement. This appears basically to be

Edward G. Browne’s position. Browne holds that at the time of Baha’u’llah’s

release from his 1852 imprisonment and for some years later “Beha’u’llah

was, as his own writings prove, to all appearance as loyal a follower of

Subh-i-Ezel as he had previously been of the Bab.”48 Browne points to the

firm guidance which was needed to control the exiled Babi community and

maintains:

Such firmness Subh-i-Ezel, a peace-loving, contemplative, gentle

soul, wholly devoted to the memory of his beloved Master, caring

little for authority, and incapable of self-assertion, seems to

have altogether lacked. Even while at Baghdad he lived a life of

almost complete seclusion, leaving the direction of affairs in

the hands of his half-brother Beha’u’llah, a man of much more

resolute and ambitious character, who thus gradually became the

most prominent figure and the moving spirit of the sect. For a

considerable time Beha’u’llah continued to do all that he did in

the name, and ostensibly by the instructions of Subh-i-Ezel; but

after a while, though at what precise date is still uncertain,

the idea seems to have entered his mind that he might as well

become actually as he already was virtually, the Pontiff of the

Church whose destinies he controlled.49

That Baha’u’llah for a time did, at least to .outward appearance, act in

the name of Subh-i-Azal is confirmed in the *Traveller’s Narrative*, where

‘Abdu’l-Baha says that Baha’u’llah “wrote letters ostensibly at his

[Subh-i-Azal’s] dictation, to the Bab.”50 In Browne’s view, this situa-

tion continued until Baha’u’llah decided to assume open control of the

faith and then seemingly for awhile after that until the Babis had been

at Adrianople for two or three years, when Baha’u’llah

threw off all disguise, publicly proclaiming himself to be “Him whom

God shall manifest,” and called upon Subh-i-Azal and all the Babi

Churches throughout Persia, Turkey, Egypt and Syria, to acknowledge

his supreme authority, and to accept as God’s Word the revelations

which he forthwith began to promulgate, and continued till his death

on May 16th of last year (1892) to publish.51

In this view, references to Baha’u’llah’s awareness of his mission or

of his open control of the movement during the earlier part of the

pre-declaration period would be seen as predating events or reading

back into the earlier period the developments of a later time, when

Baha’u’llah did become the leader of the faith.

Another view would be that Baha’u’llah at a very early date

planned eventually to put forward a claim and that during his pre-decla-

ration days he was laying the foundation for assuming full control of

the movement. The *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* reports that, while the Bab and Quddus

were still alive, Baha’u’llah “fell under suspicion, and it was said that

he not improbably harboured designs of setting up a standard” of his own.52

According to the Baha’is, Baha’u’llah first came to an awareness of his

mission in the Siyah-Chal in Tihran (1852) but for “a period of no less

than ten years” only hinted “in veiled and allegorical language, in epistles,

commentaries, prayers and treatises” that “the Bab’s promise had already

been fulfilled,” and that only “a few of His fellow-disciples … per-

ceived the radiance of the as yet unrevealed glory.”53

The Baghdad Period

The historical circumstance which forced the Babi community

into exile in Baghdad was an attempt on the life of the Persian shah on

August 15, 1852, by persons belonging to the Babi religion. Some see this

event as a definite Babi plot to assassinate the king. Browne points out

that the *Nasikhu’t-Tawarikh*, “which gives the most circumstantial account

of the occurrence; indicates that Mulla Shaykh ‘Ali (Jenab-i-Azim) first

proposed the attempt and that of the twelve who volunteered, only three

carried out the plan, namely, Sadiq of Zanjan (or Milan) Mulla Fathu’llah

of Qum, and Mirza Muhammad of Niriz.55 According to information given to

Professor Browne by “the nephew of one of the three Babis actually engaged

in the plot,” seven were involved in the original conspiracy, but four

withdrew from the effort at the last moment.56 ‘Abdu’l-Baha describes the

event as perpetrated by “a certain Babi,” whom he calls “this madman,” with

“one other person being his accomplice.”57 Shoghi Effendi seems to follow

‘Abdu’l-Baha in regarding the act as the deed of only two Babis, a fanati-

cal and irresponsible Babi” named “Sadiq-i-Tabrizi, an assistant in a

confectioner’s shop in Tihran,” and “his accomplice, an equally obscure

youth named Fathu’llah-i-Qumi.”58 Ruhiyyih Khanum refers to the Babis

involved in the attempt as ‘three half-crazed, insignificant fools.”59

Regardless of the number or the mental condition of those

involved in the attempt, Baha’is maintain that the act was done without

the knowledge or sanction of the Babi leadership. Baha’u’llah denies

having had anything to do with the attempt.60 Professor Browne agrees

that “so far as can be ascertained, it was utterly unauthorized on the

part of the Babi leaders” and “was caused by the desperation to which

the Babis had been driven by a long series of cruelties, and especially

by the execution of their Founder in 1850.”61

At any rate, the attempt to assassinate the king by members

of the Babi faith was sufficient to provoke the unleashing of horrible

persecution against the movement. Peter Avery regards the shah’s drastic

measures toward the Babis after the attempt on his life as indicative of

the influence of the movement at that time, The Babi propaganda had

spread over Persia and had revealed its power to attract a wide variety

of social types. The shah considered that drastic action was necessary.62

A letter dated August 29, 1852, by an Austrian officer, Captain

von Goumoens, employed in the shah’s service, which was published in a

German or Austrian newspaper on October 17, 1852 (a copy of which was

sent to Edward G. Browne), gives a graphic account of the cruelties

unleashed upon the Babis:

But follow me my friend, you who lay claim to a heart and European

ethics, follow me to the unhappy ones who, with gorged-out eyes,

must eat, on the scene of the deed, without any sauce, their own

amputated ears; or whose teeth are torn out with inhuman violence

by the hand of the executioner; or whose bare skulls are simply

crushed by blows from a hammer; or where the *bazar* is illuminated

with unhappy victims, because on right and left the people dig

deep boles in their beasts and shoulders and insert burning wicks

in the wounds. I saw some dragged in chains through the *bazar*,

preceded by a military band, in whom these wicks had burned so

deep that now the fat flickered convulsively in the wound like a

newly-extinguished lamp.

Not seldom it happens that the unwearying ingenuity of the

Orientals leads to fresh tortures. They will akin the soles of

the Babis’ feet, soak the wounds in boiling oil, shoe the foot

like the hoof of a horse, and compel the victim to run. No cry

escaped from the victim’s breast; the torment is endured in dark

silence by the numbed sensation of the fanatic; now he must run;

the body cannot endure what the soul has endured; he falls. Give

him the *coup de grace*! Put him out of his pain! No! The executioner

swings the whip, and—I myself have had to witness it—the unhappy

victim of hundred-fold tortures runs! … The more fortunate

suffered strangulation, stoning or suffocation; they were bound

before the muzzle of a mortar, cut down with swords or killed with

dagger thrusts, or blows from hammers and sticks. … At present

I never leave my house, in order not to meet with fresh scenes of

horror.63

Among those who fell victims in this persecution were Mirza Jani and

Qurratu’l-‘Ayn, the celebrated Babi poetess and member of the Bab’s

“Letters of the Living.” Baha’u’llah was cast into prison, in the

Siyah-Chal, where he remained for four months but was finally released

due in part to the intercession on his behalf, or at least to testimony

as to Baha’u’llah’s character, by the Russian Ambassador in Persia,64

and to his family’s wealth and position.65 Baha’u’llah’s father had been,

according to state papers preserved by the Cyprus government, chief sec-

retary of state to the Persian shah.66

After Baha’u’llah’s release from imprisonment, he made his

way to Bagdad, arriving there, according to some accounts, before Mirza

Yahya,67 and according to others, after Mirza Yahya.68

The persecuted Babis made their way to Baghdad, where they

enrolled themselves as Turkish subjects and thus obtained a certain

degree of freedom and protection. For about eleven years the Babis

were relatively unmolested, and the period proved most fruitful in

terms of the new religion’s literary production.69 Three important

works by Baha’u’llah were written in Baghdad—the *Kitab-i-Iqan*, the

*Seven Valleys*, and the *Hidden Words*.

Although relatively safe from outside persecution, the Babi

community, however, was beset by inner dissension. A number of Babis

put forward claims of being the promised manifestation, each winning a

certain following and, according to Mirza Abu’l-Fadl, thus “subdividing

the community into different sects.”70 The author of the *Hasht Bihisht*

says that “the matter came to such a pass that everyone on awakening

from his first sleep in the morning adorned his body with this preten-

sion.”71

One of the claimants was Janab-i-Dayyan, a prominent Babi.

The picture of the peace-loving, gentle Mirza Yahya which Browne presents

in his introduction to the *New History*72 is not entirely accurate, for

Browne was later to point out that Mirza Yahya in one of his writings

not only reviles Dayyan “in the coarsest language, but expresses his

surprise that his adherents ‘sit silent in their places and do not trans-

fix him with their spears,’ or ‘rend his bowels with their hands.’”73

Dayyan was later drowned by the Babis. A tract entitled *Risaliy-i-Armih*,

“the Aunt’s Epistle” or “the Aunt’s Treatise,” written to support Subh-i-

Azal’s claims, admits and even condones Subh-i-Azal’s responsibility for

Dayyan’s murder.74

After Baha’u’llah had been in Baghdad for one year, he suddenly

departed from Baghdad on April 10, 1854, destined to wander in the wastes

of Kurdistan for a period of two years.75 Baha’is regard the period as

a time of preparation for Baha’u’llah’s future ministry: “There for two

years, as Christ in the wilderness, as Buddha in the Indian forest, as

Muhammad in the fiery hills of Arabia, he became prepared for his task.”76

In the *Kitab-i-Iqan*, written after Baha’u’llah’s return to

Baghdad, he mentions that the object of his retirement was to avoid

becoming a subject of discord among the faithful.”77 According to the

*Hasht Bihisht*, Baha’u’llah was tending to relax some the severer code of

the *Bayan* and had gathered about him some Babis who were sympathetic with

his innovations. Certain other Babis, however, presented a rigorous pro-

test, whereupon Baha’u’llah suddenly left Baghdad.78 Subh-i-Azal charges

that Baha’u’llah simply “got angry.”79 Baha’u’llah’s statement that he

left Baghdad to avoid being “a subject of discord” would indicate that some

kind of dispute was in progress centering around himself.

No one seems to have known where Baha’u’llah was for two years.

When Subh-i-Azal learned where he was, he wrote a letter requesting that

he return.80 Browne believed that a passage in the *Iqan* proved that

Baha’u’llah was submissive to the authority of Mirza Yahya.81 The pas-

sage in question is Baha’u’llah’s acknowledgment that he contemplated no

return to Baghdad

until the hour when, from the Mystic Source, there came the

summons bidding Us return whence We came. Surrendering Our

Will to Him, We submitted to His injunction.82

If Baha’u’llah means Subh-i-Azal by the expression “the Mystic Source,”

or ‘the Source of Command,” as it is rendered in the earlier translation

of the *Iqan* by Ali Kuli Yhan,83 and is referring to Subh-i-Azal’s letter

as the “summons” to return, then the passage reveals that Baha’u’llah

acted in submission to Subh-i-Azal’s will and was thus acknowledging,

at least to outward appearance, Subh-i-Azal’s authority in the community.

Baha’is, however, finds Brown’s interpretation of “the Mystic Source” to

be “grotesque.”84 Balyuzi says that the Babi who sought out Baha’u’llah,

on behalf of the Babis in Baghdad who knew that the success of the move-

ment depended on Baha’u’llah, was Shaykh Sultan.

True, Mirza Yahya had also written to ask Baha’u’llah to return,

but it was a request, not a ‘summons’. The ‘Mystic Source’ which

Baha’u’llah mentions in *The Book of Certitude*, from whence the

summons came, is obviously the Godhead.85

That the “Mystic Source” or “Source of Command” could refer to one who bore

the “Divine influences” is seen in the references in the *New History* to

Baha’u’llah as “the Source of Command.”86 In Babi thought, God’s emissaries

represented God, and the author of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* understands that the

Bab, who calls Subh-i-Azal God, meant for the “Divine influences” to

pass upon Subh-i-Azal after the Bab’s death.87 When Baha’u’llah declared

himself “Him whom God shall manifest,’ he became for the Babis who accepted

him “the Source of Command.” But until then, “the center provisionally

appointed pending the manifestation of the Promised One”88 was Mirza Yahya.

Baha’u’llah, in yielding to the will of Mirza Yahya, perhaps wanted to

achieve two purposes: (1) show himself a loyal Babi by being obedient to

the center appointed by the Bab to dispel the suspicions creating the

disturbance leading to his departure from Baghdad, (2) and regain his

position in the community whereby he could gradually lead it out of

its present difficulties.

Some insight into Baha’u’llah’s outlook during the Baghdad

period is provided by the *Kitab-i-Iqan*, revealed within this period.89

The *Iqan* reveals that its author is a devout and loyal Babi, well versed

in the Babi doctrines and an able defender and exponent of the Babi

position. He argues that, when the Bab made his appearance, the people

should have accepted him because of the fulfilment of the predictions

concerning him. Even the year of his manifestation was given in the

traditions as the year “sixty” (A.H. 1260),90 yet people shunned the

truth by ignoring these explicit indications of the Bab’s station.

He calls the Babi movement “this wondrous and most exalted Cause” and

refers to the Bab as “God’s wondrous Manifestation.”91 Of the Bab,

Baha’u’llah says: “His rank excelleth that of all the Prophets, and His

Revelation transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their

chosen ones.”92 “No day is greater than this Day, and no revelation more

glorious than this Revelation,” Baha’u’llah declares.93 The Bab’s book,

the *Qayyumu’l-Asma*, he calls “the first, the greatest and mightiest of

all books.”94 So utterly devoted to the Bab and his cause, Baha’u’llah

even longs for the opportunity to die as a martyr in the Bab’s services

“Perchance, through God’s loving kindness and His grace, this revealed

and manifest Letter may lay down His life as a sacrifice in the path of

the Primal Point.”95

The picture of Baha’u’llah which emerges in the *Iqan* is of

one utterly convinced of the unsurpassed greatness of the Babi revela-

tion, of one absorbingly engaged in expounding, defending, and exalting

the truth of the Day of God centering in the figure of ins Primal Point,

of one whose greatest desire is to give his life in love for “that Quin-

tessence of Light, the Bab.

Baha’u’llah’s references to the coming Manifestation have led

some interpreters to believe that Baha’u’llah is contemplating advancing

a claim at this time.97 His references, however, to the coming of “Him

whom God shall manifest” would not necessarily mean or imply that Baha’u’-

llah thought of himself as that resplendent figure. The teaching of the

coming of “Him whom God shall manifest” and the need to recognize him

when he came is basic Babi doctrine. Baha’u’llah need be doing no more

than merely reiterating the basic Babi teaching on this point, which

figured so prominently in the Bab’s doctrine. Certainly no true exposition

of Babi teaching would overlook that most prominent subject. Yet, those

passages, when coupled with other curious statements in the *Iqan*, leave an

impression that Baha’u’llah may indeed be considering advancing a claim

to be “He whom God shall manifest.”98

BAHA’U’LLAH’S DECLARATION OF HIS MISSION

The continued flow of Babi literature and propaganda into

Persia and the growing strength of the movement prompted the Persian

government to request that the Babi community be removed from Baghdad

further into the interior of the Ottoman Empire. For twelve days before

the departure from Baghdad, Baha’u’llah resided in a tent in the garden

of Ridvan outside the city. Here Baha’is say Baha’u’llah openly announced

to a few of his friends that he was the promised manifestation. The

twelve-day “Feast of Ridvan” (April 21-May 2) is held annually by Baha’is

in commemoration of Baha’u’llah’s declaration on this occasion.

Some little confusion occurs in connection with Baha’u’llah’s declaration.

Nabil’s chronological poem places Baha’u’llah’s declaration in the year

A.H. 1283 (A.D. 1866-1867), when Baha’u’llah was fifty years old.100

This was, however, Baha’u’llah’s public declaration made later in

Adrianople, referred to in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* as “the land of the Secret”

because the secret of Baha’u’llah’s being a new manifestation was divulged

in Adrianople.101

Baha’is insist, however, that an earlier declaration to only a

few was made before the departure from Baghdad. Bahiyyih Khanum, daughter

of Baha’u’llah, maintains that the claim was made only to ‘Abdu’l-Baha

and four close disciples.102 Some evidence is available supporting an

earlier declaration in the Garden of Ridvan. Richards points out that

Baha’u’llah in a tablet to ‘Ali Naqqi wrote:

Blessed art than in that thou was privileged to be present in the

Garden of Rezvan, on the Festival of Rezvan, when God the Merciful,

showed forth His glory to the world.103

In the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, also, Baha’u’llah writes:

All things were dipped in the Sea of Cleansing on the First

of *al-Ridwan* when we appeared in glory to him who is in (the realm

of) the possible with our Most Beautiful Names and our most high

attributes.104

The passage appears to be a reference to Baha’u’llah’s declaration of

himself an the first day of the twelve days in the Garden of Ridvan and

means that all things became clean at that time.105 Later in the

*Kitab-i-Aqdas*, Baha’u’llah refers to the “two great feasts” of his dispen-

sation, the festival of his declaration when the “Merciful was revealed

to those (in the realm) of the Possible by His most beautiful Names and

His highest Attributes” and the festival of “the day on which We sent

Him who should tell the people the Good News of this Name by which the

dead are raised” (the day of the Bab’s declaration).106

Although Baha’is date the beginning of their faith from the

Bab’s declaration, Baha’u’llah’s declaration marks for them the occasion

when, as George Townshend expresses it, “Jesus Christ ascended His throne

in the power of God the Father.”107 Townshend, thus, remarks: “Surely

this Day must be the greatest day in the history of manktnd.”108

Baha’u’llah’s later public declaration resulted in the division

of the Babis into two groups, the greater number following Baha’u’llah

and eventually becoming known as Baha’is and a smaller number who con-

tinued to follow Subh-i-Azal and becoming known as Azalis.

One issue between the Baha’is and Azalis concerned the time when

the next manifestation was to appear. Azalis insisted that “He whom God

shall manifest” would not appear until 1,511 to 2,001 years had passed.109

These figures are derived from the numerical values of the words *Ghiyath*

and *Mustaghath*. The Bab had suggested that “He whom God shall manifest”

might appear “in the number of *Ghiyath*” or might “tarry until [the number

of *Mustaghath*” (Persian Bayan II, 17), but he hoped that “He will come

ere [the number of] *Mustaghath* (III, 15).110 These figures suggest that a

long duration would occur before the coxing of the next manifestation.

The Bab also had compared the coming of the manifestations

to a boy in successive stages of growth. Adam, whose coming the Bab

placed at 12,210 years before his ministry, is compared to the embryo;

Jesus, Muhammad, and the Bab, himself, are compared to the boy at ages

ten, eleven, and twelve, respectively, showing that the Bab thought of

each year in the boy’s life as roughly representing 1,000 years. The

Bab saw “Him whom God shall manifest” as the boy at age fourteen (*Bayan*

III, 12) or age nineteen (III, 15; V, 4), suggesting that the next mani-

festation would not appear before 2,000 to 7,000 years had passed.111

Baha’is, however, insist that the Bab pointed to the year “sixty-

nine” (A.H. 1269/A.D. 1852-1853) as the year when the next manifestation

would reveal himself.112 Baha’u’llah is said to have received his call at

this time and began hinting in his writings that he was the expected mani-

festation but did not openly disclose himself until ten years later.113

What opens the door to the making of an early claim by someone,

however, is that the Bab had said that no one could falsely claim to be

“Him whom God shall manifest” and told Mirza Yahya to abrogate the *Bayan*

if “Him whom God shall manifest” should appear in his lifetime, opening the

way for someone then living to advance the claim.

The Bab also had named the first month of the Babi year *Baha*

(“Splendour’) in honour of “Him whom God shall manifest” and had indicated

in the *Bayan* that “Baha’u’llah” was the “best of Names” (V, 6). This would

appear to be a strong argument in favour of Baha’u’llah were it not for

the Azali claim that the title “Baha’u’llah” was originally one of Subh-i-Azal’s titles.114

THE PERIOD AFTER BAHA’U’LLAH’S DECLARATION

Baha’u’llah left on his journey to Constantinople on May 3, 1863.

Baha’is describe the day as one of great weeping and lamentation by those

grieving over his departure.115

The Adrianople Period

Baha’u’llah, his family, and certain followers (in all about

seventy persons)116 arrived in Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman

Empire, on August 16, 1863, where they resided for four months until further

orders came for their removal in the cold winter months to Adrianople in

the extremities of the empire, referred to by Ruhiyyih Khanum as “the poli-

tical Siberia of the Turkish Empire.”117

The Adrianople period was to witness the first open efforts to

transform the Babi religion into a more acceptable and universal faith.

The period is significant for at least four reasons.

First, Baha’u’llah in Adrianople cast aside the veil and openly

declared that he was the bearer of a new message. The Tablet, the *Suriy-i-*

*Amr*, formally announced his claims, being read first to Mirza Yahya and

then to the other Babis, calling them to a decision.

Second, the Babis in Adrianople, as a result of Baha’u’llah’s

declaration, split into two rival parties, those following Baha’u’llah

and those following Mirza Yahya. This division resulted in both sides

charging the others with tampering with the texts of previous writings to

support their own claims and position, in different versions being given

to the same incident from this time on, and in actual murders by the two

groups. One incident involved an attempt at poisoning. Azalis maintain

that Baha’u’llah attempted to poison Mirza Yahya, whereas Baha’is say

that Mirza Yahya tried to poison Baha’u’llah.118

Third, Baha’u’llah began in Adrianople sending tablets to the

world’s religious and political heads, calling them to a recognition of

“the King of Kings,” admonishing them to deal justly, and warning them

of heedlessness. Among those thus addressed were Napoleon III of France,

Nasiri’d-Din Shah of Persia, the Sultan ‘Abdu’l-Aziz of Turkey, Czar

Alexander II of Russia, Queen Victoria of England, and Pope Pius IX.119

Baha’is see Baha’u’llah as thus formally declaring his cause to the world,

and they attribute the later mysterious fall of the dynasties and the

decline of religious institutions as predicted in these communications as

the direct outcome of the heedlessness of many of the world’s rulers to

Baha’u’llah’s message.

A fourth significance of the Adrianople period which has bearing

on Baha’u’llah’s religion is that Baha’u’llah during the five years of resi-

dence in Adrianople first came in touch with European civilization and

Western ideas. Non-Baha’is, therefore, attribute the concepts in Baha’u’-

llah’s message having affinities with Western thought to the experience in

Adrianople.120 The Baha’i, Horace Holley, makes this observation:

The effect of residence at Adrianople was to bring Baha’o’llah into

relationship with European civilization, thus uniting his intuitive

wisdom with that stock of scientific and sociological experience

which so completely differentiates the personal problems of life in

West and East. Without this contact and assimilation, Baha’o’llah’s

revelation might have remained Oriental in its statement and expres-

sion, and, conditioned by the incomplete social experience which

that implies, might have reached our Western consciousness only

through the medium of an intervening personality—a St, Paul, that

is, whose interpretation would have lessened fatally the prophet’s

power to unite. Happily for both hemispheres alike, this contact

of intuition and social experience did take place, and, as a result,

Europe and America enter equally with the Orient into this prophetic

station.121

This is a rather remarkable statement, for Holly admits the conditioning

effect of-Western civilization and ideas upon Baha’u’llah’s revelation,

or at least upon its expression, and sees this as necessary in giving

that message its uniting power.

Other Baha’is may not be inclined to make Holley’s admission,

but his outlook fits perfectly with Baha’i philosophy that the prophets’

messages are conditioned by the times and social state of the people among

whom they appear, Baha’u’llah’s experience touched both East and West, and

his message, therefore, is directed to both hemispheres, thereby uniting the

two within his one revelation.

The exact reasons for the removal of the Baha’is and Azalis

from Adrianople are difficult to ascertain because of conflicting stories,

but the event seems to here resulted from a combination of a number of

factors: internal dissension, the circulation of various reports about

what the Babis were planning and teaching,122 one report being that they

planned on taking over the city of Constantinople and disposing of the

Turkish officials who refused to embrace the religion,123 and the possible

detection of a fresh attempt at propaganda.124

Mirza Yahya and certain followers were banished to Cyprus,

where they arrived on August 20, 1868.125 Baha’u’llah, his family, and

companions, numbering about seventy, were exiled to ‘Akka, where they

arrived on August 31, 1868. Four Baha’is were sent with the Azalis, and

a certain number of Mirza Yahya’s adherents were sent with the Baha’is.

These were intended to serve as spies.

The ‘Akka Period

The Baha’is in ‘Akka were confined for two years in the mili-

tary barracks, a fortress built of rocks, and endured much hardship and

suffering, but in October, 1870, in the course of the war between

Russia and Turkey, the barracks were needed for Turkish soldiers, and

the Baha’is were moved into houses within the city walls. In 1879,

Baha’u’llah moved into the Palace of Bahji, where he was residing when

Professor Edward Browne of Cambridge University was permitted four

interviews with him in April, 1890. Browne tells of that experience

in the introduction to the *Traveller’s Narrative*:

The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I

cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one’s

very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the

deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the

jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable

luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to

ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one

who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might

envy and emperors sigh for in vain!126

One incident during the ‘Akka period which has brought criticism

upon the movement is the murder of the Azalis who had accompanied the

Baha’is to ‘Akka. The Azalis had given the Baha’is a good bit of trouble,

particularly by reports which they spread after they and the Baha’is

moved from the barracks into the city. Certain Baha’is decided to end

the mischief. According to Shaykh Ibrahim’s account given to Edward

Browne, the number of Azalis who accompanied the Baha’is to ‘Akka were

seven, five of whom are named. Twelve Baha’is, acting without instruc-

tions from Baha’u’llah, went armed with swords and daggers to the house

where the Azalis were living. After they knocked on the door, Aka Jan

answered and was killed immediately. The Baha’is then entered the house

and slew the other six.127

Bahiyyih Khanum gives a different account, according to which,

only three Baha’is and three Azalis were involved. The Baha’is proceeded

to the house of the Azalis, calling them outside. The Azalis fiercely

attacked the Baha’is with clubs and sticks; a general fight followed in

which one Baha’i and two Azalis were killed.128

Balyuzi, however, admits that “it is a fact that three Azalis

were murdered by a few Baha’is in ‘Akka,” but maintains, “that shameful

deed brought great sorrow to Baha’u’llah.”129 As far as can be deter-

mined, the murderers were not acting on Baha’u’llah’s orders.130 Browne

believed, however, that a passage in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* shows that Baha’u’-

llah “regarded this event with some complaisance.”131 “God has taken the

one who seduced thee,” Baha’u’llah writes, addressing himself presumably

to Mirza Yahya, in reference to Haji Siyyid Muhammad Isfahani, one of the

Azalis killed in ‘Akka and a prime supporter of Mirza Yahya.132 Balyuzi

considers Browne’s allegation that “those responsible for that odious deed

were freed from goal by ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s intercession” as a “novelty.”133

Baha’u’llah passed away at the hour of dawn on the 2nd of

Dhi’l-Qa’dih, 1309 A.H. (May 29, 1892), in his seventy-fifth year.134

That Baha’u’llah’s life was not cut short by a Roman cross, a Persian

firing squad, or by some other means, is significant for Baha’is, for

“Baha’u’llah was not slain nor prevented from giving His full message.”135

“What the Bab suffered for six years only, as Christ had suffered for

three years, Baha’u’llah, like Moses and Muhammad, suffered to the very

end of a long life.”136

BAHA’U’LLAH’S TRANSFORMATION

Shoghi Effendi, as noted earlier, speaks of “those momentous

happenings” which “transformed a heterodox … offshoot of the Shaykhi

school … into a world religion.”137 The dominating figure behind

those momentous happenings and the person primarily responsible for

that transformation of the Babi religion into a world faith was Baha’u’-

llah, believed to be “descended from the line of kings of the Sassanian

dynasty of Persia” and also from “the line of Zoroaster Himself.”138

Being from an early date a wealthy and influential supporter of the Babi

movement in Persia and the elder half-brother of the Bab’s own nominee for

leadership in the movement after his death, Mirza Yahya, who had left the

more practical affairs of this faith to the administration of his half-

brother, Baha’u’llah had gradually risen to the forefront of the movement

through his writings and able administration during the Baghdad period.

When in Adrianople he openly proclaimed himself the promised one, “He whom

God shall manifest,” the next manifestation, he won the overwhelming sup-

port of the majority of the Babi community.

The problem facing Baha’u’llah is compared to that facing the

Apostle Paul in Christianity. Edward Browne refers to a comment made to

him by Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, a British minister at Tihran, who had

recently returned to England, who said:

The question here was not a mere question of historical rights

or documentary evidence, but the much greater question as to

whether Babiism was to become an independent world-religion, or

remain a mere sect of Islam. In the struggle between Subh-i-Ezel

and Baha’u’llah we see a repetition of the similar conflict which

took place in the early Christian Church between Peter and Paul.

The former was in closer personal relations with Christ than the

latter; but it is owing to the victory of the latter that Chris-

tianity is now the religion of the civilized West, instead of

being an obscure sect of Judaism.139

Baha’u’llah intended to remove from the Babi religion those elements

which he realized would keep it from being more widely accepted and to

establish the religion as a spiritual rather than political movement

aiming at the betterment of the world.

No sooner was Beha firmly established in his authority than he

began to make free use of the privilege accorded by the Bab to

“Him whom God shall manifest” to abrogate, change, cancel, and

develop the earlier doctrines. His chief aim seems to have

been to introduce a more settled order, to discourage specula-

tion, to direct the attention of his followers to practical

reforms pursued in a prudent and unobtrusive fashion, to exalt

ethics at the expense of metaphysics, to check mysticism, to

conciliate existing authorities, including even the Shah of

Persia, the Nero of the Babi faith, to abolish useless, unprac-

tical, and irksome regulations and restrictions, and, in general,

to adapt the religion at the head of which he now found himself

to the ordinary exigencies of life, and to render it more capable

of becoming, what he intended to make it, a universal system

suitable to all mankind.140

Baha’u’llah incorporated into his teachings the basic theology, eschato-

logy, and hermeneutics of the earlier Babi religion.141 The *Kitab-i-Iqan*,

which especially presents the basic Babi teaching, and other writings of

Baha’u’llah before his declaration are accepted by Baha’is as part of

the revelation for the new age, thus indicating the essential relatedness

and compatibility of the Babi and Baha’i outlook. Baha’u’llah, in a

sense, was acting as a reformer within the Babi religion, but to esta-

blish the kind of reforms he deemed necessary, which involved changing

certain Babi laws, required that Baha’u’llah assume the role of the

coming manifestation, who alone would have the authority to initiate

such basic changes in the religion. Baha’is still date the beginning

of their religion with the Bab’s declaration, not with Baha’u’llah’s.

These considerations raise the question of whether the Baha’i

faith is a distinct faith from the Babi religion or whether Baha’i is an

advanced and reformed stage of the Babi movement. If Baha’u’llah is a

reformer within a movement which began with the Bab’s declaration, then

Baha’i is only a reformed and later stage of that movement; if Baha’u’llah

is the next manifestation, then in Babi-Baha’i thought, he is the founder

of a distinct religion. Actually, Baha’u’llah is both. He is a reformer

within an already founded religion, as can be seen in the Baha’i dating of

the faith from the Bab, not Baha’u’llah, and also in the fact that Baha’u’-

llah built upon an already established doctrinal outlook. Baha’u’llah let

fall to the wayside certain characteristic yet nonessential elements of

the Babi religion which he felt were deterrents to the religion’s wider

acceptance, incorporated into and amplified in his teachings certain other

elements of Babi doctrines, directly abrogated some laws, and added to the

faith his own characteristic teachings, particularly those inspired by his

touch with Western civilization. Baha’u’llah is also, in the belief of

Baha’is and according to his own claim, an independent manifestation. Only

with this authority was he able to make the reforms he desired to make.

Theoretically, then, Baha’u’llah’s religion is as distinct from the Babi

religion as it is from other previous faiths. This distinction is not

sharply made, however, for two reasons. Historically, the proximity of

the religions and their evident relatedness keep them from being sharply

distinguished. Doctrinally, Baha’is uphold the two religions as being

essentially related, in that the former is seen as uniquely preparatory

for the latter. This is especially true in the claim that the Bab is a

forerunner of Baha’u’llah. Baha’u’llah’s dual role, therefore, as reformer

and independent manifestation, while constituting the faith centering in

him an independent religion, makes it nevertheless a transformation of

the earlier Babi religion. This transformation produces a certain tension

within the Baha’i faith in defining and understanding the precise rela-

tionship existing between the Babi and Baha’i religions and between the

Bab and Baha’u’llah.

Baha’u’llah’s transformation of the Babi religion into the

Baha’i faith is seen particularly in three areas: (1) Baha’u’llah’s

shifting of the religion’s central focus from the Bab to himself; (2)

the redirecting of Babi aspirations from military to spiritual conquests;

(3) and the general widening of the religion’s outlook to more practical

concerns, which involved abrogating certain Babi laws and establishing

new laws and teachings which would be more universally appealing.

The Religion’s New Central Focus

Baha’u’llah, in claiming to be “He whom God shall manifest,”

foretold by the Bab, was claiming a station infinitely superior to the

Bab or to any of the prophets who preceded him. The Bab’s *Bayan* was

to be in force only until the appearing of this coming manifestation.

Baha’u’llah was faced with two basic questions concerning the Bab and

his revelation: (1) why should the Bab’s dispensation be so short, and

(2) what would be the purpose in a major manifestation coming to inaugu-

rate a dispensation which would be superseded so quickly.

Baha’u’llah seems to have relegated the answer to the first

question to the realm of God’s mysteries. Shoghi Effendi quotes Baha’u’-

llah as saying:

That so brief an interval should have separated this most mighty

and wondrous Revelation from Mine own previous Manifestation is a

mystery such as no mind can fathom. Its duration had been fore-

ordained.142

Baha’u’llah may also be referring to this matter when he writes in the

*Kitab-i-Aqdas*:

Order (*al-nazm*) has been disturbed by this Most Great Order,

and arrangement has been made different through this innovation,

the like of which the eye of invention has not seen.143

Baha’u’llah had a more ready answer to the second question of

the Bab’s purpose. The close proximity of Baha’u’llah’s revelation

to that of the Bab and the Bab’s emphasis given to the coming of “Him

whom God shall manifest” placed the Bab in the category of a forerunner

to Baha’u’llah.

Edward G. Browne and those following his interpretation have

misunderstood this aspect of Baha’i teaching, seemingly believing that

Baha’is do not regard the Bab as a major prophet, or manifestation.

Browne writes in this respect:

It must be added that the theory now advanced by the Baha’is that

the Bab considered himself as a mere herald or fore-runner of the

Dispensation which Baha’u’llah was shortly to establish, and was

to him what John the Baptist was to Jesus Christ, is equally devoid

of historic foundation. In his own eyes, as in the eyes of his

followers, Mirza ‘Ali Muhammad inaugurated a new Prophetic cycle,

and brought a new Revelation, the *Bayan*, which abrogated the *Qur’an*

as the *Qur’an* had abrogated the Gospels, and the Gospels the Penta-

teuch. … But it is not true that the Bab regarded himself as a

fore-runner of “Him whom God shall manifest” in any narrower sense

than that in which Moses was the forerunner of Christ, or Christ of

Muhammad, or Muhammad of the Bab.144

Baha’u’llah, however, does acknowledge the Bab’s being a major manifes-

tation, not only in the *Kitab-i-Iqan*, which so exalts the Bab’s dispen-

sation, but also in Baha’u’llah’s later books and tablets written after

his own declaration, in which he sometimes refers to the Bab as his pre-

vious manifestation and he regards the Bab’s *Bayan* as God’s laws to be

followed until his abrogation of them.

It is precisely the Bab’s being a major manifestation which

makes the short Interval between his dispensation and that of Baha’u’llah

such an impenetrable mystery. Baha’u’llah does, however, see the Bab’s

role as being his “Forerunner”145 or “Precursor.”146 But Baha’u’llah

sees the Bab as having a duel role and thus refers to him as “My Previous

Manifestation and Harbinger of My Beauty.”147

The close proximity of Baha’u’llah’s dispensation to the Bab’s

and the more exalted station of Baha’u’llah over the Bab led Baha’is to

begin referring to ‘Ali Muhammad by the first title he assumed (the Bab)---

the title by which he is generally known today--rather than by his later,

higher designations and led them to see in that title a new meaning.

In Shi‘ite thought the *bab* was the station of one who served as

a “channel of grace” between the hidden Imam and his community, but the

Shi‘ites also believed that the hidden, twelfth Imam would one day appear

as the Qa’im, so that one could possibly see in this tern the meaning of

“the Gate” to the coming Qa’im. This possible future reference of the

term allowed ‘Abdul-Baha to interpret its meaning in the following manner:

Now what he intended by the term *Bab* (Gate) was this, that he was

the channel of grace from some great Person still behind the veil

of glory, who was the possessor of countless and boundless perfec-

tions, by whose will he moved, and to the bond of whose love he

clung.149

‘Abdu’l-Baha later remarks that some supposed that the Bab

claimed to be the medium of grace from His Highness the Lord of

the Age (upon him be peace); but afterwards it became known and

evident that his meaning was the Gate-hood [*Babiyyat*] of another

city and the mediumship of the graces of another person whose

qualities and attributes were contained in his books and treatises.150

The Bab later openly professed to be the Qa’im himself, thus

seemingly becoming the very person of whom he had previously declared

to be merely the gate. It is to the Qa’im, or to the hidden Imam in his

future revelation, that the term “Bab” had any future reference. The

Baha’is, however, by referring to ‘Ali Muhammad by his first title, the

Bab, and by emphasizing the title’s future reference and connecting it

with the Bab’s prominent doctrine concerning the future manifestation,

“He whom God shall manifest,” were able to shift the reference from the

coming Qa’im, whom the Bab himself later claim[s] to be, to the coming mani-

festation. Thus, for Baha’is the term “Bab” took on the meaning of “gate-

way” to Baha’u’llah. Ferraby writes:

He was indeed a Gate, but not to a hidden Imam; He was the Gate to

the new age, to the Baha’i era, the Gate to the Promise of All Ages,

the Gate to the Glory of God, Baha’u’llah.151

In considering Baha’u’llah as the religion’s new central focus,

a question emerges of whether or not Baha’u’llah claimed to be God. The

*Hasht Bihisht* charges that Baha’u’llah claimed “to be, not only ‘He whom

God shall manifest,’ but an Incarnation of the Deity Himself.”152 This

is a rather strange charge, for the Bab had already explained that a mani-

festation has two stations, identity with and distinction from God. But

J. R. Richards holds that Baha’u’llah never claimed to be God:

Whilst there is such in his writings which would at first

seem to justify the belief that Baha’u’llah did claim to be God,

a careful study serves to show that he did not actually make any

such claim. It is a mistake to take the sayings of Baha’u’llah

out of their setting, and to interpret them literally. It should

also be borne in mind that there is a vast difference between

Western thought, with its background of Christian teaching, and

Eastern thought, with an Islamic background, and Christian ideas

should never be read into words of Baha’u’llah.153

Again, Richards holds that Baha’u’llah’s “followers did come to regard

Baha’u’llah as God, but their belief was based on a wrong interpretation

of the claims he made.”154

Some passages in Baha’u’llah’s writings would seem to bear out

Richards’ interpretation. In responding to the attribution of divinity

to himself, Baha’u’llah explains: This station is the station in which

one dieth to himself and liveth in God. Divinity, whenever I mention it,

indicateth My complete and absolute self-effacement.”155 Again, Baha’u’-

llah says:

Certain ones among you have said: “He it is Who hath laid claim

to be God.” By God! This is a gross calumny. I am but a servant

of God Who hath believed in Him and in His signs, and in His Pro-

phets and in His angels.156

Certainly, Baha’u’llah does not claim to be an incarnation of God in the

Christian sense. Baha’u’llah emphatically declares, “Know thou of a

certainty that the Unseen can in no wise incarnate His essence and reveal

it unto men.”157 In Babi-Baha’i thought, the manifestations are “mirrors”

of God; they are essentially distinct from God, yet God reveals his attri-

butes in them. Baha’u’llah says:

The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His image,

and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory. … By the

revelation of these Gems of Divine virtue all the names and attri-

butes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion,

mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty, and grace, are made manifest.158

God could never be known were it not for his manifestations,

He Who is everlastingly hidden from the eyes of men can never be

known except through His Manifestation, and His Manifestation can

adduce no great proof of the truth of His Mission than the proof

of His own Person.159

God, Baha’u’llah says, has ordained the knowledge of his manifestations

to be identical with knowledge of himself:

Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to

their call, hath hearkened to the Voice of God, and whoso testi-

fieth to the truth of their Revelation, hath testified to

the truth of God Himself. Whoso turneth away from them, hath

turned away from God, and whoso disbelieveth in them, hath di-

believed in God.160

In this sense, the manifestation, though essentially distinct from God

and in no sense an incarnation of God, say be spoken of as God. “These

manifestations of God have each a twofold station.”161 One is the

station of unity with God, inasmuch as they reflect God, and one the

station of distinction from God.

Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare:

“I am God,” He, verily, speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth

thereto. … And were they to say, “We are the Servants of God,”

this also is a manifest and indisputable fact.162

By virtue of this station they have claimed for themselves the

Voice of Divinity and the like, whilst by virtue of their station of

Messengership, they have declared themselves the Messengers of God.163

Richards, therefore, is correct in saying that Baha’u’llah did not claim

to be God in the Christian sense of an incarnational Christology; but he

is wrong if he disallows any sense in which Baha’u’llah claimed to be

God, for Baha’u’llah clearly claimed, in the Babi-Baha’i understanding, to

be God.

As Jesus is called the “Son of God,” Baha’u’llah claims to be

“the father.” “He Who is the Father is come,” Baha’u’llah declares.164

Baha’is understand the Christian teaching that Christ will come again

in “the glory of his Father” (Mark 8:38) as referring to the coming of

Baha’u’llah (“the Glory of God”). When Edward G. Browne first heard

this teaching from the Baha’is in Shiraz, he was astonished, wondering

if the Baha’is meant to equate Baha’u’llah with God Himself.165 This

does not appear to be the meaning, however, for the manifestations are

not identified with the Essence of God. The term as applied to Baha’u’llah

does mean that Baha’u’llah stands in a superior relation to previous

manifestations, not that he is innately superior, for the manifestations

are all the same inasmuch as they reflect the same God, but the intensity

or fuller measure of Baha’u’llah’s revelation, coming as it does at the

stage of man’s maturity, renders his station superior.

In some passages, Baha’u’llah seems to propose a finality for

his revelation:

It is evident that every age in which a Manifestation of God

hath lived is divinely ordained, and may, in a sense, be characterized

as God’s appointed Day. This Day, however, is unique, and is to be

distinguished from those that have preceded it. The designation

“Seal of the Prophets” fully revealeth its high station. The Pro-

phetic Cycle hath, verily, ended. The Eternal Truth is now come.

He hath lifted up the Ensign of Power, and is now shedding upon

the world the unclouded splendor of His Revelation.166

The expression “Seal of the Prophets” is used by Muslims to mean that

Muhammad was the last of the prophets. Baha’u’llah here applies this

term to his own revelation. Elsewhere, Baha’u’llah writes:

In this most mighty Revelation all the Dispensations of the past

have attained their highest and final consummation. Whoso layeth

claim to a Revelation after Him, such a man is assuredly a lying

impostor.167

The Bab, however, had indicated that there would be other manifestations

to follow “Him whom God shall manifest” (*Bayan* IX, 9). Baha’u’llah

declares, however, that another manifestation will not appear for

1,000 years: “Who layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God, ere the

expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying im-

postor.”168 Baha’is believe the manifestations to come after Baha’u’llah

will be, however, in the shadow of Baha’u’llah,169 meaning that their

revelations will not be as resplendent.

The Bab’s basic teaching concerning God and God’s revelation

through the successive manifestations is fully incorporated into Baha’u’-

llah’s teaching, as well as other Babi concepts. The important difference

is that Baha’u’llah, in claiming to be the greater manifestation foretold

by the Bab, shifted the Babi loyalty from the Bab as God’s spokesman of

the age to himself and substituted for the Bab’s *Bayan* his own holy book,

the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*.

