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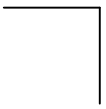
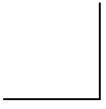
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Women's education: How does it matter?

GEETA GANDHI KINGDON

Abstract

While there is consensus in the social science literature that women's education matters very much to a range of social and economic development outcomes – such as productivity and economic growth, fertility and child mortality rates, and child health and education – there is less agreement about the mechanisms through which women's education has its impact on these outcomes. This paper considers how women's education matters to their fertility and to their children's education, taking into account both economic and non-economic pathways. It evaluates the so-called bargaining power mechanism in the light of Baha'i teachings about the purpose of women's education. It considers whether education has to raise women's earnings in order for its benefits to accrue, and examines the trade-off between the economic and non-economic mechanisms through which women's education acts.

1. Introduction

Baha'i teachings lay monumental emphasis on girls' education. Many statements in the Baha'i writings imply that women's education is crucial for human progress.¹ An earlier paper (Kingdon, 1997)² presented evidence from quantitative studies showing that while women's education is associated with economic benefits comparable to those from men's education, it is associated with very considerable social benefits, such as significantly lower infant mortality and fertility rates, and better health and education outcomes for children. It showed that men's education had comparatively very much smaller effects on these important welfare outcomes. Equally interestingly, other interventions such as increases in per capita national income, degree of urbanization, number of medical personnel per thousand population, and family planning service provision, etc. had much smaller effects on these welfare outcomes than the effect of women's education. The paper remarked on the astonishing consistency of the evidence on the gains from female education and argued that these powerful benefits of women's education provided insights as to why Baha'i writings stress the importance of women's education. While noting that many governments and aid organizations such as the World Bank and UN agencies are now enthusiastically championing girls' schooling, the paper also highlighted the fact that equality of educational opportunity for the sexes was not yet accepted everywhere as a universal value: some countries were apt to label it a 'Western' value.

Although a brief reference was made in an earlier paper in 1997 to the pathways through which women's education may lead to social gains,³ the topic merits deeper analysis. In spite of 15 years of research and policy interest in the ubiquitous relation between female education and developmental

1 'The question of training the children . . . is extremely important, but most important of all is the education of girl children, . . . the education of girls is of far greater consequence than that of boys. This fact is extremely important, and the matter must be seen to with the greatest energy and dedication' ('Abdu'l-Bahá in *Bahá'i Education*, compilation issued by the Universal House of Justice, Oakham: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1976, pp. 49–50). 'Devote ye particular attention to the school for girls, for the greatness of this wondrous Age will be manifested as a result of progress in the world of women' (ibid. 37).

2 Geeta Gandhi Kingdon, 'Education of Women and Social and Economic Development', *Baha'i Studies Review*, 7 (1997) 39–48.

3 Kingdon, 'Education of Women' see note 2.

outcomes such as lower fertility and mortality rates and better child welfare outcomes, the mechanisms behind this relation continue to intrigue and fascinate economists and sociologists. Thus, while the 1997 paper was concerned with why women's education mattered, the present paper is concerned with how women's education matters, that is to say, with the processes by which women's education has its impact. In particular it asks: does the existence of a universal relationship imply universally common mechanisms or, given the vast variety of situations in which the relationship exists, could it be that the mechanisms too are similarly varied?

The economics literature implies that the most important mechanism by which women's education acts on fertility and mortality rates and on child welfare is by raising the value of women's time in the labour market and (partly as a consequence of that) raising their bargaining power within the home. In other words, it requires that educated women do earning work in order for their education to contribute to development.⁴

This economic route is clearly an important pathway through which women's education affects their fertility and their children's attainments. Baha'i writings exhort women to acquire knowledge in all the sciences and the arts and predict that women will enter into the various professions and occupations.⁵ This would seem to suggest that facilitating women's participation in the labour market is acknowledged as one route through which female schooling will contribute to economic and social progress. However, the economic route is not the only one. Another one heavily emphasized in Baha'i teachings is that maternal education directly raises children's human capital because it enhances women's efficiency in the production of child learning within the home.

