

West African slaves influenced other histories (e.g., the Afro-American history), how Christian missionaries missionaries set out to redeem the souls of African ‘heathens’, and modern day slavery in the form of sex trafficking, to mention but a few.³

According to some reports, the first Black African slave arrived in Virginia, USA in 1619 and was christened Jonathan. This raises the question of relationship of colour and race to slavery, the aetiology of which is decidedly ignored by Clarence-Smith in the title under review. The groundbreaking work by Goldenberg on this subject matter was apparently unknown to our author. According to Goldenberg, the myth of the ‘Curse of Ham’, which became dominant in the writings of the three Abrahamic faiths from the seventh century, imposed on Blacks the ancestral malediction of slavery.⁴ This is obviously a fertile area of investigation to which our author’s call for further research may well apply. By all accounts, Clarence-Smith has, through his peregrination in the institution of slavery from Islamic antiquity to date, provided a systematic and methodical analysis of an old bromide which may have been consigned to history but is nonetheless alive in different forms in the contemporary world. We shall remain beholden to him for a long time for this magisterial effort.

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An Introduction to the Baha’i Faith

Peter Smith

Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, 229 pp.

Very few religious minorities have been studied in such detail as the Baha’i faith in Peter Smith’s book, *An Introduction to the Baha’i Faith*. This work seeks to complement previous studies such as *The Baha’i Faith: A Short History* (2nd ed., 1999) and *Concise Encyclopedia of the Baha’i Faith* (2000, 2nd ed. 2002), both published by the same author. The last of these two books has been an essential

³ For which the following may be consulted with profit: Bruce S. Hall, ‘How Slaves Used Islam: The Letters of Enslaved Muslim Commercial Agents in the Nineteenth-Century Niger Bend and Central Sahara’, *The Journal of African History*, 52(3) (2011), pp. 279–297; J.D. Fage, ‘Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Context of West African History’, *Journal of African History*, 10(3) (1969), pp. 393–404; Sylviane A. Diouf, *Dreams of Africa in Alabama: The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Story of the Last Africans Brought to America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); John Wright, *The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade* (Oxford: Routledge, 2007). On new perspectives on slavery in Africa, see *Journal of African History*, Vol. 53, Issue 1, 2012; Siddharth Kara, *Sex Trafficking. Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁴ David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham. Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, NJ & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 174. This title is a classic which no discussion on the subject can dispense with. See also, Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Another essay illustrating the ‘Black’ view on slavery is John O. Hunwick, ‘Ahmad Baba on Slavery’, *Sudanic Africa*, 11 (2000), pp. 131–139. See also Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Trevor Burnard and Gad Heuman (eds), *The Routledge History of Slavery* (London & New York: Routledge, 2010); Ehud R. Toledano, *As If Silent and Absent: Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

support in the configuration of *An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith*, as the author admits in the preface to his work.

With this book, Smith develops a more complete index of the history of the Baha'i faith, from its beginnings in Iran as the 'Babi movement' in the mid-nineteenth century to its current conception of minority religion spread throughout the world. In terms of organisation, the author has chosen to focus on three well-defined areas of study of the Baha'i faith: history, belief and practice. In the first part of the book, Smith presents the Babi religion since its beginning as a movement associated with Shi'i Islam (Chapter 1: 'The Babi Movement'). The following chapters then explore the birth of the Baha'i faith, the different periods in which its development can be divided (Rumelian and Syrian periods, 1863–1868 and 1868–1892, respectively) and the figure of its founder Bahá'u'lláh (Chapter 2: 'Bahá'u'lláh and the Emergence of the Baha'i Faith'), his successors, 'Abdu'l Bahá (Chapter 3: 'The Ministry of 'Abdu'l Bahá, 1892–1921') and Shoghi Effendi (Chapter 4: 'The Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi, 1922–1957'), as well as the founding and administration of the Universal House of Justice (Chapter 5: 'The Universal House of Justice, 1963–') and the survival of the movement after the death of its founder (Chapter 6: 'Expansion since 1921'). However, and despite the great historical introduction made in this first section of the book, it would have been useful if a more detailed description of the situation of the movement nowadays and its development as a religious doctrine persecuted among the minorities of Iran had been provided.

The second part of the book is concerned with what the author calls 'beliefs'. This topic is new in the work of Smith and provides the reader with a useful analysis of the Baha'i conception of humanity and its sacred texts (Chapter 7: 'Baha'i Texts: Sources of Belief and Practice'). Smith also devotes several subdivisions in this part of the book to the doctrine of God, his revelation and interpretation (Chapter 8: 'Divine Knowledge and Guidance'); the soul, the concepts of heaven and hell, death and rationalism (Chapter 9: 'Being Human'), and its relationship with Islam, Judaism, Christianity and other major religions of mankind (Chapter 10: 'The Baha'i Faith and Other Religions'). The author also provides a detailed description of its conception of unity and world peace, justice, gender equality, education and economic development (Chapter 11: 'Social Teachings and the Vision of a New World Order').

One of the more important aspects of this book is the information the author provides on the Baha'i practices, absent in previous studies and presented here by theme. For example, in the third section of the book, entitled 'Being a Baha'i: Aspects of Baha'i Life', Smith examines the practice of the Baha'i faith, not only from the point of view of the individuality of the believer but also their relationship with other individuals, both members of the community and/or outsiders (Chapter 12: 'The Spiritual Path'; and Chapter 13: 'Community Membership and Baha'i Law'). This includes aspects such as prayer, fasting, marriage, divorce, domestic violence, drugs, sexuality, ritual, general appearance, behaviour and the sanctions imposed on the members. Subsequent chapters explore the administrative system of the Baha'i faith, including rules and institutions such as the Universal House of Justice, the Assembly System, the election of its members or the funding of its administrative structure (Chapter 14: 'Baha'i Administration'). The author also mentions the most routine aspects of the Baha'i faith, such as the community meetings, holy days and places, pilgrimage or its conception of the

different artistic disciplines (Chapter 15: 'Aspects of Baha'i Community Life'), as well as its expanding mission, its position on international organisations like the United Nations or the diffusion of its teachings (Chapter 16: 'Baha'i Activities and the Wider World').

In addition to this meticulous study of the Baha'i faith, the book also contains a map of Iran and the Ottoman Empire in the mid-nineteenth century (p. 2); several figures and tables on the 'estimated Baha'i populations in 1954 and 1988' (p. 83), 'major works in the English-language Baha'i canon' (p. 102) and the 'Baha'i holy days and feast days' (p. 190), which complete most of the information Smith develops throughout the chapters. The work also includes some final commentaries and an appendix of the 'Recent Baha'i Leaders' (pp. 215–217), in which the author lists the hands of the cause of God appointed by Soghi Effendi (indicating their dates of birth and death and nationality), as well as a detailed account of the members of the Universal House of Justice (with their previous position and their years of service and election). An extensive bibliography (including the different websites of the international Baha'i community), organised according to the three main parts of the book, and an index conclude the volume.

Overall, *An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith* is a very useful source for both students and scholars interested in comparative studies of religion and minorities, and especially in studies of Persian Islam.

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Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) Instituto de Lenguas y Culturas del
Mediterráneo y Oriente Próximo (CCHS-ILC)
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2012.709712>