The New Emphasis on Spiritual Conquests

Another aspect of Baha’u’llah’s transformation was the redi-

recting of Babi aspirations from military to spiritual conquests. Since

the Babi episodes with the shah’s troops, which had convulsed Persia for

several years, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Persians (Babi and

non-Babi), and the later open attempt to assassinate the shah by confessed

members of the Babi religion, the Babi movement had gained the reputation

of being an enemy to the government and aiming at its overthrow, thus sub-

jecting the movement to severe persecution and political suspicion.

Baha’u’llah determined to counter and reduce both the persecution and the poli-

tical suspicion by (1) explaining the reason behind the Babis’ military

exploits, (2) by setting forth the spiritual concerns of the Baha’is under

his leadership, (3) and by stressing the Baha’i loyalty to government.

The Babis’ Military Exploits

The primary defense of the Babi uprisings is that the Babis

were ignorant of the Bab’s teachings. Baha’u’llah, in his conciliatory

letter to the Persian shah, as quoted by ‘Abdu’l-Baha, wrote that

“sedition hath never been nor is pleasing to God, and that which certain

ignorant persons formerly wrought was never approved,” for Baha’u’llah

held that it is better to be slain for God’s good pleasure than to slay.170

This position is generally followed by Baha’is. Mirza Abu’l-Fadl explains

the Babis’ military exploits in this manner:

These people who had just embraced the Baha’i religion were for-

merly Babis, and during the time of “Fitrat” (interval between two

prophets or the time between the martyrdom of the Bab and the rise

of Baha’u’llah) they had frequently departed from the limit of modera-

tion, owing to the evil training of different leaders. Thus they

had grown to consider many censurable actions as allowable and justi-

fiable, such as disposing of men’s property and pillaging the

defeated. This latitude and laxity of principle likewise extended

to the conflict and bloodshed permitted by their former religion,

Islam. The Babis generally were ignorant of the ordinances of the

Bab and supposed them to be similar to the doctrines of the Shi‘ites,

which they considered the source of the Babi religion. This ignorance

was due to the fact that the Babis were strictly prohibited by the

Persian rulers from holding intercourse with or visiting the Bab,

while the latter was in prison. Thus they had been deprived of the

opportunity of seeing Him and receiving instructions in His laws and

ordinances. Warfare and pillage were absolutely violations of the

fundamental basis of the Religion of Beha-Ullah, which was established

for the express purpose of spreading universal brotherhood and

humanity.171

Mirza Abu’l-Fadl, in defending the Baha’is in his audience before the

governor of Tihran and Mazandaran and the commander-in-chief of the

Persian army, maintains that the Baha’is ought not to be punished or

persecuted because of the former actions of the Babis, because he holds

that the two religions are distinct:

Although some unseemly actions which proceeded from the Babis at the

outset of the Cause can by no means be denied, nor can they be

excused in any way, yet to arrest the Baha’is for the sins committed

by the Babis is, in fact, the greatest error and oppression upon

the part of the Government. For punishing an innocent one in lieu

of the sinner is far from equity end justice. These unfortunate

ones who are now subjected to the wrath and anger of the great

Prince, have no connection with the Babis, nor are they of the same

religion and creed; nor have they ever seen any of those Babis

who fought against the Government. … Had the Bahais approved

the conduct of the Babis and behaved accordingly they would not

have become subject to their hostility and rancor.172

That the Babis were ignorant of the Bab’s teachings may have some basis

of fact, for the Bab in the *Bayan* had ruled that unbelievers were not to

be killed, that anyone slaying another person was not to be considered

one of the believers (IV, 5).

The intercourse between the Bab and his followers was not as

restricted as is sometimes maintained, however,173 but the swiftness of

events connected with the Bab’s ministry, his imprisonment for much of

the period of his ministry, the dispersion of his believers in various

parts of Persia, and the cataclysmic nature of the events of the latter

part of his ministry were not calculated to render any wide diffusion or

dissemination of his teachings practical.

The Baha’is’ Spiritual Concerns

Baha’u’llah ruled that his followers were not to take up arms

against the government: “Know thou that We have annulled the rule of the

sword, as an aid to Our Cause, and substituted for it the power born of

the utterance of men.”174 “The sword of a virtuous character and upright

conduct,” Baha’u’llah declares, “is sharper than blades of steel.”175

Again, he says:

Beware lest ye shed the blood of any one. Unsheathe the sword of

your tongue from the scabbard of utterance, for therewith, ye can

conquer the citadels of men’s hearts. We have abolished the law

to wage holy war against each other.176

More pointedly, Baha’u’llah declares: “By the assistance of God, the

sharp swords of the Babi community have been returned to the scabbards

through good words and pleasing deeds.”177 The reason Baha’is need

not take up arms, according to Baha’u’llah, is because their mission

is the reconstruction, not the destruction, of the world:

This people need no weapons of destruction, inasmuch as they have

girded themselves to reconstruct the world. Their hosts are the

hosts of goodly deeds, and their arms are the arms of upright con-

duct, and their commander the fear of God.178

In books and tablets, by deeds, and testimony before public officials,

the Baha’is under Baha’u’llah’s leadership attempted to manifest that

the real nature of their movement was concerned with spiritual rather

than military or political interests.

Baha’i Loyalty to the Government

Closely connected with Baha’u’llah’s interest in directing his

followers to spiritual rather than political concerns was his interest

in establishing the character of the religion centering in his person

as being entirely loyal to governmental powers. Baha’u’llah’s teachings,

similar to those of the Apostle Paul in Christianity, stress the right

of those who govern as established by God and the need to render sub-

mission to their authority. Baha’u’llah quotes with approval from Paul’s

Epistle to the Romans that “every soul” is to “be subject to the higher

powers.”179 In the spirit of Paul, Baha’u’llah in his *Kitab-i-‘Ahd* writes:

Kings are the manifestors of God’s power and the source of His

majesty and affluence. Pray ye in their behalf. The government

of the earth has been vouchsafed unto them. But the hearts of men

He decreed unto Himself.180

Elsewhere, Baha’u’llah decrees: “To none is given the right to act in

any manner that would run counter to the considered views of them who are

in authority.”181

New Laws and Teachings

All the writings of Baha’u’llah are accepted by Baha’is as

Scripture, but one small volume, the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* (“Most Holy Book”),

is considered as “the brightest emanation of the mind of Baha’u’llah, as

the Mother Book of His Dispensation, and the Charter of His New World

Order.” This book is Baha’u’llah’s book of laws, corresponding to the

Qur’an, the *Bayan*, and sacred books of previous dispensations. The work

was written in ‘Akka. A reference to the visit of “the king of Austria”

to “the furthest Mosque” (*al-masjid al-aqsa*), an expression used in the

Qur’an (17:1) to denote Jerusalem, is a reference to the Emperor

Francis Joseph’s visit to Jerusalem in 1869. An allusion to Napoleon III

of France who had “returned with great loss to the dust” would bring the

books date to 1873, when Napoleon III died.183 That the work was composed

before the spring of 1888 is known because Edward Browne at that time learned

of its existence and later was given a copy of it.184 A printed edition

with a Russian translation by Captain Tumanski was published at St. Peters-

burg in 1899.185

No English translation of this most important work has yet been

published-by Baha’is, although Shoghi Effendi delineates some of its basic

features,186 and the Baha’is lately have published a codified summary of

its contents. An English translation by non-Baha’is, however, is available,

and the following summary of some of its features is based on that trans-

lation. Shoghi Effendi has indicated that the laws of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*

are “absolutely binding” on Baha’is and Baha’i institutions in both the

East and the West “whenever practicable and not in direct conflict with

the Civil Laws of the land.”187

Provisions of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*

Baha’u’llah abrogates a number of Muslim and Babi laws and

regulations. The Bab had ordained that house furnishings were to be

renewed every nineteen years, but Baha’u’llah says that God will exempt

the one unable to do this. The Bab’s prohibition against travelling to

foreign lands is rescinded. The study of other languages is permitted.

An important abrogation concerns the destruction of books:

God has excused you from what was sent down in *al-Bayan* regarding

the destruction of books. And we have permitted you to read of

the learning (of the Islamic doctors) what is useful to you, but

not that which results in controversy in speech.188

Baha’u’llah reduces the number of daily prayers from five, in Muslim

practice, to only three, in the morning, at noon, and in the late after-

noon. The *qibla* (direction to face when praying) is established as

wherever the manifestation may be. All things previously considered

ceremonially unclean are declared to be clean. Baha’u’llah sanctions

the use of gold and silver vessels, which was forbidden by Muslim law.189

The wearing of silk, forbidden in Islam, is permitted.

Among the laws established by Baha’u’llah for his followers

are the following: Marriage is made obligatory, but Baha’u’llah warns

against having more than two wives, and he declares it better to have

only one. Baha’u’llah goes beyond the Bab’s law concerning marriage,

which required only the consent of the bride and groom, to require also

the consent of the parents. Baha’u’llah follows the Islamic marriage

custom of requiring that a dowry (*mahr*) be paid by the husband to the

wife, fixing the value between nineteen and ninety-fire *mithqals* of

gold for urbanites and the same amount in silver for villagers.190

The dead are to be buried in coffins of crystal, rare stones, or beauti-

ful hard woods, and engraved rings are to be placed on their fingers.

The dead body is to be wrapped in five garments of silk or cotton, but

for those unable to provide five, one is sufficient. Incumbent on every-

one is the writing of a will in which one’s belief in the unity of God

and his manifestation is confessed. Fathers are to educate their sons

and daughters. Worship and fasting are required of every boy and girl

after reaching maturity (age fifteen). Made incumbent upon everyone is

the engaging in some occupation.

As was true with the Bab, Baha’u’llah’s laws extend even to

minute personal matters. Baha’u’llah enjoins his followers concerning the

paring of nails and taking a bath every week in water that covers the body

and in water not previously used by someone else. The pouring of water

over the body rather that getting into water is declared the better

practice. Baha’is are to wash their feet every day in summer and once

every three days in winter.

Baha’u’llah also forbids certain practices. The body of the

dead may not be carried for burial farther than one hour’s distance from

the city. The confession of sins before anyone but God is not permitted.

Prohibited also are the kissing of hands as an act of homage, the mounting

into pulpits, the carrying of arms except in times of necessity, the wor-

ship of anyone but God, begging and giving to beggars, the opposing and

killing of another person, the buying and selling of maid servants and

youths, the overloading of animals with more than they can carry, the

use of opium, and engaging in gambling. Divorce is not permitted until

after a year, allowing time for a possible marital reconciliation.

Baha’u’llah sets out the penalties for certain crimes. The

penalty for killing someone by mistake is payment of 100 *mithqals* of gold.

Adulterers and adulteresses must pay a fine to the House of Justice of nine

*mithqals* of gold. One who burns a house intentionally is to be burned as

punishment and one who kills another intentionally should be killed, but

it is allowable that these only be condemned to perpetual imprisonment.

Thieves are to be punished by banishment and prison. A third offense

requires a sign placed on the forehead so that thieves may be identified

and kept out of “the cities and provinces of God.”191

Baha’u’llah also in the *Aqdas* sets out various requirements

concerning the manner of worship and who may be exempted under certain

circumstances. Also a complicated tax of inheritance is set forth.192

The Emphasis on Unity

Baha’u’llah’s primary emphasis is on the note of unity, the unity

of God, the unity of religion, and the unity of mankind. He saw himself

as the figure predicted in all the sacred Scriptures of past ages who

would usher in mankind’s golden age of peace and unity.

He Who is the Unconditioned is come, in the clouds of light, that

He may quicken all created things with the breezes of His Name,

the Most Merciful, and unify the world, and gather all men around

this Table, which hath been sent down from heaven.193

He attempted to annul through his words all the laws and teachings of

past ages which served only to divide man,194 he urged his followers

to “consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendli-

ness and fellowship,”195 and he saw religion as a mighty force in molding

men together and in thus bringing about the unity of the world.196

Transforming the Babi religion into a religion centering in his own person,

he was thus in a position to make further .modifications, directing his

followers from their more militant past to spiritual conquests, abrogating

past laws and teachings which he felt were hindrances to his broader con-

cerns, and adding his own teachings which were motivated throughout by

a passionate desire to bring harmony and unity to the world. Baha’u’llah

believed that he had created a religion destined to unite mankind in one

universal faith and one world order. But he also saw that religion could

be used to defeat the very purposes for which it existed: “The religion of

God is to create love and unity; do not make it the cause of enmity and

discord.”197

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1 Edward G. Browne, “Bab, Babis,” *Encyclopaedia of Religion*

*and Ethics*, ed. by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons,

1955), II, 301.

2 Lady Blomfield (Sitarih Khanum), *The Chosen Highway* (Wilmette,

Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1967), p. 50.

3 John Ferraby, *All Things Made New* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i

Publishing Trust, 1960), p. 215.

4 H. M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Baha’i Faith*

(London: George Ronald, 1970), p. 39 (hereinafter referred to as *Browne*).

The quoted words are from Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.:

Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1957), p. 163.

5 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 112.

6 Cf. Browne’s statement that the Bab “had nominated as his

successor” Mirza Yahya (Edward G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*

[3d ed.; A. and C. Black, 1959], p. 226, n. 2 [hereinafter referred to

as *Year*]).

7 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 114.

8 Edward G. Browne, ed. and trans., *A Traveller’s Narrative*

*Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab*, Vol. II; English Transla-

tion and Notes (Cambridge: University Press, 1891), Note W, p. 350

(hereinafter referred to as *Traveller’s Narrative*). See also Edward G.

Browne, ed. and trans., *The Tarikh-i-Jadid* or *New History of Mirza ‘Ali*

*Muhammad the Bab*, by Mirza Husayn of Hamadan (Cambridge: University

Press, 1893), pp. xviii-xix (hereinafter referred to as *New History*), and

Browne, “Bab, Babis,” p. 307.

9 Joseph Arthur Gobineau, *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans*

*l’Asia Centrale* (Paris: Didier et Cie, 1866), p. 277; see Samuel Graham

Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims* (New York: Fleming A. Revell Co., 1915),

p. 184, n. 3.

10 Browne, *Year*, p. 352; see also pp. 366-67.

11 Browne, *New History*, Appendix II, p. 381; see also Edward G.

Browne, ed., *Kitab-i-Kaf, Being the Earliest History of the Babis*

*Compiled by Hajji Mirza Jani of Kashan between the Years A.D. 1850 and 1852*,

edited from the Unique Paris Ms. Suppl. Persan 1071 (Leiden, E. J. Brill,

1910. London: Luzac & Co., 1910), pp. xxxi-xxxii (hereinafter referred

to as *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*).

12 Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, p. xxxii.

13 Browne published both the text and translation of the document

in his article “The Babis of Persia,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic*

*Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, XXI (October, 1889), 996-97. The

English translation also appears in Appendix IV of the *New History*, p. 426.

14 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 39.

15 Edward G. Browne, trans., “Personal Reminiscences of the Babi

Insurrection at Zanjan in 1850, Written in Persian by Aqa ‘Abdu’l-Abad-i-

Zanjani, and Translated into English by Edward G. Browne, M.A., M.R.A.S.,”

*The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*,

XXIX (1897), 763 (hereinafter referred to as “Personal Reminiscences”);

cited by Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 39.

16 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 39, n. 4.

17 Browne, *New History*, Appendix IV, pp. 422-23.

18 See Richard Cavendish, *The Black Arts* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s

Sons, 1967), pp. 117-21.

19 Browne, *New History*, Appendix II, p. 381.

20 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 95, n. 1; see also p. xxiv

and Note W, p. 374.

21 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 51; Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 49.

22 Nabil-i-A‘zam (Muhammad-i-Zarandi), *The Dawn-Breakers, Nabil’s*

*Narrative of the Early Days of the Baha’i Revelation*, trans. by Shoghi

Effendi (London: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1953), p. 55.

23 The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the British

Isles, *The Centenary of a World Faith, The History of the Baha’i Faith*

*and Its Development in the British Isles* (London: Baha’i Publishing Trust,

1944), p. 10.

24 Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, p. xxxiv.

25 Browne, *Year*, p. 352.

26 ibid., pp. 366-67.

27 ibid., p. 345.

28 Browne, *New History*, Appendix II, pp. 346-47; see also Appendix

II, p. 388 and p. 64, n. 1.

29 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 62.

30 ibid.

31 See Wilson, *Baha’ism and Its Claims*, p. 42.

32 Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 50.

33 *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, trans. by Shoghi

Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1963), p. 90 (herein-

after referred to as *Gleanings*); *Prayers and Meditations by Baha’u’llah*,

comp. and trans. by Shoghi Effendi (London: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1957),

pp. 107, 117, 140.

34 Mirza Abul Fazl, *Hujaj’ul Bahiyyeh* (*the Baha’i Proofs*), trans.

by Ali Kuli Khan (New York: J. W. Pratt Co., 1902), p. 52 (hereinafter

referred to as *Proofs*).

35 ibid., pp. 52-53.

36 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, pp. 101-102.

37 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 98.

38 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 63.

39 Browne, *Year*, p. 226, n. 2.

40 Browne, *New History*, Appendix IV, p. 426.

41 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, pp. 28-29.

42 ibid., p. 90.

43 ibid., p. 164.

44 See above, pp. 175-80.

45 See above, pp. 182-83.

46 Browne, Appendix II, p. 381.

47 Gobineau, *Les Religions*, II, 72-73, cited by William McElwee

Miller, *Baha’ism: Its Origin, History, and Teachings* (New York: Fleming

H. Revell Co., 1931), p. 72.

48 Browne, *New History*, p. xx.

49 ibid., p. xxi.

50 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 63.

51 Browne, *New History*, p. xxii.

52 ibid., Appendix II, p. 380.

53 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 103.

54 Shoghi Effendi identifies him as Sadiq-i-Tabrizi (*God Passes*

*By*, p. 62).

55 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 53, n. 1.

56 ibid., Note T, p. 322.

57 ibid., p. 50.

58 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 62.

59 Ruhiyyih Rabbani, *Prescription for Living* (London: George

Ronald, 1960), p. 161.

60 Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, trans. by Shoghi

Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1962), p. 21; see also

Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, pp. 52-53.

61 Browne, *Year*, p. 111. The “master” whose martyrdom Sadiq was

grieving was, according to Abu’l-Fadl, not the Bab but Sadiq’s master, a

prominent Babi to whom he was devotedly attached (Abu’l-Fadl, *Proofs*,

p. 46).

62 Peter Avery, *Modern Iran* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger,

1965), p. 65.

63 Edward G. Browne, comp., *Materials for the Study of the Babi*

*Religion* (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), pp. 267-71.

64 Abul Fazl, *Proofs*, pp. 50-51; Browne, *New History*, Note W,

p. 376.

65 Ruhiyyih Khanum, *Prescription for Living*, p. 162.

66 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note W., p. 380.

67 ibid., p. 375. According to Mirza Yahya’s own testimony, he

arrived a few days after Baha’u’llah.

68 ibid., p. 355; see also Browne, *New History*, p. xx.

69 Edward G. Browne, “Babiism,” *Religious Systems of the World*

(London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1905), p. 350.

70 Abul Fazl, *Proofs*, p. 51.

71 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note W, p. 358.

72 Browne, *New History*, p. xxi; see above, p. 188.

73 Browne, *Materials*, p. 218. The followers of Dayyan (Mirza

Asadu’llah of Khuy) called themselves Asadiyyun, or Asadis (*Materials*,

p. 219).

74 ibid., p. 227; Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 44.

75 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 120; Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*,

p. 64.

76 David Hofman, *Renewal of Civilization*, Talisman Books (London:

George Ronald, 1960), p. 21.

77 Baha’u’llah, *The Kitab-i-Iqan: The Book of Certitude*, trans.

by Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1960), p. 251.

78 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note W, pp. 356-57.

79 ibid., p. 357, n. 1.

80 ibid., p. 357.

81 Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, p. xxxii; Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 78.

82 Baha’u’llah, *Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 251.

83 Baha’u’llah, *The Book of Ighan*, trans. by Ali Kuli Khan,

assisted by Howard MacNutt (2d ed.; Chicago: Baha’i Publishing Society,

1907), p. 180.

84 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 78.

85 ibid., p. 79.

86 Browne, *New History*, pp. 315-16.

87 ibid., Appendix II, p. 381.

88 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 127.

89 Baha’is date the *Kitab-i-Iqan* as written in 1862. Browne

wrote in the *Traveller’s Narrative* (p. 27, n. 1) that it was written in

Baghdad in A.H. 1278 (A.D. 1861-1862) but in a later article assigns the

date as about 1855-1859 (Browne, “Bab, Babis,” p. 307). J. R. Richards

maintains that the work was written in A.H. 1274 (A.D. 1857-1858) (*The*

*Religion of the Baha’is* [London: Society for Promoting Christian Know-

ledge, 1932. New York: Macmillan Co., 1932], p. 56).

90 Baha’u’llah, *Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 253.

91 ibid., p. 201.

92 ibid., p. 244.

93 ibid., p. 143.

94 ibid., p. 231.

95 ibid., p. 252.

96 ibid., p. 253.

97 Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is*, p. 56; Miller, *Baha’ism*,

p. 78.

98 One such passage is the following: “By God! This Bird of

Heaven, now dwelling upon the dust, can, besides these melodies, utter a

myriad songs, and is able, apart from these utterances, to unfold innumer-

able mysteries. Every single note of its unpronounced utterances is im-

measurably exalted above all that hath already been revealed, and immensely

glorified beyond that which hath streamed from this Pen. Let the future

disclose the hour when the Brides of inner meaning, will, as decreed by

the Will of God, hasten forth, unveiled, out of their mystic mansions, and

manifest themselves in the ancient realm of being” (Baha’u’llah, *Kitab-i-*

*Iqan*, pp. 175-76).

99 Browne, *Materials*, pp. 275-87.

100 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 55, n. 3; Browne, “Bab,

Babis,” p. 302; Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, p. xxxiii. Baha’u’llah was born

in 1817.

101 E. E. Elder and William McE. Miller, trans. and ed., *Al-Kitab*

*Al-Aqdas or The Most Holy Book*, by Mirza Husayn ‘Ali Baha’u’llah, “Oriental

Translation Fund,” New Series Volume XXXVIII (London: Published by the

Royal Asiatic Society and sold by its Agents Luzac & Company, Ltd.,

1961), p. 34 and n. 4 (hereinafter referred to as *Aqdas*).

102 Myron H. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*,

New York & London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, the Knickerbocker Press,

1904), p. 30.

103 Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is*, p. 59, citing *Suratu’l-*

*Haykal* (A.H. 1308), p. 172f.

104 Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 45.

105 ibid., p. 45, n. 2.

106 ibid., p. 58.

107 George Townshend, *Christ and Baha’u’llah* (London: George

Ronald, 1963), p. 77.

108 ibid., p. 78.

109 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 73.

110 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. xvii; Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*,

pp. lxx, xxv-xxvi.

111 Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, pp. xxvii-xxviii; William McElwee

Miller, “The Baha’i Cause Today,” *The Moslem World*, XXX (Oct., 1940), 381.

112 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 55 and n. 3; Shoghi, *God*

*Passes By*, p. 98.

113 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 103.

114 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note W, p. 353; Browne, *New*

*History*, p. 301, n. 4.

115 Browne, *Materials*, p. 117; Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 155.

116 Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 59.

117 Ruhiyyih Rabbani, *Prescription for Living*, p. 173.

118 For the Azali version, see Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*,

Note W, pp. 358-59; for a Baha’i version, see Bahiyyih Khanum’s account

in Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, p. 40. See also Phelps’

reasons for believing the Azali version is a “transparent fabrication”

(p. 42, n. 1) and Wilson’s objections to Phelps’ reasons (*Baha’ism and Its*

*Claims*, pp. 226-27).

119 See *The Proclamation of Baha’u’llah to the Kings and Leaders*

*of the World* (Haifa, Israel: Baha’i World Centre, 1967); William Sears,

*The Prisoner and the Kings* (Toronto, Canada; General Pub. Co., 1971);

Firuz Kazemzadeh, “Baha’u’llah’s Call to the Nations,” *World Order*, II

(Winter, 1967), 10-14; and Shoghi, *God Passes By*, pp. 171-76.

120 See Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims*, p. 76.

121 Horace Holley, *Bahaism: The Modern Social Religion* (New

York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1913), p. 164.

122 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 98.

123 ibid., Note W, p. 360; Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 360.

124 ibid., p. 100n.

125 ibid., p. 102n.

126 ibid., pp. xxxix-xl.

127 Browne, *Year*, pp. 558-61. Browne believes these numbers

exceed the actual number of those involved (*Traveller’s Narrative*, Note W,

p. 370).

128 Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, pp. 73-75.

129 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 34.

130 E. Denison Ross, “Babism,” *Great Religions of the World*

(New York: Harper and Brothers, 1912), p. 209n; Browne, *Traveller’s*

*Narrative*, Note W, p. 370.

131 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note W, p. 370.

132 Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 73; see also Browne, *Traveller’s*

*Narrative*, p. 93, n. 1.

133 Balyuzi, *Browne*, p. 82. The information that ‘Abdu’l-Baha

interceded for the Baha’is involved in the murders was given to Browne

by the Baha’i, Shaykh Ibrahim (Year, p. 561).

134 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 221.

135 Horace Holley, “A Statement of the Purpose and Principles

of the Baha’i Faith,” *Baha’i Year Book*, Vol. I (New York: Baha’i Pub-

lishing Committee, 1916), p. 13.

136 Ruhiyyih, *Prescription for Living*, p. 178.

137 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. xii; see above, p. 117.

138 William Sears, *The Wine of Astonishment*, Talisman Books

(London: George Ronald, 1963), p. 90. The Shah Bahram, the Zoroastrian

Messiah, whom Baha’is identify with Baha’u’llah was to be a descendent

of Hurmuz, the son of the last Sassanian king, Yazdagird III (d. 651 A.D.),

whose rule was brought to a close by the Muslin invasions of Persia (Browne,

*Year*, p. 484).

139 Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, pp. xxiv-xxv;

see also Browne, “Bab, Babis,” p. 303.

140 Browne, *New History*, pp. xxiv-xxv.

141 Samuel Graham Wilson, *Modern Movements among Moslems* (New

York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1916), p. 124.

142 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 92.

143 Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 72 and n. 1.

144 Browne, *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, pp. xxiv-xxv.

145 Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 141, 142, 158.

146 *Baha’i World Faith: Selected Writings of Baha’u’llah and*

*‘Abdu’l-Baha* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust,1956), p. 202, here-

inafter referred to as *Baha’i World Faith*).

147 *Gleanings*, pp. 244-45.

148 W. M. Miller, however, in his new book favors the view that

the Bab did not use the term with the traditional Shi‘íte meaning.

149 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 3.

150 ibid., p. 3.

151 Ferraby, *All Things Made New*, p. 202.

152 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, Note W, p. 359.

153 Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is*, p. 81.

154 ibid., p. 82.

155 Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 41.

156 *Gleanings*, p. 228.

157 ibid., p. 49.

158 ibid., pp. 47-48.

159 ibid., p. 49.

160 ibid., p. 50.

161 *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 21.

162 ibid., p. 24.

163 ibid., p. 25.

164 Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 57.

165 Browne, *Year*, p. 340.

166 *Gleanings*, p. 60.

167 ibid., p. 224.

168 ibid., p. 346.

169 Ferraby, *All Things Made New*, p. 304.

170 Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, p. 115. See also ‘Abdu’l-

Baha’s comments in the *Traveller’s Narrative*, pp. 35, 65.

171 Abul Fazl, *Proofs*, p. 63.

172 ibid., pp. 77-78. Abu’l-Fadl apparently means by the “Babis”

in this last sentence the supporters of Subh-i-Azal; cf. Balyuzi, *Browne*,

p. 26.

173 Ruhiyyih Khanum, widow of Shoghi Effendi, indicates that at

Mah-Ku the Bab was allowed walks and that pilgrims “from the corners of

the land” were “freely permitted to enter his presence.” She further

refers to how the Bab in Chihriq was “at first rigorously confined” but

how he gradually won over many who oppressed him, and the official in

charge “would in spite of emphatic instructions he had received, deny no

one access to the Bab, for whom he had conceived a deep attachment; on the

contrary, large assemblies of pilgrims, seekers and local inhabitants

would be permitted to gather, and to hear, spellbound, His public discourses”

(Ruhiyyih, *Prescription for Living*, pp. 141-44).

174 *Gleanings*, p. 303.

175 Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 29.

176 ibid., p. 25.

177 *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 173.

178 Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 74.

179 ibid., p. 91.

180 *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 209.

181 *Gleanings*, p. 241.

182 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 213.

183 Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 48, n. 2. Shoghi Effendi says

that the mark was “revealed soon after Baha’u’llah had been transferred

to the house of ‘Udi Khammar” about 1873 (*God Passes By*, p. 213).

184 Browne, *Year*, pp. 328, 344.

185 Browne, “Bab, Babis,” p. 307.

185 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, pp. 213-16.

187 See *The Baha’i World: A Biennial International Record*, Vol.

VI (New York: Baha’i Publishing Committee, 1937), p. 71.

188 Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 45.

189 ibid., p. 37 and n. 2.

190 “A *mithqal* is approximately five grammes or one-seventh of

an ounce” (Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 38, n. 1).

191 Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 37.

192 ibid., pp. 24-31. See also Shoghi Effendi’s summary of the

Aqdas (*God Passes By*, pp. 213-16).

193 Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 46.

194 ibid., pp. 33-34; *Gleanings*, p. 95.

195 *Gleanings*, p, 95.

196 *Baha’i World Faith*, pp. 180-98, 201; Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to*

*the Son of the Wolf*, p. 28.

197 *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 209.

**CHAPTER V**

**‘ABDU’L-BAHA AND THE PREROGATIVES OF**

**“THE SERVANT”**

Baha’u’llah before his “ascension” provided that his eldest

son would become his successor in the leadership of the Baha’i religion.

He had written in his *Kitab-i-Aqdas* that after his passing the believers

were to turn to “the one who is a Branch from this ancient Root,”1 indica-

ting by the word “Branch” that one of his sons was to succeed him, though

he is here unnamed. In Baha’u’llah’s will, the *Kitab-i-*‘*Ahd*, however, that

son is identified as “the most great Branch,” a title of ‘Abdu’l-Baha:

God’s Will and Testament enjoins upon the branches, the twigs,

and the kinsfolk, one and all, to gaze unto the most great Branch. Con-

sider what we have revealed in my Book of Aqdas, to wit:

“When the sea of My Presence is exhausted and the Book of Origin

hath reached its end, turn you unto him (‘Abdu’l-Baha) who is desired by

God—he who is issued from this ancient Root.”

The purpose of this sacred verse is the most great Branch. Thus

have we declared the matter as a favor on our part, and we are the gra-

cious, the beneficent!

God hath, verily, decreed the station of the great Branch next

to that of the most great Branch.2

In the translation of the *Kitab-i-*‘*Ahd* as here given, “the most great Branch”

refers to ‘Abdu’l-Baha and “the great Branch” to ‘Ali Muhammad, the eldest

son of another of Baha’u’llah’s wives, yet younger than ‘Abdu’l-Baha.

Another passage in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* reads:

O people of Creation, whenever the dove flies from the forest

of praise and makes for the furthermost hidden goal, then refer what

you did not understand in the Book to the Bough which branches from

the Self-Subsistent Stock.3

Richards renders this passage “refer what you do not know from

the Book to the Branch that springeth forth from this upright Stock” and

says that the

passage is ambiguous, for whilst it can be read to mean that ‘Abdu’l-

Baha has the right of interpreting the book, it can also be read to

mean that all matters not dealt with in the book are to be referred

to him.4

Richards feels that “it is therefore a matter of doubt whether he really

had the right to interpret the ‘Aqdas.’”5

The point of the matter is that Baha’u’llah appointed ‘Abdu’l-

Baha as his successor to whom the believers were to turn for guidance after

his passing, and ‘Abdu’l-Baha, therefore, was in a position to make whatever

decisions or modifications in the religion he considered necessary or expe-

dient. But were there limits to the modifications which ‘Abdu’l-Baha might

legitimately make? Could ‘Abdu’l-Baha overstep the prerogatives which were

his as Baha’u’llah’s appointed successor? The question of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s

prerogatives became the burning issue in the stage of the Baha’i religion’s

development centering in the figure of ‘Abdu’l-Baha.

SKETCH OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHA’S LIFE

Baha’is give the birth of Abbas Effendi (who later took the title

of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, “the Servant of Baha”) as May 23, 1841, the very evening

when the Bab declared his mission.6 Bahiyyih Khanum, ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s sister,

indicates that he was born in Tihran “in the spring of 1844, at midnight

following the day upon which, in the evening, the Bab made his declaration,”

so that he was eight and she was five in August, 1852, when the attempt

was made on the Shah’s life.7 Thorton Chase, a Baha’i, later wrote that

‘Abdu’l-Baha was born “at the very hour while the Bab was uttering in Shiraz

his declaration of the fullness of the times and the coming of the Great

Revealer.”8 Still later, J. E. Esslemont, in his popular introduction to

the Baha’i faith, wrote that “the exact hour” of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s birth “has

not been ascertained,”9 but elsewhere in the volume he gives his birth as

“shortly before midnight on the 23rd May, 1844, in the very same hour in

which the Bab declared His mission.”10 If ‘Abdu’l-Baha was born near mid-

night, then he would not have been born in the very hour when the Bab de-

clared his mission, which is given as two hours and eleven minutes after

sunset. Baha’is seem to have abandoned the view that ‘Abdu’l-Baha was born

in the hour of the Bab’s declaration. The British *Centenary* volume, cele-

bating the Bab’s declaration, gives ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s birth as May 23, 1844,

and points out that “only a few hours earlier, the Bab had revealed His mis-

sion.”11 And the third revised edition (1970) of Esslemont’s *Baha’u’llah and*

*the New Era* changes the words “the very same hour” to “the very same night.”12

According to a list of descendants of Mirza Buzurg of Nur, Baha’u’-

llah’s father, which was sent to Edward Browne by an Azali scribe of Isfahan,

living in Tihran, ‘Abdu’l-Baha was born in A.H. 1259/A.D. 1841. The original

of this list is in the handwriting of a certain Mirza Ibrahim Khan, the son

of the niece of Mirza Buzurg’s daughter, Shah Sultan Khanum, Baha’u’llah’s

half-sister.”

According to this account, ‘Abdu’l-Baha would have been eleven

years old in 1852 when his father was imprisoned. From this time until

the “Young Turk” revolution in 1908, ‘Abdu’l-Baha was subjected to exile

and sometimes imprisonment as was his father until his death in 1892. As

a result of this revolution, all religious and political prisoners held under

the previous regime were released. Shoghi Effendi sees the three years

of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s travels in Egypt, Europe, and America which began in 1910

as marking

a turning point of the utmost significance in the history of the

century. For the first time since the inception of the Faith,

sixty-six years previously, its Head and supreme Representative

burst asunder the shackles which had throughout the ministries of

both the Bab and Baha’u’llah so grievously fettered its freedom.14

In September, 1910, ‘Abdu’l-Baha sailed for Egypt, remaining at Port Said

for about a month, and set out for Europe but was prevented from going

further due to ill health. But on September 4, 1911, ‘Abdu’l-Baha arrived

in London, England, and on September 10 he delivered his first public address

before a Western audience in the City Temple in Holborn. This was the begin-

ning of numerous speaking engagements in Christian churches and before Jewish,

Muslim, and other religious groups.15

From London, ‘Abdu’l-Baha went to Paris, where he stayed for

nine weeks, delivering various addresses as well as short talks each morning

in the salon of his apartment at 4 Avenue de Camoëns.16 He returned to Egypt

in December, 1911, and spent the winter in Ramleh.

According to H. M. Balyuzi, it was suggested to ‘Abdu’l-Baha

that he might travel to the United States in the *Titanic*, which was about

to make her maiden voyage, but ‘Abdu’l-Baha preferred a long sea journey on

a slower boat and so sailed on the *S. S. Cedric* from Alexandria on March

25, 1912, arriving in New York on April 11.17 Just before midnight on April

14, 1912, the *Titanic* on its maiden voyage from Southampton to New York

crashed into an iceberg and sank.

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s historic tour of the United States extended from

April 11 to December 5, 1912. He travelled from the East to the West coast,

visiting such cities as Buffalo. Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Chicago,

Omaha, Denver, Sacramento, and Los Angeles. He delivered more than one

hundred eighty addresses in Christian churches of various denominations,

in Jewish temples and synagogues. on university campuses, in homes, and

before various interest groups.17 One significant event connected with

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s visit to the United States was the dedication of the temple

grounds of the *Mashriqu’l-Adhkar*, “Dawning-place of the Praises of God,”

the Baha’i house of worship in Wilmette, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, on

May 1, 1912. ‘Abdu’l-Baha, himself, laid the foundation stone,18 giving

to the Wilmette temple the distinction of being not only the first Baha’i

temple in the West (hence its designation, “Mother Temple of the West”) but

of being the only Baha’i temple whose foundation stone was laid by ‘Abdu’l-

Baha.

The publicity given to ‘Abdu’l-Baha in newspapers and magazines

proved a great boon for the Baha’i movement, for many were attracted to the

religion through these notices. The glamour of a religious prisoner being

set free and touring the world in the name of world peace was seized upon

by the press. James T. Bixby referred to ‘Abdu’l-Baha in these terms:

As an international ambassador of peace, the first one of the acknow-

ledged primates of a considerable Church to exhibit public and con-

spicuous activity in opposing war, the presence of this head of the

Bahai faith to co-operate to the establishment of “the Most Great

Peace,” and the bringing together of all the nations in harmony,

under treaty agreements, to submit their differences to the judicial

decision of Arbitration Boards is both a notable and a helpful event.19

The *Literary Digest* wrote: “It is not necessary to accept Abbas Effendi as

a veritable prophet, or to fall at his feet in adoration, in order to recog-

nize in him one of the great religious thinkers and teachers of the time.”20

Notice was given to how within a week of his arrival in England,

where ‘Abdu’l-Baha was almost unknown, he delivered an address in the City

Temple, “being introduced by its rector as the leader of one of the most

remarkable religious movements of this or any other age,” and how after his

arrival in the United States similar invitations to speak in churches were

extended to him by various ministers.21 Some Christians were appalled by

the welcome reception given to ‘Abdu’l-Baha during his travel in the United

States. Robert M. Labaree wrote:

The effect of this reception was most unfortunate. It gave

to Abbas Effendi a larger hearing than he ever could have won for

himself, and it created an unwarranted presumption in his favor.22

Ruth White, who authored *Abdul-Baha and the Promised Age* and

other books on the Baha’i movement, was first attracted to Baha’i by a photo-

graph of ‘Abdu’l-Baha appearing in a newspaper. She speaks of the “remarkable

photograph in the paper which a newsboy thrust toward me. It was a photograph

of Abdul Baha, gazing at me with benign serenity and the wisdom of the ages

written on his face.”23 Most of the photographs of ‘Abdu’l-Baha which may

be seen today are from the period of his world travels.

After leaving the United States, ‘Abdu’l-Baha returned to England,

from whence he proceeded to Paris, Stuttgart, Budapest, Vienna, back to

Stuttgart, then to Paris again, back to Egypt, and then returned to Haifa,

Israel, thus concluding his travels on December 5, 1913.24

‘Abdu’l-Baha arrived back in Haifa shortly before the outbreak

of World War I. The war years were a time of literary production for ‘Abdu’l-

Baha. The important Tablets of the Divine Plan were revealed from March 26,

1916, to March 8. 1917.25 During these trying years ‘Abdu’l-Baha also had

certain Baha’i properties cultivated, and the food was used in the relief of

famine. For this latter work, ‘Abdu’l-Baha was knighted by the British

Empire.26

‘Abdu’l-Baha passed away on November 28, 1921. His funeral,

according to Shoghi Effendi, was attended by no less than ten thousand

people from every class, religion, and race in that country. Among those

sending messages of condolence were Winston Churchill, British Secretary

of State for the colonies, Viscount Allenby, the High Commissioner for

Egypt, and General Sir Arthur Money, former Chief Administrator of Palestine.

Behind the coffin walked members of his family, Sir Herbert Samuel, the

British High Commissioner, Sir Ronald Storrs, the Governor of Jerusalem,

Sir Stewart Symes, the Governor of Phoenicia, and various other government

officials and notables representing various religious groups.27

OPPOSITION TO ‘ABDU’L-BAHA’S LEADERSHIP

Baha’u’llah definitely appointed ‘Abdu’l-Baha as his successor,

but Baha’u’llah also had indicated that no new manifestation would appear

for 1,000 years. What, then, were ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s legitimate rights? To

what extent could he exercise his rights as Baha’u’llah’s appointed succes-

sor without appropriating to himself the prerogatives of an independent

manifestation? This issue divided Baha’u’llah’s family into two opposing

factions, with ‘Abdu’l-Baha at the head of one, and his half-brother, Muham-

mad ‘Ali, at the head of the other. Almost all of Baha’u’llah’s family

ranged themselves against ‘Abdu’l-Baha.28 The issues over which they divided

throw some light on the transformation in the religion effected by ‘Abdu’l-

Baha.

The first occasion for differences between Baha’u’llah’s sons

followed immediately upon Baha’u’llah’s death. Nine days after Baha’u’-

llah’s passing, ‘Abdu’l-Baha chose nine persons to hear the reading of

Baha’u’llah’s will, one of whom was Mirza Jawad, who reports that ‘Abdu’l-

Baha had concealed a portion of the will with a blue leaf (of paper).

Aqa Riza of Shiraz, at a sign from ‘Abdu’l-Baha, read the will to the place

covered by the blue leaf. ‘Abdu’l-Baha explained: “Verily a portion of

this book is concealed for a good reason, because the time doth not admit

of its full disclosure.” That afternoon, Majdu’d-Din Effendi read it again

to the same place and read no further.29

Mirza Jawad, in cementing on this action, probably expresses

the general feeling of those who began to question ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s rights:

Let it not be hidden from persons of discernment that the

injunctions set forth in the above-mentioned book all refer to this

community generally; how then could it be right for Abbas Efendi to

disclose what he wished and conceal a portion thereof? For there is

no doubt that if what was so concealed had not been suitable [for

general publication] His holiness Baha’u’llah would not have written

it in His august writings.30

The most serious charge against ‘Abdul-Baha was that he “adop-

ted the position of originality,”31 meaning that he claimed to be the

“bearer of a new Revelation.”32 This charge seems to have been based not

on any explicit claim by ‘Abdul-Baha but on an interpretation of certain

of his sayings, such as: “The Dispensation in its entirety hath reverted

to this visible place [to ‘Abdul-Baha] and it is not [permissible] for

anyone to stir save after his permission.”33

The position ‘Abdul-Baha seems to have taken is that he, as

the living interpreter of Baha’u’llah’s words, held the exclusive right

of giving a final judgment of their meaning. The matter of interpretation,

therefore, was not left to private judgment by Baha’u’llah’s followers. The

“unitarians” (as the followers of Muhammad ‘Ali called themselves) represented

a kind of Protestant “back to the Bible” movement, however, for they placed

ultimate authority in Baha’u’llah’s written words. In support of their

position, they pointed to the verse in the *Aqdas*: “If you differ on a matter,

bring it back to God while the sun shines from the horizon of this heaven.

Whenever it sets [when Baha’u’llah dies], go back to that which was sent down

from Him [his writings].”34 The unitarians, therefore, attempted to arrange

a meeting between themselves and ‘Abdu’l-Baha to work out their differences

by referring their questions to Baha’u’llah’s writings, but ‘Abdu’l-Baha

refused to respond to this arrangement.

The problem was this: if ‘Abdu’l-Baha, or any future head of

the religion, could be called into question over whether or not his actions

or teachings were in accord with Baha’u’llah’s writings, then his authority

would always be subject to the decision reached by representatives from the

differing factions and he could never guarantee the unity of the faith by

his own final decision; if, however, ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s actions, decisions,

and teachings were subject to no restrictions, then he was free to make

whatever modifications or additions to the religion he might desire to make.

Baha’is generally have given unquestioned loyalty to each appointed succes-

sor, seemingly never allowing the possibility that one might exceed his

proper authority as an appointed head.