This paper does a number of things. Firstly, it charts the processes by which women's education reduces their fertility and improves child education (sections 2 and 3). Secondly, it considers more closely the so-called 'bargaining-power' mechanism through which women's education is hypothesized to act, and relates this to some Baha'i writings on the purpose of women's education (section 4). Thirdly, it asks whether education must necessarily enhance women's labour market work/earnings in order for it to be beneficial (section 5). Finally, the paper examines the potential trade-off between educated women's labour market time and their child-rearing/home-teaching time (section 6).

4 The idea of per capita national income as the major indicator of a country's level of development was based on the so-called 'commodities approach' to development. While right-wing economists continue to regard income as the main measure of development, the commodities approach has given way in the 1990s to the more enlightened 'capabilities approach' of Amartya Sen. Under this approach, the measure of development includes indicators of the extent to which the country is able to achieve the functionings that human beings value. For instance, human beings have reason to value length of life – both their own life and that of their children. Thus, lowering infant and (premature) adult mortality is an important goal – and measure – of development in its own right, quite apart from the goal of increasing per capita income. Similarly, most people would like to be able to control the number of children they have. Thus, the total fertility rate is an important (inverse) measure of development. It is also an important inverse measure of development because of 'population pessimism', i.e. the view that rapid population growth has powerful negative economic, social, and environmental effects.

5 'There can be no improvement unless the girls are brought up in schools and centres of learning, unless they are taught the sciences and other branches of knowledge, and unless they acquire the manifold arts, as necessary, and are divinely trained' ('Abdu'l-Baha in *Women*, compilation issued by the Universal House of Justice, Oakham: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1986, p. 18). '... [Women] will enter all the administrative branches of politics. They will attain in all such a degree as will be considered the very highest station of the world of humanity and will take part in all affairs... and the entrance of women into all human departments is an irrefutable and incontrovertible question ...' ('Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1961, pp. 182–83).

2. Women's education and fertility: mechanisms through which education acts

While most social scientists believe in the primacy of women's education as a determinant of fertility reductions, there is considerable debate about the *processes* by which women's education lowers their fertility.⁶

One mechanism is simply logistical: being enrolled in secondary education delays age at marriage (or at cohabitation) since school attendance is usually seen as incompatible with marriage. This mechanism may be quite important in reducing fertility in countries where teenage marriage is common, such as in most of South Asia and some of Africa, and where secondary-school students can be in their twenties (as in much of Africa). Education therefore reduces the total number of children born to a woman via delay in age at marriage. Another process may be by influencing the duration of breast-feeding, which suppresses fertility. Appleton finds evidence for the first mechanism but for not for the second in Cote d'Ivoire.⁷

However, there are many other mechanisms by which women's education lowers their fertility. In order to chart these pathways, it is useful to distinguish between the influence of women's education on desired family size and on women's ability to achieve the desired family size.

Education may reduce women's fertility by causing them to desire fewer children. The mechanisms for this may be:

- (a) *Economic*: Education raises the economic value of women's earning activities by increasing wages, and thereby increases the perceived 'cost' of forgoing economic activity by having more children. Thus, for economic reasons, education of women reduces their desired number of children.
- (b) *Attitudinal*: Education may change women's preferences about the quantity versus the quality of children, with educated women choosing fewer children but of better 'quality' because of the trade-off between number of children and the time available for each child.
- (c) *Media-related*: Educated women may absorb media messages on the small family norm more readily than do uneducated women, and thereby desire fewer children.

Education reduces fertility not only by reducing the desired number of children but also by improving women's ability to achieve the desired number of children. It improves that ability in several ways.

- (d) *Via improved child health*: Education lowers infant mortality by improving child health because of educated mothers' greater knowledge of the importance of hygiene and of simple remedies. Lower infant mortality among educated mothers means that they need to plan fewer births in order to achieve a given desired family size.