The issues between the unitarians and ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s followers

was further aggravated by the overzealous desire of some Baha’is to

identify ‘Abdu’l-Baha with the returned Christ and to place him in the

same category with the Bab and Baha’u’llah. Ruhiyyih Khanum refers to

“the unfounded but over-enthusiastic claims of some of the Baha’is that

He too partook of the Prophetic powers shared by the Bab and Baha’u’llah.”35

This identification was largely due to the teaching of Ibrahim

George Khayru’llah, a Christian Arab who had been converted to the Baha’i

religion during the lifetime of Baha’u’llah (in 1890). He arrived in New

York in December, 1892, leaving there in July, 1893, for Michigan, and moved

to Chicago in February, 1894, which became the center of his activities in

teaching the new faith.36 Within a two-year period, Khayru’llah won some

2,000 Americans to Baha’i, 700 in Chicago alone.37 Many of the outstanding

early Baha’is in the United States were won through the efforts of Khayru’-

llah. Khayru’llah, however, did not teach pure Baha’i but added teachings of

his own. He taught that God did not manifest himself through the personality

of Baha’u’llah, as with Jesus, but that Baha’u’llah was actually God him-

self. Abbas Effendi (‘Abdu’l-Baha), Khayru’llah maintained, was the rein-

carnation of Jesus Christ.38 This teaching was possibly construed from the

Baha’i teaching that Baha’u’llah is “the Father,” and ‘Abdu’l-Baha, being

the son of Baha’u’llah, would be thus the son of God, or a return of the

station of Jesus Christ. Helping to complicate matters was the title given

to ‘Abdu’l-Baha by Baha’u’llah of *aqa*, generally treated into English as

“Master,” a word used by Christians in reference to Christ. *Aqa*, however, is

the Persian equivalent of “‘mister” or “sir.”39

The equating of ‘Abdu’l-Baha with Christ and the manifestations

may be seen in these statements: Florian King said to ‘Abdu’l-Baha: “To me

Thou art Baha’u’llah, Thou art Muhammad, Thou art Jesus, Thou art Moses,

Thou art Buddha.” When she asked if she light kiss his hand (an act for-

bidden by Baha’u’llah), ‘Abdu’l-Baha replied: “No, my daughter, it is not

permitted; the personality is not to be worshipped; the Light it is which is

of importance, not the lamp through which it shines.”40

Mirza Valiyyu’llah Khan Varqa, son of the martyred poet, Varqa

records how one night Baha’u’llah said to Varqa: “At stated periods souls

are sent to earth by the Mighty God with what we call ‘the Power of the Great

Ether.’ And they who possess this power can do anything; they have all Power.”

Then says Mirza Valiyyu’llah Khan Varqa:

Jesus Christ had this Power.

The people thought of Him as a poor young man, Whom they had

crucified; but He possessed the Power of the Great Ether, therefore He

could not remain underground. This ethereal Power arose and quickened

the world. And now look to the Master, for this Power is His.41

A. P. Dodge understood the biblical prophecies concerning “the Son of Man”

to refer to ‘Abdu’l-Baha.42 Isabella D. Brittingham, on pilgrimage to ‘Akka,

spoke of ‘Abdu’l-Baha:

I have seen the King in his beauty, the Master is here and we need

not look for another. This is the return of the Lion of the tribe

of Judah, of the Lamb that once was slain; … the Glory of God and the

Glory of the Lamb.”43

Horace Holley, in his volume *Baha’i: The Spirit of the Age*, advanced the

idea of a “Cosmic Trinity” of love, will, and knowledge being manifested,

respectively in the Bab, Baha’u’llah, and ‘Abdu’l-Baha. He sees these

“three Manifestations of God”44 existing on a cosmic or spiritual plane

above the merely human, and by coming into the human plane they are able

to lift man to higher levels.45

‘Abdul-Baha, however, repeatedly denied that he was Christ.

To Julia Grundy, an pilgrimage in ‘Akka, ‘Abdu’l-Baha said:

I am nothing but the Servant of God. Some in America are looking

for a ‘third Christ’ or personage [in addition to the Bab and Baha’u’-

llah]. This is only imagination. Some call me Christ. This also

is imagination. … Do they realize that I make no claim for myself.46

Grundy again reports ‘Abdu’l-Baha as saying: “I am only His [God’s] Servant;

nothing more.”47 Constance E. Maud reports:

Some people came to him asking if he were a re-incarnation of the

Christ. He laughed at the question in his kindly wise way. “No, no,

no,” he answered emphatically, “I am not the Christ—I am not even a

prophet—Baha Ullah was a prophet, but I his son am simply this—the

‘servant of God.’ You also,” he added, “must be servants of God.”48

But if ‘Abdu’l-Baha denied being Christ, Baha’is believed, and

still believe, that at least he lived the life of Christ. George Townshend

says that is the story of ‘Abdu’l-Baha the Christian may find

reassurance that the moral precepts of Christ are to be accepted

exactly and in their entirety, that they can be lived out as fully

under modern conditions as under any other, and that the highest

spirituality is quite compatible with sound common sense and prac-

tical wisdom.49

David Hofman writes: “He lived the life of Christ among the people, never

caring for himself but always for them.”50 Thornton Chase maintained:

He, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, has never claimed or acknowledged that He is the

Christ, and has not permitted others to claim it for Him, but He lives

the life of Christ, He fills the Office of Christ, He teaches the

doctrines of Christ. … [He] is saying to us many things of which

Jesus said: ‘I have many things to say unto you, but ye can not bear

these now. But, when He, the Spirit of Truth, shall come, He will

guide you unto all Truth, will reveal all things unto you.’51

The unitarians, therefore, were wrong in saying that ‘Abdu’l-

Baha claimed to be Christ, but that some of his followers in the so-called

“Christian West” did hail him as the return of Christ and that Western

Baha’is still see him as having lived the life of Christ are indubitable

facts. In pure Baha’i teaching, Baha’u’llah, not ‘Abdu’l-Baha, is the

return of Christ. Yet, the veneration thus given to ‘Abdu’l-Baha by

Western converts to Baha’i helped lay the foundation for the transforma-

tion which may be associated with his ministry.

One event in the ‘Abdu’l-Baha-Muhammad ‘Ali controversy which

produced a certain crisis in the early American Baha’i community and which

throws some light on the issue of that controversy was the conversion of

I. G. Khayru’llah to the Muhammad ‘Ali faction. Khayru’llah was desirous

of having the writings of Baha’u’llah that he might examine Baha’i teaching

at first hand and might thereby compare and correct his own teachings. Khay-

ru’llah had requested that ‘Abdu’l-Baha send him such writings but had re-

ceived none. One of the purposes of his journey to ‘Akka in 1898 was to

secure a volume of Baha’u’llah’s writings.51

‘Abdu’l-Baha greeted Khayru’llah with such appellations as “O

Baha’s Peter, O second Columbus, Conqueror of America!” He highly praised

Khayru’llah before the believers for his endeavors in teaching the faith in

America. He bestowed upon him the honor of participating with himself in

laying the foundation stone of the mausoleum of the Bab.

An estrangement, however, developed between Khayru’llah and

‘Abdu’l-Baha. Khayru’llah, when he met with ‘Abdu’l-Baha, would explain

the teachings he presented to the Americans, even translating lengthy

sections of his material and asking ‘Abdu’l-Baha to correct his errors.

‘Abdu’l-Baha, according to Mirza Jawad’s account, declared Khayru’llah’s

teachings to be correct, and when differences occurred between Khayru’llah’s

and ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s teachings, ‘Abdu’l-Baha affirmed that the matter had two

meanings, one spiritual and one material. Khayru’llah pressed matters,

however, to the point where an open disagreement between the two became

apparent on the question of whether God’s essence is limited by his

essence. Khayru’llah argued that it was, and ‘Abdu’l-Baha declared him

to be in error. Khayru’llah further tried unsuccessfully to obtain from

‘Abdu’l-Baha the books printed in India by command of Baha’u’llah. Khayru’

llah, however, obtained the books in Egypt on his return to the United

States. Further, ‘Abdu’l-Baha had tried to keep Khayru’llah from meeting

with Muhammad ‘Ali and the members of the family who opposed ‘Abdu’l-Baha,

when Khayru’llah returned to the States, he compared Baha’u’llah’s teachings

with those of ‘Abdu’l-Baha and renounced ‘Abdu’l-Baha in favor of Muhammad

‘Ali. This conversion resulted in a split within the American Baha’i

community, with some three hundred believers in Chicago and Kenosha following

him in renouncing ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s leadership as well as a small number in the

various cities where Baha’is were located. The majority, however, remained

faithful to ‘Abdu’l-Baha.33

Copies of two letters from Muhammad ‘Ali and Badi‘u’llah, dated

March 31, 1901, in the holdings of Union Theological Seminary, New York,

give evidence of a correspondence between Muhammad ‘Ali and his sup-

porters who apparently had recently organized themselves. The copies do not

indicate the location of the recipients. One letter is addressed to “the

president of The House of Justice” who had “embraced the faith five years

ago through the mercy of Almighty God and the efforts of your efficient

director, Dr. Kheiralla,” thanking him for his “esteemed letter which

expressed unto us your sincere love and earnest desire to spread the lights

of Truth.” “Your Behaist Society,” the writers indicate,

is undoubtedly the first one which was famed in the civilized United

States, and it shall have priority over all other Societies which may

be formed hereafter, for all preeminence belongs to the pioneers, even

though others should excel them in organization.

Mention is made of certain “texts” which had already been sent and of others

which would be sent which would explain “the Day of the Lord” and would

“keep steadfast His Children in elevating His Sacred Word.” One paragraph

mentions the existing dissension among the Baha’is:

As regards the dissensions existing in these days we can only

say that it results from lack of obedience to the Commands of God, and

from going out from the shadow of His Sacred Word and from not under-

standing its true meaning. If all were to return to the true utterances

of God as they are commanded to do, the dissension will no doubt cease,

harmony will prevail and the lights of the Word will shine brightly far

and wide.

This statement confirms the basic position of Muhammad ‘Ali’s followers that

differences are to be settled by recourse to Baha’u’llah’s writings. Mention

is then made of the eagerness expressed to pursue these writings:

We do not doubt that you are eager to read the traces of the

Sublime Pen as is disclosed in your letter, and we shall whenever op-

portunity permits send you many of them, but we are waiting until you

are enabled to have an efficient translator (as you say) who would be

able to translate both from the Persian and the Arabic into your native

tongues.

The other of the two letters is written in reply to a letter

from “the Society of Behaists” and is addressed to “ye members of the Com-

mittee formed in the Name of the Everlasting Father, and who are straining

your efforts in spreading the light of His Word and are enlightened by the

light of His Truth and Wisdom.” “We are glad to know,” the writers men-

tion, “that you have formed a council in the name of Beha according to the

commandments of our Lord, and that you bane legally organized it.”

The writers evidently regard the members of the committee

as “the House of Justice,” for they quote the words: “Oh men of Justice,

be ye good shepherds to the sheep of God in His Kingdom, guard them from

the wolves which disguise themselves as much as ye would guard your own

children: thus are ye advised by the faithful adviser.” One paragraph

refers to Khayru’llah’s efforts to obtain Baha’u’llah’s writings from

‘Abdu’l-Baha:

You say that you have sought for some texts from the sublime

Pen and that your instructor, Dr. Kheiralla, wrote to Abbas Effendi

several times, asking for these, but was not answered and was only

told to follow the commands of the Greatest branch and to do this

without investigation. No doubt the sacred texts were descended to

direct the people in the straight path and to refine their manners

and if their promulgation should be stopped the intended results for

which the texts descended will not take place. Therefore all must

spread the odours of the texts so that the world should be directed

and enlightened.

These words also confirm Mirza Jawad’s account that Khayru’llah was unsuccess-

ful in obtaining from ‘Abdu’l-Baha the writings of Baha’u’llah. The next

paragraph reveals Muhammad ‘Ali’s and Baha’u’llah’s belief that one could

not exercise “independent investigation of the truth” without having recourse

to Baha’u’llah’s writings:

No wise man will follow another without investigation for man

was created to acquire knowledge and is given the eyes of understanding

to see everything by them. If we cannot see the rose and witness its

coloring how can we judge that it is a fine flower which diffuses a

sweet odor. Thus we cannot come to a knowledge of the Father without

consideration and without looking into the traces of the might and the

wondrous wisdom. Such great truths should not be adopted by tradition.

The function of the instructor is to guide and show the traces and dis-

solve the mysteries so that the understanding of the neophyte should be

enlightened and he be able to understand the utterances of God.

All the confusions existing at present have resulted from

following others without confirmation or investigation. Verily he

who meditates on the traces of the Lord and weighs everything by the

scale of understanding cannot follow vain superstitions, but will

rather rid himself of them and thus keep firm in serving the most

merciful Father.

Badi‘u’llah, the younger full brother of Muhammad ‘Ali, in the

spring of 1903 renounced his allegiance to Muhammad ‘Ali and gave his

support to ‘Abdu’l-Baha, publishing a tract in Persian to this effect.55

‘ABDU’L-BAHA’S TRANSFORMATION

All interpreters may not agree on the extent to which ‘Abdu’l-

Baha effected a transformation within the Baha’i religion. J. R. Richards

holds that “the official teachings of the sect” underwent “a complete

transformation” under ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s leadership.56 Richards refuses to

identify Western Baha’i, shaped largely by the personality and teachings

of ‘Abdu’l-Baha and bearing a distinct Christian influence, as pure Baha’i.

‘Abdu’l-Baha did not transform the faith into a new religion with a new

name, as Baha’u’llah had done with the Babi religion, but the faith under

‘Abdu’l-Baha took on a distinctly new appearance. The religion as trans-

formed by ‘Abdu’l-Baha may be regarded as Baha’i, but it represents a new

stage in the evolving faith. The transformation effected by ‘Abdu’l-Baha

will be discussed under three headings.

The Station of ‘Abdu’l-Baha

‘Abdu’l-Baha gave to the religion another focal point to be added

to that of Baha’u’llah. Today, in Baha’i homes, temples, and literature,

one will encounter various photographs of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, so such so that one

might gather that ‘Abdu’l-Baha, not Baha’u’llah, is *the* prophet of the reli-

gion. The reasons for the extensive use of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s photographs are

because only a few photographs of Baha’u’llah were ever taken, the few which

were taken are held especially sacred, and photographs of ‘Abdu’l-Baha

abound, due especially to the publicity accorded to ‘Abdu’l-Baha during

his Western travels.

This physical focus on ‘Abdu’l-Baha by Westerners is symbolic of

a deeper, spiritual focus. Western Baha’is had not seen nor known Baha’u’-

llah personally, but ‘Abdu’l-Baha was a living prophet walking in their

midst. “In him you see an Old Testament patriarch personified,” wrote

E. S. Stevens.57 His simple life and manners and certain of his teachings

reminded many of the pilgrims who made their way to ‘Akka of the life and

teachings of Christ. The high devotion given to ‘Abdu’l-Baha is reflected

in Ruhiyyih Khanum’s words: “To those who never met the Prophet [Baha’u’-

llah] in the flesh, but who knew His son, it seemed impossible that Baha’u’-

llah could have been any greater than ‘Abdu’l-Baha.”58

Out of the tension between the high veneration given to ‘Abdu’l-

Baha by overzealous Baha’is, who saw him as the returned Christ and in a

category with the manifestations, and the explicit Baha’i teaching that no

new manifestation would appear for at least 1,000 years developed a syn-

thesis in which ‘Abdu’l-Baha, while not being officially regarded as a

manifestation, is nonetheless one of “the three central figures of the

faith” along with the Bab and Baha’u’llah. He occupies a station above

the merely human but below the category of a manifestation. Although

not now regarded by Baha’is as the returned Christ, Baha’is nonetheless

revere him as having lived the Christ-life, which is in effect to declare

his life sinless. He is the perfect and ideal Baha’i.

The official teaching regarding ‘Abdu’-Baha’s station was not

formulated until Shoghi Effendi’s ministry, yet the veneration accorded

to ‘Abdu’l-Baha and the position he assumed in the faith which led to

that formulation were properly aspects of the transformation affected

within his ministry.

His Words Regarded as Scripture

As ‘Abdu’l-Baha holds a unique station in the Baha’i religion,

officially not a manifestation but practically holding that office, his

words also hold a unique authority for Baha’is. They are not the words

of a manifestation, yet they have for Baha’is the character of a revela-

tion, and today Baha’is accept his authenticated writings, along with

those of Baha’u’llah, as being Scripture. David Hofman writes: “His

word has the same validity as Baha’u’llah’s own.”59 Horace Holley main-

tains: “The interpretation is one with the message, as the sunlight is

one with the sun.”60 George Townshend writes concerning ‘Abdu’l-Baha:

What strikes many in reading His writings is that they possess a

quality different from that which belongs to any human being. There

is a cadence, a power in them which definitely comes from a higher

world than that in which we live. It is natural, therefore, that

His writings should be spoken of as a Revelation. Yet he was human,

not a Manifestation, and His scripture, though valid, has not the

rank of the Revelation of a full Prophet.61

Richards charges that ‘Abdu’l-Baha thus “is free to explain away the plain

meaning of his father’s words.”62 Baha’is would not allow for such a

dichotomy of meaning in the teachings, but ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s words are as

important, or more important, than Baha’u’llah’s in establishing teachings

of the faith, for although Baha’u’llah’s words theoretically have a higher

status—being the words of a manifestation—Baha’is are obliged to follow

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s interpretation. Thus, when the meaning of Baha’u’llah’s

and ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s teachings seem to differ, the believer must subscribe

to ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s interpretation rather than follow his own personal

judgment in understanding Baha’u’llah’s meaning. The authority of ‘Abdu’l-

Baha’s interpretation is intended to prevent schism which might result from

conflicting personal interpretations by Baha’is, but the result is that

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s words for all practical purposes carry more force than do

Baha’u’llah’s own, since the believer may not advance a personal interpre-

tation of Baha’u’llah’s words which might differ from ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s inter-

pretation.

‘Abdu’l-Baha, therefore, is in a position to make certain modi-

fications and additions to Baha’u’llah’s teachings in authoritatively defin-

ing Baha’i doctrine. For example, although Baha’u’llah had forbidden the

practice of congregational prayer except at funerals, ‘Abdu’l-Baha allowed

the chanting of prayers among the assembled believers until all had gathered

for the Sunday meetings.63 Baha’u’llah identified the manifestations as

Noah, Hud,64 Salih,65 Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and the Bab.66 ‘Abdu’l-

Baha dropped from his lists Hud and Salih and added Zoroaster and Buddha67

and at times seems also to have added Confucius.68 Some confusion exists

among Baha’is today concerning which religions were founded by mani-

festations of God. According to one list, the nine revealed religions are

the Sabaean religion, Hinduism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christiani-

ty, Islam, the Babi religion, and Baha’i.69 Hugh E. Chance, however, lists

the nine recognized religions as Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Confu-

cianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha’i Faith.70

Teachings Adapted to the West

‘Abdu’l-Baha was increasingly in contact with persons in the

West. Many of the pilgrims making their way to ‘Akka were from the West

and had a Christian background, Their questions often involved Christian

or biblical subjects. The audiences to which ‘Abdu’l-Baha spoke in Europe

and America were composed of persons oriented by a Western scientific and

Christian outlook. ‘Abdu’l-Baha, accordingly, adapted his message to his

Western hearers.

Exposition of Biblical Subjects

Baha’u’llah, in the Baha’i understanding, appointed ‘Abdu’l-

Baha as the interpreter of his teachings, but ‘Abdu’l-Baha, by his contact

with the West was also expected to be an authority on numerous subjects

not covered in Baha’u’llah’s teachings. Notable among such subjects were

those involving Christian or biblical topics. Baha’is accept ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s

pronouncements on these subjects as being as authoritative as his interpreta-

tions of Baha’u’llah’s teachings.

‘Abdu’l-Baha regards the story of Adam and Eve as a symbol.

Adam signifies Adam’s spirit and Eve his soul. The tree of good and evil

represents the human world and the serpent signifies attachment to the

human world. On the question of original sin, ‘Abdu’l-Baha in one place

speaks of the sin “which has been transmitted from Adam to his posterity”71

but elsewhere he rejects this view:

The mass of the Christians believe that as Adam ate of the forbidden

tree, he sinned in that he disobeyed, and that the disastrous conse-

quences of this disobedience have been transmitted as a heritage, and

have remained among his descendants. Hence Adam became the cause of

the death of humanity. This explanation is unreasonable and evidently

wrong; for it means that all men, even the Prophets and the Messengers

of God, without committing any sin or fault, but simply because they

are the posterity of Adam, have become without reason guilty sinners,

and until the day of the sacrifice of Christ were held captive in hell

in painful torment.72

Christ’s greatness, ‘Abdu’l-Baha maintains, “is not due to the

fact that he did not have a human father, but to his perfections, bounties,

and divine glory.”73 He argues that if Christ is great because he was father-

less, then Adam is greater than Christ, for he had neither father nor mo-

ther.”74

The resurrection of Christ means that “the Reality of Christ,

which signifies his teachings, his bounties, his perfections, and his spiri-

tual power” become “manifest,” his disciples became assured and steadfast,

and so “his religion found life.”75 The Holy Spirit is “the Bounty of God

and the luminous rays which emanate from the Manifestations.” In some pas-

sages the Holy Spirit signifies a certain person.76 The Trinity does not

mean that there are divisions within the Godhead but that “the Sun of Reality,

the Essence of Divinity” reflects itself in the mirrors of Christ and the

Holy Spirit.77 On the question of Satan or evil, ‘Abdu’l-Baha explains

that “the evil spirit, satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to

the lower nature in man,” for “God has never created an evil spirit; all

such ideas and nomenclature are symbols expressing the mere human or earthly

nature of man.”78

That ‘Abdu’l-Baha should contradict himself at times was perhaps

inevitable, since he addressed himself to so many questions on different occa-

sions. He seems to contradict himself on the question of Christ’s attitude

toward war. In explaining Christ’s saying to “put up the sword into the

sheath,” ‘Abdu’l-Baha says: “The meaning is that warfare is forbidden and

abrogated; but consider the Christian wars which took place afterward.”79

But in explaining other words of Christ, ‘Abdu’l-Baha maintains:

What Christ meant by forgiveness and pardon is not that, when nations

attack you, burn your homes, plunder your goods, assault your wives,

children and relatives, and violate your honour, you should be submis-

sive and allow then to perform all their cruelties and oppressions. No,

the words of Christ refer to the conduct of two individuals towards

each other; if one person assaults another, the injured one should

forgive him. But the communities must protect the rights of man.80

Marzieh Gail quotes both of these statements in her small volume on ‘Abdu’l-

Baha, seemingly without noting any contradiction.81

‘Abdu’l-Baha also attempted to give a Christian meaning to

certain Baha’i concepts and practices, as, for example, in the case of the

Baha’i feasts: “The feast (supper) [every nineteen days] is very acceptable

and will finally produce good results. The beloved and the maid-servants of

the Merciful must inaugurate the feast in such wise as to resurrect the feast

of the ancients—namely, the ‘lord’s supper.’”82

Although the Baha’i religion already contained a certain approach

to Christianity, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, by his life and teachings, attempted further

to lessen the distinction between the two religions. ‘Abdu’l-Baha seems to

have accepted the virgin birth of Christ as a “fact,”83 although he stresses

that his greatness is not due to it. Christ had all power and was able to

perform miracles, although ‘Abdu’l-Baha often gives a demythologized inter-

pretation to the miracles:

Wherever in the Holy Books they speak of raising the dead, the meaning

is that the dead were blessed by eternal life; where it is said that

the blind received sight, the signification is that he obtained the

true perception; where it is said that a deaf man received hearing,

the meaning is that he acquired spiritual and heavenly hearing. This

is ascertained from the text of the Gospel where Christ said: “These

are like those of whom Isaiah said, They have eyes and see not, they

have ears and hear not; and I healed them.’84

‘Abdu’l-Baha accepts Christ as divine, as the Son of God, and as the Word

of God.84 Christ’s sacrificial death is accepted: “He perished in body,

so as to quicken others by the spirit.”85 The resurrection of Christ is

affirmed, although ‘Abdu’l-Baha gives an interpretation to it much in the

manner of liberal Christian theology.86 The second coming of Christ is

also affirmed, but for ‘Abdu’l-Baha and other Baha’is Christ returned in

the later manifestations, especially in Baha’u’llah.

At the first coming he came from heaven, though apparently from the

womb; is the same way also, at his second coming, he will come from

heaven, though apparently from the womb.87

The Baha’i Principles

In various public speeches, ‘Abdu’l-Baha delineated the Baha’i

principles, attempting to set forth for his Western hearers the basic fea-

tures of Baha’u’llah’s teachings. Since ‘Abdu’l-Baha was speaking often to

general audiences, he emphasized the social and humanitarian tenets of the

faith. Because of the wide publicity given to ‘Abdu’l-Baha during his

European and American travels, the image of the religion presented in the

press was of a social and humanitarian movement. It is largely because of

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s teachings that the religion is often seen as a social move-

ment.

One may raise the question whether ‘Abdu’l-Baha was actually

drawing upon the teachings of Baha’u’llah for these principles or was reading

Western ideas back into Baha’u’llah’s teachings. Baha’is insist that

Baha’u’llah taught these concepts at a time when they were not even accepted

in the West, and they attribute their acceptance by enlightened persons in

the modern world to energies radiating from Baha’u’llah’s revelation. Wilson,

however, holds that “not one of these is new; not one owes its position

in the world of thought or activity to the Bahai propaganda.”88

What ‘Abdu’l-Baha may be attempting to do is to adapt certain

of Baha’u’llah’s teachings to a Western audience or, in other words, to

translate concepts which find a basis in Baha’u’llah’s teachings into the

terminology and thought forms of Western civilization. However one may

choose to judge the matter, the Baha’i principles as enunciated, elaborated,

and emphasized by ‘Abdu’l-Baha gave to the religion a distinct social color-

ing. Since these principles are set forth today as the basic teaching of

the religion, some comment on certain of the principles is required.

Independent Investigation of the Truth

This principle means basically that each person should exercise

his own power of reason in distinguishing truth from falsehood and not

accept beliefs simply because they were handed down by one’s ancestors. Nor

should one blindly rely upon the opinions of others without making his own

inquiry. “God has not intended man to blindly imitate his fathers and

ancestors. … He must not be an imitator or blind follower of any soul.

He must not rely implicitly upon the opinion of any man without investiga-

tion.”89 The principle means especially for Baha’is that one should investi-

gate the Baha’i religion without being prejudiced by other religious beliefs.

Richards maintains that “independent investigation of truth

never was a principle of Baha’u’llah’s teaching”:

Baha’u’llah claimed to be the infallible interpreter of all Scriptures,

and the infallible teacher of mankind. None has the right to question

his statements, but if he declares water to be wine, the believer must

unhesitatingly accept his statement. In the same way, ‘Abdu’l-Baha

allows no room for independent investigation; whatever he says is true,

and must be accepted by all believers. The true teaching of Baha’ism

does not allow independent investigation, but demands servile submis-

sion and unquestioning acceptance of the doctrine of Baha’u’llah and

‘Abdu’l-Baha.90

Miller, however, points out that “independent investigation of truth was

not a new idea, for the Shi‘ite theologians had long ago maintained that in

matters which concern the fundamentals of religion, personal investigation

(*tahqiq*) is obligatory.”91 Historically, then, it was possible and likely

that the principle would find its way into Baha’u’llah’s teachings.

Baha’u’llah, in fact, opens his *Kitab-i-Iqan* with an appeal for

man to detach himself from all earthly affections and considerations:

Man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious,

can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can

never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine

nearness and favour, unless and until he ceases to regard the words and

deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recog-

nition of God and His Prophets.92

Baha’u’llah proceeds to show how man continuously has opposed God’s prophets

when they have appeared, and his point is that man, if he blindly follows

these opponents of the prophets, who were often the religious leaders of the

day, in their derision and persecution of God’s messengers, then will

never attain the true knowledge of God nor have fellowship with him. Baha’u’-

llah also in his *Hidden Words* writes:

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away

therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide

in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through

the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not

through the knowledge of thy neighbor.93

To ‘Abdu’l-Baha, however, must be given the credit of giving the principle

the prominence which it now holds in the faith.

But the question may be asked as to how the principle can be

reconciled with the Baha’i requirement that complete submission must

be given to the authority of Baha’u’llah and his appointed successors.

Apparently, the principle as it relates to religious matters is more a

principle for non-Baha’is than for Baha’is. One is to exercise indepen-

dent investigation until he finds the truth in Baha’i, and then having

found the truth, he is to give unreserved obedience to the Baha’i laws

and Baha’i administrative authority. Should those in authority decree

that Baha’is are not to road certain literature or associate with certain

persons, they must without question follow such restrictions.

The Oneness of Mankind

The oneness of mankind was definitely one of Baha’u’llah’s

teachings. Arthur Dahl calls this principle the “keynote of Baha’u’llah’s

teachings. Among Baha’u’llah’s often quoted statements on this point are

these: “Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.”94

“The earth is but one country, and mankind its citisens.”95 The ideal of

the oneness of mankind, however, does not exist in practice. Baha’u’llah

saw the purpose of his mission as transforming the ideal into reality:

“We, verily, have come to unite and weld together all that dwell on earth.”96

The unity of mankind is, of course, not a new principle. Both

the Old and New Testament uphold the ideal of man’s basic unity as the

creation of one God. The Apostle Paul declares that God has “made of one

blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts

17:26). The Qur’an maintains that “mankind were one community” but “then

they differed” (10:20), and so God sent prophets with the scripture among

the people to “judge between mankind concerning that wherein they differed”

(2:213), evidently for the purpose of settling those differences.

‘Abdu’l-Baha, in elaborating on the principle, explains that

mankind is divided into various “limited unities,” which have the effect

of dividing man. Man has united himself along the lines of race, language,

nationality, political parties, and other such groups. unity exists within

these groups, but all of these are limited unities and can, therefore, only

produce limited results. Only unlimited unity can produce unlimited result.

Man must, therefore, break loose of these limited unities and learn to live

as one family under one God.97

‘Abdu’l-Baha approved and encouraged interracial marriages, and

Baha’is today take pride in the fact that their membership is composed of

many men and women of many races and they believe their religion is the first

to have broken down, not only in theory but in practice, the wall of separa-

tion between racial groups.

The Essential Harmony of Science and Religion

Richards maintains that it was in France that “the claim was

first made that in the Baha’i religion Science and Religion are reconciled.”

He holds that this view was introduced in France by Hippolyte Dreyfus, a

Jewish convert to Baha’i, to extol Baha’i before the rationalistic French,

who held that science and religion were contrary to one another. Thereafter,

the claim became “one of the main planks in the Baha’i platform.”98

‘Abdu’l-Baha, in stating this principle, however, may be drawing

upon the Babi-Baha’i philosophy that all of mankind’s arts and sciences are

derived from the manifestation’s influence upon his age.99 To the Bab, this

meant that the study of other volumes besides those containing the words of

the manifestation were unnecessary. To Baha’u’llah, the principle seems

to have meant that the arts and sciences were therefore legitimate areas

of study. Baha’u’llah abrogated the Bab’s law concerning the destruction

of books, and his eleventh “glad-tidings” is that to study sciences and

arts of all descriptions is allowable; but such sciences as are profitable,

which lead and conduce to the elevation of mankind.”100 Baha’u’llah

stressed the importance of acquiring knowledge in the sciences:

Knowledge is like unto wings for the being, and is as a ladder for

ascending. To acquire knowledge is incumbent on all, but of those

sciences which may profit the people of the earth, and not such

sciences as begin in mere words, and end in mere words. The posses-

sors of sciences and arts have a great right among the people of the

world.101

Possibly this was the aspect of Baha’u’llah’s teachings which ‘Abdu’l-

Baha formulated into the principle of the “harmony of science and religion”

for his Western audiences. The principle for ‘Abdu’l-Baha means:

Religion must stand the analysis of reason. It must agree

with scientific fact and proof, so that science will sanction religion

and religion fortify science. Both are indissolubly welded and joined

in the reality. If statements and teachings of religion are found to

be unreasonable and contrary to science, they are the outcome of super-

stition and imagination.102

Equality of Men and Women

Marzieh Gail has some basis for charging:

In Judaism, Christianity, Islam, sex equality does not exist.

The Old Testament says (of the man to the woman): “He shall rule over

thee” (*Genesis* 3:18). And the New Testament: “let the woman learn

in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach,

nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (I *Timothy*

2:11-12). “Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the

Lord” (*Ephesians* 5:22). Of men and women the Qur’an, watch how-

ever gives women a higher place than did previous Faiths, says:

“*Men are a degree above them*” (2:228).103

Baha’is believe that their faith gives equality to the sexes. ‘Abdu’l-Baha

affirms that the principle of “the equality of men and women” was among

Baha’u’llah’s teachings. That the Babi and Baha’i movements did accord a

higher status to women than did Islam may readily be acknowledged, although

Browne observes that “their efforts to improve the social position of woman

have been much exaggerated.104

Both the Babi and Baha’i communities accepted the removal of

the veil (covering the face) by their women members in their meetings,

thereby acquiescing to the example of the Babi heroine, Qurratu’l-‘Ayn

(Tahirih). The Baha’i women in Persia, however, continued to wear the veil

in public until the law permitted them to remove it.105 Baha’u’llah made

it incumbent upon fathers to educate both their sons and daughters, but

whether Baha’u’llah taught the full equality of men and women is another

matter. Baha’u’llah allowed a man to take two wives,106 but seems not to

have granted to women a similar right to have two husbands. Baha’u’llah,

himself, had at least two wives, and according to some accounts as many as

four.107

Baha’i quotations setting forth the equality of men and women

are from ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s writings, not Baha’u’llah’s.108 But even ‘Abdu’l-

Baha did not allow women to be members of the “Houses of Justice,” the

administrative bodies in the faith. The “Spiritual Assemblies” were origi-

nally called “Houses of Justice” or “Houses of Spirituality.”109 ‘Abdu’l-

Baha approved of organizing “Houses of Justice” of men and separating the

women into “Assemblies of Teaching.”110 In time these bodies became known

as “Spiritual Assemblies,”111 composed of both men and women, but even today

women are barred from being members of the Universal House of Justice,

the highest administrative body in the Baha’i world.

Universal Peace Upheld by a World Government

Another principle which ‘Abdu’l-Baha claims to find in

Baha’u’llah’s teachings is “universal peace upheld by a world government.”

Baha’is sometimes maintain that “it was Baha’u’llah who first admonished

men to come together and consult for peace, to form an international body

to regulate the affairs of the world, to limit and gradually do away with

armaments.”112 Baha’u’llah was not the first to propose peace and disarma-

ment, for, as Wilson points out, the American Peace Society was formed as

early as 1815 “to promote permanent peace through arbitration and disarma-

ment,”113 and for this purpose world congresses were convened at London

(1843), Brussels (1848), Paris (1849), Frankfort (1850), and London (1851),114

but Baha’u’llah did admonish “the elected representatives of the people in

every land” to take “counsel together” and to let their “concern be only

for that which profiteth mankind, and bettereth the condition thereof.”115

One of Baha’u’llah’s requirements is that in every city a “House

of Justice” be formed, composed of nine or more men, who will act as the

“stewards of the Merciful” and “agents of God for the whole earth.”116

Among the duties of the House of Justice are legislating on topics not

revealed in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*,117 selecting an international language,118

and concerning themselves with matters which benefit mankind.119

‘Abdu’l-Baha maintains that the House of Justice is “endowed

with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and

blending of church and state.”120 He further comments:

A universal or international House of Justice shall also be organized.

Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of

Baha’u’llah, and that which the universal House of Justice ordains

shall be obeyed by all mankind. This international house of Justice

shall be appointed and organized from the Houses of Justice of the

whole world, and all the world shall come under its administration.121

The election of the Universal House of Justice is to be “after the manner of

the customary elections in Western countries such as those of England,” ‘Abdu’l-

Baha specifies.122

Some of the principles enumerated by ‘Abdu’l-Baha are definitely

in the teachings of Baha’u’llah, such as the oneness of mankind. Other of

the principles find some basis in Baha’u’llah’s teachings but have under-

gone some modification in their formulation for a Western and scientifically

oriented audience. ‘Abdu’l-Baha adapted Baha’u’llah’s teaching that certain

sciences are allowable and profitable for study and his requirement to gain

knowledge from the sciences into the principle of the “harmony of science and

religion.” The higher status given to women in the Baha’i religion becomes

for ‘Abdu’l-Baha the full-fledged “equality of men and women.”

Allan Ward, in his study of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s speeches delivered

in the United States, points out that his speeches were adapted to his

audiences. In speaking to the Theosophists, he used “extended and complex

reasoning patterns” but “where the audience represented a lower educational

level, … the reasoning was minimized in favor of simple analogy.”123 A

similar adaptation is at work in all of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s messages in the West.

He emphasized aspects of the faith which would find a more ready hearing in

the West, giving to some teachings a more scientific coloring, presenting the

religion as a more advanced form of Christianity, and minimizing dogmatic

aspects in favor of a social and humanitarian emphasis.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1 E. E. Elder and William Miller, trans. and ed., *Al-Kitab*

*Al-Aqdas or The Most Holy Book*, by Mirza Husayn ‘Ali Baha’u’llah, “Oriental

Translation Fund,” New Series Volume XXXVIII (London: Published by the

Royal Asiatic Society and sold by its Agents Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1961),

p. 56 (hereinafter referred to as *Aqdas*).

2 *Baha’i World Faith: Selected Writings of Baha’u’llah and*

*‘Abdu’l-Baha* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1956), pp. 209-10

hereinafter referred to as *Baha’i World Faith*). Miller points out that

the titles for ‘Abdu’l-Baha (*Ghusn-i-A‘zam*) and Muhammad ‘Ali (*Ghusn-i-Akbar*)

are both superlatives so that an accurate translation would be, respectively,

“the Most Mighty Branch” and “the Most Great Branch” (William McElwee Miller,

*The Baha’i Faith: Its History and Teachings* [South Pasadena, Calif.;

William Carey Library, 1974], pp. 173-74). Browne says that he wrongly

transposed the two titles in his first article on the Babis in the J.R.A.S.,

July, 1889 (Edward G. Browne. *A Year amongst the Persians* [3d ed.; London:

Adam and Charles Black, 1950], p. 368, n. 3), but he seems rather to have

been wrong in giving the titles in *A Year amongst the Persians*.

3 Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 70.

4 J. R. Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is* (London: Society

for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1932), p. 97.

5 ibid.

6 This evening, as noted earlier, would actually be May 22, 1844.

7 Myron H. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi* (New York &

London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, the Knickerbocker Press, 1904), p. 13.

8 Thornton Chase, *The Baha’i Revelation* (New York: Baha’i Pub-

lishing Committee, 1919), p. 59. The Bab’s declaration was two hours and

eleven minutes after sunset.

9 J. E. Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era* (Wilmette, Ill.:

Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1960), p. 19.

10 ibid., p. 64.

11 *The Centenary of a World Faith: The History of the Baha’i*

*Faith and Its Development in the British Isles* (London: Baha’i Publishing

Trust, 1944), p. 28.

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12 J. E. Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era* (3d rev. ed.; New

York: Pyramid Books, 1970), p. 64.

13 Edward G. Browne, comp., *Materials for the Study of the Babi*

*Religion* (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), pp. 319-20.

14 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publish-

ing Trust, 1957), pp. 279-80.

15 For an account of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in London, see *Abdul-Baha in*

*London. Addresses & Notes of Conversations* (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Trust,

1921), Lady Blomfield (Sitarih Khanum), *The Chosen Highway* (Wilmette, Ill.:

Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1967), pp. 147-78, and H. M. Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Baha,*

*The Centre of the Covenant of Baha’u’llah* (London: George Ronald, 1971),

pp. 140-58.

16 For these addresses, see *Paris Talks, Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l*-

*Baha in Paris in 1911-1912* (10th ed.; London: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1961).

This work was first published in 1912 and was published in the United States

under the title *The Wisdom of Abdul-Baha*. For an account of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in

Paris, see also chapter III of Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, pp. 179-87, and

chapter XI of Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Baha*, pp. 159-66.

17 ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s addresses delivered in the United States have

been collected and published in two volumes entitled *The Promulgation*

*of Universal Peace, Discourses by Abdul Baha Abbas during His Visit to the*

*United States in 1912*, Vol. I (Chicago: Executive Board of Bahai Temple Unity,

1921-1922), Vol. II (Chicago: Baha’i Publishing Committee, 1925). See also

Allan Lucius Ward, *An Historical Study of the North American Speaking Tour of*

*‘Abdu’l-Baha and a Rhetorical Analysis of His Address* (Ph.D. dissertation,

Ohio University, 1960), and Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Baha*, chapters XII-XVIII, pp.

171-339.

18 Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Baha*, p. 186, and *The Baha’i Centenary*, 1844-

*1944*, comp, by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United

States and Canada (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Committee, 1944), p. 84.

19 James T. Bixby, “What Is Behaism?” *The North American Review*

Vol. 196, No. DCLXXIX (June, 1912), 833.

20 “Personal Glimpses: A Prophet from the East,” *The Literary*

*Digest*, XLIV (May 4, 1912), 957.

21 “Will Bahaism Unite All Religious Faiths?” *The American Review*

*of Reviews*, XLV (June, 1912), 748-49.

22 Robert M. Labaree, “The Baha’i Propaganda in America,” *The*

*Missionary Review of the World*, XLII (Aug., 1919), p. 591.

23 Ruth White, *Bahai Leads out of the Labyrinth* (New York: Univer-

sal Pub. Co., 1444), p. 7. Ruth White later fell from grace in the eyes of

Baha’is under Shoghi Effendi’s guardianship. See the next chapter.

24 For a brief account of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s travels, see Shoghi Effen-

di, *God Passes By*, pp. 279-81.

25 Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Baha*, pp. 420-22.

26 ibid., p. 443.

27 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, pp. 310-13.

28 ibid., p. 247.

29 Browne, *Materials*, p. 75.

30 ibid., p. 76.

31 ibid., p. 77.

32 ibid., p. 77, n. 1.

33 ibid., p. 79.

34 Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 39. Brackets mine. See also

Brown, *Materials*, p. 82.

35 Ruhiyyih Rabbani, *Prescription for Living* (London: George

Ronald, 1960), p. 182.

36 Browne, *Materials*, pp. 94-95; Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Baha*, p. 65.

37 R. P. Richardson, “The Persian Rival to Jesus, and His American

Disciples,” *The Open Court*, XXII (Aug., 1915), 477.

38 Browne, *Materials*, pp. 117-18.

39 See Samuel Graham Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims* (New York:

Fleming H. Revell Co., 1915), 93-94, and Marzieh Gail, *Baha’i Glossary* (Wil-

mette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1957), p. 8.

40 Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 211.

41 ibid., p. 134.

42 Arthur Pillsbury Dodge, *Whence? Why? Whither? Man, Things,*

*Other Things* (Westwood, Mass.: Ariel Press, 1907), pp. 87, 264.

43 Isabella D. Brittingham, comp., *The Revelation of Bahä’-Ulläh,*

*in a Sequence of Four Lessons* (Chicago, Baha’i Publishing Society, 1902),

p. 24; cited by Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims*, p. 94. See also other quota-

tions in Wilson, pp. 94-95.

44 Horace Holley, *Bahai: The Spirit of the Age* (London: Kegan

Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1921, p. 25.

45 ibid., pp. 56-57, 61, 71.

46 Julia M. Grundy, *Ten Days in the Light of Acca* (Chicago: Bahai

Publishing Society, 1907), pp. 36-37.

47 ibid., p. 48.

48 Constance Elisabeth Maud, “Abdul Baha,” *The Fortnightly Review*,

XCIII, N.S. (April, 1912), 715.

49 George Townshend, *The Mission of Baha’u’llah and Other Literary*

*Pieces* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1952), p. 47.

50 David Hofman, *The Renewal of Civilization*, Talisman Books

(London: George Ronald, 1946), p. 28.

51 Browne, *Materials*, p. 101.

52 ibid., p. 102.

53 ibid., pp. 101-10.

54 These letters were called to my attention by Miss Marjorie

Giffis, Reference Librarian, Union Theological Seminary Library, in a letter

dated February 5, 1970. They are uncatalogued letters, located with other

material in the section numbered *OU23 pam*. The letters are in English,

probably translations of originals written in Persian. The English copies

indicate that the letters were signed by “Mohammed Ali” and “Badi Allah”

from “Acre” on “March 31st 1901.”

55 Browne, *Materials*, p. 197. For an English translation of

this tract and also an epistle setting forth the reasons behind Badi‘u’llah’s

switch to ‘Abdu’l-Baha, see Mirza Badi Ullah, *An Epistle to the Bahai World*,

trans. by Ameen Ullah Fareed (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1907). The

“confession” occupies three pages at the beginning. This publication appears

in facsimile in Ruth White, *The Bahai Religion and Its Enemy the Bahai Organi-*

*zation* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle Company, 1919), pp. 129-63.

56 Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is*, p. 99.

57 Ethel Stefana Stevens, “The Light in the Lantern,” *Everybody’s*

*Magazine*, XXV (December, 1911), 779.

58 Rabbani, *Prescription for Living*, pp. 183-84.

59 Hofman, *The Renewal of Civilization*, p. 30.

60 Horace Holley, “A Statement of the Purpose and Principles

of the Baha’i Faith,” *Baha’i Year Book*, Vol. I (New York: Baha’i Publishing

Committee, 1916), p. 14.

61 George Townshend, *Christ and Baha’u’llah* (London, George

Ronald, 1957), p. 96.

62 J. R. Richards, *Baha’ism*, “Christian Knowledge Booklets,” No. 5

(London: S.P.C.K., 1965), p. 19.

63 *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* (3 vols.; Chicago: Bahai Publish-

ing Trust, 1909-1919), I. 15-16 (hereinafter referred to as *Tablets*).

64 Hud is an ancient Arabian prophet after whom the eleventh

surah of the Qur’an is named. According to the Qur’an, he was sent to his

people of the tribe of A‘ad (VII, 65; II, 50; XXVI, 124: XCVI, 21).

65 Salih is another ancient Arabian prophet sent to the tribe of

Thamud (VII, 75; XI, 61; XXVI, 142; XXVIII, 45).

66 Baha’u’llah. *The Kitab-i-Iqan: The Book of Certitude*, trans. by

Shoghi Effendi (2d ed.; Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1950), pp.

7-65.

67 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, I, 192.

68 ibid., I, 216, II, 339-40; ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*,

collected and trans. by Laura Clifford Barney (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Pub-

lishing Trust, 1964), p. 189.

69 *One Universal Faith* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust,

n.d.), p. 5.

70 Hugh E. Chance, “Baha’i Faith,” *Collier’s Encyclopedia*, 1965,

III, 462.

71 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 143.

72 ibid., pp. 136-37.

73 ibid., p. 103.

74 ibid.

75 ibid., pp. 120-21.

76 ibid., pp. 124-25.

77 ibid., p. 130.

78 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 289..

79 ibid., p. 82.

80 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 310.

81 Marzieh Gail, *The Sheltering Branch* (London: George Ronald,

1959), pp. 51, 57-58.

82 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Tablets*, I, 149.

83 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 103. See above, p.

256.

84 ibid., pp. 133-38, 240-42.

85 ibid., p. 137.

86 ibid., pp. 117-21.

87 ibid., p. 127.

88 Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims*, p. 34.

89 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 285.

90 Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is*, p. 111.

91 Miller, *The Baha’i Faith*, p. 233.

92 Baha’u’llah, *The Kitab-i-Iqan*, pp. 3-4.

93 *The Hidden Words of Baha’u’llah*, trans. by Shoghi Effendi

(Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1963), pp. 3-4.

94 *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, trans. by Shoghi

Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1963), p. 218 (hereinafter

referred to as *Gleanings*); Baha’u’llah. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, trans.

by Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1962), p. 14.

95 *Gleanings*, p. 25.

96 Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 24.

97 *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 257.

98 Richards, *Baha’ism*, pp. 16-17; see also Richards, *The Religion*

*of the Baha’is*, p. 101.

99 See above, pp. 158-59.

100 *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 195.

101 ibid., p. 189.

102 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, I, 170-71.

103 Gail, *The Sheltering Branch*, p. 81. Perhaps worth noting,

though, are Paul’s words in Galatians 3:28 that “there is neither male nor

female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

104 Edward G. Browne, “Babiism,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed.,

III, 95.

105 Gail, *The Sheltering Branch*, p. 83.

106 Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 40.

107 Baha’u’llah’s first wife, whom he married in 1835, was named

Nawwab. She was the mother of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Bahiyyih Khanum, three eons who

died in childhood, and of one eon who died at ‘Akka. Baha’u’llah married his

cousin Mahd-i-‘Ulya in 1849. She was the mother of Muhammad Ali and Badi‘u-

’llah, leaders in the opposition against ‘Abdu’l-Baha, of two children who

died in childhood, and of another son and a daughter (Browne, Materials, pp.

320-21). Wilson holds that Baha’u’llah had “three wives, or two wives and a

concubine.” The third wife (or concubine) was taken in the last year in Bagh-

dad (1867-1868) (Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims*, pp. 159-61). The third wife

was named Gohar. Mention is made also of a fourth wife whom Baha’u’llah married

in his later years, named Jamaliyya, a niece of Khadim Allah, a loyal follower

(Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 40, n. 3).

108 John Ferraby, *All Things Made New* (rev. American ed.; Wilmette,

Ill.; Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1960 , pp. 94-95; Esslemont, Baha’u’llah and

the New Era, 3d rev. ed., pp. 154-56.

109 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Tablets*, I, 8.

110 ibid., I, 27; see also p. 90.

111 See *Tablets*, I, p. 69, where ‘Abdu’l-Baha addressee the

Muskegon, Michigan, assembly as “O Spiritual Assembly.”

112 Rabbani, *Prescription for Living*, p. 179; see also Charles

Mason Remey, *The Bahai Movement: A Series of Nineteen Papers upon the Bahai*

*Movement* (Washington, D.C.: Press of J. D. Milans & Sons, 1912), p. 75.

113 R. L. Bridgman, “World-Organization Secures World-Peace.” *The*

*Atlantic Monthly*, XCIV (September, 1904), 358.

114 Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims*, pp. 75-76.

115 *Gleanings*, p. 254.

116 Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 31.

117 *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 184.

118 ibid., p. 199.

119 Elder and Miller, *Aqdas*, p. 30.

120 *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 247.

121 ibid., p. 248.

122 *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 447.

123 Ward, *An Historical Study of the North American Speaking Tour*

*of ‘Abdu’l-Baha*, p. 114.

**PART III**

**MODERN BAHA’I: THE FAITH AS AN INSTITUTIONALIZED RELIGION**

**CHAPTER VI**

**SHOGHI EFFENDI AND THE INSTITUTIONALIZING**

**OF THE FAITH**

The form of the Baha’i faith to emerge under the direction of

Shoghi Effendi may appropriately be referred to as “modern Baha’i” in

sharp distinction from the faith’s previous forms. Shoghi Effendi gave

to Baha’i a precision of historical understanding, doctrinal formulation,

and institutional organization which had not yet been fully achieved in

the religion and, thus, made obsolete much of the faith’s previous litera-

ture, doctrine, and practice.

SHOGHI EFFENDI’S APPOINTMENT AS GUARDIAN

‘Abdu’l-Baha had no surviving sons. His son, Husayn, died in

childhood. In his *Will and Testament*, ‘Abdu’l-Baha appointed as his

successor, Shoghi Effendi, his eldest grandchild and his first grandson,

born of his eldest daughter, Diya’iyyih Khanum.1 The will is divided

into three parts, each written at different times.2 In the earliest part,

these words are written:

O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one,

it is incumbent upon the Aghsan (Branches), the Afnan (Twigs) of the

Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the

loved ones of the Abha Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi—the youth-

ful branch branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees and

the fruit grown from the union of the two off shoots of the Tree of

Holiness,—as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the guardian

of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghsan, the Afnan, the Hands

of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder

of the words of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his

lineal descendents.3

The authority which ‘Abdu’l-Baha herewith bestowed upon his grandson is

fully revealed in his statement concerning “the guardian” and the Universal

House of Justice, which in the future was to be elected and established:

Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth his not, neither

obeyeth thee, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and

against then hath contended with God; whoso disputeth with him hath

disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whose disbelieveth

in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself and

turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and

turned aside from God. May the wrath, the fierce indignation, the ven-

gence of God rest upon him! The mighty stronghold shall remain impreg-

nable and safe through obedience to him who is the guardian of the

Cause of God. It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice,

upon all the Aghsan, the Afnan, the hands of the Cause of God to show

their obedience, submissiveness and subordination unto the guardian of

the Cause of God, to turn unto him end be lowly before him. He that

opposeth him hath opposed the True One, will make a breach in the Cause

of God, will subvert His word and will become a manifestation of the

Center of Sedition.4

The necessity to give obedience to Shoghi Effendi is again stated in the

concluding portion of the third part of the will, and these words are added:

To none is given the right to put forth his own opinion or express

his particular convictions. All must seek guidance and turn unto the

Center of the Cause and the House of Justice.5

These words appear to be a blatant denial of the Baha’i principle of “inde-

pendant investigation of truth” and to reveal the basic inconsistency in

affirming such a principle in a religion which demands absolute submission

to the authority of each successive head of the faith. David Hofman, a

Baha’i, insists that the first sentence

cannot be lifted from its context and applied to anything else. It

applies only to the appointment of the Guardian and the authority

vested in him. Indeed such a statement in any other setting would

be a direct contradiction of the Baha’i principle of consultation,

which requires everyone to set forth his views with moderation and

recognizes that “*out of the clash of differing opinions the spark*

*of truth cometh forth*”.6

If one may not question the appointment of Shoghi Effendi, however, then

seemingly it would follow that neither could he question any of Shoghi

Effendi’s acts or statements of doctrine while holding that office, since

whoever disputes with him, according to ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will, disputes with

God. If one must turn to Shoghi Effendi and seek his guidance in all things

pertaining to the faith, then one’s own convictions would seem to be annulled,

except as they should agree with the guardian’s views. The passage is a dif-

ficult passage to interpret, and opinions have differed as to its meaning.

The authority which passed to Shoghi Effendi was undoubtedly a

high authority. The language which ‘Abdu’l-Baha used, that anyone denying,

disbelieving, disputing against, and opposing Shoghi Effendi would be denying,

disbelieving, disputing against, and opposing God, is similar to language

which Baha’u’llah used in reference to the authority which was to pass from

him to ‘Abdu’l-Baha. The language used by ‘Abdu’l-Baha may even be somewhat

stronger than that used by Baha’u’llah, and it was probably asserted so

strongly because of the opposition which ‘Abdu’l-Baha had faced during his

ministry. The words could be understood as placing Shoghi Effendi in a

station as high as that of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, but Shoghi Effendi, himself, declined

a station equal to ‘Abdu’l-Baha. Nonetheless, he held a high station and was,

therefore, in a position to make whatever codifications in the faith he deemed

necessary, and none could stay his hand nor question his actions.

SHOGHI FFFEND’S TRANSFORMATION

When his grandfather passed away in 1921, Shoghi Effendi was

only twenty-four years of age, a student at Oxford University, but the young

Shoghi Effendi took a firm bold on the direction of the faith’s affairs.

The period of his administration (1921-1957) is one of the most remarkable

periods in the faith’s history in terms of institutional development, geo-

graphical expansion, literature production and distribution, and doctrinal

solidification. Under Shoghi Effendi, the Baha’i faith became truly the

Baha’i *World* Faith. Baha’u’llah gave the faith a definite world vision,

but Shoghi Effendi, armed with that vision, led in the dramatic extension

of the faith into all parts of the world. From the thirty-five countries

opened to the faith at the time of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s passing in 1921, the faith

under Shoghi Effendi’s leadership penetrated into 254 countries and depen-

denies.

The Establishing of Baha’i Doctrine

One notable contribution of Shoghi Effendi’s ministry was the

solidifying of Baha’i doctrine. What took Christianity several centuries

to do—to arrive at a definitive statement of cardinal doctrines—Shoghi

Effendi, by the supreme authority which he exercised, singlehandedly ac-

complished for his faith during the thirty-six year span of his ministry

by defining the stations of the three central figures of the faith and by

formulating other basic Baha’i concepts.

The Station of the Bab

Edward Browne understood that the Baha’is, in relegating the

Bab to the position of forerunner to Baha’u’llah, were thereby denying

the Bab’s claim of being an independent manifestation.7 Other non-Baha’is

have followed Browne in this view. The confusion in understanding the

Baha’i position regarding the Bab is also reflected in Wilson’s statement

that to all intents and purposes the Bab is as much an obsolete prophet

as Mani or Babak.”8

Shoghi Effendi, however, clearly states not only that the Bab

is an independent manifestation but that his greatness lies primarily in

his independent prophethood:

That the Bab, the inaugurator of the Babi Dispensation, is fully entitled

to rank as one of the self-sufficient Manifestations of God, that He has

been invested with sovereign power and authority, and exercises all the

rights and prerogatives of independent Prophethood, is yet another funda-

mental verity which the Message of Baha’u’llah insistently proclaims

and which its followers must uncompromisingly uphold. That he is not to

be regarded merely as an inspired Precursor of the Baha’i Revelation,

that in His person, as He Himself bears witness in the Persian Bayan, the

object of all the Prophets gone before Him has been fulfilled, is a truth

which I feel it my duty to demonstrate and emphasize. … Indeed the

greatness of the Bab consists primarily, not in His being the divinely-

appointed Forerunner of so transcendent a Revelation, but rather in His

having been invested with the powers inherent in the inaugurator of a

separate religious Dispensation, and in Him wielding, to a degree

unrivaled by the Messengers gone before Him, the scepter of independent

Prophethood.9

The Bab, therefore, holds a twofold station, as an independent manifestation

and as the forerunner of Baha’u’llah. Shoghi Effendi finds the independent

prophethood of the Bab a further sign of the greatness of Baha’u’llah’s

revelation:

Among the distinguishing features of His Faith ranks, as a further

evidence of its uniqueness, the fundamental truth that in the person

of its Forerunner, the Bab, every follower of Baha’u’llah recognizes

not merely an inspired annunciator but a direct Manifestation of God.

It is their firm belief that, no matter how short the duration of His

Dispensation, and however brief the period of the operation of His

laws, the Bab had been endowed with a potency such as no founder of

any of the past religions was, in the providence of the Almighty,

allowed to possess.10

Two questions raised for Baha’is by the Bab’s ministry are why,

if he is an independent manifestation, his ministry was so short and why

certain of his lams were of such a drastic nature. Concerning the former

question, Shoghi Effendi answers: “As the Bab was not only a Manifestation

but a Herald of this Baha’i Faith, the interval between His Revelation

and that of Baha’u’llah was of shorter duration.”11 But due to the essen-

tial relatedness of the Babi and Baha’i religions, Shoghi Effendi sees the

Bab and Baha’u’llah as co-founders of the Baha’i faith. Thus, “His Dispen-

sation in a sense will last as long as Baha’u’llah’s lasts.”12 As to the

Bab’s severe laws, Shoghi Effendi writes:

These drastic measures enforced by the Bab and His followers were

taken with the view of undermining the very foundation of Shi‘ah

orthodoxy, and thus paving the way for the coming of Baha’u’llah.

To assert the independence of the new Dispensation, and to prepare

also the ground for the approaching Revelation of Baha’u’llah the

Bab had therefore to reveal very severe laws, even though most of

them, were never enforced. But the mere fact that He revealed them

was in itself a proof of the independent character of His Dispensa-

tion and was sufficient to create such widespread agitation, and

excite such opposition on the part of the clergy that led them to

cause His eventual martyrdom.13

Concerning the Bab’s numerous writings, Shoghi Effendi maintains:

Except for the Bayan, the Seven Proofs and Commentary on the Surih

of Joseph, we cannot be sure of the authenticity of most of His

other works as the text has been corrupted by the unfaithful.14

Although the Bab’s writings have been superseded by Baha’u’llah’s revela-

tion,10 modern Baha’is attribute to the Bab’s works a certain validity.

Baha’is, of course, revere all the previous revealed scriptures and acknow-

ledge their validity for the times in which they were written, but the Bab’s

writings, although being superseded along with the other revealed scriptures

of the past, stand in a closer relationship to Baha’u’llah’s. They consti-

tute somewhat of an “Old Testament” for Baha’is. They foretell in a special

sense, Baha’is believe, the coming of Baha’u’llah and magnify the greatness

of his revelation. The doctrinal outlook is much the same as well as the

allegorical method of interpreting previous scriptures. The Bab’s writings,

however, have not been translated into English except for isolated passages

in Baha’i writings and a few prayers.

The Station of Baha’u’llah

Baha’is, of course, regard Baha’u’llah as the supreme manifesta-

tion. His revelation signalizes the human race’s “coming of age”; and,

although other manifestations will follow Baha’u’llah, it marks “the last

and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man’s collective life on

this planet.”16 Baha’is believe that it will eventually usher in mankind’s

golden age of peace and unity.

The supremacy of Baha’u’llah’s revelation raises the questions

of Baha’u’llah’s relationship with God and with the other manifestations.

Is Baha’u’llah, unlike the other manifestations, to be identified with the

essence of God? Is his manifestation an incarnation of that essence? Shoghi

Effendi explains:

The divinity attributed to so great a Being and the complete incarnation

of the names and attributes of God in so exalted a Person should, under

no circumstances, be misconceived or misinterpreted. The human temple

that has been made the vehicle of so overpowering a Revelation must, if

we be faithful to the tenets of our Faith, ever remain entirely distin-

guished from that “innermost Spirit of Spirits” and “eternal Essence of

Essences”—that invisible yet rational God Who, however much we extol

the divinity of His Manifestations on earth, can in no wise incarnate

His infinite, His unknowable, His incorruptible and all-embracing Rea-

lity, in the concrete and limited frame of a mortal being. Indeed, the

God Who could so incarnate His own reality would, in the light of the

teachings of Baha’u’llah, cease immediately to be God. So crude and

fantastic a theory of Divine incarnation is as removed from, and in-

compatible with, the essentials of Baha’i belief as are the no less

inadmissible pantheistic and anthropomorphic conceptions of God—both

of which the utterances of Baha’u’llah emphatically repudiate and the

fallacy of which they expose.17

Again Shoghi Effendi maintains:

That Baha’u’llah should, notwithstanding the overwhelming

intensity of His Revelation, be regarded as essentially one of these

Manifestations of Cod, never to be identified with that invisible

Reality, the Essence of Divinity itself, is one of the major beliefs

of our Faith—a belief which should never be obscured and the integrity

of which no one of its followers should allow to be compromised.18

Baha’u’llah, then, according to these pronouncements, is not to be identified

with the invisible essence of God nor to be understood as an incarnation of

that essence. He is essentially one with the other manifestations of God,

although the latest in the series. His greatness consists, in Baha’i thought,

not in any innate qualities but simply in the greatness of time when his

manifestation occurred—at the point of mankind’s maturity and the outpouring

of God’s full revelation. This time, Baha’is hold, is foretold and antici-

pated by all the previous manifestations of God.

The Station of ‘Abdu’l-Baha

‘Abdu’l-Baha occupies a unique station in the Baha’i faith, for

Shoghi Effendi defines his station as less than a manifestation yet posses-

sed of superhuman characteristics. Shoghi Effendi maintains that there is

no authority whatever:

for the opinion that inclines to uphold the so-called “mystic unity”

of Baha’u’llah and ‘Abdu’l-Baha, or to establish the identity of the

later with His Father or with any preceding Manifestation.19

Shoghi Effendi repeatedly declares that “‘Abdu’l-Baha is not a Manifestation

of God.”20 Yet, Shoghi Effendi maintains that, notwithstanding ‘Abdu’l-

Baha’s own denials of holding a station equal to the Bab or Baha’u’llah,

his station is “immeasurably exalted … above and beyond the implica-

tions of … His own written statements.”21

Although not a manifestation, ‘Abdu’l-Baha is linked with

the Bab and Baha’u’llah in a special way:

Though moving in a sphere of His own and holding a rank radically

different from that of the Author and the Forerunner of the Baha’i

Revelation, He, by virtue of the station ordained for Him through

the Covenant of Baha’u’llah, forms together with them what may be

termed the Three Central Figures of a faith that stands unapproached

in the world’s spiritual history. He towers, in conjunction with

them, above the destinies of this infant Faith of God from a level

to which no individual or body ministering to its needs after Him,

and for no less a period than a full thousand years, can ever hope

to rise. To degrade His lofty rank by identifying His station with

or by regarding it as roughly equivalent to, the position of those

on whom the mantle of His authority has fallen would be an act of

impiety as grave as the no less heretical belief that inclines to

exalt Him to a state of absolute equality with either the central

Figure or Forerunner of our Faith.22

As Baha’u’llah was a “mirror” of God’s attributes, so is ‘Abdu’l-Baha a

mirror of Baha’u’llah’s glory:

He is and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost,

as the Center and Pivot of Baha’u’llah’s peerless and all-enfolding

Covenant, His most halted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His

light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring interpreter

of His Word, the embodiment of every Baha’i ideal, the incarnation of

every Baha’i virtue …23

The expression, the “Mystery of God,” by which Baha’u’llah designated ‘Abdu’l-

Baha, Shoghi Effendi maintains, “does not by any means justify us to assign

to him the station of Prophethood” but does indicate how

in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Baha incompatible characteristics of a

human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended

and are completely harmonized.24

As to ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s words, Shoghi Effendi holds that “His words

are not equal in rank, though they possess an equal validity with the

utterances of Baha’u’llah.”25 ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s words, however, appear in a

variety of forms, in books he has written, recorded from his speeches, quoted

in newspaper and magazine articles, written in diaries of individual Baha’is,

reported in biographies and other books by Baha’i and non-Baha’i authors,

collections of sayings published by Baha’i pilgrims, in letters to various

persons, and sayings attributed to him by his former secretaries or close

associates.

Shoghi Effendi urged the believers in the West to “quote and

consider as authentic only such translations as are based upon the authenti-

cated text of His recorded utterances in the original tongue.”26 The *Baha’i*

*News* reported:

Shoghi Effendi has made it clear that all diaries and records of visits

during the lifetime of the Master, if consisting of quotations taken

down by the pilgrim and not corrected and approved by ‘Abdu’l-Baha, are

to be edited in such a way as to make it clear that these words of

‘Abdu’l-Baha are not direct quotations but rather the understanding of

the editor himself of what the Master said. This removes all such works

from the list of what we might call the authoritative utterances.27

Shoghi Effendi later indicated:

Baha’u’llah has made it clear enough that only those things that have

been revealed in the form of Tablets have a binding power over the

friends. Hearsays may be matters of interest but can in no way claim

authority. … This being a basic principle of the Faith we should

not confuse Tablets that were actually revealed and mere talks attri-

buted to the Founders of the Cause. The first have absolute binding

authority while the latter can in no way claim our obedience.28

Holding the highest rank of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s words, therefore, are those

writings specifically revealed by him: *The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-*

*Baha*, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Baha* (3 vols.),

*Tablets of the Divine Plan*, and *Memorials of the Faithful*.

Collection of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s talks and sayings which have been

approved either by ‘Abdu’l-Baha or by Shoghi Effendi are *Some Answered*

*Questions*, *Paris Talks*, and *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (2 vols.),

although concerning the latter Shoghi Effendi has suggested the eventual

retranslation of this work from Mahmud’s original Persian notes. Included

with these writings may be listed *Foundations of World Unity* (compiled

largely from the previously mentioned work).29

A large amount of Baha’i agrapha, therefore, consists of ‘Abdu’l-

Baha’s sayings printed in unauthenticated works. Included in the list of

unauthentic or obsolete texts are Ahmad Sohrab’s collection of sayings,

entitled *I Heard Him Say*, a circulated mimeographed work attributed to

‘Abdu’l-Baha, entitled *Fourth Dimensional Consciousness*, a *Tablet to the*

*Americas*, *The Mysterious Forces of Civilization* (retranslated from the

original Persian by Shoghi Effendi and retitled *The Secret of Divine Civili-*

*zation*), and Myron Phelps’ *Abbas Effendi, His Life and Teachings*, regarded

by Shoghi Effendi as not entirely correct historically.30 Added to these

are numerous unauthenticated sayings in newspapers and magazines.

The Station of Shoghi Effendi

Shoghi Effendi also defined the station which he, himself, held

and which he believed would be held by the guardians who would succeed him.

For wide as is the gulf that separates ‘Abdu’l-Baha from Him Who is

the Source of an independent Revelation, it can never be regarded as

commensurate with the greater distance that stands between Him Who is

the Center of the Covenant [‘Abdu’l-Baha] and His ministers who are to

carry on His work, whatever be their name, their rank, their functions

or their future achievements.31

Although ‘Abdu’l-Baha referred to Shoghi Effendi as “the sign of God” and

conferred upon him an authority in terms similar to those which Baha’u-

’llah had used in reference to ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi made no claim of

being “the perfect exemplar” of Baha’u’llah’s teachings:

No Guardian of the Faith, I feel it my solemn duty to place

on record, can ever claim to be the perfect exemplar of the teachings

of Baha’u’llah or the stainless mirror that reflects His light. Though

overshadowed by the unfailing, the unerring protection of Baha’u’llah

and of the Bab, and however much he may share with ‘Abdu’l-Baha the

right and obligation to interpret the Baha’i teachings, he remains

essentially human and cannot, if he wishes to remain faithful to his

trust, arrogate to himself, under any pretense whatsoever, the rights,

the privileges and prerogatives which Baha’u’llah has chosen to confer

upon His Son. In the light of this truth to pray to the Guardian of the

Faith, to address him as lord and master, to designate him as his holi-

ness, to seek his benediction, to celebrate his birthday, or to commemo-

rate any event associated with his life would be tantamount to a depar-

ture from those established truths that are enshrined within our

beloved Faith. The fact that the Guardian has been specifically

endowed with such power as he may need to reveal the purport and

disclose the implications of the utterances of Baha’u’llah and of

‘Abdu’l-Baha does not necessarily confer upon him a station co-equal

with those Whose words he is called upon to interpret. He can

exercise that right and discharge this obligation and yet remain

infinitely inferior to both of them in rank and different in nature.32

The Baha’i Faith and Other Religions

In defining the relationship between the Baha’i faith and other

religions, Shoghi Effendi writes in the following sentence:

The Revelation identified with Baha’u’llah abrogates unconditionally

all the Dispensations gone before it, upholds uncompromisingly the

eternal verities they enshrine, recognizes firmly and absolutely the

Divine origin of their Authors, preserves inviolate the sanctity of

their authentic Scriptures, disclaims any intention of lowering the

states of their Founders or of abating the spiritual ideals they incul-

cate, clarifies and correlates their functions, reaffirms their common,

their unchangeable and fundamental purpose, reconciles their seemingly

divergent claims and doctrines, readily and gratefully recognizes their

respective contributions to the gradual unfoldment of one Divine Revela-

tion, unhesitatingly acknowledges itself to be but one link in the

chain of continually progressive Revelations, supplements their teachings

with such laws and ordinances as conform to the imperative needs, and

are dictated by the growing receptivity, of a fast evolving and con-

stantly changing society, and proclaims its readiness and ability to

fuse and incorporate the contending sects and factions into a universal

Fellowship, functioning within the framework, and in accordance with

the precepts, of a divinely conceived, a world-unifying, a world-redeem-

ing Order.33

Shoghi Effendi’s reference to the Baha’i religion as “but one link in the

chain of continually progressive Revelations” is underscored unequivocally

by the Baha’i teaching that its own faith is not final:

Great as is the power manifested by this Revelation and however vast

the range of the Dispensation its Author has inaugurated, it emphati-

cally repudiates the claim to be regarded as the final revelation of

God’s will and purpose for mankind. To hold such a conception of its

character and functions would be tantamount to a betrayal of its

cause and a denial of its truth. It must necessarily conflict with

the fundamental principle which constitutes the bedrock of Baha’i

belief, the principle that religious truth is not absolute but rela-

tive, that Divine Revelation is orderly, continuous and progressive

and not spasmodic or final. Indeed, the categorical rejection by

followers of the Faith of Baha’u’llah of the claim to finality which

any religious system inaugurated by the Prophets of the past may

advance is as clear and emphatic as their own refusal to claim

that same finality for the Revelation with which they stand iden-

tified.34

Baha’u’llah’s revelation, although being a link in the chain of revelations,

is nonetheless greatly distinguished from the other revelations:

It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in

the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage

in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination

of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as

marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of

man’s collective life on this planet.35

The manifestations of God following Baha’u’llah will reside in the “shadow”

of Baha’u’llah, and their revelations, by implication, will not be as resplen-

dent as Baha’u’llah’s revelation. The Baha’i faith, although disclaiming

finality, does claim supremacy. Is it not the claims of the various

religions to supremacy, rather than their claims to finality, which hinder

their unification?

Worth noting also in discussing the faith’s relationship to

other religions is that as Baha’i begin to develop in India, the question

arose concerning the possible divine founding of Hinduism, Shoghi Effendi

wrote to a Baha’i in India:

As regards your study of the Hindu religion. The origins of

this and many other religions that abound in India are not quite known

to us, and even the Orientalists and the students of religion are not

in complete accord about the results of their investigations in that

field. The Baha’i Writings also do not refer specifically to any of

these forms of religion current in India. So, the Guardian feels it

impossible to give you any definite and detailed information on that

subject.30

Hinduism was, however, too important a religion to be overlooked. In time,

Baha’is selected Krishna from among the Hindu avatars to be added to the

list of Baha’i manifestations and founders of religions.

The Baha’i Administrative Order

The fundamental feature of the Baha’i faith which marks the

secret of its strength, according to Shoghi Effendi, is its administrative

order.

This Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything

that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Baha’u’llah

has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions,

appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary

authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative

ordinances. Therein lies the secret of its strength, its fundamental

distinction, and the guarantee against disintegration and schism. No-

where in the sacred scriptures of any of the world’s religious systems,

not even in the writings of the Inaugurator of the Babi Dispensation,

do we find any provisions establishing a covenant or providing for an

administrative order that can compare in scope and authority with those

that lie at the very basis of the Baha’i Dispensation.37

Shoghi Effendi contends that neither in Christianity nor Islam nor even in

the Babi religion are there *written* and *explicit* directions establishing

the precise nature of the institutions to be formed, investing in the

successive heads of the faith an unassailable authority, and providing the

safeguards to guarantee the religion from breaking into the contending sects

and factions which history has demonstrated became the unavoidable fate.

Only in the Baha’i faith, Shoghi Effendi holds, may one find those provisions

which guard it from schism.

The “twin pillars that support this mighty Administrative Struc-

ture are “the institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House

of Justice.’38 These “two inseparable institutions,” Shoghi Effendi main-

tains, “should be regarded as divine in origin, essential in their functions

and complementary in their aims and purpose.” The hereditary guardianship

provides for the continuous office of one qualified to interpret the Baha’i

writings and thus prevent divisions which might result over differing

interpretations; and the Universal House of Justice provides a legislative

body with powers to enact laws on matters not dealt with in the Baha’i

scriptures and with power to abrogate its own enactments to meet the

changing needs. Both these institutions, therefore, have their own sphere

of authority and “neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and

prescribed domain of the other.”39 The guardian is the permanent head of

the Universal. House of Justice and, while having power to interpret what

is specifically revealed in Baha’i scripture, “cannot legislate except in

his capacity as member of the Universal House of Justice.”40

The Baha’i administrative order is “the sole framework” of the

future Baha’i commonwealth.41 Shoghi Effendi delineates the essential

futures of the future world commonwealth in an important passage a portion

of which is as follows:

The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Baha’u’llah, im-

plies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations,

races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in

which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and

initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and

completely safeguarded. This commonwealth must, as far as we can

visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will act

as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire

resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as

shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust

the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed

by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at,

and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safe-

guard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal

will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all

and any disputes that may arise between the various elements consti-

tuting this universal system. A mechanism of world inter-communica-

tion will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national

hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swift-

ness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the

nerve center of a world civilization, the focus towards which the

unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing

influences will radiate. A world language will either be invented

or chosen from among the existing languages and will be taught in

the schools of all the federated nations as an auxiliary to their

mother tongue. A world script, a world literature, a uniform and

universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify

and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and

races of mankind. In such a world society, science and religion,

the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will

coöperate, and will harmoniously develop. The press will, under such

a system, while giving full scope to the expression of the diversi-

fied views and convictions of mankind, cease to be mischievously

manipulated by vested interests, whether private or public, and will

be liberated from the influence of contenting governments and people.

The economic resources of raw materials will be tapped and fully

utilized, its markets will be coördinated and developed, and the

distributions of its products will be equitably regulated.42

Institutional Development

In addition to the establishing of Baha’i doctrine, Shoghi

Effendi turned his attention to the institutional development of the faith.

Unlike ‘Abdu’l-Baha who travelled extensively after his release from im-

prisonment, taking part in numerous public appearances and speaking engage-

ments, and who before his death was planning yet another world tour, Shoghi

Effendi was content to reside in relative seclusion in Haifa, from whence

he directed, through a constant flow of letters and cablegrams, the ever-

growing affairs of the worldwide Baha’i community.

National and Local Assemblies

Shoghi Effendi began urging the immediate formation of a “National

Spiritual Assembly” in every country where conditions were favorable and where

Baha’is had reached a considerable sise.43 Such assemblies were instituted

in the United States in 1925 (superseding the Baha’i Temple Unity, organized

during ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s ministry), in the British Isles, Germany, and India in

1923, in Egypt in 1924, in Iraq in 1931, and in Persia and Australia in

1934.44 He urged that in every locality where the number of Baha’is exceeded

size a “Local Spiritual Assembly” be established. Shoghi Effendi called

for the establishment of a Baha’i fund to be under the control of the

assemblies and to be expended for the promotion of the cause in the respec-

tive locality or country.45 He urged the assemblies, national and local,

to elect committees to discharge particular responsibilities and welcomed

their reports along with the reports from the national assemblies. Shoghi

Effendi named over sixty national committees, originating mainly in the West,

which were functioning by 1944.46

As soon as the rational assemblies were functioning properly,

Shoghi Effendi set about to place them on a clear legal basis. Two signi-

ficant milestones in the faith’s evolution were the drafting and adoption

by the Baha’is in the United States in 1927 of the first Baha’i national

Constitution and the drafting of by-laws by Baha’is in New York City in

1931.47 This national constitution became the pattern for other national

constitutions, and the New York by-laws became the pattern for other local

assemblies.

In 1929, the National Spiritual Assembly in the United States

was incorporated, followed by the incorporation of the National Spiritual

Assembly of the Baha’is of Egypt and the Sudan in 1934, of the National

Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of Australia and New Zeeland in 1938,

and of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the British Isles

in 1939. Local assemblies also were similarly incorporated, beginning

with the Chicago assembly in 1932.48

To the various national assemblies, Shoghi Effendi sent messages

encouraging the Baha’is in their work, projecting goals, defining their

authority, clarifying issues, settling disputes and answering questions,

reporting on activities in various parts of the world, urging the trans-

lation of Baha’i writings into native tongues, keeping before Baha’is the

ultimate purposes of the faith, reminding them of promises of divine assis-

tance, and continuously directing them to greater accomplishments.

A series of campaigns was initiated in 1937 designed to spread

the faith throughout the world. The “first seven year plan” for American

Baha’is (1937-1944) had three objectives” (1) to complete the exterior

ornamentation of the Baha’i temple in Wilmette, Illinois; (2) to establish

a local spiritual assembly in every state in the United States; (3) and to

create a Baha’i center in every Latin American republic. Although the

“seven year plan” was carried out during the difficult years of the war,

Baha’is successfully achieved their goals. After the American Baha’is began

their “seven year plan,” similar plans also were initiated by other national

assemblies.

After a “two-year respite,” a “second seven year plan” was ini-

tiated (1946-1953), having four objectives: (1) consolidation of the vic-

tories won on the American continents during the “first seven years” effort;

(2) completion of the interior ornamentation of the Wilmette Baha’i temple;

(3) formation of three new national assemblies in Canada and in Central and

Southern America; (4) and “the initiation of systematic teaching activity in

war-torn, spiritually famished European continent.”49 The emphasis fell

on the fourth objective, and thus this “second seven year pan” became

known as “the European Campaign,” aiming at establishing spiritual assem-

blies in ‘Ten Goal Countries,” Spain, Portugal, Holland, Belgium, Norway,

Sweden, Denmark, Italy, the Duchy of Luxembourg, and Switzerland. Finland

later was added to the list.

Baha’i pioneers (missionaries) were dispatched from the United

States into Europe in the first systematic effort to carry the faith to the

European continent. In the middle of the European campaign, Baha’i pioneers

from Latin America were sent to aid in the work.50

International Stage of the Faith

The Baha’i faith entered a new international stage in its evolu-

tion as the decade of the 1950s began. Shoghi Effendi, who had previously

addressed individual national spiritual assemblies, began directing his mes-

sages to the Baha’i world community. Three important developments at this

stage were the launching of a “Ten Year World Crusade,” the establishing of

the International Baha’i Council, and the appointment of “Hands of the Cause.”

*The Ten Year World Crusade*: The ten year crusade (1953-1963)

aimed at planting the faith in all the chief remaining territories of the

world not yet opened to the faith. At the beginning of the crusade, Shoghi

Effendi wrote to the believers:

The avowed, the primary aim of the Spiritual Crusade is none other

than the conquest of the citadels of men’s hearts. The theater of

its operations is the entire planet. Its duration a whole decade,

its commencement synchronizes with the centenary of the birth of

Baha’u’llah’s Mission. Its culmination will coincide with the cen-

tenary of the declaration of that same Mission. The agencies assis-

ting in its conduct are the nascent administrative institutions of

a steadily evolving divinely appointed order. Its driving force is

the energizing influence generated by the Revelation heralded by

the Bab and proclaimed by Baha’u’llah. Its Marshal is none other

than the Author of the Divine Plan. Its standard-bearers are the

Hands of the Cause of God appointed in every continent of the

globe. Its generals are the twelve national spiritual assemblies

participating in the execution of its design. Its vanguard is the

chief executors of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s master plan, their allies and

associates. Its legions are the rank and file of believers standing

behind these same twelve national assemblies and sharing in the glo-

bal task embracing the American, the European, the African, the

Asiatic and Australian fronts. The charter directing its course is

the immortal Tablets that have flowed from the pen of the Center of

the Covenant Himself. The armor with which its onrushing hosts have

been invested is the glad tidings of God’s own message in this day,

the principles underlying the order proclaimed by His messenger, and

the laws and ordinances governing His Dispensation. The battle cry

animating its heroes and heroines in the cry of Ya-Baha’u’l-Abha,

Ya ‘Aliyyu’l-A‘la.51

Fired with the vision of conquering the world for Baha’u’llah, Baha’is

accepted the challenge and went forth as spiritual crusaders to establish

the faith triumphantly around the globe. The faith penetrated into some

131 new countries and territories, and Baha’i literature was translated into

220 additional languages. The number of national assemblies increased in

this period from the original twelve52 entrusted with executing the Ten

Year Plan to fifty-nine, through the formation of twelve new assemblies

in the American continent, thirteen in the European continent, eight in

the Asiatic continent, three in the African continent, and one in Aus-

tralasia. Baha’i temples were built in Sydney, Australia, and in Kampala,

Uganda (both dedicated in 1961) and the superstructure completed for the

first European Baha’i temple, in Frankfurt, Germany (later dedicated in

1964).53

The International Baha’i Council: In a cablegram, January 9,

1951. Shoghi Effendi announced the “weighty epoch-making decision of for-

mation of first International Baha’i Council” which he called the “first

embryonic International Institution” which in time would develop into the

Universal House of Justice. He declared that history would acclaim the

constitution of this International Council as “the greatest event shedding

luster upon second epoch of Formative Age of Baha’i Dispensation potentially

unsurpassed by any enterprise undertaken since inception of Administrative

Order of Faith.” Shoghi Effendi outlined its threefold function:

first, to forge link with authorities of newly emerged State [Israel];

second, to assist me to discharge responsibilities involved in erec-

tion of mighty superstructure of the Bab’s Holy Shrine; third, to con-

duct negotiations related to matters of personal status with civil

authorities.54

To these would be added other functions in the course of its evolution.

Among the nine members of the Council were Amatu’l-Baha Ruhiyyih, Shoghi

Effendi’s wife, serving as liaison between him and the Council, and Mason

Remey, serving as its President.55

The Hands of the Cause: ‘Abdu’l-Baha in his *Will and Testament*

had indicated that the guardian must appoint Hands of the Cause of God to

be under his command with obligations to “diffuse the Divine Fragrances,” to

edify men’s souls and improve their character, and to be detached from

earthly things.56 Baha’u’llah had appointed during his lifetime four hands

to serve him. ‘Abdu’l-Baha did not appoint any additional hands, but he

did refer to some outstanding Baha’i teachers after their deaths as hands,

a practice continued by Shoghi Effendi until his first appointment of living

hands on December 24, 1951, when he announced in a cablegram the elevation

to that office of twelve Baha’is, equally allocated (three each) to the Holy

Land (Israel) and to the Asiatic, American, and European continents.57

In February, 1952, Shoghi Effendi raised the number of appointed

hands to nineteen and maintained this number until October, 1957, by appoin-

ting new hands to take the places of five who passed away during this period.

In Shoghi Effendi’s last message to the Baha’i world (October, 1957) before

his death, he appointed eight additional hands, bringing the total number

to twenty-seven. In this last message, Shoghi Effendi referred to the

hands as:

the Chief Stewards of Baha’u’llah’s embryonic World Commonwealth,

who have been invested by the unerring Pen of the Center of His

Covenant with the dual function of guarding over the security, and

of insuring the propagation, of His Father’s Faith.58

Shoghi Effendi also called upon the hands to appoint nine members from

each of the five continents to serve on auxiliary boards to assist the

hands as their adjuncts or deputies.59

Independent Character of the Faith

Although the establishing of Baha’ doctrine and the developing

of the Baha’i institutional structure sharply distinguished the faith under

Shoghi Effendi from its previous forms, the heart of Shoghi Effendi’s trans-

formation was the molding of Baha’i into an independent religion. This some-

what unexpected development was foreshadowed in Shoghi Effendi’s refusal,

unlike ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s practice, to go to the mosque. Ruhiyyih Khanum remarks:

With the reading of the Will and the establishment of the

Guardianship, came quite naturally and organically a new phase in

the development of the Faith. This was typified by one of the first

acts of the Guardian: Shoghi Effendi never set foot in the Mosque,

whereas ‘Abdu’l-Baha had attended it until the last Friday of His life.60

The difference between ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s and Shoghi Effendi’s relationship to

the Muslim mosque dramatically symbolizes the different approaches of their

ministries regarding other religions and helps focus on Shoghi Effendi’s

transformation of the faith from that which existed under ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s

leadership.

‘Abdu’l-Baha lived the outward life of a Muslim. Amelia Collins,

one of the hands of the faith, comments: “The Master Himself, though so

widely loved and respected, was not known as the Head of an independent

religion, but rather regarded as a Moslem notable and Holy Man.”61 H. H.

Jessup, who visited ‘Abdu’l-Baha around 1902, left this report: “On Fridays

he prays with the Moslems in the mosque, as he is still reputed a good Moham-

madan of the Shiite sect.”62 Myron Phelps speaks of how ‘Abdu’l-Baha kept

the Muslim fast of Ramadan and all the other Muslim observances for the

sake of peace and to avoid the imputation of social innovation.”63

Consistent with his practice, ‘Abdu’l-Baha did not ask any

believer to leave the church or religion with which he was identified.

Shoghi Effendi, however, who made no pretense of living the life of a Mus-

lim, was destined to bring about a significant change in Baha’i outlook and

practice. The transformation thus effected may be brought into better focus

by taking a closer look at Baha’i philosophy during ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s ministry.

Baha’i as an Inclusive Religion

The Baha’i faith which made its first significant impact in the

Western world during the time of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, especially during his Western

travels, was regarded more as a new spiritual attitude of unity and coopera-

tion than as a competing religion. Favorite phrases were that Baha’i was

“the spirit of the age” or “religion renewed” and not a new religion. The

faith was an *inclusive* rather than exclusive religious movement. One could

be a Baha’i, it was held, and still retain membership in other religious

bodies. This aspect of the faith was regarded as one of its unique features:

The Baha’i is the first religious movement that does not insist on

the alienation of the convert from his own traditional religion.