6 Based on historical trends showing that mortality decline has almost everywhere preceded fertility decline over a period of several decades, some demographers have argued that fertility decline is due to a massive decline in death rate rather than due to an increase in female education per se (Dyson, 2001, 'A Partial Theory of World Development: The Neglected Role of the Demographic Transition in the Shaping of Modern Society', *International Journal of Population Geography*, 7: 1-24). However, in response to this view, Amartya Sen argued in a 2001 'Workshop on Fertility Change' at King's College, Cambridge, that the fact that mortality decline preceded fertility decline does not mean that the former *caused* the latter (just as the prior arrival of Christmas cards does not mean that it caused Christmas). Secondly, if fertility decline is mainly due to mortality decline then one would expect fertility to fall to replacement level (about 2.1 children per woman) but the fertility rate has fallen to 1.6, 1.4 or even 1.2 children per woman in many places, due to a fall in *desired* family size. Women's education is a prime factor associated with a decline in desired family size (International Institute for Population Sciences, *National Family Health Survey: India 1992-93*, Bombay: IIPS, 1995). Thirdly, women's education is an important determinant of infant mortality rates themselves (Jean Drèze and Mamta Murthi, 'Fertility, Education, and Development: Further Evidence from India', *Population and Development Review*, 27 (March 2000) 33-64).

7 Simon Appleton, 'How Does Female Education Affect Fertility? A Structural Model for Cote d'Ivoire', *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics* 58, no. 1 (1996) 139-66.

- (e) *Via literacy*: An educated woman is able to read information, and is therefore more likely to be aware of (and to successfully use) family-planning methods. This will enhance her ability to achieve her desired family size.
- (f) *Via increased bargaining power of women within the marriage*: Research shows that educated women have more bargaining power within the household because their potential economic position outside marriage is stronger. Thus, educated women may be more successful in achieving their desired family size since their wishes are given greater weight in household decision-making.

3. Women's education and child schooling: mechanisms through which education acts

The importance of the mother's education for children's education is widely documented. There is empirical support for the notion that schooling of women has an important relationship with the human capital of future generations.⁸ A large number of studies that examine the determinants of children's schooling participation, years of schooling, and academic achievement find that the mother's education matters very significantly to these educational outcomes.⁹ However, the *mechanism* through which maternal education affects children's human capital is debated. Some hypotheses have been:

- (a) Educated mothers' increased efficiency in home teaching.
- (b) Educated mothers' greater income due to their greater participation in the labour force and/or greater earnings; more is therefore spent on children's education.
- (c) Educated mothers' greater bargaining power and the consequent increase in demand for goods preferred by the mother such as greater resource allocation to children's education (as well as other child goods). Studies show that a significantly greater proportion of women's (than men's) earned income goes towards child goods.¹⁰

4. The increased bargaining power mechanism

It is useful to examine the last mechanism in some detail, namely that women's education raises their out-of-marriage economic position and thus raises their bargaining power within the marriage and, in this way, enables women to steer household choices in the direction of their (i.e. women's) own preferences, such as the preference for fewer children (lower fertility) and for better child schooling.

Early economic models of the household developed in the 1960s assumed that men and women's preferences within the household were identical (that is to say, that there is consensus in the family). There is now considerable evidence that this 'unitary' model of the household is unrealistic. Women's

8 World Bank, *World Development Report: The Challenge of Development*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; UNDP, *Human Development Report 1996*, New York: United Nations Development Programme, 1996; and numerous papers in economic journals.

9 The theoretical literature raises the rather pessimistic possibility that this maternal and child education relationship may not be causal because of the following reasoning. Innately more able women acquire more education than less able women. They also marry more educated (more able) men. They transmit their ability genetically to their children who then go on to acquire more education (or better achievement test scores) than less able children. This is known as intergenerational ability bias. It is very difficult to test empirically whether the cross-sectional relationship between the mother's education and children's schooling outcomes is causal; to my knowledge only one paper (Jere Behrman and Mark Rosenzweig, 'Does Increasing Women's Schooling Raise the Schooling of the Next Generation?', *American Economic Review*, vol. 92, no. 1 (2002) 323-34) attempts to test it using a sample of identical twins in the US. This is discussed later in this paper.

10 See Lawrence Haddad, John Hoddinott and Harold Alderman (eds.), *Intrahousehold Resource Allocation in Developing Countries: Models, Methods, and Policy*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, for a review of such studies.

and men's preferences vary substantially. For example, women typically prefer smaller families than men since they are the ones who disproportionately bear the costs of repeated child bearing and of child rearing. Moreover, studies show that a greater proportion of women's earned income (than men's) goes to child goods, such as children's clothing and education, and that a greater proportion of men's (than women's) earned income goes to goods such as housing (rent/mortgage) and on entertainment goods – such as alcohol, tobacco, magazines, and cinema. In other words, men's and women's preferences appear to differ.