Instead, he approves of his becoming a better Muslim, Jew, or Chris-

tian.64

Similarly, Albert Vail wrote:

Apparently, it is not so much an organization as a spiritual atti-

tude, not so much a new religion as religion renewed. Its followers

are found in all sorts of ecclesiastical organizations. To be a

Bahai a man need not sever his previous religious affiliation; he

may remain a Buddhist, or Hindoo Braman, a Parsee, a Mohammedan, or

a Christian. He becomes one of the Bahai Movement when he catches

the Bahai spirit.65

Jessyca Gaver relates that a university professor once asked

‘Abdu’l-Baha: “If I became a Baha’i, can I keep the religion of my saintly

Christian mother?” ‘Abdu’l-Baha replied: “Of course you may keep it. If

you become a Baha’i you will apply it.”66 Stanwood Cobb saw this aspect

of the faith as a reason for its missionary success:

The great success of Baha’i missionary work has been due to the fact

that no one is asked to abandon his own religion in order to become

a Baha’i. The Baha’i propagandist, because he does not have to argue

the inferiority of other religions, avoids arousing a spirit of com-

bative ecclesiastical loyalty on the part of those to whom he preaches,

of whatever religion they may be.67

Thus, Cobb says:

The Baha’i missionary can do what no other missionary can. He goes

among various races and religions and wins adherents to his cause

without attack, without invidious comparison, without offense to the

sensibilities and loyalties of other religíonists.68

Consistent with the practice of retaining membership in one’s

original ecclesiastical or religious institutions were ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s broad,

humanitarian definitions of a Baha’i:

To be a Bahai means to love humanity and try to serve it; to work

for the universal peace and the universal brotherhood of mankind.69

He is a true Baha’i who strives by day and by night to progress and

advance along the path of human endeavor; whose cherished desire is

to live and act so as to enrich and illumine the world.70

In reply to questions asked by a representative of *The Independent* through

an interpreter, ‘Abdu’l-Baha had listed nine Baha’i principles and added:

If a man does and believes these things then he is a Bahaist,

no matter whether he calls himself Shintoist, Confucianist, Buddhist,

Hindoo, Jew, Mohometan, Zoroastrian, Parsee or Christian. No matter

in what church or temple he worships.71

Esslemont points out that in one of ‘Abu’l-Baha’s London talks he said

“that a man may be a Baha’i even if he has never heard the name of Baha’u-

’llah.”72

The philosophy behind this earlier Baha’i understanding was that

Baha’i was not a religion alongside other religions but stood in the

relationship of fulfillment to promise. All the religions found their

fulfillment and higher expression in Baha’i. Thus, one did not cease being

a Christian, Buddhist, or whatever in becoming a Baha’i but only accepted

the new form of that religion. Baha’i was, therefore, compatible with

existing religious traditions. Moreover, Baha’is hoped that by working from

within the various religious institutions—as a leaven—they could expand

the horizon of the conflicting viewpoints and bring about their eventual

unification in the Baha’i philosophy. Maude Holbach wrote:

A Baha’i was a Mohammedan reformer, a Bahai may be a reformer *in any*

*Church to which he happens to belong*, for Abdul Baha asks none to

leave their own religion *but to love it*—to look back through the

mists of ages and discern the true spirit of its founder—to cast

off dogma and seek reality!173

The Baha’i view that in becoming a Baha’i one did not cease being a Chris-

tian or advocate of his own religion was upheld in a very literal sense,

for the believer could retain his membership of affiliation.

Baha’is did have a limited Baha’i organization under ‘Abdu’l-

Baha, but it was not considered in any sense as competitive with other

religions organizations because of its *inclusive* character. E. A. Dime

quotes ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s words:

The Bahai Revelation is not an organization. The Bahai Cause can

never be organized. The Bahai Revelation is the spirit of this age.

It is the essence of all the highest ideals of this century. The

Bahai Cause is an inclusive movement: the teachings of all religions

and societies are found here.74

In commenting on these words, Dime says:

The Bahais explain that the impossibility of organizing the Bahai

Cause does not mean that the people cannot organize and cooperate for

the accomplishment of the work of the Cause.75

Horace Holley, in his *Bahai: The Spirit of the Age*, gives expres-

sion to the broad understanding of Baha’i. He maintains that the “slightest

appreciation” of the Baha’i revelation “leads one to realize that the spirit

of the age cannot be thus conveniently confined” to “the Bahai Movement.”

The slight Bahai organization which exists is, in comparison with the

Revelation itself, only as body in comparison to soul. Obviously, the

cosmically conscious person of to-day cannot accept any arbitrary, li-

miting classification.76

Even during the early years of Shoghi Effendi’s administration, Horace Hol-

ley wrote:

A Baha’i community differs from other voluntary gatherings in that

its foundation is so deeply laid and broadly extended that it can

include any soul. Whereas other associations are exclusive, in

effect if not in intention, and from method if not from ideal, Ba-

ha’i association is inclusive, shutting the gates of fellowship to

no sincere soul. In every gathering there is latent or developed

some basis of selection. In religion this basis is a creed limited

by the historical nature of its origin; in politics this is party

or platform; in economics this is a mutual misfortune or mutual

power; in the arts and sciences this basis consists of special

training or activity or interest. In all these matters, the more

inclusive the basis of selection, the stronger the movement—a con-

dition diametrically opposed to that existing in the Baha’i Cause.77

Little did Baha’is realize that this broad, inclusive understanding of

Baha’i would undergo a complete reversal.

Baha’i as an Exclusive Religion

Shoghi Effendi, early in his administration, called for lists

of members of all local assemblies to be sent to him through the national

assembly. The question arose, therefore, of what the qualifications for

membership were ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s broad definitions of a Baha’i were no

longer considered adequate as defining qualifications for Baha’i membership.

Shoghi Effendi considered as fundamental the following qualifications:

Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and

the True Exemplar of the Baha’i Cause, as set forth in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s

Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever

has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to

every clause of our Beloved’s sacred Will; and close association with

the spirit as well as the form of the present day Baha’i administra-

tion throughout the world ….78

These qualifications were included in Article II of the By-Laws of the

National Spiritual Assembly as part of the qualifications for a voting

member of the Baha’i community.

An event of far-reaching effect on the Baha’i faith was the

decision by the Supreme Religious Court of Egypt that the Baha’is of

that land were adherents of a heretical faith at variance with accepted

beliefs of Islam and were, therefore, outside of its jurisdiction. In

a communication to the National Spiritual Assembly in the United States,

dated January 10, 1926, Shoghi Effendi wrote:

This decision, however locally embarrassing, in the present stage

of our development, may be regarded as an initial step taken by our

very opponents in the path of the eventual universal acceptance of

the Baha’i Faith, as one of the independent recognized religious

systems of the world.79

In a later communication of February 12, 1927, Shoghi Effendi pointed out

that the text of the court’s decision refers to the Baha’i faith as a “new

religion” and “entirely independent” and that its adherents could no more

be called Muslims than Muslims could be called Christian or Jew. He notes

that the decision places the Baha’is of Egypt in “a most humiliating and

embarrassing position,” but he maintains that:

they, however, cannot but rejoice in the knowledge that whereas in

various Muhammadan countries and particularly in Persia the over-

whelming majority of the leaders of Islam are utterly opposed to any

form of declaration that would facilitate the universal recognition

of the Cause, the authorized heads of their co-religionists in one

of the most advanced communities in the Muhammadan world have, of their

own initiative, published to the world a document that may justly be

termed as the first chapter of liberty emancipating the Baha’i Faith

from the fetters of orthodox Islam.80

The text indicates further that the Muslim Court cannot renew the marriages

of the Baha’is who were required to divorce their Muslim wives until they

recant their Baha’i faith.

In the meantime, another significant development occurred. The

National Spiritual Assembly of the United Staten and Canada, of New York,

N. Y., filed in the United States Patent Office on March 10, 1928, an appli-

cation for registration of the name “BAHA’I” as a trademark. The name was

registered on August 7, 1928, as Trade-Mark 245,271. An application for re-

gistration of the symbol of the “Greatest Name” also was made on April 12,

1934, and was registered on August 28, 1934, as Trade-Mark 316,444. Regis-

tered in Canada also were the name “BAHA’I” on November 13, 1935, and the

symbol of the “Greatest Name” on December 3, 1935.81

Reflecting the increasing exclusiveness of the Baha’i religion

are Horace Holley’s words, in his short discussion of the legal protection

now granted to the name “Baha’i” and to the symbol of the “Greatest Name”:

A revealed Faith is universal, and in each cycle is offered freely

to the entire world. The Baha’i Faith, however, involves an adminis-

trative order and a degree of discipline raising it above the realm

of the spiritual philosophies which can be adapted to suit the indi-

vidual understanding. The believers, therefore, realize a responsi-

bility in upholding the full and complete standard of faith, which

remains incomplete until membership in the Baha’i order is attained.32

The concept of the Baha’i faith as a spiritual attitude was more and more

being replaced by a concrete, institutional concept.

Then in a communication appearing in *Baha’i News*, August, 1933,

regarding membership in the World Fellowship of Faiths and similar societies,

Shoghi Effendi indicated that Baha’is “should refrain from any act or word

that would imply a departure from the principles … established by Baha’u-

’llah,” and then stated:

Formal affiliation with and acceptance of membership in organizations

whose program or policies are not wholly reconcilable with the Teachings

is of course out of the question.83

The implication of these developments, however, was not imme-

diately recognized. That the Baha’i faith increasingly was being regarded

as independent of its parent faith of Islam did not necessarily suggest to

Baha’is that their faith also should become independent of other religions.

The copyrighting of the name “Baha’i” and the instruction to refrain from

joining bodies not wholly reconcilable with Baha’i teachings did not neces-

sarily mean that present religious memberships should be severed.

But in a communication printed in *Baha’i News*, July, 1935, were

these words:

Concerning membership in non-Baha’i religious associations, the Guardian

wishes to re-emphasize the general principle already laid down in his

Communications to your Assembly and also to the individual believers

that no Baha’i who wishes to be a whole-hearted and sincere upholder

of the distinguishing principles of the Cause can accept full member-

ship in any non-Baha’i ecclesiastical organization. … For it is

only too obvious that in most of its fundamental assumptions the Cause

of Baha’u’llah is completely at variance with outworn creeds, ceremo-

nies and institutions. … During the days of the Master the Cause

was still in a stage that made such an open and sharp dissociation

between it and other religious organizations, particularly the Muslim

Faith, not only inadvisable but practically impossible to establish.

But since His passing events throughout the Baha’i world, and particu-

larly in Egypt where the Muslim religious courts have formally testi-

fied to the independent character of the Faith, have developed to a

point that has made such an assertion of the independence of the Cause

not only highly desirable but absolutely essential.84

After this statement appeared in the *Baha’i News*, letters from

various local spiritual assemblies and individual Baha’is were written to

the national assembly, and in October, 1935, the national assembly sent out

a general letter in reply to some of these communications in which it

upheld the Guardian’s instructions, pointing out that various statements

in Shoghi Effendi’s communications were leading in this direction and that

it was as necessary and inevitable result of the steady development of the

World Order of Baha’u’llah.”85

In a later communication, dated June 15, 1935, and printed in

the October issue of *Baha’i News*, the Guardian recalled:

the separation that set in between the institutions of the Baha’i

Faith and the Islamic ecclesiastical organizations that oppose it—

a movement that has originated in Egypt and is now spreading steadily

throughout the middle East and will in time communicate itself to

the West.86

He maintained:

This historic development, the beginnings of which could neither be

recognized nor even anticipated in the years immediately preceding

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s passing, may be said to have signalized the Formative

Period of our Faith and to have paved the way for the consolidation

of its administrative order.87

Then reaffirming his position, Shoghi Effendi said;

Though our Cause unreservedly recognizes the Divine origin of all

the religions that preceded it and upholds the spiritual truths which

lie at their very core and are common to them all, its institutions,

whether administrative, religious or humanitarian, must if their dis-

tinctive character is to be maintained and recognized, be increasingly

divorced from the outworn creeds, the meaningless ceremonials and man-

made institutions with which those religions are at present identified.88

The new policy created problems of adjustment for some Baha’is.

One case in particular involving “an aged believer, afflicted with illness,

for whom severance of church relations might have been too great a shock”89

was brought to Shoghi Effendi’s attention. He replied:

In this case, as also in that of suffering believers, the Assemblies,

whether local or national, should act tactfully, patiently and in a

friendly and kindly spirit. Knowing how painful and dangerous it is

for such believers to repudiate their former allegiances and friend-

ships, they should try to gradually persuade them of the wisdom and

necessity of such an action, and instead of thrusting upon them a new

principle, to make them accept it inwardly, and out of pure convic-

tion and desire. Too severe and immediate action in such cases is not

only fruitless but actually harmful. It alienates people instead of

winning then to the Cause.90

Thus, Shoghi Effendi’s transformation of the faith was complete. He had

transformed it from a spiritual leaven working within the various religions

into a new independent faith operating outside of and alongside of the

other “obsolete” religious institutions. Had the “spirit of the age” become

confined to an exclusive religious order? ‘Abdu’l-Baha had indicated that

one might be a Baha’i who had never even heard of Baha’u’llah, but with

the National Spiritual Assembly holding copyright on the name “Baha’i,”

steps were taken to restrict the use of the name by anyone outside of the

Baha’i organization. Some, however, opposed the new developments.

OPPOSITION TO SHOGHI EFFENDI’S TRANSFORMATION

The Baha’i religion, in the course of its history, has lost

some important members who, after their defections, became strong critics

of the faith. Some, however, continued to consider themselves loyal

adherents of the Baha’i religion but drew a sharp distinction between

the Baha’i religion and the Baha’i organization of which Shoghi Effendi

was the head.

Ruth White

One of these was Ruth White, an actress and newspaper writer

whose varied religious background included being a Roman Catholic,

a Protestant, an agnostic, and nearly a Communist. She met ‘Abdu’l-Baha

in Boston in 1912 and became a Baha’i. After receiving the news of the

appointment of a successor to ‘Abdu’l-Baha, which came, Ruth White main-

tains, “as a thunderbolt out of a clear sky to everyone,”91 since ‘Abdu’l-

Baha, as she holds, had never indicated any intention of appointing a

successor, she carried on a solitary effort to prove the inauthenticity of

the alleged will.

She travelled to London where she obtained photographic copies

of the will and turned them over to Dr. C. Ainsworth Mitchell, handwriting

expert for the British Museum and editor of *The Analyst*, to compare with

photographs which she had also obtained of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s inscriptions

written in 1912 in the Guest Bible of City Temple, London, and in the Bible

of the Unitarian Church, Montclair, New Jersey, and with authenticated signa-

tures of ‘Abdu’l-Baha on two letters and another signature on an older letter.

Mitchell’s report, which is dated June 3, 1930, as it appears in

Ruth White’s book *Abdul Baha’s Questioned Will and Testament*, indicates that

he made a “minute examination” of the photographs and states near the begin-

ning:

In the absence of an opportunity to examine the original docu-

ment, any conclusions to be drawn from an examination of the photogra-

phic enlargements must necessarily be of a provisional character con-

tingent upon the accuracy of the photographic records, Moreover, some

of the facts which are taken into consideration in the scientific exami-

nation of an original document cannot be perfectly studied in a photo-

graphic reproduction, such as, for example, the ink, paper, penstrokes,

and so on.

Assuming that the authenticated specimens of writings are of

approximately the same period as that at which the disputed will is

alleged to have been written and signed, the points which can be accu-

rately compared in the photographic enlargements are the mode of formation

of the writing, the changes in pressure, the form of individual

letters and the relationship in the size of parts of the letter to

the whole.92

Mitchell indicates that the signature on the older letter may be considered

as authentic since it agrees closely with the other signatures, but he

maintains that “a comparison of the four signatures on the envelope of the

alleged will with the four authenticated signatures reveals many striking

differences in the mode of formation of the characters” and that in his

opinion “these differences are not consistent with the signatures upon the

envelope being in the writing of the writer of the authenticated signature.”

As to the body of the will, Mitchell reports that

A minute comparison of the authenticated writing with the

writing on every page of the alleged will … has failed to detect

in any part of the will the characteristics of the writing of Abdul

Baha, as shown in the authenticated specimens.

Mitchell also maintains that the writing in the will “does not agree with

the hypothesis that it was all written by one person,” for he observes that

page two, except the last two lines, agrees with the writing on page three.

The last two lines of page two agree with pages four, five, six, seven and

eight. Pages nine and ten show points of resemblance with the writing on

the envelope.93

J. R. Richards holds that “it is somewhat doubtful how much

value can be set on the report in question,” because Mitchell had said that

“any conclusions” were of a “provisional character contingent upon the

accuracy of the photographic records.” Richards believes, therefore, that

“the evidence produced by Mrs. White … is not sufficiently strong to

merit acceptance.”94 Mitchell did indicate, however, “the points which can

be accurately compared in the photographic enlargements,” and it was upon

these points that Mitchell arrived at his conclusion. Mitchell’s report

sharply contradicts the claims of Shoghi Effendi and the Baha’is who accept

the will that it was “signed and sealed by ‘Abdu’l-Baha; entirely written

with His own hand.”95

The Baha’i organization attempted to allay Mrs. White’s questions

concerning the will by assuring her that a number of well-known Baha’is had

examined the will and concluded that it was written by ‘Abdu’l-Baha and by

pointing out to her that the British government, mandatory power over Pales-

tine under the League of Nations, officially recognized the will.

Ruth White held, however, that since the Baha’is who examined the

will were not handwriting experts and were not disinterested witnesses, they

were not legally qualified to judge its authenticity; and the British govern-

ment’s recognition of the will consisted simply in permitting Shoghi Effendi

to be custodian of the tombs of Baha’u’llah and the Bab and that this would

have been conceded to him, as ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s oldest male descendant, even

without a will and, therefore, had no direct bearing on the vital issue of

the will’s authenticity.96

Ruth White’s objection to the Baha’i organization was not based

merely on the question of the will’s authenticity, for she maintained that

“whether the will is valid or invalid does not alter the fact that the Bahai

organization is the worst enemy of the Bahai Religion and its only real

one.”97 She maintained that “the policies of the Bahai organization are

the inversion of the Bahai Religion.”98 She argued that under Shoghi Effendi

and the Baha’i organization “the great universal Bahai Cause has been changed

into a narrow bigoted sect and many of the tactics of the dark ages have been

revived.”99

She held that the Baha’i organization’s insistence that “the

individual conscience must be subordinated to the decisions of the elected

Spiritual Assmbly”100 was in violation of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s teachings concern-

ing the liberty of the human conscience. She opposed the copyrighting of

the name Baha’i.

Her strong belief that the Baha’i organization was an enemy of

the Baha’i religion as promulgated by ‘Abdu’l-Baha led her to believe that

Shoghi Effendi was in collusion with Muhammad ‘Ali in forging the will to

give Shoghi Effendi the succession from which they might profit financial-

ly.101 Shoghi Effendi expressed his amusement at

the preposterous and fantastic idea that Muhammad ‘Ali, the prime

mover and the focal center of unyielding hostility to the person of

‘Abdu’l-Baha, should have freely associated himself with the members

of the family of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in the forging of a will which in the

words of the writer herself, is but a “recital of the plottings” in

which for thirty years Muhammad-‘Ali has been busily engaged.102

Shoghi Effendi elsewhere refers to Mrs. White, though unnamed, as “a besot-

ted woman” who flouted ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s Will but who was unable “to produce

the slightest breach in the ranks of its valiant upholders.”103 Ruhiyyih

Rabbani refers to Mrs. White’s efforts as “the attacks of a thoroughly foolish

American believer,” noting that Shoghi Effendi had written to Tudor Pole

that “the most powerful and determined opponents of the Faith in the

East … have vehemently attacked its provisions, but never questioned

its authenticity,” and she remarks that “all Mrs White ever achieved was

to stir up a temporary and insignificant cloud of dust.”104

Ruth White, admittedly, appears to have been alone in challenging

the authenticity of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will and testament. Her religious pil-

grimage did not end with Baha’i. Miller points out that Mrs. White seems

to have transferred her devotion from ‘Abdu’l-Baha to Meher Baba and

wrote in 1957 about visiting him.105 Meher Baba claimed to be the last

of a series of avatars including Zoroaster, Krishna, Rama, Buddha, Jesus,

and Muhammad.106 Perhaps being disillusioned by the great changes which

had overtaken the Baha’i faith, she found an affinity of outlook with

Baha’i in Meher Baba. Ruth White was not able to adjust to the transfor-

mation in the Baha’i faith effected by Shoghi Effendi.

The New History Society

Ruth White indicated that she was never a member of the Baha’i

organization. Two persons, whose story is significant in Baha’i history,

were at first members of the Baha’i organization, accepting ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s

will as authentic and regarding Shoghi Effendi as the appointed successor.

They were opposed, however, to the organization’s control of their activi-

ties in propagating the Baha’i teachings, and in time the society which they

founded encountered a head-on collision with the organized Baha’is in a

lawsuit in New York City. They were Julie Chanler and Mirza Ahmad Sohrab.

Julie Chanler was wife of Lewis Stuyvesant Chanler, New York’s

onetime lieutenant governor and a respected criminal lawyer, the marriage

of whose daughter in a Baha’i ceremony was noted in Time, March 10, 1930.

Ahmad Sohrab was a Persian scholar and poet, nephew of a powerful Baha’i

leader in Isfahan. He served as secretary to ‘Abdu’l-Baha for eight years

(1910-1919) and accompanied him on his Western travels, serving also as his

interpreter. In 1919, ‘Abdu’l-Baha sent him to the United States bearing

the “Tablets of the Divine Plan,” which were read at the eleventh annual

International Baha’i Congress, April 26-30. After the Baha’i Congress, he

travelled extensively throughout the United States and Canada, giving lec-

tures on the faith and on ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s Divine Plan. When ‘Abdu’l-Baha

died in 1921, Ahmad Sohrab’s allowance from ‘Abdu’l-Baha stopped and he

was forced to seek extra work. He gained some work in Hollywood movies,

as extras or atmosphere, portraying pirates, beggars, and Oriental princes.

He also continued his lecturing. He became secretary to the Persian minister

to the United States and later founded the “Persian-American Educational

Society” and the “Orient-Occident Unity.”

While visiting New York in 1917, he met Julie Chanler, who insisted

that he come to New York and teach on Baha’i. On April 5, 1929, Mr. and Mrs.

Chanler and Ahmad Sohrab formed the New History Society with twenty-eight

original members.107 Over the years, the society carried on active programs.

It sponsored well-attended lectures by personalities such as Albert Ein-

stein, Rabindranath Tagore, Helen Keller, Margaret Sanger, Grand Duke Alexan-

der of Russia, and Count Ilya Tolstoy. Annual prize competitions were held

on subjects such as world peace, world religion, world reconstruction, and

racial amity. The society published a number of books and pamphlets, includ-

ing the 743-page *The Bible of Mankind*, edited by Ahmad Sohrab, containing

selections from the scriptures of Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Con-

fucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha’i faith. The

society forged the Caravan of East and West, an international correspon-

dence club, which in 1943 had 1,300 chapters in thirty-seven countries with

a membership of 100,000 children, young people and adults.108 The society

commissioned Max Brand, Austrian composer, to coauthor with Ahmad Sohrab

“The Gate,” a dramatic history of the Baha’i movement, which premiered at

the New York Metropolitan Opera House on May 23, 1944, the centennial of

the Bab’s declaration of his mission.

After the formation of the New History Society and during the

early years of its activity. Julie Chanler sent reports of its progress

to Shoghi Effendi, her “Beloved Guardian.”109 Shoghi Effendi at first

approved of the work, which was attracting large numbers to the faith.

Shoghi Effendi’s secretary wrote: He wishes me to assure you of his prayers

and best wishes that you may succeed in your ardent labors.”110

Soon, however, friction developed between the Baha’i organization

in New York and the New History Society. The organized Baha’is resented the

fact that the New History Society had been formed without consulting them

and was operating without their supervision. Julie Chanler, in her letters

to Shoghi Effendi, expressed the hope that the society could be kept inde-

pendent and free to conduct its activities as it saw fit, feeling that

control by the New York assembly would impede the activities and hinder the

success of the effort. She even indicated that, although working indepen-

dently, the society would urge those whom it attracted to Baha’i to join

the Baha’i organization and would serve as a “recruiting station” for the

organization.

But in the August, 1930, issue of *Baha’i News* appeared the first

pronouncement against the New History Society in an article entitled “The

Case of Ahmad Sohrab and the New History Society.” The article pointed out

that the society was formed without consulting either the National or Local

Spiritual Assembly and that its activities were “maintained apart from the

principles of consultation and Assembly supervision which today, under the

Will and Testament of Abdul Baha, form the basis of Baha’i unity and pro-

tection of the Cause,” and therefore the National Spiritual Assembly informed

the Baha’is that

the activities conducted by Ahmad Sohrab through The New History Society

are to be considered as independent of the Cause; as outside the juris-

diction of the Local and National Assembly, and hence in no wise entitled

to the cooperation of Baha’is.111

A cablegram printed in *Baha’i News*, September, 1930, read: “Approve action

regarding History Society. Deeply appreciate loyalty (of) believers. Sho-

ghi.”112

The New History Society continued to expand its activities,

operating without the approval of Shoghi Effendi or the Baha’i organization.

On November 7, 1939, the society opened a “Baha’i Bookshop” on Lexington Ave-

nue in New York, and a month later, a letter, dated December 5, 1939, from

the law firm of Watson, Bristol, Johnson & Leavenworth, representing the Na-

tional Spiritual Assembly and Trustees of the Baha’is of the United States and

Canada and the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the city of New York, in-

formed Julie Chanter and Ahmad Sohrab that they had infringed on the copyright

on the name “Baha’i.”

A later amended complaint dropped the reference to the trademark

infringement but held that the defendants were conducting meetings and

lectures without the authority of the plaintiffs, who, they alleged, were

the authorized representatives of all Baha’is in the United States and

Canada, and that the defendants were giving the erroneous impression that

they were connected with the Baha’i organization and were qualified to solicit

contributions.

On April 1, 1941, Supreme Court Justice Louis A. Valente handed

down the following judgment:

1. In the Court’s opinion, the complaint fails to state a

good cause of action. The plaintiffs have no right to monopoly on

the name of a religion.

2. The defendants, who purport to be members of the same reli-

gion, have an equal right to use the name of the religion in connection

with their own meetings, lectures, classes and other activities.

3. No facts are alleged in the complaint to indicate that the

defendants have been guilty of any act intended or calculated to deceive

the public into believing that their meetings, lectures or book shop are

identified with or affiliated with the meetings, lectures, etc., and

book shop of the plaintiffs.

4. (a) Defendants have the absolute right to practice Bahaism,

(b) to conduct meetings,

(c) to collect funds,

(d) to sell literature in connection therewith, and

(e) to conduct a book shop under the title of “Bahai Book

Shop.”113

An appeal was made by the organized Baha’is, but the appellate

court upheld the decision of Justice Valente. The *New York World-Telegram*,

June 19, 1941, expressed the decision in journalistic language that “Baha’i

Is Placed In Public Domain.” Ahmad Sohrab saw the victory as meaning that

“Baha-O-Llah has freed his Cause!”114

Shoghi Effendi no doubt was greatly disturbed by the ruling, and

his words in reference to Ahmad Sohrab, as printed in *Baha’i News*, October,

1941, were that “the latest protagonist of a spurious cause cannot but in

the end be subjected, as remorsely as his infamous predecessors, to the fate

which they invariably have suffered.”115

The suit against Ahmad Sohrab and Julie Chanler provoked Sohrab’s

release of “innermost thoughts, pent up and stored away during the passage

of rears.”116 For twelve years, he says, he followed the advice to remain

silent and “held my tongue and pen in leash, the while witnessing the daily

crucifixion of the movement which I love and believe in.”117 During the

litigation, Sohrab began writing articles in the *New History*, monthly

magazine of the society, which were later incorporated in his book Broken

Silence. Sohrab maintains that “reactionary and dogmatic forces” which set

in after ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s death

little by little, gained ground until at present this movement, which

was the most universal and liberal of all movements, past or present,

has been reduced to a sect, while its spirit is all but extinguished.

The principles of Baha-O-Llah are forgotten and in their stead we see

nothing but a mass of rules and regulations that duplicate, to say the

least, the ecclesiastical paraphernalia of previous organized reli-

gions.118

Ahmad Sohrab was always opposed to the organization of religion,119

but unlike Ruth White, Sohrab held that ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will was authentic.

Sohrab writes in *Broken Silence*:

Practically, from the departure of the Master from this life

until today, it has been charged against me by the Bahai Organization

and by members of the Community that I deny the Will of Abdul Baha

and refuse to accept Shoghi Effendi as Guardian. Therefore, I take

this opportunity to make a plain and unequivocal statement: Never in

thought, word or writing have I questioned the authenticity of the

Will, nor denied the validity of the appointment of Shoghi Effendi.

Let us now hope that once and for all time, this fact has been made

clear and manifest.120

Sohrab admits that he has “occasionally disagreed with the policies of Sho-

ghi Effendi,” but maintains that

it is not because I, in the least, contest the genuineness of the Will

of Abdul Baha or question the appointment of Shoghi Effendi to the

Guardianship, but because, as a Bahai, I maintain my freedom of con-

science and hold to the injunction of Baha-O-Llaha: Independent investi-

gation of Truth.121

If Ahmad Sohrab accepts the will and the appointment of Shoghi

Effendi to the guardianship, how could he question Shoghi Effendi’s policies,

for, according to that will, whoever contends with him contends with God?

Some light on this question is thrown by a later writing of Ahmad Sohrab,

*The Will and Testament of Abdul Baha: An Analysis*. In this work, Sohrab

again affirms his belief that the will is genuine. He indicates that through

the years he “became fully familiar with the turns, strokes and trims of the

art of caligraphy” as used by ‘Abdu’l-Baha, that he had read volumes of his

works and was “thoroughly conversant with his choice of words, his mode of

expression and his manner of phraseology,” and that he had in his possession

more than a hundred of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s tablets addressed to him, some being

wholly written in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s handwriting, the majority only signed by

him. Sohrab asserts “without any hesitation and with no mental reservations,

that the Will and Testament was written, signed and sealed by ‘Abdu’l-Baha,

every word being in his own handwriting.”122

Sohrab, like Ruth White, expresses the “bewilderment” which he

felt when news came of the appointment of a successor to ‘Abdu’l-Baha, because,

he says,

Abdul Baha had never in speech or writing given the slightest indica-

tion that there would be a successor to himself. On the contrary, a

number of addressee delivered by him on various occasions had made

the opposite impression. Consequently, it took several years before

a section of the Baha’i’s could adjust themselves to the new situation.123

He points out that according to Baha’u’llah’s will the succession after

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s passing was to go to Muhammad ‘Ali, who was next in authority

to ‘Abdu’l-Baha. Richards had earlier made this observation, noting that

after Muhammad ‘Ali the control of the faith’s affairs was to go to the

House of Justice, and concluded, therefore, that ‘Abdu’l-Baha, even though

his will be considered authentic, did not possess the right to nominate

Shoghi Effendi and his descendants as guardians of the faith.124

Ahmad Sohrab contends that ‘Abdu’l-Baha had reached the conclusion

that Muhammad ‘Ali was not fit to become the new leader and so “made the

stupendous decision of setting aside his Father’s commands as to the suc-

cession” and that “the action of Abdul Baha, wherein he brought into play

his own conscience in the face of the written text of Baha-O-Llah, relieves

the fabric of religion of the weighty dogma of infallibility.” Sohrab

goes on to say that ‘Abdu’l-Baha, thus, “in an urgent crisis lived up to

his own teaching … that the station of the Prophet is twofold—divine

and human.” The prophet’s words at the divine level are “imperishable

truths,”‘ whereas “those spoken on the human plans, in regard to material con-

ditions, may be subject to change according to the requirements of advancing

times.”125 Sohrab, therefore, saw ‘Abdu’l-Baha, because of the existing cir-

cumstances, placing his conscience (or will) above the explicit text of the

prophet’s words concerning the succession. He believes that ‘Abdu’l-Baha

advocated this freedom of conscience for all men.

Sohrab acknowledges that ‘Abdu’l-Baha “enjoins his followers to

implicitly obey Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian of the Cause, and, to all

intents and purposes, to accept him is an infallible leader,” but he maintains:

If one takes ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s injunctions literally (and the present-day

Baha’is are super-literalists), agreeing that to obey Shoghi Effendi is

to obey God and to oppose him is to oppose God, there is no escaping

the conclusion that the Master asks of us the surrender of our wills,

minds and reason to the Guardian—a surrender which is fraught with

far-reaching consequences for it implies a betrayal of the very Bahai

ideals which the Master himself spent his life sharing with the world.126

Ahmad Sohrab, therefore, would not surrender his freedom of conscience, which

he believed was guaranteed to him in the Baha’i teachings, to the demanding

will of Shoghi Effendi, who, he believed, had completely reversed the charac-

ter of the Baha’i religion. He believed that he had helped win a victory

for religious liberty in America, but to the organized Baha’is he was only

one more fallen luminary before the advancing evolution of the Baha’i faith.

Ruhi Afnan

Another of the fallen luminaries in the Baha’i story, in the eyes

of the organized Baha’is, is Ruhi Afnan, son of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s second daugh-

ter, Tuba Khanum and her husband, Mirza Muhsen Afnan. Unlike Ruth White who

could not accept ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will as authentic, and unlike Julie Chanler

and Ahmad Sohrab who could accept the will as authentic but who could not

accept the control of the Baha’i organization, Ruhi Afnan accepted both the

authenticity of the will and the organizational hold upon the Baha’i communi-

ty. In fact, Ruhi Afnan was a leading figure in the Baha’i organization.

He served for fourteen years as confidential secretary to Shoghi Effendi.

During those years (1922-1936), he was active in various capacities. As

Shoghi Effendi’s personal representative, he delivered an address on the

Baha’i faith in 1924 before the Conference of Some Living Religions within

the British Empire. He visited the United States in 1927 and fervently

championed the system of Baha’i administration before declared Baha’is and

as an honored guest at the twentieth annual Baha’i convention in Chicago,

participating in all its proceedings. He travelled from coast to coast

delivering speeches in churches and colleges and before other gatherings and

was guest speaker at Green Acre Baha’i summer school in Maine. In Geneva,

Switzerland, in 1928, he was the accredited representative of the Baha’i

religion at the Conference of International Peace though the Churches,127

In 1935, Ruhi Afnan made a second visit to the United States.

*Baha’i News* recorded:

The National Spiritual Assembly is privileged to announce that

Ruhi Effendi Afnan, great-grandson of Baha’u’llah, has come to America

and with the Guardian’s approval can remain until November in order to

take part in the National Meeting at the Temple on October 26 and 27,

and visit local Baha’i communities to assist in teaching on his way to

and from Chicago.128

But in 1941, Ruhi Afnan was excommunicated and became one of

a number of Baha’u’llah’s family who were so excommunicated in the years

1941 and 1942.129 Appalled by these excommunications, Ahmad Sohrab in

1943 wrote a study of Ruhi Afnan’s contributions to the Baha’i organization

and the reasons for his excommunication, prefacing that work with a “Protest

against the Excommunication of Members of Baha’O’Llah’s Family” signed by

various leaders of religion and educators who were opposed to the practice

of excommunication by any religious body.130

As indicated in cablegrams from Shoghi Effendi, the reasons for

Ruhi Afnan’s excommunication seem to have been three: (1) Ruhi’s sister

had married the “covenant-breaker Fayzi,” a previously excommunicated

person, with whom all communication, association, or aid was, therefore, to

have been severed; (2) Ruhi Afnan’s alleged failure to obtain Shoghi Effen-

di’s approval of his second visit to the United States, a charge which con-

tradicts the report in the *Baha’i News* (quoted above) that he had the Guar-

dian’s approval to be in the States until November; (3) Shoghi Effendi’s

disapproval of Ruhi Afnan’s own marriage.131

Ahmad Sohrab closed his book on Ruhi Afnan with a quotation

from ‘Abdu’l-Baha which he believed had special advice to Ruhi Afnan now

that he had been excommunicated by the Baha’i organization:

Abandon silence and seclusion and solitary nooks and go forth

into the arena of explanation. Convey the Message of thy Lord with

clearest speech and most complete elucidation. This is better for

thee than solitude.132

Ruhi Afnan did continue to spread the Baha’i teachings, although he has

no connection now with the Baha’i organization nor does he have their

approval.

Ruhi Afnan’s book, *The Great Prophets*, a study of Moses, Zoroas-

ter and Jesus, although it would not be regarded ordinarily, or officially,

as a Baha’i book, nevertheless manifests a basic underlying Baha’i philo-

sophy. Ruhi Afnan advances in this work the view of a “perennial religion”

which progressively manifests itself in such religions as Judaism, Zoroas-

trianism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha’i faith.133

In a later work, *Zoroaster’s Influence on Greek Thought*, Ruhi

Afnan attempts to bring out the complementary nature of the Zoroastrian

culture, with its definitely religious base, and the Greek culture, with

its more secularly oriented outlook.134

A more recent work, *The Revelation of Baha’u’llah and the Bab*,

is the first of a series of volumes intending to set forth the teachings of

Baha’u’llah and the Bab on a number of subjects.135

The three stories treated in this chapter each have their dis-

tinctive character, Ruth White refused to join the Baha’i organizations;

Julie Chanler and Ahmad Sohrab, without denying the validity of the Baha’i

organization, attempted to work independently of it; Ruhi Afnan, at first a

strong supporter of the Baha’i administration, was cast forth from the or-

ganization. Each had to make his own particular adjustment in the face of

Shoghi Effendi’s transformation of the faith.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

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12 ibid.

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ing Trust, 1957), p. 100.

34 Shoghi, *World Order of Baha’u’llah*, p. 115.

35 ibid., p. 163.

36 Shoghi, *Dawn of a New Day*, p. 198.

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38 ibid., p. 147.

39 ibid., p. 150.

40 ibid.

41 ibid., p. 152.

42 ibid., pp. 203-4.

43 Shoghi Effendi, *Baha’i Administration* (rev. ed.; Wilmette, Ill.:

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44 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 333.

45 Shoghi, *Baha’i Administration*, pp. 37, 41.

46 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 334.

47 ibid., p.335; Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, pp. 302-3.

48 Shoghi, *God Passes By*, p. 336.

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51 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Baha’i World: 1950-1957*

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52 These twelve national assemblies were those of the Baha’is in

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Sudan; ‘Iraq; India, Pakistan and Burma; Persia; Australia and New Zealand;

Canada; Central America; South America; and Italy and Switzerland.

53 See above, p. 27.

54 Shoghi, *Messages to the Baha’i World*, p. 7.

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Mason Remey attached to his being the president of the embryonic council, see

the following chapter.

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59 ibid., pp. 44, 59, 128.

60 Ruhiyyih Khanum., *Twenty-Five Years of the Guardianship* (Wil-

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72 Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, p. 83.

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tions of Meetings with Abdul Baha,” *The Nineteenth Century and After*, LXXVII

(February, 1915), 453. The problem of Baha’is seeking membership in Chris-

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after Baptism should be asked to declare publicly before the whole Church

that they consider Baha’u’llah a false prophet. Some such formula as the

following would probably meet the case, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the

Son of God; that He really died on the Cross for our salvation; that He

really and truly rose from the dead, leaving behind Him an empty tomb; that

He was really and truly seen by the disciples as the Gospels bear witness.

I believe that He alone is the Saviour of the World. I deny the doctrine of

*rij’at*, by which I am to believe that Jesus was Moses returned, and Mohammad,

the Bab and Baha’u’llah were “returns” of Jesus, and I declare it to be false

teaching. Accepting Jesus as my Lord and Saviour I declare Mohammad, the

Bab, and Baha’u’llah to have been false prophets and false guides, leading

men away from the truth.’” (J. R. Richards, *The Religion of the Baha’is*

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127 Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, *Abdul Baha’s Grandson: Story of Twentieth*

*Century Excommunication* (New York: Published by Universal Publishing Co. for

the New History Foundation, 1943), p. 67.

128 *Baha’i News*, October, 1935, p. 3, cited by Sohrab, Abdul Baha’s

Grandson, p. 151.

129 For a list of the excommunicated members, see Sohrab, *Abdul*

*Baha’s Grandson*, p. 24.

130 See Sohrab, *Abdul Baha’s Grandson*, pp. 11-18.

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133 Ruhi M. Afnan, *The Great Prophets: Moses-Zoroaster-Jesus*

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134 Ruhi Muhsen Afnan, *Zoroaster’s Influence on Greek Thought*

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135 Ruhi M. Afnan, *The Revelation of Baha’u’llah and the Bab*

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**CHAPTER VII**

**THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE AND THE**

**QUESTION OF THE GUARDIANSHIP**

The unexpected death of Shoghi Effendi of a heart attack on

the morning of November 4, 1957, in London, England, where he had gone

with his wife to order furniture for the interior of the International

Archives Building, thrust the Baha’i religion into a most critical situa-

tion, for adding to the grief connected with Shoghi Effendi’s passing was

the anxiety in the later realization that Shoghi Effendi apparently had

left no will appointing a successor.1

When Ruhiyyih Khanum, Shoghi Effendi’s widow, returned to Haifa

on November 15, 1957, she and four other hands of the cause seated with

wax and tape Shoghi Effendi’s safe and desk drawers, and on November 19,

nine hands chosen by Ruhiyyih Khanum made a thorough search through the

papers in the safe and desk and later signed a document testifying that no

will had been found.

The Baha’is were left in a grief-stricken and bewildered condi-

tion. They had no new leader to whom they might turn. The faith had

achieved such marvelous successes under Shoghi Effendi’s able direction:

the foundations of the administrative order were firmly laid; the Baha’i

ship was ready to sail into even more glorious conquests, but now there

was no captain at the helm.

Shoghi Effendi had noted in his book *God Passes By* that Baha’u-

’llah “lays upon every person the duty of writing a testament.”2 Had

Shoghi Effendi, himself, the head of the Baha’i faith, failed to comply

with this duty? How could Shoghi Effendi, who was so careful with every

minute detail in the administration of the faith and who, as Baha’is main-

tained, was divinely guided, especially in matters of supreme importance,

have failed to leave a will, naming a successor? If he did not plan to

name a successor in his last will, why did he not announce this to the

Baha’i world or at least leave some instructions on how the faith might

conduct its affairs being bereft of infallible guidance? Had Shoghi

Effendi left a will which was lost, stolen, or worse, deliberately de-

stroyed? Shoghi Effendi’s failure to write a will—or the failure to find

his will—naturally produced within the faith a crisis of the highest mag-

nitude.

The hands of the cause, who certified that Shoghi Effendi had

left no will and testament and likewise certified that he had left no

heir, in their historic proclamation to the Baha’is of East and West on

November 25, 1957, mentioned that all the *Aghsan*, male descendants of

Baha’u’llah, who might have been appointed, seeing that the guardian, him-

self, had no children, were either dead or declared by Shoghi Effendi to

be violators of the covenant, and indicated:

The first effect of the realization that no successor to Shoghi

Effendi could have been appointed by him was to plunge the Baha’is of

the Cause into the very abyss of despair. What must happen to the

world community of his devoted followers if the Leader, the Inspirer,

the Planner of all Baha’i activities in all countries and islands of

the seas could no longer fulfill his unique mission?3

The hands also suspected that “our implacable opponents may, and probably

will, unleash attacks, assuming in their ignorance that the Faith of

Baha’u’llah is weakened and defenceless.”4

In this grave crisis, the hands were conscious of two important

facts, (1) that Shoghi Effendi had passed away in the midst of their Ten

Year World Crusade and that they still had the guardian’s explicit direc-

tions as to the faith’s objectives until the termination of the world cru-

sade in 1963, (2) and that infallible guidance would devolve again upon

the faith once the Universal House of Justice came into existence, which

according to the Baha’i teachings, was to be under the protection of Baha’u-

’llah.

THE FAITH UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE GUARDIANS

Until the Universal House of Justice could be formed, the hands

of the cause assumed the direction of the faith. Five conclaves were held

by the hands between Shoghi Effendi’s passing and the election of the

Universal House of Justice in 1963, and one additional conclave was

held at the time of its election. At the conclusion of each conclave, the

heads sent forth a message to the Baha’i world.

First Conclave of the Hands—November, 1957

Twenty-six of the twenty-seven hands of the cause gathered at

Bahji in November, 1957. Corinne True, at the age of ninety-six, was unable

to be present. ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will and testament had indicated that the

hands were to elect nine of their number to “be occupied in the important

services in the work of the Guardian of the Cause of God.”5 The hands,

therefore, elected nine from their number, who were designated for legal

purposes as “Custodians of the Faith,” whom they charged

to exercise—subject to such directions and decisions as may be

given from time to time by us as the Chief Stewards of the Baha’i

World Faith—all such functions, rights and powers in succession

to the Guardian of the Baha’i Faith, His Eminence the late Shoghi

Effendi, as are necessary to serve the interests of the Baha’i

World Faith, and this until such time as the Universal House of

Justice, upon being duly established and elected in conformity

with the Sacred Writings of Baha’u’llah and the Will and Testa-

ment of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, may otherwise determine.6

One of the nine nominated hands for this office and one of the twenty-six

hands signing the resolution in which the above words occur was Mason

Remey, president of the Baha’i International Council.

These twenty-six hands, then, issued their proclamation to the

Baha’is of East and West, noting the crisis into which the faith had been

plunged, encouraging them to continue the work of the Ten Year World Crusade,

announcing their appointment of the nine custodian hands, and indicating that

meanwhile:

The entire body of the Hands assembled by the nine Hands of the

World Center will decide when and how the International Baha’i

Council is to evolve through the successive stages outlined by

the Guardian, culminating in the call to election of the Univer-

sal House of Justice by the membership of all National Spiritual

Assemblies.