The evidence of differing tastes and preferences and, therefore, of dissension among members about consumption and other choices within the household, has led to the emergence of new economic models of the household in the past 20 years – known as 'collective' models. These models stand in contrast to the neoclassical 'unitary' model of the household in that they do not assume a glued-together household where a benevolent dictator or altruist makes decisions about intra-household distribution, and that these decisions coincide with other household members' preferences. The new models recognize the individuality of household members and explicitly address the question of how differing tastes and preferences of husband and wife lead to a collective household choice. They theorize that decisions within the household are made through a bargaining process between husband and wife. The relative bargaining power of each member determines the extent to which his/her preferences are taken into account in household choices (about consumption and intra-household distribution, and so on). Bargaining power is determined by (a) personal endowments such as the person's education level; (b) by assets owned solely by the individual, for example, assets which the woman would be entitled to take away with her in case of the dissolution of the marriage; and (c) by extra-household environmental parameters, that is to say factors that affect women's out-of-marriage economic position, such as the return to women's education in the labour market as well as government laws governing taxation when people change marital state and laws such as alimony and child-care payments by husbands of divorced/separated women. The more pro-female such laws, the greater the bargaining power of women within the marriage because they strengthen the woman's 'threat-points' (her out-of-marriage economic options).

Women's education is an important determinant of their bargaining power within the household. Several studies show, for example, that a woman's education acts in the same way as female headship of the household. In other words, educated women are more able than uneducated women to steer household choices in the direction of their preferences.

It is possible that many Baha'is will experience dissonance with these intra-household bargaining models. In particular, they may feel uncomfortable with the idea that for women's preferences to count in household decision-making, or for gender equality within the household, there needs to be equality of bargaining power of men and women. However, there is an unrealistic wishfulness in thinking that men will grant equality to wives merely on the basis of moral exhortations and an appreciation (by men) of the spiritual principle of the equality of all human beings. 'Abdu'l-Baha hints that merely *proclaiming* women's equality is insufficient for achieving it. The achievement of true gender equality rests on the *demonstration* of equality of attainment by men and women, so that men will be compelled to acknowledge equality. In other words, the attainment of the goal of gender equality will not be possible by mere pious exhortation to men. 'Abdu'l-Baha exhorts women thus: 'Women must endeavour then to attain greater perfection, to be man's equal in every respect, to make progress in all in which she has been backward, so that man will be compelled to acknowledge her equality of capacity and attainment . . . [Woman's] actions will show her power, there will no longer be any need to proclaim it by words.'¹¹ 'Abdu'l-Baha also states: 'I hope . . . that they [women] may be even superior to the men, versed in the sciences and yet detached, so that the world may bear witness

11 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks* 160–61.

to the fact that men and women have absolutely the same rights.’¹² Thus ‘Abdu’l-Baha suggests that women may have to demonstrate even greater advancement than men in the sciences, as well as in spiritual qualities such as detachment, for their equal rights with men to be acknowledged.

5. Does education have to raise women’s earnings in order for its benefits to accrue?

Two of the mechanisms mentioned in sections 2 and 3 – by which maternal education reduces fertility and raises child schooling – rely on women’s education increasing their labour market earnings (section 2, processes (a) and (f); section 3, processes (b) and (c)). Across a range of studies in different societies, a greater proportion of women’s cash income than men’s is spent on child goods,¹³ so that women’s education and the consequent increase in their income and/or bargaining power would appear to have particular benefits for child quality.

There is much evidence for the economic and bargaining power routes:¹⁴ women’s education increases their economic options outside the household and gives them greater command over resources within the household, which they choose to allocate to children at a higher level than men would. Handa finds support for the idea that the role of maternal education in increasing her children’s education represents educated mothers’ greater bargaining power within the home.¹⁵

However, the idea that education raises women’s bargaining power presupposes that women’s education has economic returns outside the household. It also implies that the expansion of options for women in the labour market along with enhanced investments in women’s schooling is *necessary* to achieve greater investments in children.

This idea jars somewhat against Baha’i views on the uses of women’s education. By far the most frequent explanation given by ‘Abdu’l-Baha for emphasizing women’s education is that educated mothers can bring great benefits to the next generation through educating their own children more capably. Indeed, the role of the mother as the educator of her children is even elevated to the rank of worship of God.¹⁶

Thus, the direct teaching mechanism much emphasized in Baha’i writings whereby women’s education benefits the education of children does not rely on increasing women’s participation or

12 ‘Abdu’l-Baha in *Women* 11.

13 Kingdon, ‘Education of Women’ see note 2.

14 Nancy Folbre, ‘Market Opportunities, Genetic Endowments, and Intrafamily Resource Distribution: Comment’, *American Economic Review*, 74 (1984) 518–20 and Haddad, Hoddinott, and Alderman, *Intrahousehold Resource Allocation*, to cite but two.

15 Sudhanshu Handa, ‘Maternal Education and Child Attainment in Jamaica: Testing the Bargaining Power Hypothesis’, *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics* 58, no. 1 (1996) 119–37. He finds that in female-headed households – where one presumes children receive more weight in the intra-household distribution of resources irrespective of the mother’s education – the impact of maternal education on children’s educational enrolment and attainment is small and statistically insignificant. However, in male-headed households – where the mother’s relative bargaining power is likely to be a more important determinant of the mother’s influence on child schooling – the impact of maternal schooling is up to five times larger than in female-headed households. This is taken as evidence that a mother’s education assists in the education of children by strengthening the bargaining power of the mother within the household.

16 ‘... the mother is the first teacher of the child. In whatever way she reareth the child, so will the child become, and the results of that first training will remain with the individual throughout his entire life ... how can a mother, herself ignorant and untrained, educate her child?’ (*Bahá’i Education* 49); ‘If the mother be ignorant, even if the father have great knowledge, the child’s education will be at fault, for education begins with the milk’ (*Women* 11); ‘The school for girls taketh precedence over the school for boys, for it is incumbent upon the girls of this glorious era to be fully versed in the various branches of knowledge, in sciences, and the arts ... that they may educate their children ... If, as she ought, the mother possesseth the learning and accomplishments of humankind, her children, like unto angels, will be fostered in all excellence ...’ (*Bahá’i Education* 47); ‘O ye loving mothers, know ye that in God’s sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind; and no nobler deed than this can be imagined’ (*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, Haifa: Baha’i World Centre, 1978, p. 139).

earnings in the labour market, or on increasing their bargaining power within the home. This section asks to what extent there is empirical support for this direct teaching mechanism? While the idea is common sense, the extraordinary emphasis put on this mechanism in Baha'i teachings makes it interesting to search for empirical tests of this mechanism.

While economic mechanisms are useful in improving child educational outcomes where they apply, they clearly do not apply in all contexts. For instance, they will not apply in societies where cultural norms and the gender division of labour are such that women do not participate in market/earning work or where, even if they do engage in labour-market work, there is no increment to their earnings resulting from their education. For example, in rural areas of many developing countries, the only occupation for women is agricultural labour (without powers of farm decision-making), an occupation in which there are no economic returns to women's education. Moreover, there are situations where, despite the existence of women's employment and positive economic returns to their education, mothers voluntarily decide to stay at home with their children, that is to say, they choose to forgo economic returns to their education. Does the absence of labour-market returns to women's education in these situations then imply that education has little beneficial effect on children's education when educated women do no earning work? Put another way, how important is the direct home-teaching mechanism (mentioned in section 3(a))?

It is of practical significance, then, to examine whether in the absence of such economic returns, women's education can still be productive and useful via the direct home-teaching benefits of maternal education emphasized in the Baha'i teachings. I have come across only one recent study in the whole literature which empirically tests the home-teaching mechanism, that of Behrman, Foster, Rosenzweig and Vashishtha (hereinafter BFRV).¹⁷ This research finds persuasive evidence in support of the direct home-teaching mechanism in rural India at the time of the onset of the Green Revolution in Indian agriculture when there were no economic returns to women's schooling.