When that divinely ordained body comes into existence, all

the conditions of the Faith can be examined anew and the measures

necessary for its future operation determined in consultation with

the Hands of the Cause.7

This proclamation was signed also by all twenty-six hands of the cause.

Second Conclave of the Hands—November, 1958

Twenty-five of the twenty-seven hands met again in the mansion

of Baha’u’llah at Bahji. In their message to the Baha’is, the hands again

encouraged the Baha’is to attain the goals set for them in the world cru-

sade and expressed their confidence that the Baha’is

fully aware of the gravity of the crisis facing them, and unified

as never before by the sacrifice of the life of our beloved Guardian,

will arise as one soul in may bodies in a mighty forward surge to

complete as an immortal monument to his memory the triumph of the

holy Crusade.8

The hands then indicated their plan that upon the foundation of that

victory

there will be raised up the crowning glory of all the Universal

House of Justice, and once again a precious source of divine infal-

libility will return to the earth with the establishment of that

Supreme Body on the occasion of the Most Great Jubilee in 1963—

the World Congress called by our beloved Guardian himself, a glorious

and befitting fulfillment of his life of complete sacrifice.9

Third Conclave of the Hands—October-November, 1959

In their message from the third conclave, the hands announced

that they had formulated a “plan of action which will enable the Baha’i

world to establish the Universal House of Justice in 1963.” The plan

called for the election in Ridvan, 1961, of twenty-one national spiritual

assemblies in Latin America, for the election of eleven national assemblies

in Europe and on in Ceylon by Ridvan 1962. The hands also announced

that in Ridvan, 1963, members of all national and regional spiritual assem-

blies, duly constituted in Ridvan, 1960, would elect nine members to the

International Baha’i Council, who would serve a two-year term ending in

1963 with the election of the Universal House of Justice. The hands recal-

led their previous announcement that when this body comes into existence

it can examine anew, in consultation with the hands, all the conditions in

the faith and noted that this would include “the question of the Guardian-

ship.”10

Fourth Conclave of the Hands—October-November, 1960

The hands announced that hands of the cause had reached a

point in their development where they could no longer operate on a

regional basis alone and “must render their services on a global scale.”

The hands indicated also that the International Baha’i Council which

would be elected the following year would be given certain additional

administrative duties to those announced last year.11

The message from the fourth conclave noted also that the world-

wide Baha’i community had risen to “new heights of accomplishment,” al-

though “faced by yet another severe test during the past year.”12 The

“severe test” was the claim advanced in March, 1960, by Mason Remey of

being the second guardian of the faith in succession to Shoghi Effendi.

Remey succeeded in gaining a certain following and subsequently was

expelled from the faith by the hands. Remey’s story will be treated

later in the chapter. Among the powers given to the nine custodian

hands in 1957 by the entire body of the hands was authority “to expel

from the Faith violators of the Covenant.”13

Fifth Conclave of the Hands—October-November, 1961

The hands announced that on the first, second, and third days

of Ridvan, 1963, the members of all national and regional spiritual

assemblies elected in Ridvan, 1962, would constitute the electoral body

to vote for the members of the Universal House of Justice and that all

male voting Baha’is would be eligible for election to this supreme body.

They also announced that the world congress would not be held in Baghdad,

as first proposed, but in London, England, where Shoghi Effendi is

buried.14

Sixth Conclave of the Hands—April-May, 1963

In the central hall of the home of ‘Abdu’l-Baha and Shoghi

Effendi in Haifa, the hands assembled for their sixth annual conclave.

Also present were over 300 members of fifty-six national and regional

assemblies of the Baha’i world. On this historic occasion, the members

of these assemblies elected the first Universal House of Justice, compris-

ing nine men, which is today the highest administrative body of the Baha’i

world and considered by Baha’is as being infallible in its decisions.

The hands announced in a cable to all national assemblies on

April 22, 1963, the election of the Universal House of Justice.

At the conclave, the hands also established a body of five hands

to remain in Haifa to assist the Universal House of Justice in whatever

way the House deemed advisable, and the five hands were given power to act

on behalf of the lands in transferring to the House any general powers,

properties, or funds held by the custodian hands. Changes were made also

in the assignment of hands to various continents, and a cable issued indi-

cating that the hands desired now to devote their efforts to the protection

and propagation of the faith according to their functions as described in

the Baha’i scriptures.15

As can be seen in the actions of the hands between the death of

Shoghi Effendi and the election of the Universal House of Justice, the

hands assumed powers and activities formerly held and conducted by the

guardian alone. They directed through cablegrams the affairs of the faith

after the manner of the guardian; they elected nine of their number to

exercise, subject to their directions, all such functions, rights,

and powers in succession to the guardian … as are necessary to serve

the interests of the faith”; they also enlarged the sphere of their

activities to a global scale and later reassigned their appointments;

and even assumed the right to expel from the faith those whom they deemed

violators of the covenant, a right that Shoghi Effendi “never permitted

anyone else to exercise”16 besides himself, for, as it was stated during

his lifetime, “no one has the right to excommunicate anybody except the

Guardian of the Faith, himself.”17

The hands, thus, as “the Chief Stewards of Baha’u’llah’s embryo-

nic World Commonwealth,”18 a designation given to them by Shoghi Effendi

in his last message to the Baha’i world before his death, assumed tem-

porarily the control of the faith until the election of the Universal

House of Justice, at which time they resumed their duties as outlined in

the Baha’i scriptures.

THE TRANSFORMATION BY THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

One of the important questions facing the Universal House of

Justice after it came into power in April, 1963, was the question of the

guardianship, which the hands had indicated could be reexamined by the

infallible House of Justice once it came into power. Could this body

appoint a guardian or enact laws to make possible the appointment of

another guardian? In an historic cablegram, October 6, 1963, the Univer-

sal House of Justice, announced:

After prayerful and careful study of the Holy Texts bearing

upon the question of the appointment of the successor to Shoghi

Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, and after prolonged con-

sultation which included consideration of the views of the Hands

of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, the Universal House

of Justice finds that the is no way to appoint or legislate to make

it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi.19

The Universal House of Justice turned its energies to the prosecu-

tion of the Nine Year Plan (1964-73), which occupied much of its concern,

but the question of the guardianship was not a settled issue for some

Baha’is. In a message to one of the national assemblies, March 9, 1965,

the Universal House of Justice addressed certain questions concerning the

guardianship and its own authority as the supreme administrative body. The

House indicated that the international administration of the faith by the

hands of the cause prior to its election was “in accordance with” Shoghi

Effendi’s designation of them as the “Chief Stewards of Baha’u’llah’s

embryonic World Commonwealth” and insisted that “there is nothing in the

Texts to indicate that the election of the Universal House of Justice

could be called only by the Guardian.”20

In a later message, May 27, 1966, the House of Justice, in respond-

ing to a letter by an individual believer, indicated, contrary to the sug-

gestion by the believer that “certain information concerning the succession

to Shoghi Effendi” was being withheld for the good of the cause, that

“nothing whatsoever is being withheld from the friends for whatever

reason,”21 pointing out that no one could have been appointed in accordance

with ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will. The House also maintained:

The fact that Shoghi Effendi did not leave a will cannot be

adduced as evidence of his failure to obey Baha’u’llah—rather should

we acknowledge that in his very silence there is a wisdom and a sign

of his infallible guidance. We should ponder deeply the writings

that we have, and seek to understand the multitudinous significances

that they contain.22

The gravity of the crisis which struck the Baha’i faith after

the passing of Shoghi Effendi in the realization that the guardian had

not left a will and testament appointing a successor, or that at least a

will had not been found, and the significance of the transformation in

the faith by the announcement of the Universal house of Justice that no

guardian could be appointed can be appreciated only by realizing how

essential the guardianship was conceived to be in Baha’i documents and

writings.

The Baha’i claim that it is a religion which could not be torn

apart by schism rested primarily in the idea of the covenant, which provided

that the leadership of the faith would be passed on from generation to gene-

ration by a succession of appointed leaders whose authoritative voice,

especially in the interpretation of the holy texts, so often a cause of

differences within religions, would settle all questions and quell all dis-

sent.

‘Abdu’l-Baha, in his will and testament, considered the “Charter”

of the new world order, stressed: “It is incumbent upon the guardian of

the Cause of God to appoint in his own lifetime him that small become his

successor that differences may not arise after his passing.”23 Shoghi

Effendi described the state of the faith without the institution of the

guardianship:

Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World

Order of Baha’u’llah would be mutilated and permanently deprived of

that hereditary principle which, as ‘Abdu’l-Baha has written, has

been invariably upheld by the Law of God. … Without such an insti-

tution the integrity of the Faith would be imperiled, and the stabili-

ty of the entire fabric would be gravely endangered. Its prestige

would suffer, the means required to enable it to take a long, an

uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely

lacking, and the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legis-

lative action of its elected representatives would be totally with-

drawn.24

No less essential to the faith is the Universal House of Justice.

The guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are termed “the twin

institutions of the Administrative Order of Baha’u’llah,” and Shoghi

Effendi maintains, “should be regarded as divine in origin, essential in

their functions and complementary in their aim and purpose.” He refers

to them as “two inseparable institutions” and “each operates within a

clearly defined sphere of jurisdiction.”25 The guardian holds the right

of interpreting the revealed word, whereas the Universal House of Justice

has powers of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the sacred

texts.26 Shoghi Effendi elsewhere discussed the importance of the guardian-

ship to the Universal House of Justice:

It enhances the prestige of that exalted assembly, stabilizes its

supreme position, safeguards its unity, assures the continuity of

its labors, without presuming in the slightest to infringe upon

the inviolability of its clearly-defined sphere of jurisdiction.27

George Townshend expressed his view of the importance of the

guardianship:

Interpretation of the Word, which has always been the fertile

source of schism in the past, is thus taken once and for all time,

into His own hands by Baha’u’llah, and none other but His appointed

Guardian, whom He guides, can fulfil this function. This is the

secret of the unbreakable unity of the Baha’i Faith and its entire

and blessed lack of sects.28

Townshend saw the institution of the guardianship as a fulfillment of

scripture and as the means whereby God would direct his people:

When it is written that “the government shall be upon his shoulder”

the reference can be to the Guardian only and the continuing “forever”

of his sovereignty can only be referred to the lineage of succeeding

Guardians. For this is the means—the Covenant—which the Lord of

Hosts has designed to discharge His supreme mission, and the way in

which God Himself shall rule His people.29

Marzieh Gail saw the guardianship as providing a focus for human love

which would be incapable of being directed to a group of men:

The secret of Baha’i strength is the tie between the individual

and the Guardian. We obey our elected representatives, our Local and

National Spiritual Assemblies, because our interest is centered in him.

We could not gear our emotions to our chosen representatives, we could

not suffer and sacrifice and die for them; because they are many, he is

one; they change, he endures; they are our creation, he is Baha’u’-

llah’s. If—as is inconceivable—human love and loyalty were capable

of focusing on a group of men—then American Baha’is would center in

their representatives, and Persian Baha’is in theirs, and there would

be no higher devotion to hold the Baha’i world together. The memory

of Baha’u’llah would be with us, yes, but not the day-to-day expression

of His will. We would go the way of other religions, into hatred and

schism and war. Because of the Guardianship, then, I believe in the

Baha’i plan for establishing a world federation.30

The essentiality of the guardianship as a continuing institution

in the Baha’i faith could be expressed in no more forceful words than those

of Ruhiyyih Khanum:

The institution of the Guardianship—tied into the fabric of the

Faith by ‘Abdu’l-Baha through His Will in a knot no amount of per-

severance and ingenuity can undo—has, as it was destined to do,

effectively prevented any division or schism in the Baha’i ranks.31

The principle of successorship, endowed with the right of Divine

interpretation, is the very hub of the Cause into which its Doctrines

and Laws fit like the spokes of a wheel—tear out the hub and you

have to throw away the whole thing. This is why our enemies, for a

hundred years, failed to establish anything outside the Faith which

could thrive or prosper.32

The above quotations from various Baha’i writings reveal the

absolute essentiality of the hereditary guardianship in the thought of

Baha’is before Shoghi Effendi’s death. They saw the continuing guardian-

ship, with its rights of infallible interpretation of Baha’i scripture,

as the prime reason for Baha’i unity and the safeguard guaranteeing that the

faith would not be plagued with schism. But what “no amount of perse-

verance and ingenuity” could do in untying the hereditary guardianship

from the faith was done through the historical circumstances that the

guardian had excommunicated in Baha’u’llah’s family all possible candidates

to the succession and seemingly had left no will thus appointing a succes-

sor. The “principle of successorship, endowed with the right of Divine

interpretation,” described by Ruhiyyih Khanum as “the very hub of the

Cause,” was thus wrenched from the Baha’i wheel; but rather than “throw

away the whole thing,” which at a previous period in the faith was seen

as the inevitable and logical recourse, the Baha’i leaders, Ruhiyyih Kha-

num herself being one of the principal figures, decided on a not so

drastic course of picking up the pieces and managing as best they could un-

til the election of the infallible Universal House of Justice. That supreme

body ruled in effect that the living guardianship had ended with the death

of Shoghi Effendi. Some Baha’is, however, disagreed.

MASON REMEY’S OPPOSITION TO THE TRANSFORMATION

The leading voice, and for a time the sole voice, in opposing

the abandonment of the living guardianship was Charles Mason Remey, a

hand of the cause and president of the International Baha’i Council.

Mason Remey at the time of Shoghi Effendi’s death in 1957 was eighty-

three years old, having been born in Burlington, Iowa, on May 15, 1874.

He was one of the earliest American converts to the faith, having accepted

the Baha’i message upon hearing it in 1899-1900 from May Ellis Bolles,

later Mrs. Sutherland Maxwell, the mother of Ruhiyyih Khanum.33 He made

four visits to ‘Abdu’l-Baha between 1901 and 1908, before ‘Abdu’l-Baha

gained his freedom. At the time of the first visit, Shoghi Effendi was

only four years old. Another visit was made two years after his release

and again when ‘Abdu’l-Baha was in London, Eingland.34 At the beginning of

the war years in 1914, Mason Remey and George Latimer made a tour through

various countries, visiting Baha’i centers, on their way to visit ‘Abdu’l-

Baha.35 Mason Remey was also the recipient of a number of tablets from

‘Abdu’l-Baha.36

Remey travelled widely in Europe and South America, spreading

the Baha’i teachings.37 He wrote extensively about the faith.38 He was

the architect for various Baha’i buildings, including the Baha’i temples

in Kampala, Uganda, and in Sydney, Australia. In 1951, Shoghi Effendi

appointed him as president of the International Baha’i Council

and also as a hand of the cause. He was one of the hands who sealed

Shoghi Effendi’s safe and desk drawers after the guardian’s death and

who later examined his papers and certified that no will had been found.

Remey indicates that at the time of the first conclave of the

hands in November, 1957, he thought that he “might become the Guardian

of the Faith in some way or another,” but he “did not know how.”39 All was

rather vague in his mind during those confusing days immediately following

Shoghi Effendi’s passing, and so he succumbed to the majority opinion and

signed his name along with the other hands to the “Proclamation” issued on

November 23, 1957, indicating that “no successor to Shoghi Effendi could

have been appointed by him.”40

At the second conclave of the hands in November, 1958, Remey

says that he had “the vague thought” of himself “as a possible Guardian

of the Faith” and he felt that someone other than he should “Make the stand

that the hope for the continuation of the Guardianship should not be aban-

doned.” No one else made such a stand. Remey remained silent until the

last session of the conclave, when he “took the floor, and told the members

of the conclave that they were violating the Will and Testament of the Mas-

ter ‘Abdu’l-Baha in their attitude of not wanting a continuation of the

Guardianship.” Remey was ruled out of order for bringing up a subject on

which the hands had already acted.41

One of the decisions at the third conclave of the hands in 1959

was to elect in 1961 new officers to the International Baha’i Council to

hold a two-year term until the election of the Universal House of Justice

in 1963. Remey refused to sign the message of the hands from the third

conclave and went into “voluntary exile” in Washington, D.C., where he

began to collect his thoughts and compose his “appeals” to the hands of

the cause. Three appeals were issued: “An Appeal to the Hands of the Faith

in the Holy Land,” “Another Appeal to the Hands of the Baha’i Faith,” and

“A Last Appeal to Hands of the Faith.”42

In his first appeal, written in reference to the projected visit

of Ruhiyyih Khanum, Leroy Ioas, and other of the hands to the annual con-

vention of the Baha’is in the United States, Remey seeks to prepare them

for that visit, indicating that the American Baha’is “still hope for a

Guardian,” and pledging his efforts to try to build up the trust of the

American Baha’is in the hands, although he disagrees with them on their

stand concerning the guardianship. He believes that the American believers

will follow the hands “until the awakening of the Hands and their aban-

donment of the program for 1963.” He mentions that “something is going

to happen as a surprise to the Baha’i world from another direction altoge-

ther,” perhaps hinting at his announcement of himself as the second guar-

dian, if at this time he has reached this conviction, and maintains that

the hands for the most part will have to take an awful thrashing.” He

tells the hand: “I know that you are up the wrong track and that in the

end your majority will be obliged to acknowledge your mistake.”43

Remey’s second appeal consists of a series of letters in which

he maintains that the hands should be awaiting the appearance of the second

guardian.

The “Last Appeal” is the meet important of Remey’s three appeals,

for in this work he takes a more forceful stand against the position of

the hands, and although he does not declare himself the second guardian,

the work reveals that he has come to regard himself as holding this sta-

tion.44 The major points in this work may be summarized as follows.

Remey contends that the hands have no authority to proclaim

that the living guardianship has ended, that likewise they have no

authority to call for the election of an International Baha’i Council

or for the election of the Universal House of Justice,45 and that in the

Baha’i teachings “the Hands of the Faith are given no authority to control

anything.46 Nor have the hands any power, Remey maintains, to put anyone

out of an office who was placed there by the guardian of the faith.47 Remey

evidently is thinking here of the call by the hands for an election of the

International Baha’i Council, whose members were appointed by Shoghi Effen-

di. “The only prerogative bestowed upon the Hands of the Faith in the Will

and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Baha,” Remey says, “is that they propagate and

that they protect the Faith.”48 Remey maintains that the hands, thus,

are in “violation of the Will and Testament” of ‘Abdu’l-Baha.”49

Remey feels that the position of the hands has created a situa-

tion in the faith similar to the days of ‘Abdu’l-Baha “when we only knew

about the Covenant and knew nothing about the Administration under a

Guardian.” According to Remey, “the elimination of the Guardianship

eliminates the message” which Baha’is have to give to the world, for the

guardianship is “the heart of the Administration” established by ‘Abdu’l-

Baha’s will and testament,50 a position similar to that previously held

by Ruhiyyih Khanum when she describes the guardianship as the “hub” in

the wheel without which the rest would have to be thrown away.

The fallacy of the program of the hands, Remey maintains, is that

without the guardianship the institution of the hands also will not exist

within a generation or two because only the guardian can appoint hands of

the cause, thus eliminating the first two of the essentials of a kingdom

(the king, his nobility, and his people), and “the Cause ere long will be

but an indiscriminate mass of people trying to rule and regulate them-

selves!”51

Remey holds that only the guardianship can give infallibility to

the Universal House of Justice:

The Universal House of Justice can only function in its infalli-

bility when it has these two supports—the International Assembly

alone without the Guardianship cannot be the Universal House of

Justice.52

Such a House of Justice with no guardian as its president would be merely

“a human democratic institution proclaiming the voice of the people.”53

Remey compares the position of the hands with that of Ahmad

Sohrab, who accepted Baha’u’llah’s and ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s teachings but who

“refused to accept the Guardianship of the Faith as provided for in the

Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Baha.”54

Remey points out that the proposal to abandon the guardianship

was advanced first by one of the ten Persian hands and that “all of the

other Persian Hands quickly arose in support of this move, with the result

that this move had the immediate support of the majority of the Hands.”

Remey believes that the Persian hands had “consulted amongst themselves”

between the first two meetings of the first conclave of the hands and that

“they had come to an agreement between themselves that the Guardianship be

abandoned.”55 Remey believes that the Baha’is in the Orient “have never

been as keen about the Administration as have been the Baha’is of Ameri-

ca.”56 Remey maintains that the course being pursued by the hands would

result eventually in a split in the faith, especially between the Orient

and the Occident.57 He expresses a strong confidence that the American

Baha’is would resist the hands if they knew that the hands had closed the

matter of the guardianship:

If the American Baha’is as a whole should realize that the very exis-

tence of the Faith is now at stake, it would indeed create an agita-

tion in the Cause because America is the Cradle of the Administration

of the Faith and the strength of the Administration is firmly rooted

in the consciousness that envelopes them very strongly and to which

they will cling.58

Again, he states, “In my opinion the American Baha’is are just not going

to take this violation of the Will and Testament that you are trying to

put over on the Baha’i world!”59

To stop what Remey considers the violation of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s

will and the destruction of the faith, he asserts his authority as the

president of the International Baha’i Council, appointed by Shoghi Effendi,

to call for a halt to the program of the hands concerning the election of

a new International Council and the election of the Universal House of Jus-

tice. Remey’s position could not be disputed, for Shoghi Effendi had ap-

pointed him to the presidency of the council and had announced his appoint-

ment to the Baha’i world. Remey maintained, therefore, that he could call

a halt to any steps being taken about the council of which he, as its ap-

pointed president, did not approve. The calling of a halt to steps taken

concerning the council would necessarily stop the steps being taken regar-

ding the House of Justice, which was to evolve from the International Coun-

cil.

Remey was actually, therefore, setting up a power block in the

administrative machinery. His position as president of the council was

undisputed, whereas the hands had no clear authority in Baha’i texts to

exercise any administrative authority over the faith but were agents of

the guardian to carry out his biddings. Their functions were propagation

and protection of the faith. Remey maintains that they were not pro-

tecting the faith but violating the faith. The authority assumed by the

hands after Shoghi Effendi’s death was based on the words of his last mes-

sage that the hands were “the Chief Stewards of Baha’u’llah’s embryonic

World Commonwealth,” but even in this last message no administrative powers

are passed to them. They are described as “invested … with the dual

function of guarding over the security, and of insuring the propagation,”

of the faith.61

If it is true, as Remey asserts, that the guardian had not given

his “instructions to organize anything or to do anything at all”62 about

the council is his position as president and that “the Council has always

been a quiescent body, the duties of which have never been assigned or

designated,”63 then one may question what authority Remey had for declar-

ing that Shoghi Effendi had placed “the reins of power in my hands over

the body of Hands and thus over the believers of all the world by my ap-

pointment as President of the Baha’i International Council” and that he

was “now in command of the Baha’i Faith.”64 In other words, if Shoghi

Effendi never activated the council during his lifetime, then Mason Remey

seemingly could exercise no authority as president of a quiescent body.

Remey’s authority as asserted is his *Last Appeal* is on the basis of his being

president of the International Baha’i Council, not on his being the second

Guardian. Remey, therefore, had no active power as the president of the

International Council.

Remey’s position, however, as expressed in the following state-

ment has some validity:

My position … while it did not allow me to go ahead with

the activities of the Council in the days of Shoghi Effendi, now

gives me the authority not to do anything with or about the Council

until so commanded by the Second Guardian of the Faith.65

Remey, as president of the council, could keep it from functioning, since

no higher administrative power in the faith existed which could compel him

to activate the council as a functioning body. The individual members of

the council had carried out Shoghi Effendi’s directions, but the council

never assembled to function as a body.

But regardless of Remey’s authority as the council president,

his point is valid that no one person or body of persons had authority

after Shoghi Effendi’s death to initiate steps to elect a new council

whose original members were appointed by Shoghi Effendi himself. The

authority which the hands assumed after the guardian’s passing was con-

ceded to them by the national assemblies but was not granted to them by

the Baha’i writings. The Universal House of Justice later commented on

the action of the hands:

Following the passing of Shoghi Effendi the international

administration of the Faith was carried on by the Hands of the

Cause of God with the complete agreement and loyalty of the na-

tional spiritual assemblies and the body of the believers. This

was in accordance with the Guardian’s designation of the Hands

as the “Chief Stewards of Baha’u’llah’s embryonic World Common-

wealth.66

This is a carefully worded statement, for it presents the facts that the

hands did begin administering the international affairs of the faith, and

that the national assemblies agreed to this arrangement, states the basis

upon which the hands so acted, and by implication approves of the conduct

without stating definitely that the action was in accord with their right-

ful authority. The statement by the House of Justice that the hands rea-

lized that “they had no certainty of Divine guidance such as is incontro-

vertibly assured to the Guardian and to the Universal House of Justice”67

allows the possibility that they could have overstepped their legitimate

authority.

Had Remey persisted in his stand within the faith as the presi-

dent of the International Baha’i Council to oppose the authority of the

hands to do anything concerning the council, he might have created legal

problems in the functioning of the faith’s processes, whether or not the

majority in the end would have bypassed him, but Remey soon after announced

himself as the second guardian, a position not as explicitly designated as

his presidency of the International Council, and was promptly expelled from

the faith, thus solving any difficulties facing the hands in their projec-

ted endeavors. The expulsion of Remey from the faith by the hands, of

course, also raises the question of what clear authority the hands had for

this action, but the basis upon which Remey claimed the guardianship was more

easily attacked than his appointment as council president, considering the

lack of an explicit appointment as well as the fact that Remey did not

assert his claim for three years after Shoghi Effendi’s death.

In his *Last Appeal* to the hands, Remey did not openly claim the

guardianship, but various hints are given that he considers himself the

new guardian. He indicates that the hands should know without being told

who the second guardian is and says that he has known “for the past eleven

or twelve years who the Second Guardian was to be.”68 He promises that if

the hands will follow his urging and at the next conclave will restore

hope in the guardianship that the second guardian will emerge “from his

occultation” to take command of the faith.69 The guardian, he says, is

“with us but waiting to be wanted”70 and “is delaying his coming forth

from his occultation in the hope that the Hands of the Cause will want to

welcome him when he comes to them.”71 By the stand he is taking in his

message to the hands he is, he holds, “assuming a command tantamount to

that of a Guardian of the Faith to be obeyed by all.”72 He affirms

“I am the protector of the Faith”;73 “I guard the faith.”74

By Ridvan 117, Remey said: “all was clear to me.”75 He first

announced himself as the second guardian to the hands of the faith and

then before the Ridvan convention in Wilmette, Illinois. Remey hoped and

even expected that the Baha’is in America, “the Cradle of the Administra-

tion,” would accept his as guardian. He had previously warned the hands

that the American believers would not sanction their stand against the

guardianship. He wrote a letter, dated March, 1960 (the day not indica-

ted), to Charlie Wolcott, secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly in

the United States, enclosing a copy of his *Proclamation* to be read before

the national convention and outlining the procedure by which he was to be

conducted formally to Wilmette to meet with the Baha’i leaders if the con-

vention should accept his guardianship.

The printed *Proclamation* contains five pages with these words on

the cover: “Proclamation to the Baha’is of the World through the Annual

Convention of the Baha’is of the United States of America Assembled at

Wilmette, Illinois, Ridvan 117 Baha’i Era, from Mason Remey, the Second

Guardian of the Baha’i Faith.” Remey introduces himself in the *Proclama*-

*tion*, giving a brief account of his background and focusing on his position

as the president of the International Baha’i Council, and declares that he

is, therefore, “the President of the Embryonic Universal House of Justice,”

and that “when this August body become the Universal House of Justice,” if

during his lifetime, he “will then be the President of the First Universal

House of Justice of the Baha’i Dispensation” (‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will and testa-

ment indicates that the presidency of the Universal House of Justice is

a position to be filled by the guardian.) He charges the hands with fla-

grantly violating the will of ‘Abdu’l-Baha by their “program for 1963.”76

Remey says that be is “fully confident” of the American believers’

“support and cooperation in all Baha’i matters for you understand the Adminis-

tration of the Faith” and indicates that he expects the Baha’is at the con-

vention “to accept me without question as their Commander-in-Chief in all

Baha’i matters and to follow me so long as I live for I am the Guardian of

the Faith—the Infallible Guardian of the Baha’i Faith.” He maintains: “The

line of the Guardianship of the Baha’i Faith in unbroken for I have been the

Guardian of the Faith since the death of the Beloved Guardian Shoghi Effen-

di,” signing the document as “Mason R., Guardian of the Baha’i Faith.”77

Remey’s hopes of being accepted officially as the second guardian

by the Baha’is in convention, however, were not realized, and he mentioned

in a later writing that almost the entire Baha’i world, it would seem, en-

dorsed the violation of the Hands of the Faith in their repudiation” of Sho-

ghi Effendi’s appointment of him, as he maintains, as the second guardian.78

Although with only a small following, Remey believed that his cause was right

and that it would eventually triumph over the violation of the hands and

those who followed them.

After his *Proclamation*, Remey issued three encyclical letters to

the Baha’i world, setting forth his position. Remey’s claim to the guardian-

ship rests primarily upon Shoghi Effendi’s appointment of him as presi-

dent of the International Baha’i Council, which Shoghi Effendi said would

evolve into the Universal House of Justice. He points out that this appoint-

ment was made during Shoghi Effendi’s lifetime and was thus in accord with

the requirement in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will that Shoghi Effendi appoint him suc-

cessor during his lifetime. He admits that his “appointment was veiled at

the time” but that nonetheless it was “very clear and concise and not to

be misunderstood.”79 He finds that in his attempt to stop the hands from

violating the will and testament by endorsing the termination of the living

guardianship he was even then guarding the Baha’i faith, although not yet

fully aware of his station.

Remey maintains that he is not advancing his own claim to the

guardianship nor attempting to usurp that office but merely announcing to

the Baha’i world an appointment which Shoghi Effendi himself had made.

“The Guardians of the Faith do not appoint themselves, for they are appoin-

ted—each Guardian by his predecessor.”80 To the charge that he is attemp-

ting to cause schism in the faith, Remey answers:

The Hands of the Cause accuse me of attempting to create a

split in the Cause—as if this were a bad thing for the Baha’i Faith!

I am indeed making a split in the Faith, for I am separating the dis-

eased from the healthy living spiritual organisms of the body of the

Baha’is. Such was the manner in which The Blessed Master saved the

Faith in his day and the Beloved Guardian saved the Faith in his day.81

He declares all the hands who signed the message from the third conclave,

November, 1959, to be “cut off from the Baha’i Faith”82 and “expels from

the Faith all who stand with and give support to these former Hands of the

Faith.”83 He declares that all those who “proclaim themselves to be ‘Ba-

ha’is Sans Guardianship’, should not be considered as Baha’is, for the only

true and legitimate Baha’is are those now serving under the Second Guardian

of the Faith.”84

BAHA’IS UNDER THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

The majority of Baha’is refused to accept the claims of Mason

Remey, considering themselves the true Baha’is and Mason Remey and his fol-

lowers as covenant-breakers and, thus, outside the faith and not entitled

to identify themselves as Baha’is.

Arguments against Remey’s Claim

Two major arguments are raised against Remey’s claim of being

Shoghi Effendi’s successor in the guardianship.

Not a Descendant of Baha’u’llah

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will and testament specifies that the appointed

successor “must be the essence of purity, [and] must show in himself the

fear of God, knowledge, wisdom and learning,” and provides that if “the

first-born of the guardian of the Cause of God” does not meet these quali-

fications, then the guardian must “choose another branch to succeed him.”85

The word “branch” could mean another of the guardian’s sons or could mean

one of the *Aghsan* (“Branches”), male descendants of Baha’u’llah. The House

of Justice points out, however, that Shoghi Effendi

had no children and all the surviving Aghsan had broken the

Covenant. Thus, as the Hands of the Cause stated in 1957, it

is clear that there was no one he could have appointed in accor-

dance with the provisions of the Will. To have made an appoint-

ment outside the clear and specific provisions of the Master’s

Will and Testament would obviously have been an impossible and

unthinkable course of action for the Guardian, the divinely

appointed upholder and defender of the Covenant.86

How the institution of the guardianship, the essentiality of

which is so clearly upheld in the Baha’i writings, could suddenly come

to naught seems to have been explained by the Persian hands at the first

conclave of the hands by the concept of *bada*, God’s changing his mind.87

This concept, no doubt quite familiar to the Persian Baha’is but not so

well known to Western Baha’is, asserts that “God can change his mind,

especially in the designation of a prophet or Imam.” It was one of the

heresies charged against the Babis. The classic use of the term, Edward

G. Browne points out, was the sixth Imam’s traditional saying in reference

to his sons, “God never changed His mind about anything as He did about

Isma‘il.”88 Ja‘far-i-Sadiq, the sixth Imam, desired for Isma‘il to succeed

him but he subsequently appointed instead his other son Musa as seventh

Imam, through whom the “Twelver” sect continues the line of Imams to Mu-

hammad, the twelfth Imam. The “seveners” regard Isma‘il as the seventh

and last Imam.

Mason Remey employs the *bada* concept in holding not that God

changed his mind and ended the guardianship but that God changed his mind

about the guardianship’s being passed on within Baha’u’llah’s family:

God the Almighty stepped in and changed the entire possibility of

the Beloved Guardian’s carrying out this order of inheritance that

was written in the Will and Testament. … Then it was that the

Beloved Guardian in his infallibility designated that I, Mason

Remey, succeed him in the Guardianship of the Faith.89

Remey’s followers also saw a certain significance in ‘Abdu’l-

Baha’s reference to the occasion of Christ’s brothers seeking him, when

Christ “answered that His brothers were those who believed in God. …”

In this context, ‘Abdu’l-Baha speaks of “the Divine Gardener who “cuts

off the dry or weak branch from the good tree and grafts to it, a branch

from another tree.”90 Remey’s followers see in these passages a spiri-

tual inheritance in the “hereditary Guardianship” which allowed Shoghi

Effendi to choose to succeed him “another branch” outside of the natural

branches.

The Consent of the Hands to the Guardian’s Choice

Another argument against Remey’s claim is that the hands never

acknowledged any appointed successor. ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will and testament

stipulated:

The Hands of the Cause of God must elect from their own

number nine persons that shall at all times be occupied in the

important services in the work of the guardian of the Cause of

God. The election of these nine must be carried either unani-

mously or by majority from the company of the hands of the Cause

of God and these, whether unanimously or by a majority vote, must

give their assent to the choice of the one whom the guardian of

the Cause of God hath chosen as his successor.91

These words seem to allow the possibility that the hands could vote

against the guardian’s choice of his successor, an interpretation held

by Ahmad Sohrab, who points out in reference to the hands that “consi-

dering that the members of this body cannot be dismissed or expelled, a

mighty deadlock might ensue.”92 That is, the guardian and the hands would

be at odds, and the guardian could do nothing to see that his choice of

a successor should become the next guardian.

Does this stipulation in the will provide an argument against

Remey’s claim? Even if Shoghi Effendi should have appointed him as suc-

cessor, as he holds, the hands never acknowledged him as the new guar-

dian. The House of Justice pointed out that ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will

provided a clear means for the confirmation of the Guardian’s appoint-

ment of his successor. … The nine Hands to be elected

by the body of the Hands were to give their assent by secret ballot

to the Guardian’s choice. In 1957 the entire body of the Hands, after

fully investigating the matter, announced that Shoghi Effendi had

appointed no successor and left no will. This is documented and es-

tablished.93

Remey’s claim to the guardianship would seem, therefore, to be annulled

by the lack of any confirmation of his appointment by the hands, that is,

if one should interpret the passage in the will as meaning that the hands

could block the guardian’s choice of a successor. Shoghi Effendi did not

so interpret the passage:

The statement in the Will of ‘Abdu’l-Baha does not imply that

the Hands of the Cause of God have been given the authority to

overrule the Guardian. ‘Abdu’l-Baha could not have provided for a

conflict of authority in the Faith. This is obvious, in view of

His own words, which you will find on p. 13 (p. 11 of 1944 U.S.

Edition) of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, “The mighty

stronghold shall remain impregnable and safe through obedience to

him who is the guardian of the Cause of God, to turn unto him

and be lowly before him. He that opposeth him hath opposed the

True One”, etc.94

In Shoghi Effendi’s understanding, then, the hands have not the power

to overrule the guardian or to set up a “deadlock,” as Sohrab mentions,

and, therefore, the argument that the hands did not consent to Remey’s

appointment would not be valid for those who hold that Shoghi Effendi

appointed Mason Remey to the guardianship.

Moreover, the hands were to “elect .from their own number nine

persons” to be “occupied in the important services in the work of the

guardian,” and although the hands had power in themselves to elect this

body, they were to be elected evidently during the guardian’s lifetime

to assist him in his work, and since this body was nonexistent when

Shoghi Effendi passed away, they were not in a position to carry out

the will’s provision to assent to the guardian’s choice.

The Institution of the Guardianship

Some word of clarification is necessary in defining the position

of the Baha’is who refused to accept Remey’s guardianship in regard to

the institution of the guardianship. They do not see themselves as

having abandoned the institution of the guardianship. The hands sent

forth their messages to the Baha’i world by signing themselves as “In

the Service of the Beloved Guardian of the Faith,” i.e. Shoghi Effendi.

Mason Remey would not sign the message from the third conclave partly

because he believed the hands should be signing themselves after Shoghi

Effendi’s death as “In the Service of the Second Guardian of the Baha’i

Faith.”95

A careful reading of the announcement from the Universal House

of Justice concerning the guardianship reveals that it did not state

any abandonment of the guardianship nor declare that the guardianship had

ended. It merely pointed out that it could find no way to appoint

or legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed

Shoghi Effendi.”96 The institution of the guardianship, therefore, simply

came to a standstill. Baha’is still look to the writings of Shoghi Effen-

di, and his guardianship, in a sense, still continues through his written

words. Quite pointedly, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

The Guardianship does not lose its significance nor position in

the Order of Baha’u’llah merely because there is no living Guar-

dian. We must guard against two extremes: one is to argue that

because there is no Guardian all that was written about the

Guardianship and its position in the Baha’i world Order is a dead

letter and was unimportant; the other is to be so overwhelmed by

the significance of the Guardianship as to underestimate the

strength of the Covenant, or to be tempted to compromise with the

clear Texts in order to find somehow, in some way, a “Guardian.”97

The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice

One of Remey’s contentions was that the Baha’is overstepped

their authority in calling for the election of the Universal House of

Justice because only the guardian could call for its election. But

the Universal House of Justice maintained that “there is nothing in the

Texts to indicate that the election of the Universal House of Justice

could be called only by the Guardian” and pointed out that ‘Abdu’l-

Baha had “envisaged the calling of its election in His own lifetime.”

At one point when ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s life was threatened, it noted, ‘Abdu’l-

Baha wrote to Haji Mirza Taqi Afnan “commanding him to arrange for the

election of the Universal House of Justice should the threats against

the Master materialize.”98

Remey also insisted that only the guardian could give infal-

libility to the Universal House of Justice and that without him the House

would be merely a democratic body. The House of Justice, however, stated:

The infallibility of the Universal House of Justice, operating

within its ordained sphere, has not been made dependent upon the

presence in its membership of the Guardian of the Cause.59

It admits, however, that one of the guardian’s functions was “to define

the sphere of the legislative action” of the Universal House of Justice.

The question therefore arises: In the absence of the Guardian, is

the Universal House of Justice in danger of straying outside its

proper sphere and thus falling into error? Here we must remember

three things: First, Shoghi Effendi, during the thirty-six years

of his Guardianship, has already made innumerable such definitions,

supplementing those made by ‘Abdu’l-Baha and by Baha’u’llah Him-

self. As already announced to the friends, a careful study of

the Writings and interpretation on any subject on which the House

of Justice proposes to legislate always precedes its act of legis-

lation. Second, the Universal House of Justice, itself assured of

Divine guidance, is well aware of the absence of the Guardian and

will approach all matters of legislation only when certain of its

sphere of jurisdiction, a sphere which the Guardian has confidently

described as “clearly defined.” Third, we must not forget the

Guardian’s written statement about these two institutions: “Neither

can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain

of the other.”100

Another question which arises is, since Shoghi Effendi stressed

the inseparability of the institutions of the guardianship and the Uni-

versal House of Justice, whether they may function independently. On

this question, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

Whereas he obviously envisaged their functioning together, it can-

not logically be deduced from this that one is unable to function

in the absence of the other. During the whole thirty-six years

of his Guardianship Shoghi Effendi functioned without the Universal

House of Justice. Now the Universal House of Justice must function

without the Guardian, but the principle of inseparability remains.101

One of the ironies of Baha’i teachings is that these “two inseparable

institutions” actually were never united. A distance of some six years

intervened between Shoghi Effendi’s guardianship and the beginning of

the Universal House of Justice.

The Continental Boards of Counselors

The Baha’i texts do not indicate how long the term of office

may be of the members of the Universal House of Justice. But in October,

1963, the House announced that the next election for the Universal House

of Justice would be held in the spring of 1968. Accordingly, at that

time the newly elected Universal House of Justice took office. One of

its first actions was to deal with the problem of being unable to

appoint new hands of the cause. ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will indicated: “The

Hands of the Cause of God must be nominated and appointed by the guardian

of the Cause of God.”102 Without a living Guardian to appoint new hands,

this body eventually will expire. The Universal House of Justice pre-

viously ruled in November, 1964, that “there is no way to appoint, or legis-

late to make it possible to appoint, Hands of the Cause of God.”103

In June, 1968, the newly elected Universal House of Justice

established eleven continental boards of counselors in Northwestern

Africa, Central and East Africa, Southern Africa, North America, Central

America, South America, Western Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia,

Australasia, Europe.104

In the cablegram, June 21, 1968, announcing the decision to

establish these boards, the Universal House of Justice indicated that

“this significant step,” following consultation with the hands, “insures

(the) extension (in the) future (of the) appointed functions (of) their

institution.”105 The board members were appointed on June 24. Their

duties are the propagation and protection of the faith. They also are

to assume the direction of the auxiliary boards to the hands, thus freeing

the hands of this responsibility and allowing them to increase their inter-

continental services. Unlike the hands, who are appointed for life, the

members of the continental boards serve a term of office.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ORTHODOX BAHA’I FAITH

Mason Remey, being rejected by the majority of Baha’is and

expelled from the faith by the hands of the cause, began to organize

the Baha’is who accepted him as the second guardian. They called them-

selves the Baha’is under the Guardianship, then the Baha’is under the

Hereditary Guardianship, and finally the Orthodox Baha’is to distin-

guish themselves as the true Baha’is from the “Sans Guardian Baha’is.”

Doctrine of the Great Global Catastrophe

One teaching given particular emphasis in Mason Remey’s writings

concerns a “great global catastrophe.” Remey combined certain Biblical,

Qur’anic, and Baha’i prophecies relating to a coming day of tribulation

and judgment with current geological theories, particularly as popularized

by Charles H. Hapgood,106 to arrive at a concept of a coming catastrophe

brought on by a shifting of the earth’s crust which will produce cataclys-

mic changes in the earth’s atmosphere and surface, killing two-thirds of

the earth’s population.

Concerning Daniel’s prophecy (chapter 12), Remey asserts:

Some of the Friends had come to the conclusion that the prophecy of

the one thousand three hundred and five and thirty days indicated

the date 1917 A.D. and they wished to know just what might be ex-

pected to happen in the world at that time.107

According to Remey, he asked ‘Abdu’l-Baha what would happen in the world

at that time and received the reply that “after the year 1917 there is

coming a very great catastrophe in the world!” Remey then asked: “Would

this be soon after 1917, or in the distant future?” ‘Abdu’l-Baha, he says,

answered: “Not soon after nor distant.”108 Remey says that years later

Shoghi Effendi told the world that 1963 would be the year of fulfillment”

of “the abomination of desolation.”109

Because of this coming catastrophe, Remey on July 16, 1961,

directed his followers to prepare the future center of their national

Baha’i administrative headquarters in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and of their

international European center in the capital city of Berne in the Swiss

Oberland,110 areas which he believed would survive the catastrophe.

In 1961, Remey also removed all of his personal records from

Chicago to Santa Fe, where at an altitude of 7000 feet above sea level, he

deposited them in fireproof storage.111 Believing that time was running

out before the great catastrophe, Remey wrote on June 19, 1962, to the

National Spiritual Assembly in Wilmette urging them to “lose no time in

preserving the archives of the Faith that are now in the crypt of the

Temple” by removing them to a place of safety high above sea level. He

indicates in this letter that he had previously written to Ruhiyyih

Khanum ordering her to remove the remains of Shoghi Effendi from the

Great Northern Cemetery in New Southgate to Mt. Carmel in Haifa. The

location of Shoghi Effendi’s present tomb, Remey maintained, would be

inundated along with all of London except for a high portion of Hamp-

stead Heights. According to Remey, Chicago and Wilmette are also doomed

for destruction in the catastrophe.112

Remey later set the date of the great catastrophe forward to

May, 1995.