The BFRV paper examines the demand for schooled wives at the time of the Green Revolution in rural India, from the late 1960s onwards. During this time, many villages experienced large technological change – in that high-yielding-variety seeds began to be utilized and this required the use of irrigation, fertilizer, etc. Successful use of the new seed technology required literacy and numeracy skills and it led to much greater yields than with traditional seeds. The gender division of labour in rural India was such that only men made farm-related decisions. Thus, the economic returns to men's education rose substantially in the farming sector. However, women's limited role in agricultural decision-making as well as in rural employment did not change, that is to say, the economic return to women's education remained negligible. BFRV's estimates indicate that demand for literate wives increased more rapidly in areas of high agricultural growth, despite the absence of market returns to female schooling. They interpret this increase in demand for female schooling as an input into the production of child schooling. They find evidence to support this interpretation. Firstly, they find that children of literate mothers had significantly greater hours of home study than children of unschooled mothers. Secondly, they find that literate women command a premium in the marriage market: men accept significantly lower dowries for literate brides than for illiterate ones. These facts are consistent with the view that men value female literacy for its home production of child schooling.¹⁸

17 Jere Behrman, Andrew Foster, Mark Rosenzweig and Prem Vashishtha, 'Women's Schooling, Home Teaching, and Economic Growth', *Journal of Political Economy*, 107, no. 4 (1999) 682–714.

18 It opposes the idea that women's literacy provides women with improved post-marriage bargaining power. The higher bargaining power of educated women imposes a cost on men in the sense that their dominance in the household is compromised. If it were the case that men had no economic advantage from women's schooling (i.e. no increase in household income), they would need to be compensated for this cost in terms of higher dowries for more educated (thus higher-bargaining-power) brides. BFRV's finding of a negative relationship between bride's schooling and dowry amount suggests that women's literacy has a value to men that outweighs any cost in terms of the higher bargaining power of the

Because of low levels of female employment, BFRV are able to rule out important effects of women's education on their earnings. This absence of economic returns, coupled with evidence of (a) increased demand for literate wives in high technological change areas; (b) a significant effect of maternal literacy on the study hours of children; and (c) lower dowries received by men marrying literate women – indicates that at least some component of the significant, positive relationship between maternal and child schooling in rural India reflects the effect of maternal schooling on the efficiency of maternal time in the production of child human capital.

An important implication of the BFRV results is that growth in female employment opportunity is not a necessary condition for achieving greater investments in children's schooling if women's schooling enhances their productivity in the home production of children's human capital, and there are economic returns to male schooling. Increasing labour-market opportunities for women or increasing women's participation in labour-market work is not necessary to justify increased investments in female schooling, which has payoffs even in settings in which there is increased demand for schooling only in male-dominated occupations. These are rather important conclusions in the light of statements in the Baha'i writings about women's role as the primary educators of their children.

6. Trade-off between educated mothers' labour-market time and child-rearing time

We have said that women's education can benefit children via the direct home-teaching method and/or via the economic mechanism. However, a popular concern in common discourse is the potential for educated women's labour-market time to reduce their child-rearing time – that is to say, the economic mechanism reduces the scope for the direct home-teaching mechanism. Another way of saying the same thing is that there may be a trade-off between women's labour-market work (which their education facilitates/promotes) and their child-care/home-teaching role (which their education also promotes the efficiency of). It seems likely that any such trade-off would be more severe in societies with more inflexible labour markets – ones where the scope for women's part-time work is low so that combining economic work with child rearing is difficult.

While much of the empirical literature in the area finds a strong positive inter-generational relationship between maternal (and paternal) education and child education, a recent study using US data on identical twins fails to find a positive relationship and, instead, finds a weak negative relationship.¹⁹ It finds that raising the level of schooling attainment of women would not raise the level of schooling of the next generation and may even weakly lower it. It also finds that raising the levels of female schooling decreases the total amount of time spent in the home by the mother and increases the time spent in the labour market. Another recent paper also finds that, controlling for a host of factors, including family income, if the mother worked full-time when child was 0–5 years old, child educational attainment turns out to be significantly lower.²⁰ However, the effects of the mother's part-time employment and the father's employment are smaller and less well determined but again negative. These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that there is a trade-off between women's employment and home time and that women's time in the home is a critical determinant of the human capital of children.

more schooled wives. Given the absence of labour-market returns to women's education in rural India at the time, BFRV infer that the value to men of educated brides comes from educated mothers' greater efficiency in home-teaching of children.