Incorporation under the Second Guardian

From Florence, Italy, November 30, 1962, Remey outlined the

preliminary steps toward the election of national spiritual assemblies

of the Baha’is under his guardianship. He appointed three local assem-

blies to serve as “mother assemblies” for three nations. Each mother

assembly would be in charge of organizing elections leading to the forma-

tion of national assemblies. The appointed mother assemblies were the

Local Spiritual Assembly in Santa Fe for the United States, the local

assembly in Rawalpindi for Pakistan, aid the local assembly of Lucknow

for India. From the reports from the three mother assemblies on the

number of local assemblies, groups, and isolated believers, Remey decided

on the number of delegates to be elected for the national conventions.113

Two national bodies of Baha’is under the Guardianship, in the

United States and in Pakistan, were formed in 1963. According to the

*Glad Tidings*, a bulletin of the Baha’is under the second guardian, almost

all the Baha’is in Pakistan accepted Mason Remey as second guardian.114

The United States national assembly was elected in April, 1963, by seven-

ty-five delegates, assembled in Santa Fe, New Mexico, representing local

Baha’i groups throughout the country. According to A. S. Petzoldt, Quincy,

Illinois, who was elected the first chairman of the newly formed national

assembly, Baha’is under the Guardianship were located in Argentina, Chile,

Ecuador, Mexico, Costa Rica, the Canal Zone, France, England, Holland,

Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Africa, and in the Mauritius and Reunion

islands.115

The attorney for the Baha’is under the Guardianship informed

the American assembly on March 16, 1964, that the “Declaration of Trust

and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the

United Stated of America under the Hereditary Guardianship” had been

legally incorporated in New Mexico and its incorporation subsequently

filed with the U.S. Department of State. The attorney further explained

that the incorporation

embraces all of the believers of the Baha’i Faith in the United

States as members of the new corporation, whether or not they

have declared allegiance to the principle of Guardianship. The

new legal incorporation also embraced all of the properties held

by all of the believers of the Baha’i Faith, whether or not some

of the properties currently may be operated or under the control

of certain Baha’i believers who have not declared their allegiance

to the Guardianship principle.116

The Wilmette Property Lawsuit

With their new legal incorporation embracing all Baha’i proper-

ties, the Baha’is under the Guardianship proceeded to institute a legal

suit in the Federal District Court in Chicago against the National

Spiritual Assembly in Wilmette on August 5, 1964, for “breach of trust,”

attempting to gain legal ownership of the Wilmette Baha’i temple

property held by the “Sans Guardian Baha’is.”117

The Santa Fe Baha’is maintained that the Baha’is refusing to

acknowledge the continuation of the guardianship were violating the

Declaration and Trust under which they were incorporated, which declares

the purposes of the trust to be to administer Baha’i affairs according

to principles

created and established by Baha’u’llah, defined and explained by

‘Abdu’l-Baha and amplified and applied by Shoghi Effendi and his

duly constituted successor and successors under the provisions of

the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Baha.118

Unknown to the Santa Fe Baha’is was that the National Spiritual Assembly

in Wilmette, after the election of the Universal House of Justice in

1963, had amended and copyrighted its Declaration of Trust in 1964,

deleting references to the “successor and successors” after Shoghi

Effendi (in Article II) and deleting reference to the “Guardian of the

Cause” in Article IV and in Article IX of the By-Laws, making their

affairs subject only to the Universal House of Justice.119

The Wilmette Baha’is also filed on December 23, 1964, a counter-

claim against the Baha’is under the Guardianship for trademark infringe-

ment, mailing on January 27, 1965, a notice to the Commissioner of Patents,

Washington, D.C., reporting the trademark infringement as entered in the

counterclaim.

After a year and a half of legal battle, the Wilmette Baha’is

succeeded in getting an injunction against the Baha’is under the Guardian-

ship on June 28, 1966. The injunction entered by .Judge Richard Austin in

the Federal District Court, Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Divi-

sion, reads:

IT IS ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED that the counter-defendant,

the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United

States of America Under the Hereditary Guardianship, Inc., its

officers, agents, servants, employees, attorneys, and all per-

sons in active concert or participation with them, including

affiliated Local Spiritual Assemblies, groups, and individuals,

or any of them, be and they are hereby enjoined from using in

their activities the designations “National Spiritual Assembly

of the Baha’is of the United States of America under the Here-

ditary Guardianship, Inc.,” “Baha’i News Bureau,” “Rebels Round

Robin,” “Baha’i,” trademark representations of the Baha’i House

of Worship, the Arabic design “The Greatest Name,” and any other

designation which by colorable imitation or otherwise is likely

to be mistaken for or confused with the counterclaimant’s name

or marks as indicated above or is likely to create the erroneous

impression that counter-defendant’s religious activities, pub-

lications or doctrines originate with counterclaimant, and from

otherwise competing unfairly with counterclaimant or infringing

counterclaimant’s rights.120

The Baha’is under the Guardianship had sixty days in which to file a

motion for a new trial and appeal to a higher court. On August 8, 1966,

they filed the motion for a new trial and a motion to amend the judg-

ment. While the National Spiritual Assembly under the Guardianship

and their lawyer, Donald S. Frey, made preparations for the new trial,

an unexpected directive from Mason Remey ordered the National Spiritual

Assembly under the Guardianship to withdraw from the proceedings “regard-

less of the consequences.”121

Remey’s position was that the court case detracted from their

teaching efforts, that they were dealing with a spiritual problem which

could not be solved in a law court, and that the Baha’is were not to

engage in such “aggressive” actions.122

Since the “Conclusions of Law” submitted by the Wilmette Baha’is

states that the Wilmette National Spiritual Assembly did not presume to

infringe on the right to religious liberty or to organize and worship

according to the dictates of conscience, the Baha’is under the Hereditary

Guardianship interpreted the ruling against them that they could continue

their teaching and advertising activity, give talks on the Baha’i religion,

and privately call themselves Baha’is but could not use the name “Baha’i”

in their advertisements.123

The Wilmette Baha’is had lost their case in New York State against

the New History Society in attempting to restrict the use of the name

“Baha’i” to their own organization. This time they won.

As a result of the injunction, Mason Remey, in 1966, ordered

the National Spiritual Assembly in Santa Fe to be dissolved. The Baha’is

under Mason Remey continued as best they could under the injunction to

spread the Baha’i teachings while refraining from advertising themselves

as Baha’is.124

Mason Remey’s Messages

Mason Remey, before and after the Chicago lawsuit, issued various

messages to those accepting his guardianship. These were often printed

in the *Glad Tidings* until the Chicago injunction. After the National

Spiritual Assembly in Santa Fe was dissolved, Remey sent his messages to

his followers in the United States through Charley O. Murphy, who reproduced

the letters or portions of letters or announcements which were specified

as for the believers at large. These messaged dealt with points of doctrine

and announcement’s related to the affairs of the faith under the direction

of Mason Remey.

One of Remey’s earlier messages pertained to a non-Baha’i, English

translation of Baha’u’llah’s *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. A surprising feature of the

Baha’i faith is that, although Baha’u’llah’s *Kitab-i-Aqdas* is the most

important of Baha’u’llah’s writings, the book to which all Baha’is must turn

for the laws governing the present age, it has never yet been translated

into English and published by Baha’is. A non-Baha’i translation by E. E.

Elder with an introduction by William McElwee Miller, however, was pub-

lished in 1961. Remey encouraged his followers to avail themselves of this

work. Pointing out that it is not an “authorized” Baha’i publication and

that its laws cannot yet be enforced on a community level, Remey held none-

theless that it would be profitable for individual use.123 The Wilmette

Baha’is find this translation unacceptable.

Remey announced in 1964 his belief that the break in the line of

descent in the guardians “can be remedied” and brought “back again into

the line of descent from Baha’u’llah … as soon as there may arise

amongst those of this chosen descent one who will qualify.”126

In a statement issued August 9, 1964, Remey defined the infalli-

bility of the guardianship. He held that the guardianship is endowed with

infallibility but that “this does not seen that every act, word and deed

of the Guardian remains inflexibly binding on the believers of the future

generations.” Remey maintained that only the words of Baha’u’llah cannot

be changed until a future manifestation.

The interpretation of the Holy Word, however, may differ from

time to time depending upon the interpretation of the Living Guar-

dian *alone* for he *alone* has been authorized as the interpreter).

If this were not so, then any believer might wish to hold to what

a former Guardian established and conflict would arise. Therefore,

*no believer* has a right to contest what the living Guardian of the

Faith gives to the Baha’i World as his interpretation.127

These words perhaps formed the basis for Mason Remey’s departure

from the teachings of Shoghi Effendi. Remey began to criticize Shoghi

Effendi’s administration. In a message, January, 1967, Remey declared

that “Shoghi Effendi was all wrong in teaching that the future world govern-

ment would be installed on Mt. Carmel,” asserted that “Shoghi Effendi was

a sick and disorganized soul,” and spoke of the “violations of the Faith

that were made unwittingly by Shoghi Effendi.”128

In a letter, January 28, 1958, Remey maintained that the Babi and

Baha’i religions are two separate and distinct religions” that have “very

different and opposing objects,” contended that “Shoghi Effendi forced the

Babi Faith upon the entire world of the Baha’i Community,” and held that

“this was all wrong and is the cause of the contusion of the Baha’i people

of today, and they don’t understand this!” Remey declared: “Shoghi Effendi

built his Administration about the Babi Faith. He ought to have built it

about the Baha’i Faith but he did not.”129

In 1968, Remey appointed the first five of an intended twenty-four

elders who would together with the guardian “administer the Faith of

Baha’u’llah,” finding support for the twenty-four elders in Revelation

4:10-11 and 11:16-17, and in a passage in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s *Some Answered*

*Questions*. Donald Harvey, to be mentioned subsequently, was appointed as

the first elder and the “member at large” of the body. To the remark

that Shoghi Effendi knew of no twenty-four elders, Remey replied that

“Shoghi Effendi knew nothing” of the twenty-four elders of the Baha’i

dispensation because “his administration was confined to the Babi Faith

that had been dead for more than a century.”130 Remey later dissolved

the body of twenty-four elders.

On May 19, 1969, Remey announced that English would be “the official

language of the Baha’i Faith” and urged communities in each country of the

world to begin teaching English to illiterates, allowing them to become

world citizens at once.”131 On July 16, 1971. Remey indicated that Colo-

rado Springs would be the best location for the Baha’i temple.132 Mason

Remey in his 100th year, passed away in Florence, Italy, on February 4,

1974.

THE EMERGENCE OF A THIRD GUARDIAN

An unusual development among those who looked to Mason Remey as

second guardian was the emergence in November, 1969, some four years and

three months before Remey’s death, of a claimant to the third guardian-

ship, who won the support of most of Remey’s followers. The circumstances

of this development were as follows:

In December, 1961, some nineteen months after Mason Remey’s *Pro-*

*clamation* was issued, Joel Marangella, according to his written testimony,

received from Remey a letter “in whose outer envelope was enclosed a

smaller sealed envelope” on which were written these words:

Joel: Please take care of this sealed envelope among your papers

in the Bernese Oberland. As I see things now it may have to do

with the coming world catastrophe in or after 1963. *You will know*

*when to break the seal*. Mason, Washington, D.C., U.S.A., 5 December

1961.133

Joel Marangella, as instructed, deposited the letter unopened in a safety

deposit box in a bank near his permanent residence in Switzerland.

Then, on September 21, 1964, Mason Remey appointed Joel Marangella as

president of the newly created second International Baha’i Council (an-

nounced in *Glad Tidings*, October, 1964), an act of high importance for

Remey’s followers, for Remey’s claim to the second guardianship rested on

his appointment by Shoghi Effendi as president of the first International

Baha’i Council.

Soon after this appointment, Marangella journeyed to Switzer-

land, where he felt that the time had come to open the letter which he

had placed in the safety deposit box three years earlier. The handwrit-

ten letter read:

Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

5 December 1961

Dear Joel,

This is to tell you to tell the Baha’i World that

I appoint you to be the third Guardian of the Baha’i Faith

according to the Will and Testament of the Master, Abdu’l-

Baha.

Mason, Guardian

of the Baha’i Faith134

Marangella indicates that he was struck by the fact that the letter was

addressed to him instead of to the believers and that it commissioned

his to “tell” the Baha’i world that he was the third guardian. The

question arose in his mind of when to make his announcement, and he says

that he concluded that it would only be appropriate after the second

guardian’s passing, although he says “an examination of the Will and

Testament of Abdu’l-Baha does not disclose that this is a precondi-

tion.”135

Marangella indicates further that when he visited Mason Remey

in Florence, Italy, in the summer, 1965, Remey instructed him to

announce the activation of the Baha’i Council of which Marangella was

president. Marangella’s announcement appears *in Glad Tidings*, October,

1965, under the heading of “Council Assumes Task.”

Then in a letter from Remey to Marangella, February 18, 1966,

(published in *Glad Tidings*, May, 1966), he wrote: “I am turning the

affairs of the Faith over to you as the President of the second Baha’i

International Council to handle this for me—you having the other members

of the Council to assist you,” and further indicated in the letter, “from

now on I will leave you free to conduct the affairs of the Faith, I making

suggestions when necessary.”136 In a letter a portion of which is printed

in Glad Tidings, October, 1966, Remey wrote:

Joel Marangella will soon have a message for all Baha’is that I

trust will put everyones [sic] mind at rest about who will be the 3rd

Guardian of the Faith. I have devised a plan that will assure the

people that there will be a 3rd Guardian but that no one will know

who he is to be until the catastrophe has passed and with it the

confusion of the days of tribulation.

This will be about 29 years from now according to my reckon-

ing.137

But, unexpectedly, Mason Remey in a handwritten letter, May 23,

1967, made another appointment to the guardianship:

In the most Holy Name of El Baha,

I the Second Guardian of the Baha’i Faith hereby appoint Donald

Harvey at my death to be my Successor the Third guardian of the

Faith.

(Signed) Mason Remey

May 23rd 1967

Florence, Italy

P.S. May the Spirit of El Abha ever protect this line of Spiritual

descent from Abdul Baha the Center of the Covenant of El Baha.

(Signed) C.M.R.138

Since Mason Ramey had not annulled his previous appointment,

Marangella wrote a letter to Remey enclosing a photostatic copy of

his appointment of Marangella in 1961 and seeking an explanation. Remey’s

reply, Marangella says, “offered no explanation and served to confirm

my worst fears that something was seriously wrong if Mason Remey had for-

gotten, as was obviously the case, this all-important appointment.” Maran-

gella, at this point, in “great commotion” of “heart and soul,” reasoned:

After meditating on the situation for some time in an effort to find

a rational explanation, it dawned on my consciousness that the rea-

son for this, as well as the lamentable state of affairs in the Faith

and the conflicting statements which were coming from Mason Remey

lay in the fact that the mantle of Guardianship no longer reposed on

the shoulders of Mason Remey nor had it done so since the autumn of

1964 when I had opened the letter addressed to me by Mason Remey tel-

ling me *to tell* the Baha’i World that I was the third Guardian of

the Baha’i Faith. As earlier explained, I had considered at the time

that this was an announcement that I would only make after the pas-

sing of Mason Remey. But as I have already pointed out Mason Remey

had on two occasions provided me with the opportunity, however unbe-

knownst to himself and unrecognized by me to take over the reins of

the Faith (i.e., when the Council was activated in October 1965 and

in February 1966). In some respects, my own failure to perceive my

accession to the Guardianship parallels the experience of Mason Re-

mey as it will be recalled that some three years elapsed (from 1957

to 1960) before he perceived that he had been the Guardian of the

Faith since the passing of Shoghi Effendi.139

On November 12, 1969, Joel Marangella issued his proclamatory

letter, containing the above quoted words, claiming the station of third

guardian. Marangella, thus, holds that he had been third guardian since

autumn, 1964, and apparently for Marangella and his followers, Mason

Remey’s pronouncements after that data have no validity, thereby elimi-

nating for them Remey’s attacks on Shoghi Effendi’s administration during

the closing nine years of Remey’s long life.

Marangella later wrote to his follows urging them “to not be

critical of Mason Remey in any way,” referring to “the problems of a

person who has reached his extremely advanced age,” and indicating that

they are common to all very old people and happily he was not af-

flicted until far past the usual age. At the time that he made

his appointment of me as his successor (i.e. the second year after

the issuance of his Proclamation) he was given the wisdom to rea-

lize that a time would come when he was no longer able to function

in the office of the Guardianship and hence couched his letter of

appointment in the terms that he did.

The Second Guardian of the Faith was unquestionably endowed

with the necessary qualities to stand up like a rock against the

greatest violation that the faith has ever known. Thus the con-

tinuity of the Guardianship was preserved and for this the present

generation of faithful Baha’is as well as succeeding generations

down through the centuries of the Baha’i Dispensation owe him an

incalculable and eternal debt of gratitude.140

Not all the Baha’is under Remey accepted the claim of Marangella. Mason

Remey, himself, kept issuing his announcements and letters of instruction

to those who continued to accept him as guardian.

Arguments against Marangella’s Claim

At least three arguments are advanced against Marangella’s claim

to the third guardianship. Shortly after Marangella issued his procla-

mation letter of November 12, 1969, a paper was circulated insisting that

there could not be two living guardians at the same time. Marangella

agreed. He was the guardian; Remey was no longer guardian. Remey’s

manner of appointing him, Marangella reasoned, was a form of abdication

of the office of guardian whenever Marangella should announce himself as

guardian.141 Marangella had said previously in his proclamatory letter

that

the Institution of the Guardianship of the Faith is independent of

and apart from the individual who occupies this Office at a

particular time. Down through the ages to come, different persons

will sit upon the spiritual Throne of the Guardianship—a Throne

upon which is focused the light of the Holy Spirit. Only when

the one who is the “chosen branch” of the Tree of the Covenant is

seated thereon does he become irradiated with that eternal Light

end is he enabled to discharge the sacred Trust with which he has

been envested.142

A second argument is that ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will and testament

indicates that the guardian holds this office for life. The will and

testament, in referring to the Universal House of Justice, says that

“the guardian of the Cause of God is its sacred head and the distin-

guished member *for life* of that body.”143 The reasoning would be that

to be the “sacred head” of the Universal House of Justice for life would

necessitate being guardian for life, because only the guardian can be

president of the Universal House of Justice. Remey also had written in

his *Proclamation* that he expected the Baha’is in convention in Wilmette

in 1960 “to follow me *so long as I live* for I am the Guardian of the

Faith.”144 Mason Remey, also, in a letter to the city editor of the *Des*

*Moines Register*, Des Moines, Iowa, January 10, 1963, identified himself

as “the Guardian for life of the Baha’i (Orthodox) World Faith.” These

statements were made by Remey during the time of his recognized guardians-

ship. How, then, does Marangella meet these objections?

One of the explanations why Shoghi Effendi never urged Mason

Remey to activate the International Baha’i Council was that, had the Coun-

cil been activated then Remey, as president of the embryonic Universal

House of Justice, would have become guardian at that time. Marangella

maintains, however, that “unlike Shoghi Effendi,” Mason Remey

instructed me to *activate* the Council thus making me the active

head of that body and simultaneously passing on the mantle of

guardianship and placing it upon my shoulders.145

In this case, then, the guardianship, according to Marangella, passed

to him prior to Remey’s death.

A third objection, granting the legitimacy of Marangella’s

appointment, is that the later appointment of a third guardian by Remey

annuls Marangella’s previous appointment, since legally the last written

will of a person is the one in force. Marangella’s position is that

Remey’s later appointment of a third guardian was after the mantle of

guardianship already had passed to him and the subsequent appointment,

therefore, invalid along with Remey’s other enactments after ceasing to

be guardian.

Development of the Orthodox Baha’i Faith under Marangella

On March 1, 1970, Joel Marangella announced the establishment

with four initial members of the National Bureau of the Orthodox-Baha’i

Faith in America, “pending the reestablishment of the orthodox Baha’i

Administrative System under the hereditary Guardianship on the North

American Continent.” The functions of the Bureau are to serve as a

point of contact between the guardian and Baha’is in the United States

and Canada who recognize the third guardianship; serve as provisional

custodian of a national Baha’i fund; officially represent the Orthodox

Baha’i faith in national contacts with non-Baha’is; maintain a member-

ship roll of Orthodox Baha’is; and initiate a Baha’i library.146

Plans originally were to establish an office in New York City,

where the Supreme Court had ruled in 1941 that the Wilmette Baha’is

“have no right to monopoly on the name of a religion,”147 but in July,

1972, the Bureau was transferred to New Mexico and later incorporated

under the laws of the state.

Prior to its incorporation, the Bureau was deactivated temporarily

when some of its members, along with some others, chose to follow Rex King,

who claimed to be a “Regent for the Cause of Baha’u’llah.” King was one of

the members of the first elected National Spiritual Assembly under the

Hereditary Guardianship in 1963. After Joel Marangella claimed the third

guardianship, King accepted him and was appointed by Marangella as president

of the National Teaching Institute of the Orthodox Baha’i Faith in the

United States. King, however, issued on January 15, 1973, a sixteen-page

proclamation asserting his “Regency of the Cause.” His claim was based on

a mystical experience and Marangella’s conferring upon him of the presidency

of the National Teaching Institute. In a subsequent paper, King denied that

Marangella was or ever had been guardian of the Baha’i faith, although he

held that Marangella had made appointments and given titles to him through

the Holy Spirit.

Marangella announced on August 12, 1973, the establishing of the

European Bureau of the Orthodox Baha’i Faith with functions paralleling

the U.S. Bureau except that to the European Bureau was given an additional

duly of preparing, editing, and publishing a Baha’i magazine. The “Winter

1973/74” issue of *Herald of the Covenant* was the first issue of this maga-

zine. The European Bureau has since been inactivated, but plans are to

continue publication of the magazine.

Marangella augmented the role of the U.S. National Bureau

on January 15, 1974, to include assisting Baha’is in planning, organi-

zing, and conducting meetings, seminars, discussion panels, firesides,

and other meetings; providing publications and teaching materials for

local teaching activities and conducting regional and national publi-

city campaigns for promoting the Orthodox Baha’i Faith and preparing

and utilizing varied publicity media and materials.

Unlike the National Spiritual Assembly, the National Bureau

is an appointed, not elected, body and has no administrative or legis-

lative powers. It is temporary and provisional until the Baha’i admini-

strative order under the guardianship can be reestablished in the United

States.148

In the new *Herald of the Covenant*, Joel Marangella outlines

in nine points the beliefs of the Orthodox Baha’is. They concern belief

in (1) the Bab, (2) Baha’u’llah, (3) Baha’u’llah’s appointment of ‘Abdu’l-

Baha as his successor, (4) ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will and testament as “supple-

mentary to the Most Holy Book revealed by Baha’u’llah (the Kitab-i-Aqdas)”

and constituting “a part of the explicit Holy Text, inviolate and never

to be abrogated or altered in any way during the Dispensation of Baha’u-

’llah,” (5) the will and testament’s establishing of the guardianship

and the Universal House of Justice, both under the protection and guidance

of Baha’u’llah, (6) the sole authority of the guardian to appoint his

successor, either his “first born son” or “another individual,” preserving

“an unbroken chain of guardians each appointed by his predecessor in office

throughout the duration of the Dispensation of Baha’u’llah,” (7) Shoghi

Effendi’s appointment of Charles Mason Remey, (8) Mason Remey’s appoint-

ment of Joel B. Marangella, (9) and a closing statement affirming that

“avowed Baha’is who espouse views and doctrines at variance with the above

statement are not orthodox Baha’is and have placed themselves outside the

true Faith.”149

NOTES CHAPTER VII

1 For accounts of Shoghi Effendi’s passing, see Ruhiyyih Rabbani,

*The Priceless Pearl* (London: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1969), pp. 446-51,

and *The Baha’i World: An International Record*, Vol. XIII (Haifa, Israel:

Universal House of Justice, 1970), pp. 207-25. The latter is a reprint-

ing of Amatu’l-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum, in collaboration with John Ferraby,

*The Passing of Shoghi Effendi* (London: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1958).

2 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publish-

ing Trust, 1957), p. 214.

3 *The Baha’i World*, XIII, 342.

4 ibid., p. 343.

5 *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Baha* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i

Publishing Trust, 1944), p. 12 (hereinafter referred to as *Will and Tes-*

*tament*).

6 *The Baha’i World*, XIII, 346.

7 ibid., p. 343.

8 ibid., pp. 350-51.

9 ibid., p. 351.

10 ibid., pp. 352-53. The twelve-day Baha’i feast of Ridvan,

commemorating Baha’u’llah’s declaration, begins on April 21. The Baha’i

national convention is held annually at this time.

11 ibid., pp. 254-55.

12 ibid., p. 353.

13 ibid., p. 346.

14 ibid., p. 361.

15 ibid., pp. 362-63.

16 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada,

National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of Canada, 1965), p. 63.

17 ibid., p. 661 see also p. 65.

18 As Shoghi Effendi had designated them in his last message to

the Baha’i world before his death (Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Baha’i*

*World: 1950-1957* [Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1958], p.

127).

19 Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance: Messages*

*1963-1968* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1969), p. 11.

20 ibid., p. 48.

21 ibid., p. 81.

22 ibid., p. 82.

23 *Will and Testament*, p. 12.

24 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* (rev. ed.;

Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1955), p. 148.

25 ibid.

26 ibid., p. 150.

27 ibid., p. 8.

28 George Townshend, *Christ and Baha’u’llah* (London: George

Ronald, 1963), p. 100.

29 ibid., pp. 100-101.

30 Marzieh Gail, “Will and Testament,” *World Order*, VI (April,

1940), 21-22.

31 Ruhiyyih Khanum*, Twenty-Five Years of the Guardianship* (Wil-

mette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Committee, 1948), p. 19.

32 ibid., p. 23.

33 See Mason Remey’s “Forward” in May Maxwell, *An Early Pilgri-*

*mage* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1953) and Mason Remey’s *Proclamation to the*

*Baha’is of the World through the Annual Convention of the Baha’is of the*

*United States of America Assembled at Wilmette, Illinois, Ridvan 117,*

*Baha’i Era* (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1960), p. A (hereinafter referred to

as *Proclamation*).

34 Charles Mason Remey, *The Bahai Movement: A Series of Nineteen*

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Sons, 1912), pp. 103-10.

35 Charles Mason Remey, “Through Warring Countries to the Mountain

of God: An Account of Some of the Experiences of Two American Bahais in

France, England, Germany, and Other Countries, on Their Way to Visit Ab-

dul Baha in the Holy Land, in the Year 1914” (Honolulu, Hawaii: unpub-

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Michigan.

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Covenant, Abdul-Baha to C.M.R.” (Newport, R.I.: n.p., 1924).

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Charles Mason Remey, “Journal Diary of Baha’i Travels in Europe, 1947”

(Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1949); Charles Mason Remey, “Journal-diary of

European Baha’i Travels, April-November, 1949,” Vols. I-III (Washington,

D.C.: n.p., 1949; Charles Mason Remey, “A Teacher of the Baha’i Faith in

South America, 1945-1946,” Vols. I-III (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1949);

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D.C.: Carnahan Press, 1909).

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(Chicago, Ill.: Distributed by Bahai Publishing Society, 1919); Charles

Mason Remey, *The Peace of the world* (Chicago, Ill.: Distributed by

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cago, Ill.: Distributed by Bahai Publishing Society, 1919); Charles

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Bahai Publishing Society, 1917); Charles Mason Remey, *A Series of Twelve*

*Articles Introductory to the Study of the Baha’i Teachings* (New York:

Baha’i Publishing Committee, 1925); Charles Mason Remey, *The Universal*

*Consciousness of the Bahai Religion* (New York: Baha’i Publishing Commit-

tee, 1925).

39 Charles Mason Remey, *A Statement by the Second Guardian of*

*the Baha’i World Faith* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Baha’is of Santa Fe under

the Hereditary Guardianship, n.d.), p. 1 (hereinafter referred to as

Statement).

40 *The Baha’i World*, XIII, p. 342.

41 Remey, *Statement*, p. 3.

42 “An Appeal to the Hands of the Faith in the Holy Lands: Made

Strictly in Private to These Friends Residing in the Holy Land by Mason

Remey, President of the Baha’i International Council and Hand of the

Baha’i Faith in the Year 117 of the Baha’i Era” (unpublished typewritten

letter, 1960); “Another Appeal to the Hands of the Baha’i Faith” A Pri-

vate and Secret Document to Be Read Only by the Hands of the Faith” (un-

published typewritten letter, 1960); *A Last Appeal to the Hands of the*

*Faith: A Private and Secret Document to Be Read Only by the Hands of the*

*Faith* (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1960). The *Last Appeal* in its unpublished

form, with the two other appeals, may be found in New York Public Library

with other of Remey’s letters and documents under the heading “Baha’i

Religious Faith.” This material also is available in microfilm at Baylor

University, Waco, Texas. Quotations from the *Last Appeal* in this chap-

ter are from the published booklet.

43 Charles Mason Remey, “An Appeal to the Hands of the Faith in

the Holy Land,” (unpublished typewritten letter, 1960), mentioned in

previous footnote.

44 The “Statement” included in the back of the printed edition

of the *Last Appeal* was written, as it clearly indicates, after Remey’s

*Proclamation* had been issued, which was subsequent to the writing of the

“Last Appeal.”

45 Remey, *Last Appeal*, pp. 13, 23, 27.

46 ibid., p. 39.

47 ibid., p. 26.

48 ibid., p. 27.

49 ibid., p. 8.

50 ibid., pp. 33-34, 36.

51 ibid., p. 37.

52 ibid., p. 44.

53 ibid., p. 45.

54 ibid., p. 36. Ahmad Sohrab accepted the authenticity of

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will and testament and the will’s appointment of Shoghi

Effendi as guardian but he opposed what he considered Shoghi Effendi’s

dictatorial control over the faith, which he felt was a misuse of the

authority of the guardian in the will.

55 ibid., p. 10.

56 ibid., p. 18.

57 ibid., pp. 18, 20.

58 ibid., p. 20.

59 ibid., 35.

60 ibid., pp. 11, 14, 15, 17, 21, etc.

61 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Baha’i World: 1950-1957*

(rev. ed.; Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 127.

62 Remey, *Last Appeal*, p. 25.

63 ibid., p. 42.

64 ibid., p. 32.

65 ibid., p. 42.

66 Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 45.

67 ibid.

68 Remey, *Last Appeal*, p. 32.

69 ibid., p. 30.

70 ibid., p. 33.

71 ibid., p. 38.

72 ibid., p. 41.

73 ibid., p. 47.

74 ibid., p. 48.

75 Remey, *Statement*, p. 5. An “Announcement to the Hands of the

Faith from Mason Remey the Second Guardian of the Faith of his Appoint-

ment of Guardianship by the First Guardian of the Faith” bears the date

December, 1959. His announcement of his guardianship was sent to the

Hands evidently *between* his *Last Appeal* and his *Proclamation*, issued

at Ridvan, 117 (1960). A “Notification of the Appointment of Mason

Remey, Guardian of the Baha’i Faith by the late Guardian of the Faith,

His Eminence Shoghi Effendi Rabbani Sent to the Government of Israel

through the President of Israel and the Ministry of Religious Affairs,

Jerusalem, Israel” is dated May 15, 1960. These items may be found in

“Baha’i Religious Faith,” mentioned above in footnote 42.

76 Remey, *Proclamation*, pp. C-D. Remey does not mean the pro-

gram for 1963 as initiated by Shoghi Effendi but the program of the

hands for electing the Universal House of Justice.

77 ibid., p. E.

78 Mason Remey, *II Encyclical Letter to the Baha’i World* (Washing-

ton, D.C., n.p., n.d.), p. 1.

79 ibid.

80 ibid., p. 2.

81 ibid., p. 4.

82 ibid.

83 Mason Remey, *III Encyclical Letter to the Baha’i World* (Wash-

ington, D.C., n.p., n.d.), p. 4.

84 ibid., p. 9.

85 *Will and Testament*, p. 12.

86 Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 82.

87 Remey, *Last Appeal*, p. 10.

88 Edward G. Browne, comp., *Materials for the Study of the Babi*

*Religion* (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), p. 334.

89 Letter from Mason Remey to Dr. Jur. Udo Schaefer, June 1, 1960.

This letter may be found in “Baha’i Religious Faith” (see above, foot-

note 42).

90 *Baha’i World Faith: Selected Writings of Baha’u’llah and*

*‘Abdu’l-Baha* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1956), pp. 437-

38, referred to in Charles H. Gaines, “The Guardianship and Administra-

tion,” mimeographed manuscript, 1960, p. 24.

91 *Will and Testament*, p. 12.

92 Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, *The Will and Testament of Abdul Baha:*

*An Analysis* (New York: Published by Universal Publishing Co. for the

New History Foundation, 1944), p. 64.

93 Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 82.

94 Shoghi Effendi, *fs*, February, 1955, p. 1, cited by

Gaines, “The Guardianship and Administration,” p. 8.

95 Remey, *Last Appeal*, p. 38.

96 Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 11.

97 ibid., p. 87.

98 ibid., pp. 48-49.

99 ibid., p. 82.

100 ibid., pp. 83-84.

101 ibid., pp. 86-87.

102 *Will and Testament*, p. 12.

103 Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 41.

104 ibid., pp. 139-44.

105 ibid., p. 139. Words in parentheses are in the text.

106 Hapgood is author of *Earth’s Shifting Crust* (Pantheon Press),

bringing together views of scientists over the previous seventy-five years.

A review appears in *Saturday Review* (June 7, 1958), cited in Charles Mason

Remey, *The Great Global Catastrophe* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Baha’is of

Santa Fe under the Hereditary Guardianship, n.d.), p. 5.

107 Remey, *The Great Global Catastrophe*, p. 1. Baha’is arrived

at this date, according to E. A. Dime, because the Muslim year 1335 A.H.

corresponds to 1917 A.D. According to Dime, the Baha’is believed that

the millennium would occur before the end of 1917 (“Is the Millennium

Upon Us?” *The Forum*, LVIII August, 1917, pp. 179-80).

108 Remey, *The Great Global Catastrophe*, pp. 1-2.

109 Circulated letter from Mason Remey, July 16, 1961, p. 1.

110 ibid.

111 Remey, *The Great Global Catastrophe*, p. 1n.

112 Letter from Mason Remey to the National Spiritual Assembly,

Wilmette, June 19, 1962.

113 “Preliminary Steps toward the Election of the New N. S. A.’s,”

announcement from Mason Remey, November 30, 1962.

114 *Glad Tidings*, V (June, 1964), 4.

115 “Petzoldt Chairman of New Group of Baha’is,” *Herald-Whig*

(Quincy, Illinois), May 5, 1963, p. 11.

116 *Glad Tidings*, V (May, 1964), 3. The registration of the

incorporation shows the date of May 7, 1964 (*Glad Tidings*, V [August,

1964], 1).

117 “Legal Suit Instituted,” *Glad Tidings*, V (November, 1964), 3.

118 *The Baha’i World*, XIII, 548.

119 “From the National Spiritual Assembly,” *Glad Tidings*, V

(February, 1965), 3.

120 The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United

States of America under the Hereditary Guardianship, Inc. v. The National

Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United States of America, Inc.,

64 C 1878 (U.S. District Court, Northern District of Illinois, Eastern

Division, 1964-1966).

121 “NSA Accepts Injunction Terms,” *Glad Tidings*, VII (October,

1966), 2.

122 ibid.

123 ibid., p. 3.

124 Martin T. Fisher, Washington, D.C., inquired into the trade-

mark copyright in connection with the New History Society case and noted

in his report, December 8, 1939, that the trademark was registered under

the 1905 Act as a “non-descriptive” mark, whereas it is a descriptive

word, referring to a religion, and that the copyright pertains only to

magazines and printed matter (Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, *Broken Silence: the*

*Story of Today’s Struggle for Religious Freedom* [New York: Published

by Universal Publishing Co. for the New History Foundation, 1942], pp.

209-10.)

125 “From the Guardian,” *Glad Tidings*, IV (December, 1963), 1.

The translation of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* also may be found in an appendix

in William McElwee Miller’s *The Baha’i Faith: Its History and Teachings*

(South Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1974).

126 *Glad Tidings*, V (August, 1964), 2.

127 “Statement by the Guardian on the Infallibility of the Guar-

dianship of the Baha’i Faith,” issued from Mason Remey, August 9, 1964.

128 Letter from Mason Remey to “Friends,” January, 1967.

129 Letter from Mason Remey to the Believers, January 28, 1968.

130 ibid. and Letter from Mason Remey to Esther Sego, November

13, 1967. The passage in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette,

Ill.: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1964) is on p. 67.

131 Letter from Mason Remey to “Friends,” May 19, 1969.

132 Letter from Mason Remey to Charley O. Murphy, July 16, 1971.

133 Joel Marangella’s proclamatory letter to the faithful sup-

porters of the Covenant of Baha’u’llah throughout the world,” November 12,

1969, with attached photocopies of letter and envelope from Mason Remey

to Joel Marangella, December 5, 1961.

134 ibid.

135 Joel Marangella’s proclamatory letter, November 12, 1969, p. 3.

136 ibid., p. 4.

137 “Guidance from the Guardian,” *Glad Tidings*, VII (October,

1966), p. 1. This would place the date of the great catastrophe and

Remey’s expectation of when the third guardian would announce himself

in about 1995, which seems to contradict his statement that Marangella

“‘will soon have a message for all Baha’is.” Both here and on the enve-

lope appointing Marangella as third Guardian, Remey conceived of a pos-

sible relationship between Marangella’s announcement and the great catas-

trophe, although the expected time of the catastrophe is different.

138 Marangella refers in his proclamatory letter (p. 5) to an

announcement in August, 1967, of the appointment of a third guardian.

Presumably, this is a later announcement of the same appointment. Donald

Harvey, as previously indicated, was the first elder of Remey’s projected

twenty-four elders.

139 Marangella’s proclamatory letter, November 12, 1969, p. 5.

Marangella, born September 22, 1918, spent much of his youth in the

summers at Green Acre Baha’i Summer School, Eliot, Maine, and declared

his intention at age fifteen of being a Baha’i and was enrolled as an

adult believer on reaching twenty-one. In 1950, he journeyed to Europe

in response to Shoghi Effendi’s call for Baha’i pioneers to spread the

faith in Europe. He remained in France for eighteen rears, except for

four months in the United States in 1954, and was serving as chairman

of the first Baha’i National Spiritual Assembly in France and was also

a member of the Auxiliary Board of the Baha’is of the Cause in Europe for

Teaching when Mason Remey proclaimed himself as second guardian. The

majority of the National Spiritual Assembly, including Marangella, acep-

ted Remy as guardian. The National Spiritual Assembly in France, in-

cidentally, was the only NSA with a majority of its member’s accepting

Remey (the above biographical information was provided by Joel Marangella,

upon request, in a letter to the author, June 28, 1970).

140 Letter from Joel B. Marangella to his followers, January 8,

1970.

141 ibid.

142 Marangella, Proclamatory letter, p. 6.

143 *Will and Testament*, p. 14. Italics mine.

144 Remey, *Proclamation*, p. E. Italics mine.

145 “A Statement to the Believers,” issued by Joel Marangella

in the summer, 1973.

146 Announcement from Joel Marangella to the Faithful Champions

of the Covenant of Baha’u’llah and Supporters of the Third Guardian of

the Baha’i Faith in America,” March 1, 1970.

147 See above, p. 315.

148 Much of the information on the National Bureau was provided

to the author by the National Bureau of the Orthodox Baha’i Faith of the

United States and Canada through its secretary, Franklin D. Schlatter.

149 Joel B. Marangella, “Statement of Beliefs of the Orthodox

Baha’is under the Living Guardianship,” *Herald of the Covenant*, I (Winter

1973/74), 19-20.

**CONCLUSION**

That the Baha’i World Faith has undergone an extensive evolu-

tion in its short history from 1844 to the present is freely acknowledged

by Baha’is. The extent of this evolution in its various stages is subject

to some difference of interpretation, but this study has attempted to show

that the religion has endured and progressed through a series of critical

transformations.

SUMMARY OF THE TRANSFORMATIONS

The most far-reaching transformation was that effected by Baha’u-

’llah, the prophet after whom the religion is named. Baha’u’llah’s trans-

formation gave the religion a new name, a new central prophet, and a new

book of laws. That the Baha’i religion, although distinguished in name

from the Babi religion, was a transformation of the latter faith is seen

in these considerations: (1) that Baha’is date the beginning of their

faith not from Baha’u’llah’s declaration of his mission but from the Bab’s

declaration on May 22, 1844; (2) that Baha’is regard the Bab and Baha’u-

’llah as “Twin Manifestations” in the new era and as “co-founders” of

the faith; (3) and that Baha’is see the Bab not only as an independent

manifestation but as the herald of Baha’u’llah.

Baha’u’llah’s ministry was of the character of a reformation

within the Babi movement, carrying over into the new form of the faith

much of the basic Babi doctrine and abrogating only the more obnoxious

features of the faith not calculated to render it a universal hearing.

To this base, Baha’u’llah added his own particular touches which turned

the Persian Muslim sect of the Babi faith into a world religion.

‘Abdu’l-Baha, eldest son and appointed successor of Baha’u’llah,

carried the religion to further stages of development and won for himself

a place beside the Bab and Baha’u’llah as one of the “three central

figures of the faith” with his own writings being placed beside those of

Baha’u’llah as the sacred scriptures of the religion. ‘Abdu’l-Baha gave

the Baha’i teachings an analytic form couched in the terminology of

Western ideas and slanted to their more social and humanitarian aspects

which rendered them more readily acceptable to a modern, progressive,

and scientific audience.

The able administrative direction of Shoghi Effendi, grandson

and appointed successor of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, transformed the religion from

a loosely knit, inclusive, spiritual philosophy infiltrating the exis-

ting religions to an exclusive, tightly run organization existing out-

side of and alongside the religions bodies of the day.

A final transformation was affected after the death of Shoghi

Effendi when the faith’s leaders announced in effect the end of the

system of leadership in the religion vested in a single appointed head

of the faith and elected as their supreme authority the nine-member

Universal House of Justice. The religion henceforth will be con-

trolled and directed not by one authoritarian figure appointed by his

predecessors but by a body of elected officials whose term of office

will be temporary.

CRITICAL NATURE OF THE TRANSFORMATIONS

Each transformation was critical for the faith, for against

each effort to innovate were segments of the faith’s adherents who ob-

jected to the new developments and who saw themselves as loyal to the

previous leader or system of the religion.

Baha’u’llah’s opposition came from those who saw themselves

as loyal to the Bab and to Subh-i-Azal, the Bab’s nominee for leader-

ship in the movement after his death. They saw the Bab as a great mani-

festation whose dispensation would extend for 1,511 or 2,001 years into

the distant future. They anticipated the time when the Babi faith would

become the state religion of Persia. The value they placed upon the Bab

and his revelation is fully revealed in the *Kitab-i-Iqan* by Baha’u’llah,

written before his own declaration. The Bab’s rank excelled that of all

prophets, and no revelation was considered more glorious than his reve-

lation.1 They consider the Bab the revealer of twenty-five of the

twenty-seven letters of the alphabet. All the last prophets combined

had revealed only two letters.2 They were unable to believe that the

Bab’s revelation was destined to be surpassed within their own genera-

tion. The accusations hurled and the murders committed as a result

of the Babi-Baha’i altercation testify to the critical condition in the

faith occasioned by Baha’u’llah’s transformation.

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s opposition was from those who saw themselves

as faithful followers of Baha’u’llah, who had said that no new manifes-

tation would come before the expiration of a full 1,000 years. They did

not contest ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s appointment as Baha’u’llah’s successor but

believed that ‘Abdu’l-Baha was assuming to himself the prerogatives

which belonged only to a manifestation of God and that he, therefore, was

overstepping the bounds of his rightful authority.

The conflict between ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s opponents and his followers

was basically conflict between two commands of Baha’u’llah, both in

Baha’u’llah’s *Kitab-i-Aqdas*:

If you differ on a matter, bring it back to God while the sun

shines from the horizon of this heaven. Whenever it sets, go back

to that which was sent down from Him.3

When the Sea of Union (with Me) is dried up and the Book of

Beginning is finished in the End, then turn to the one whom God

desires, the one who is a Branch from the ancient Root.4

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s opponents stressed the former command to turn

after Baha’u’llah’s death to Baha’u’llah’s revealed words to settle dif-

ferences which might arise among the believers, holding that even Baha’u-

’llah’s appointed successor was bound to those words. ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s fol-

lowers stressed the latter command to turn after Baha’u’llah’s passing to

“the one whom God desires,” identified in Baha’u’llah’s *Kitab-i-*‘*Ahd* as

‘Abdu’l-Baha, regarding ‘Abdu’l-Baha as the interpreter of Baha’u’llah’s

words and the final arbiter in any and all disputes among the faithful.

The former, therefore, placed stress on the importance of Baha’u-

’llah’s words over those of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, whereas the latter adhered to

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s words over their individual interpretations of Baha’u’llah’s

words.

The seriousness of this crisis is seen in the fact that, as

Shoghi Effendi points out, Muhammad-‘Ali “succeeded in ranging on his

side almost the entire family of Baha’u’llah, as well as a considerable

number of those who had formed his immediate entourage.”5 The crisis

was augmented also by the fact that it occurred when the faith was gain-

ing a foothold on the American continent and threatened to wreak the

foundations of the American Baha’i community in its earliest stages of

growth, a community which later formed the base of the faith’s develop-

ment and extension in other parts of the world. Ibrahim George Khayru-

’llah, responsible for attracting and organizing the faith’s earliest ad-

herents in America, revolted against ‘Abdu’l-Baha and sided with Muhammad-

‘Ali and succeeded in creating a division in the early American Baha’i

community. The crisis had its effects outside the community also. Edward

G. Browne, who had begun his study of the faith, wrote:

This last schism, I confess, and the bitterness to which it

gave rise, created a very painful impression on my mind, for, as

I have repeatedly enquired of my Baha’i friends, where is the com-

pelling and constraining power which they regard as the essential

and incontrovertible sign of the Divine Word, when, in face of such

texts as *“Associate with [the followers of all] religions with spiri-*

*tuality and fragrance” and “Ye are all the fruit of one Tree and the*

*leaves of one Branch,”* they can show such bitter animosity towards

those of their own household.6

Likewise, the faith’s opponents of Shoghi Effendi regarded them-

selves as loyal followers of the faith as taught by ‘Abdu’l-Baha and

opposed the guardian on the basis that he was reducing the faith with its

liberal and universal spirit, capable of uniting itself to the various

religious and philosophical movements and organizations of the age, to a

narrow, sectarian faith operating hopelessly outside the existing

structures and subjecting itself to the deteriorating influences to

which all organized religions had inevitably succumbed.

As Muhammad-‘Ali and his supporters had not challenged the

legitimacy of ‘Abdu’l-Baha as the appointed successor of Baha’u’llah,

so Ahmad Sohrab and the New History Society did not challenge the authen-

ticity of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will and testament and the appointment of Shoghi

Effendi as ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s successor. The charge was that Shoghi Effendi,

as the appointed successor, was introducing into the faith innovations

contrary to the faith’s character. These Baha’is were heirs of ‘Abdu’l-

Baha’s transformation, holding vividly in their memories the teaching

of ‘Abdu’l-Baha with its emphasis on independent investigation of the

truth, its approach to the progressive spirit of the day, its broad defi-

nitions of what constituted a Baha’i, and its view that the faith by its

very nature could never be organized.

The crisis in the faith at this point was brought to a head in

the lawsuit in New York City, when the two Baha’i groups—the New History

Society and the National Spiritual Assembly together with the New York

local assembly of Baha’is—fought the issue as to whether the organized

Baha’is could restrict the use of the name “Baha’i” to their own organi-

zation.

In some ways, the crisis which struck the faith after the passing

of Shoghi Effendi was the most devastating of the crises the religion

has had to face, for the young religion was attempting to establish

an unassailable administrative structure when, for the Baha’i majority

group, one of its major pillars was destroyed. In referring to the

Baha’i administrative system, Shoghi Effendi said that “the pillars

that sustain its authority and buttress its structure are the twin

institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice.”7

But because Shoghi Effendi made no explicit appointment of a guardian

during his lifetime, because he excommunicated all possible choices in

Baha’u’llah’s family for a successor and named no one to this position

in a last will and testament, the line of succeeding guardians to direct

the faith, as established by ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will and testament, came to

a sudden and abrupt conclusion upon the death of the very first guardian.

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will and testament, called by Shoghi Effendi

“the Charter of the New World Order,”8 which was to remain is force along

with Baha’u’llah’s *Kitab-i-Aqdas* for the duration of the Baha’i dispensa-

tion, has of necessity already been modified in some of its provisions.

The requirements that the guardian “appoint in his own life-time him that

shall became his successor” and that he be the “sacred head” and “distin-

guished member for life” of the Universal House of Justice9 necessarily

must be overlooked if there are no more guardians. The stipulation con-

cerning the “fixed money offering (Huquq)” which is “to be offered through

the guardian of the Cause at God”10 must now also be modified. On this

matter, the Universal House of Justice acted on May 27, 1966, saying that

the Universal Home of Justice “must, in the absence of the Guardian, re-

ceive and disburse the Huququ’llah.”11 With the House of Justice

ruling that it could not appoint or legislate to make possible the appoint-

meet of another guardian, it had no choice but to make some modification

of this provision in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will, but it did so in the face of

Shoghi Effendi’s definition of Baha’i membership qualification as being

“steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved’s sacred Will.”12

The Baha’is who followed Mason Remey as second guardian saw

themselves as being faithful to the established system in the faith which

existed before Shoghi Effendi’s passing. So again the division in the

faith is between those who accepted and those who rejected the new trans-

formation.

In former crises in the faith, the opposition was directed

against appointed and acknowledged successors. Muhammad-‘Ali and his

supporters did not question ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s station as appointed successor

but questioned the prerogatives which he, as the designated successor, as-

sumed to himself. Ahmad Sohrab and those connected with the New History

Society did not challenge Shoghi Effendi’s appointment as guardian but

challenged his strict organizational control of the faith. Ruth White,

who did oppose Shoghi Effendi’s appointment as guardian, marks an excep-

tion.

Regardless of how much opposition was raised, the appointed

successor in these former cases was clearly designated and acknowledged

for the most part even by those who opposed them. In this last crisis,

however, the succession is not so clearly established. Two forms of the

faith emerged, each in a sense claiming the rightful succession from

Shoghi Effendi. The hands who assumed the direction of the faith’s affairs

after Shoghi Effendi’s passing elected nine from their number to serve

as “custodian” hands to exercise “rights and powers in succession to the

Guardian” until the Universal House of Justice could be elected. When

the Universal House of Justice came into power, it declared that “the

Covenant of Baha’u’llah is unbroken.”13 Mason Remey, leader of the

minority form of the faith, claimed to be the second guardian of the

faith in succession to Shoghi Effendi by virtue of his appointment by

Shoghi Effendi as president of the International Baha’i Council, the

embryonic Universal House of Justice, whose president is the guardian.

By claiming to be the second guardian from the time of Shoghi Effendi’s

death, Remey also maintained that the covenant was unbroken.

One reason for the greatness of this latest crisis in the faith

is the fact that the succession is not as certainly established. Each of

the two forms of the faith emerging after Shoghi Effendi’s passing claims

to be the true form; each sees itself as remaining faithful to the covenant

and regards the other form as having violated the covenant; each has

expelled from the faith those of the other position; each regards itself as

protecting the future integrity of the faith.

Each form accuses the other of assuming unentitled rights and

powers. The majority form accuses Mason Remey of having advanced his

claim of guardianship in the absence of an appointment to that position

by Shoghi Effendi and regards his claim to the hereditary guardianship as

clearly unacceptable by his not being of the family of Baha’u’llah.

Remey’s followers, in turn, see the hands as assuming unrightful powers

when they took over the direction of the faith’s affairs by virtue of

their designation as “chief Stewards” of the faith, when they elected

nine from their number to exercise “rights and powers in succession to

the Guardian of the Baha’i Faith,” and when they called for the election

of a new International Baha’i Council, whose members had been appointed

by Shoghi Effendi himself.

In considering the crises in the faith connected with the faith’s

transformations, two further observations may be made. Edward G. Browne,

at an earlier period in the faith’s history, remarked that it is curious

to observe … how in the Babi church the ‘stationary’ or conservative

party seems ever doomed to defeat.”14 His observation was based on two

crises in the faith—the Baha’i-Azali controversy and the ‘Abdu’l-Baha-

‘Muhammad-‘Ali dispute. Subh-i-Azal and his followers, who represented

the old school Babis, lost to Baha’u’llah and his new form of the faith,

and likewise Muhammad-‘Ali and his supporters, who saw themselves as

faithful to Baha’u’llah’s original form of the faith, lost to ‘Abdu’l-

Baha, who, they believed, was departing from Baha’u’llah’s teachings and

making innovations in the faith.

The latter two periods in the faith’s history provide further

confirmation of Brown’s observation. The majority of Baha’is followed

Shoghi Effendi and his institutionalizing of the faith against those

who wanted to cling to the earlier universal form of the religion.

Again, the majority of Baha’is at the present time are following the

Universal House of Justice against those who are holding fast to the

institution of the guardianship. In each case, those accepting the

various transformations were in the majority and those opposing in the

minority.

Another observation based on a study of the transformations

is that the opponents of the transformations were raising serious

objections to the transformations. They were looked upon often by the

majority party in each crisis as attempting to subvert the faith because

of their own personal ambitions and visions of power. Baha’i literature

draws a sharp distinction between those who followed the successive leaders

and those who questioned their actions and policies in a manner remini-

scent of old-time dramas where the all good heroes (dressed in white)

are clearly distinguished from the all bad villains (dressed in black).

Life generally is not so easily divided into such convenient and clearly

distinguished categories. The Baha’i heads of the faith, however, stand

in a position closely approximating the station which Christians give to

Christ, and the opponents of these leaders, therefore, take on the charac-

ter of “antichrists.”

A study of the Baha’i transformations reveals that these oppo-

nents of each new leader were motivated not simply from selfish inte-

rests but from serious concern about safeguarding the faith which they

thought to be threatened by the new policies in the faith. The irony of

this is that Baha’is who, by their beliefs and attitudes, would be con-

sidered faithful and honorable Baha’is at one point in the faith’s his-

tory become the castaways and despised profligates at a later stage in

the evolving faith, if they are unable to make the transition to the new

stage in the religion. This is why the religion manifests various

examples of loyal Baha’is at the center of the movement who at a later

stage become either inactive, disillusioned apostates or active leaders

in the opposition against the new developments.

SEEDS OF THE TRANSFORMATIONS

Another observation to be made is that, however much opposition

was raised, the seeds of each transformation were planted is the preced-

ing stage of the religion. Baha’u’llah’s transformation, for example,

grew out of the necessity for lessening restrictions and making modi-

fications in the original Babi faith to secure for it a more universal

hearing. The Bab’s emphasis given to his doctrine concerning “Him whom

God shall manifest’ and his repeated admonitions to his followers to

accept this coming one when he appeared opened the way for Baha’u’llah’s

later manifestation.

Baha’u’llah’s appointment of ‘Abdu’l-Baha as his successor, if

not meant to grant ‘Abdu’l-Baha the full power which be later assumed,

nevertheless made the assumption of that power possible. The Baha’i

teaching that Baha’u’llah was “the Father” and ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s designa-

tion as “the Master” led the early American converts with their Western

Christian background to see ‘Abdu’l-Baha in a position comparable to that

of Christ, resulting in the revered position accorded to him in the faith

and in his wards being accepted as scripture. Shoghi Effendi later, in

order to bring the veneration accorded to ‘Abdu’l-Baha into conformity

with Baha’i teachings, had to compromise or synthesize the perspectives

so that ‘Abdu’l-Baha was seen not as a manifestation (thus in accord with

Baha’i teaching) but as one of “the three central figures of the faith”

(in accord with the veneration bestowed on ‘Abdu’l-Baha) and his words

were not regarded as equal in rank with Baha’u’llah’s (thus in accord

with Baha’i teaching) but equal in validity (in accord with the

popular viewpoint which regarded them as scripture).

The institutional form of the faith which Shoghi Effendi developed

during his administration, moreover, already was under way to some extent

in the days of ‘Abdu’l-Baha. ‘Abdu’l-Baha approved of organizing “Houses

of Justice” for men and “Assemblies of Teaching” for women;15 he sent

Mirza Asadu’llah to the United States in 1901 to organize the House of

Justice (House of Spirituality) in September, 1901.16 The election of

certain persons to the “Spiritual Meeting” ‘Abdu’l-Baha describes as a

“source of joy.” ‘Abdu’l-Baha indicates that the Spiritual Meeting of Con-

sultation of New York and the Spiritual Meeting of Consultation of Chicago

must “unitedly approve” of writings for publication, and then if ‘Abdu’l-

Baha approves, the writing may be printed and published.17 The translation

of Baha’u’llah’s tablets, ‘Abdu’l-Baha says, is to be done by a committee

of two Persian translators and two competent English writers. The material

is to be sent then to ‘Abdu’l-Baha for his consent for its publication and

circulation.18

These actions were the first steps in the organization of the

Baha’i faith, which Shoghi Effendi carried to completion. The argument,

therefore, that ‘Abdu’l-Baha was opposed to organizing the faith is not

entirely valid. This organization, however, in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s time was

not inconsistent with the inclusive character of the religion, for appa-

rently no restrictions on membership were observed and one who considered

himself a Baha’i could also hold membership in other religious bodies.

Where Shoghi Effendi departed from previous policy was in requiring the

Baha’i to sever his membership with other religious organizations. This

action was one small step for the guardian of the faith but a giant

leap far the religion as a whole, for the faith thereby ceased being

the inclusive religion which ‘Abdu’l-Baha conceived it to be and became

a highly exclusive religion whose character is revealed dramatically in

the copyrighting of the name “Baha’i” and in the lawsuits aimed at

restricting use of the name.

The seed of the latest transformation was planted in Shoghi

Effendi’s excommunication of all possible choices for a guardian among

Baha’u’llah’s descendants and in his not naming explicitly a successor

during his lifetime or leavings a will naming one.

TENSIONS CREATED BY THE TRANSFORMATIONS

The various transformations in the faith have created certain

tensions within the religion. A tension is created by the philosophy

of a preceding stage of the religion being carried over into its later

stages to exist alongside the new philosophy or state of the faith.

The first tension created in the religion by a transformation

as that caused by Baha’u’llah’s transformation of the Babi movement

into the Baha’i faith. The philosophy of the Babi dispensation was that

the Bab was an independent manifestation in line with Moses, Jesus, and

Muhammad and was the founder of his own religion centering in his person.

After Baha’u’llah’s transformation, however, the religion’s new center

became Baha’u’llah, thus raising in the faith the problem of the rela-

tionship between the Babi and Baha’i religions and between the corres-

ponding manifestations of the Bab and Baha’u’llah.

The Bab, in Baha’i thought, became a forerunner of Baha’u’llah,

and this development helped to explain in part the Bab’s relationship

to Baha’u’llah; but the tension remains, for the faith also regards the

Bab as an independent manifestation. If he is an independent manifes-

tation, then would not his religion be one in the series of religions and

technically distinct from the Baha’i religion? Some early Baha’is took

this view. Mirza Abu’l-Fadl maintained, for example, that the Babi

religion “is not the same religion or creed as Bahaism,”19 and held,

therefore, that the Baha’i religion should not be persecuted for the

actions of the Babis. If this contention is true, then the Baha’i

religion should not count as its own the numerous celebrated martyrs of

the Babi faith, an argument sometimes advanced by non-Baha’i critics.

Edward G. Browne had noted that ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s *Traveller’s*

*Narrative* had “passed over very lightly” the “deeds and sufferings of

the early apostles if Babiism”‘ as well as “many of the most remarkable

events of the older dispensation” and had treated “very fully” certain

martyrdoms belonging to the new dispensation.20 Mason Remey, during the

early years of the faith in America, wrote that “Babism fulfilled its

purpose, and when this was accomplished in the appearance of Baha Ullah,

it, as such, ceased to exist.”21 Remey, in his later years, maintained

that the Babi and Baha’i religions were distinct faiths.

Shoghi Effendi perhaps sensed a danger that the Baha’is were

minimizing the importance of the Bab and his dispensation, holding that

“the greatness of the Bab consists primarily, not in His being the

divinely-appointed forerunner. … but rather in His having been …

the inaugurator of a separate religious Dispensation.”22 Shoghi Effendi

explained that

the chief motive actuating me to undertake the task of editing

and translating Nabil’s immortal Narrative has been to enable

every follower of the Faith in the West to better understand

and more readily grasp the tremendous implications of His exalted

station and to more ardently admire and love Him.23

Yet, although Baha’is now acknowledge the independent prophet-

hood of the Bab, they date the beginning of the Baha’i religion with the

Bab’s declaration of his Mission, not with Baha’u’llah’s. Although

Baha’is date the beginning of their faith with the Bab’s declaration, the

Bab’s religion may at times be considered as distinct and inferior to

the Baha’i faith, as in the following quotation from Shoghi Effendi:

Can the Author of the Babi Dispensation however much He may have

succeeded through the provisions of the Persian Bayan in averting

a schism as permanent and catastrophic as those that afflicted

Christianity and Islam—can He be said to have produced instru-

ments for the safeguarding of *His Faith* as definite and effica-

cious as those which must for all time preserve the unity of the

organized followers of *the Faith of Baha’u’llah*?24

A certain tension also was produced during ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s

ministry, for Baha’u’llah had indicated that no new manifestation would

appear for 1,000 years, yet the veneration which Baha’is accorded to

‘Abdu’l-Baha placed him essentially in this category, although theore-

tically ‘Abdu’l-Baha is not a manifestation. He is regarded, however,

as having lived the Christ life, as being the perfect Baha’i and the

perfect reflection of Baha’u’llah’s glory, and his words, as those of

Baha’u’llah, are sacred and infallible.

Another tension is created by equating the validity of ‘Abdu’l-

Baha’s words with those of Baha’u’llah, for whose words carry the more

authority in determining points of doctrine or policy? Both have the

same authority since they are equal in validity, but Baha’u’llah’s

words in Baha’i thought hold a higher rank for being words of a mani-

festation of God. Yet, ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s words are more determinative in

establishing faith and practice, since the believer must approach Baha’u-

’llah’s teachings through ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s interpretations. A certain

tension also exists between original teachings and adapted teachings,

for ‘Abdu’l-Baha often credits Baha’u’llah with teachings which owe their

form of expression to ‘Abdu’l-Baha and which bear the influence of a

later time.

Shoghi Effendi’s transformation also created a tension in the

faith, for in spite of that transformation some of the philosophy of

the previous period continued to be expressed. In ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s time,

the faith was described as undogmatic because of its open, inclusive,

universal character with its emphasis on humanitarian and social prin-

ciples which people of many different creeds and outlooks could easily

accept. The faith was not viewed as a church or denomination, since its

adherents were found in various religious groups, and since no one was

asked to sever his religious membership affiliation, the faith was not

seen as proselytizing.

This character of the faith, however, was changed by Shoghi

Effendi’s transformation. The faith took on a dogmatic character with

the many definitions of Baha’i doctrine which Shoghi Effendi propounded.

The faith definitely became a religious organization with its own of-

ficers, boards, committees, offerings, and missionary program.

As an illustration of this tension, Jessyca Russell Gaver

writes:

The seeker learns that the Baha’i Faith is not a church. It

does not have a formal creed to be recited, or sacraments, or a

clergy. It is not a denomination of Christianity or Islam or Ju-

daism. It is a religious community, composed of laws, principles

and institutions for community life.25

Gaver’s statement reflects the philosophy concerning the faith in ‘Abdu’l-

Baha’s day, but it was written some ten years after Shoghi Effendi’s pas-

sing. The statement, true of the faith’s character prior to Shoghi Ef-

fendi’s administration, would hardly be appropriate in describing the

faith since Shoghi Effendi’s time.

If by a church is meant a “religious body or society,”26 then

the Baha’i organization constitutes a church. Shoghi Effendi’s state-

ment of Baha’i membership qualifications, to which every Baha’i must

subscribe to be a member of the community, constitutes a kind of “creed.”

Although Baha’is do not have a formal clergy, the hands of the cause,

the auxiliary board members, the officers of the spiritual assemblies,

the Baha’i pioneers (missionaries), and now the members of the continen-

tal boards of councilors and of the Universal House of Justice function

much as the clergy of the faith.

One could get involved in various semantic problems in dis-

cussing whether the Baha’is are a church and have clergy, creeds, and

sacraments. The Jehovah’s Witnesses make no distinction between clergy

and laity, calling all their members ministers. Baha’is also seek to

involve all their members in the work of the faith but designate no one

as clergy. The original form of Christianity made no sharp distinction

between clergy and laity, and one of the main principles of the Protes-

tant Reformation was “the priesthood of all believers,” which places

all believers on an equal footing in their relationship and service to

God.

Baha’i statements about the non-creedal, non-churchly, and undog-

matic character of the faith may be explained as a carry-over into the

modern period of the philosophy prevalent during the time of ‘Abdu’l-Baha.

This philosophy received such an emphasis in the popular press during the

early development of the American Baha’i community in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s time

that it persists into the present period in spite of the faith’s evident

institutional form today.

The latest transformation in the faith also creates certain tensions.

One tension is between the faith’s basic writings underscoring the essen-

tiality and complementary functions of the various features of the adminis-

trative system and the obvious inability of the faith to operate fully

according to these provisions and definitions. Another tension may be

created by the faith’s attempt to carry on the philosophy of its previous

periods that the faith, by its unique administrative order, is protected

from schism when the primary institution in the faith to safeguard the

religion’s unity, namely the guardianship with its rights of infallible

interpretation of Baha’i scripture, is no longer operative as a continuous

institution in the faith. A further danger is that the Universal House

of Justice may assume to itself some of the prerogatives of the guardian-

ship.

THE TRANSFORMATIONS AND THE QUESTION OF SCHISM

A study of the Baha’i transformations reveals that connected

with each transformation was a conflict within the religion between

those who accepted and those who rejected the transformation. Non-

Baha’i writers readily speak of schism within the faith,27 yet Baha’is

insist that their religion is protected from schism. Conflicts may

occur, they admit, but not schism. Shoghi Effendi wrote: “Though

fiercely assailed, ever since its inception, it has, by virtue of its

character, unique in the annals of the world’s religious history, suc-

ceeded in maintaining the unity of the diversified and far-flung body

of its supporters. “28 David Hofman maintains: “There are no Baha’i

sects. There never can be.”29

The question of whether or not schism has occurred in the Baha’i

faith is rather technical and depends in part on how schism is defined.

If schism in a religion means the dividing into two or more factions of

those who identify themselves with the said religion, then obvious schism

has occurred in the Baha’i religion, for various factions each claiming

to belong to the Baha’i religion have existed in the course of the faith’s

history. In saying that schism has not occurred in the Baha’i religion,

Baha’is, then, evidently do not mean that only one group of those profes-

sing to be Baha’is has ever existed. If this is their meaning, then

history proves them wrong.

Sometimes Baha’is seem to mean that no schism has occurred in

the sense that no *lasting* schism has occurred or that the schismatic group

is so small numerically as to be hardly significant. The objection to

this attitude would be that regardless of how small, ineffective, or

temporary a schismatic group may be, it nonetheless marks schism within

the faith. The Baha’i scholar, Abu’l-Fadl, recognized this when he called

attention to the “Nakezeen“ (Covenant-breakers) in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s time,

“whose number does not exceed thirty,”30 yet lamented that

the one community of Baha-Ullah which was as the breeze of Paradise

and the fragrance of the morn of Providence, free from the foul odors

of animosity and discord, became divided through the evil intrigues

of these few. …31

What the Baha’is seem primarily to mean, however, in saying that

the Baha’i faith is immune to schism is that schism cannot occur in the

religion because a Baha’i is faithful to the covenant and one who violates

that covenant cease to be a true Baha’i and after excommunication ceases

in any sense to be a Baha’i. In Baha’i thought, if one accepts Baha’u’llah

without reservation, then he must also accept the leadership of ‘Abdu’l-

Baha, who was appointed by Baha’u’llah as his successor. Then, if ‘Abdu’l-

Baha’s leadership is accepted, he also must accept Shoghi Effendi, appointed

in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s will and testament as ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s successor and as the

guardian of the cause. In this way of thinking, those who opposed the

constituted authority in the faith automatically excluded themselves from

the faith, and they, therefore, are regarded not as schismatics within the

faith but as violators of the covenant and therefore outside the fold of the

religion. The two organizations today, both calling themselves Baha’i, do

not constitute schism in their way of thinking because each one has declared

the other to be outside the faith.

In this line of reasoning, various other religious bodies could

claim that no schism has occurred within their religion. The Roman

Catholic Church claims that it is the one true Christian church. If this

claim is true, then the unity of the Christian church would be preserved,

for bodies calling themselves Christian churches outside the Roman system

would be outside the true church. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day

Saints (Mormonism) claims that it is the true Christian church restored in

the latter days. Some Baptist bodies claim to be the church founded by

Jesus Christ and trace their history outside of the Roman Catholic Church

from the time of Christ to the present.

Shi‘ah Islam considers itself the true form of Islam, acknowledging

‘Ali as the prophet Muhammad’s choice of a successor. The Baha’i faith

follows Shi‘ah Islam in this belief. Shoghi Effendi labels the institution

of the caliphate as illegitimate and an institution which from its inception

trampled upon the sacred right of Muhammad’s lawful successors and

“‘unchained the forces of so distressful a schism” within the religion of

Islam.32 Shoghi Effendi believes, therefore, that Shi‘ah Islam represents

the lawful form of Islam, based on the authority of Muhammad to appoint

his successor and his successor’s right to appoint his successor, and so

on through the line of the Imams.

Why should the opposition against Muhammad’s appointment of

‘Ali as his successor constitute schism within Islam but the opposition

against the appointed successors in the Baha’i faith not constitute schism

within Baha’i? In each case, lawful appointments were made, the former

by the spoken word and the latter by the written documents.

The answer to this question in Baha’i thought lies in the matter

of proof of appointment. The followers of Muhammad were not equipped

with written proof of ‘Ali’s appointment and, therefore, could not fore-

stall schism among the faithful. Shoghi Effendi asks:

Could Peter, the admitted chief of the Apostles, or the Imam ‘Ali,

the cousin and legitimate successor of the Prophet, produce in sup-

port of the primacy with which both had been invested *written and*

*explicit affirmations* from Christ and Muhammad that could have

silenced those who either among their contemporaries or in a later

age have repudiated their authority and, by their action, precipi-

tated the schisms that persist until the present day?33

Shoghi Effendi affirms concerning the Baha’i religion:

Alone of all the Revelations gone before it this Faith has,

through the explicit directions, the repeated warnings, the authen-

ticated safeguards incorporated and elaborated in its teachings,

succeeded in raising a structure which the bewildered followers

of bankrupt and broken creeds might well approach and critically

examine, and seek, ere it is too ]ate, the invulnerable security

of its world-embracing shelter.34

None of the other religions has possessed the written documents

which might have silenced those who opposed the lawful appointments, and

the Baha’i faith has such written documents of appointment. The Baha’i

faith is protected from schism by the written documents in its possession.

The Baha’i faith, therefore, has proof of the succession of its appointed

heads of the faith, and those who have opposed the appointed heads have

done so in the face of written proof against them. This is why the Baha’i

faith can maintain, regardless of the apposition which may be raised

against the appointed leaders, that its unity is safeguarded and pre-

served.

How effective have the written documents been, though, in silen-

cing opposition? Baha’u’llah’s written appointment of ‘Abdu’l-Baha did

not silence Muhammad ‘Ali and his supporters. ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s written

appointment of Shoghi Effendi did not silence Shoghi Effendi’s opponents.

Ruth White, with photographs of the will and testament of ‘Abdu’l-Baha,

proceeded to try to prove the inauthenticity of the will and managed to

raise questions about the will which the Baha’is have not bothered to

explain.

The reason the written documents have not been successful in

preventing opposition to the appointed successors is that the opposi-

tion was not against their appointment, whether in word or in writing,

but against the extent of their authority as the appointed successors.

The appointed successors have been opposed on the grounds of their exceed-

ing their authority and transforming the religion into modified and per-

verted forms, contrary to the previously established character of the

religion.

Is the value of the written documents in proving to the adhe-

rents of a religion that, in spite of the opposition, it is the true form

of the faith, or is their value in silencing that opposition? It the

Baha’i concedes, as Shoghi Effendi did, that the Shi‘ah form of Islam

is the true form of Islam, wherein would lie the value of the written

proof of its true form? Those of the Shi‘ah form of Islam are already

convinced of its true form, with or without written documents. The

value of the written appointments would have to be, therefore, in silen-

cing “those who either among their contemporaries or in a later age”

might repudiate the appointments of the successive heads of the faith.

But the written documents in the possession of the Baha’i faith, although

serving to confirm the belief of Baha’is in the truth of their religion

or of their form of the religion, have not actually been too effective

in silencing opposition. If the written documents are not effective

in silencing opposition and thereby preventing schism in the faith,

then their purpose in being written is unfulfilled and their value is

questionable.

But even if the written documents were effective in preventing

schism, their effectiveness could last only so long as each successor

continued by the written document to appoint his successor. Shoghi

Effendi was the last successive leader in the religion appointed by a

written appointment. Mason Remey possessed no written document of his

appointment to the guardianship which might have silenced those who

opposed him. The Universal House of Justice, being an elected and not

appointed body, holds no written document of appointment. This is why

the present crisis in the faith is probably the greatest the religion

has faced. The succession of leadership by written documents of appoint-

ment, which formerly was seen as the distinguishing feature of the faith

guaranteeing that the Baha’i religion would not break into contending

sects like the religions which held no such written documents, now has

ended.

The Baha’i claim that it is a religion which cannot be divided

by schism, considered by Baha’is a major reason for the greatness of the

Baha’i religion, may be in the end its great weakness. Other religions

have survived their division into numerous sects, but will the Baha’i

faith be able to survive the divisions within it which may occur over

the years? Sects within the Baha’i faith would annul the major claim

of Baha’i that it is immune to schism and has the power to unite all

mankind within its fold.

A FINAL TRANSFORMATION?

Undaunted by the crises of the past and inspired in their

hopes for the future, Baha’is have continued to move forward to ever

new triumphs in the belief that their religion eventually will embrace

all the world. The words of Shoghi Effendi’s prophecy still ring out

for Baha’is:

Feeble though our Faith may now appear in the eyes of men. …

this priceless gem of Divine Revelation, now still in its embryonic

state, shall evolve within the shell of His law, and shall forge

ahead undivided and unimpaired, till it embraces the whole of man-

kind.35

When once the faith “embraces the whole of mankind,” Baha’is believe

that one final transformation is destined for the faith and for the world

which it then will embrace—a transformation which will result in world

brotherhood and peace on earth, when will be fulfilled the purpose of all

the prophets of God “of transforming the world of man into the kingdom

of God.”36 Are the transformations which the religion has undergone in

the past mere preludes to this final transformation? Are the Baha’i

transformations but “progressive stages in a single evolutionary process,

vast, steady and irresistible,”37 pressing toward the God-ordained goal

of “the Most Great Peace”? Is the Baha’i World Faith, indeed, the true

and ultimate religion in which all religions may find their common unity?

Worth pondering are the words of Thornton Chase:

The truth of any religion can be proved and confirmed only

by the heart, by testing its tenets in the life. The Bahai Reve-

lation is unshaken in the arena of intellect, but powers of reasoning

cannot make final decision concerning spiritual truth. One may read

or hear it for a lifetime, may listen to opinions or express them

endlessly, but no judgement is just, no opinion reliable except

that of the personal living and decision of the heart. It is not

a matter of philosophical reasoning, but a question of facts, and

facts are demonstrable only by experience.38

What Thornton Chase is saying is that the truth of the Baha’i faith

must confirm itself in man’s experience, in his heart more than in his

mind. It follows also that the Baha’i faith will make its impact on

the world not on the basis of the logic of its doctrines and the reitera-

tion of its principles but as it puts its faith into practice, its logic

into love, and its dreams into deeds.

The truth of the Baha’i faith will be revealed when or if it shall

succeed in its continued evolution to transform “the world of man into the

kingdom of God.” Only time can reveal what the future holds in store for

the Baha’i faith or what the Baha’i faith holds in store for the future.

NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

1 See above, p. 195.

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**APPENDIXES**

**APPENDIX I**

LETTER FROM MUHAMMAD ‘ALI AND BADI‘U’LLAH

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSE OF JUSTICE

In the Name of the Most Merciful Father,

To the president of The House of Justice, formed in the Name of

the Great and Ancient Lord (exalted be His name). We have with great plea-

sure and thanks received your esteemed letter which expressed unto us your

sincere love and earnest desire to spread the lights of Truth. We pray God

to help, strengthen, and enable you always to send forth the gentle breezes

of knowledge of truth, and to imbue other people with the pure water of

wisdom and Divine Knowledge.

We have been much delighted also in reading the letter of the

Society of Behaists, for we have inhaled from it the good odour of their

sincerity to us and of their steadfastness and firmness in the true religion

of our Heavenly Father and their efforts in the promulgation of His Ever-last-

ing laws. Enclosed we send as an answer which please present to those who are

faithful to the word of God, submissive to His commands and fervent in His

Service.

We are glad to know of your having embraced the faith five years

ago through the mercy of Almighty God and the efforts of your efficient

director, Dr. Kheiralla. This is a great blessing which can only be

appreciated by those whose hearts are enlightened by the rays of the Sun

of Knowledge and who have drunk from the Spring of God’s Word the pure

water of Wisdom and Truth.

He is only meritorious who seeks to quicken the souls of others

by the spirit of Life deposited in the words of the Everlasting Father, and

he is good and holy who is revived by the sweet smelling breeze which moves

by the Word of the Everlasting Father from the garden of His great utterances.

We bear record of your beloved instructor (Dr. Kheiralla) at

having excelled all others in this matter, for he is the only instructor who

has introduced this true knowledge in your country and spread there the

lights of the Word of God. We bear record that you are among the first to

spread the Name of God amongst the other people and to acknowledge His

wonders. Your Behaist Society is undoubtedly the first one which was formed

in the civilized [the word “world” is crossed out] United States, and it

shall have priority among all other Societies which may be formed hereafter,

for all preeminence belongs to the pioneers, even though others should excel

them in organization.

You say you have perused many books of other religions and found

many truths in them; no doubt but that the original point in all religions

is one, being the Knowledge of God and the pursuing His Path; the enlighten-

ing by the lights being the knowledge of God and the adornment by the vesture

of perfection and thorough improvement.

People, however, have varied in their opinions regarding the way

leading towards that point and in the expressions which they use as the poet

says—“Our expressions are various while Thy Beauty is one, but they all

testify to that beauty.”

Those truths, as you have said, are surrounded by fictions,

superstitions, contradictions and inconsistences and this is why the souls

are troubled, the teachings are varied and the people deceive each other,

and thus the weak are swerved from the right path.

But the true religion of our Great God is built upon a firm foun-

dation and contains the Brilliant Light of the Glorious Kingdom which radiates

to quicken the world. In the Sacred Book our Lord describes it thus:—“Think

ye not that we have brought down to you the laws; we have, rather, opened the

soul of the sealed wine by the fingers of Might and Strength,” and also:—

“Those who are faithful can see that the commandments of God are waters of

life to those who embrace them, and as a lamp of wisdom and advancement to

those who are on the earth and in the heavens.” They only contain the great

means of promoting the good of nations; refining their actions and elevating

their moralities.

Its laws are perfect truths by which the souls are attracted and

to which the spirits are made submissive—They are the Spirit which quickens

the world and confirms the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel: “I

came not to judge the world.” No one can entertain a doubt of this fact

unless he is lacking in knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures, for when a wise

man studies deeply into these commandments and marvelous utterances, he will

doubtless bear witness to its sublime preeminence and suitability to this

present age in all respects.

You have read the texts we have already sent to you, and we shall

(D.V.) later on send you others which will explain The Day of the Lord and

keep steadfast His Children in elevating His Sacred Word.

As regards the dissensions existing in these days we can only

say that it results from lack of obedience to the Commands of God, and from

going out from the shadow of His Sacred Word and from not understanding its

true meaning. If all were to return to the true utterances of God as they

are commanded to do, the dissension will no doubt cease, harmony will prevail

and the lights of the Word will shine brightly far and wide.

We do not doubt that you are eager to read the traces of the

Sublime Pen as is disclosed in your letter, and we shall whenever opportunity

permits send you many of them, but we are waiting until you are enabled to

have an efficient translator (as you say) who would be able to translate

both from the Persian and the Arabic into your native language, for most of

these sacred traces are in these two tongues. Your eagerness to read our

letters makes us thankful to you, as it shows your confidence in us. We are

also eager to read yours, and are animated by the expressions they contain.

If you were to know how glad and delighted our circle is when reading them

you’d certainly not cease sending them.

We rise before the door of the Greatness and Majesty asking and

praying to the Almighty that He will under all circumstances strengthen and

help you by the hosts of His Kingdom and by the strength of His Might and

to attract your thoughts and your pure hearts to Him. He is near and quick

in answering.

There can be no doubt that the Heavenly Father loves His children

and helps them when He sees them putting forth their efforts to spread this

great Light. He will dilate their hearts with joy and strengthen and help

them in spreading His Divine Word.

Peace, Joy and Glory to you and to those who obey the Word of

God and harken to His Doctrines which are spread among them.

(Signed) Mohamed Ali

Acre March 31st 1901 Badi Allah

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[The following prayer is added to the latter.]

(A prayer Tablet for spiritual guidance and help to gain the

[*Inner* (?)] *Sight*. With it use the *Name* twelve times.)

“Hold my right arm, O God, and dwell continually with me. Guide

me to the fountains of knowledge and encircle me with Thy Glory. Set Thy

Angel on my right side, and let mine eyes see Thy Splendor. Let mine ears

harken to Thy Melodious tones and comfort me with Thy Presence, for Thou

art the strength of my heart and the trust of ay soul, and I desire no one

besides Thee.”

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[The following note is also written on the letter.]

Meetings of *your* society are held at 11 a.m. on Sundays at

Hall 4-12, Masonic Temple. Be faithful in seeking knowledge of the Utter-

ances of Beha U’llah, and help in supporting and furthering the Cause of

God. F. O. Pease - Pres.

**APPENDIX II**

LETTER FROM MUHAMMAD ‘ALI BAD‘U’LLAH

TO THE SOCIETY OF BEHAISTS

By the Name of the Lord the most Glorious and Mighty.

Oh you members of the Committee formed in the Name of the Ever-

lasting Father, and who are straining your efforts in spreading the light

of His Word and who are enlightened by the light of His Truth and Wisdom;

we greet you by the Name of our Lord who has manifested Himself for the

promotion of the world and has submitted Himself to all sufferings and

adversities for the salvation of mankind. We pray that His care and provi-

dence should be always with you so that in all circumstances you may be

regarded by the eyes of His providence, which will keep you faithful to

His word, and be helped by the hosts of His high Kingdom so that you should

direct people to Him. We are in receipt of your esteemed letter which

showed your faithfulness and submissiveness to the commandments of the

Everlasting Father who has no other purpose in giving the True religion

and strong proofs, and in enduring adversities and afflictions than the

quenching the fires of hatred existing amongst mankind; as He has expressed

this fact in the greatest utterances of His Sacred Tablets.

Know well that your letters have given great consolation to our

sorrowful hearts, for when we read them we have been greatly animated and a

thrill of delight entered our frames for they were penned by the pen of

true sincerity and enlightened by the light of the Comprehensive Word.

Our supplications to God are that He should continue His gifts

upon you and inspire you with what may dispel doubts and enlighten the hearts,

so that through your efforts people might draw near to their creator and do

His will. We are glad to know that you have formed a council in the name of

Beha according to the commandments of our Lord, and that you have legally

organized it. We wish you all success and ask the merciful Lord to strengthen

you in this undertaking and to make the name of this organization to be a

light for directing the people to Him. No doubt that every committee which

is formed by the name of the Great Lord for no other purpose than serving and

exalting His Word, that committee will be strengthened by the hosts of His

great wonders and kept firm by the strength of His sublime Kingdom, for God

has commanded His beloved to abide in His service and has promised to

strengthen and confirm them. The light must be spread out and the good odour

must be diffused and no one can prevent them. You must not mind being few

or armless. Persevere in promulgating *the Word* and put your trust in God

the Most Glorious.

It was descended from the Sacred Kingdom in the Sacred Books,—

“Oh son of Justice, be ye good shepherds to the sheep of God in His Kingdom’

guard them from the wolves which disguise themselves as much as ye would

guard your own children: thus are ye advised by the faithful adviser.”

We pray God to make the expression of this Word true of you, by making you

as horizons of the light of justice among mankind and as guards of the weak

so that all should submit to His Will.

You say that you have sought for some texts from the sublime

Pen and that your instructor, Dr. Kheiralla, wrote to Abbas Effendi several

times, asking for these, but was not answered and was only told to follow

the commands of the Greatest branch and to do this without investigation.

No doubt the sacred texts were descended to direct the people in the straight

path and to refine their manners and if their promulgation should be stopped

the intended results for which the texts descended will not take place.

Therefore all must spread the odours of the texts so that the world should

be directed and enlightened. The wise man ought, when seeing a thirsty man,

to give him the pure water of lice, and when seeing a hungry man to feed him

with the victuals of Knowledge and Truth, for man cannot be promoted except

by being given to drink from the spring of wisdom, thus enlightening them by

the light of the Word and refining their actions.

No wise man will follow another without investigation for man

was created to knowledge and is given the eyes of understanding to use every-

thing by them. If we cannot see the rose and witness its coloring how can

we judge that it is a fine flower which diffuses a sweet odour. Thus we

cannot come to a knowledge of the Father without consideration and without

looking into the traces of the might and the wondrous wisdom. Such great

truths should not be adopted by traditions. The function of the instructor

is to guide and show the traces and dissolve the mysteries so that the

understanding of the neophyte should be enlightened and he be able to under-

stand the utterances of God.

All the confusions existing at present have resulted from follow-

ing others without confirmation or investigation. Verily he who meditates

on the traces of the Lord and weighs everything by the scale of understanding

cannot follow vain superstitions, but will rather rid himself of them and

thus keep firm in serving the most merciful Father. Those who follow (or

act) without consideration are by no means enlightened by the light of know-

ledge through which the learned are discriminated from the ignorant and the

perfect from the imperfect. This cannot but be admitted by the mind with

which the Almighty God has endowed man so that he should discriminate between

the things.

No doubt that every building which is laid upon firm foundation

will continue, while that which is not upon firm foundation will fall. Thus,

following others by the help of mind and thought is praisable and endurable

whilst to submit to others by tradition is not durable for it is done without

consideration and he who embraces its dogma without investigation cannot hold

fast to it nor keep in one way, but follows every voice he hears. He cannot

benefit himself or others.

You say that the rays of the Eternal Sun have dispelled your

darkness, and that peace has spread amongst you after violent storms. By

these expressions you have given us great consolation. Our Lord has told

us of this in His Sacred Books: “The Servant is come to quicken the worlds

and to unite all the inhabitants of the earth. What God wisheth shall con-

quer by the Will of God, and thou shalt see the earth as the garden of El

Abha: thus has the Sublime pen inscribed on the Sacred Tablet.” In all

circumstances we praise God that He has given us insight and submissiveness

to His utterances and that our feet did not slip under the violent storms

and awful distresses and we hope to keep steadfast till the end of our days,

and to bear patiently all adversities for the sake of God, for submissiveness

to His command and for the promulgation of His Word.

You have expressed your sympathy toward us for the adversities

and trials surrounding us and we do not-cease praising God for this feeling

we find in you and we pray for the continuance of this true bond which is

resulted from the submissiveness to His Word, and to make everyone of us a

help to the other, so that through our union the lights of wisdom and know-

ledge should be spread among mankind and the pure water of truth be given to

the neophytes.

Oh ye children of the Kingdom we pray and supplicate to God that

He shall strengthen, help and succor you in spreading His high and Holy

Word with faithfulness and fervency and that nothing should thwart your

efforts and to make your names as spirits of life to the creatures, and to

direct through your efforts and sincere attentions the pure hearts to the

everlasting gifts. We shall await your kind letters explaining all that

takes place in your country and in your committee and we shall, by the help

of God, not fail to write you always. Those who live under the shade of

the comprehensive word present you their respects and they cannot express

how rejoiced they were in reading your letters. They pray to the Great God

for the continuance of this grace and wish you all success in spreading

His Word.

Be sure we always yearn towards you and pray for you so that

through you the darkness of superstitions shall be dispelled and the rays

of the true light should prevail in your country.

The Spirit, the Glory, the Salaam and the peace be upon you

and upon those who initiate you in promulgating the truth and promoting

the Holy Word.

Acre. Syria. March 31st 1901

(Signed) Mohammed Ali and Badi Allah