19 The inter-generational ability bias was discussed in footnote 9. Behrman and Rosenzweig, 'Does Increasing Women's Schooling . . .?', use a sample of twins in order to purge the effect of ability bias.

20 John Ermisch and Marco Francesconi, *The Effect of Parents' Employment on Children's Educational Attainment*, IZA Discussion Paper no. 215, Bonn: Institute for the Study of Labour, 2001.

While these studies find evidence of a trade-off between labour-market work of educated women and their ability to give time to home teaching/child rearing, it is important to be cautious in interpreting this as evidence that labour-market work which takes educated women away from home necessarily reduces children's welfare outcomes. It is possible that increased mother's schooling leads to other improved outcomes such as improved child health, especially if improvements in these other outcomes are information-intensive rather than time-intensive. Moreover, while in the North American context women's education may reduce home teaching, in other labour-market contexts and cultures, increased women's schooling leads to increased child schooling. The BFRV paper described above reported strong evidence of this effect in the rural Indian context. In other words, the consequences of investments in women's schooling are context-specific and dependent on the nature of the labour market and on the education/employment relationship of women in different places.

One policy implication emerging from this discussion would appear to be that governments should design policy in such a way as to create much more flexible labour markets for women – such as enabling part-time work in the whole range of occupations. This should reduce the severity of the work/child-rearing trade-off by preserving the home-teaching role of educated mothers while at the same time permitting them to take part in the various occupations and professions for which their education has prepared them and which have manifold other developmental benefits.

7. Conclusions

The ideas emphasized in Baha'i teachings about the benefits of educating women command great empirical support. The notion advanced by 'Abdu'l-Baha that the mother's education benefits children's education directly – through educated mothers being their children's capable educators – is gaining both empirical support, such as in the BFRV paper, and greater currency. For example, the Forum for African Women Educationalists believes in the direct home-teaching mechanism, that is to say, that better-educated mothers are superior teachers in the home, so that investments in women's human capital complement investments in schools.²¹

While Baha'is may feel uncomfortable with the idea that for women's preferences to count in household decision-making, there needs to be equality of bargaining power between husband and wife, I have argued that it is optimistic to think that moral exhortation on its own will be enough for achieving equality. The Baha'i writings imply that merely *proclaiming* women's equality is insufficient for achieving it and that it requires *demonstration* of equality of attainment by men and women, so that men will be compelled to acknowledge equality. One of the ways in which women's education acts, then, is by demonstrating their equality of attainment which, in turn, raises their status and gives their preferences greater weight within the marriage.

21 Forum for African Women Educationalists, *Girls and African Education: Research and Action to Keep Girls in School*, Nairobi: Forum for African Women Educationalists, 1995.

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A survey of the Baha'i Faith in Africa from its earliest days to 1986

WILL C VAN DEN HOONAARD

Abstract

This paper presents an initial overview of the history of the development of the Baha'i Faith in Africa from its beginnings in about 1866 until 1986. It deals in particular with the systematic spread of the Baha'i Faith in Africa that occurred under the plans launched by Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice from 1951 onwards. The paper describes the development and extension of the Baha'i institutions at the national and local level as well as those areas where there were large numbers of conversions. It explores the opposition to the Baha'i Faith in both the Islamic countries of North Africa and the colonial and post-colonial governments in sub-Saharan Africa as well as the problems caused by apartheid in South Africa. It surveys some of the social and economic projects initiated by the Baha'is. The paper starts with sections on references to Africa in the authoritative Baha'i texts and on some African slaves who played a part in early Babi and Baha'i history. There is an appendix giving the date and names of the first Baha'is to move to each country as well as the names of the first indigenous Baha'is of each country.

Africa has the second largest land mass and the second largest population of the continents of the world. The present paper is a survey of the history of the Baha'i Faith in Africa from its earliest times to 1986, when this survey was completed.¹ The Baha'i community of Africa embraces 50 mainland countries and 9 major islands or island groups. By 1986, there were Baha'is in three-quarters of all African civil areas² and in that year, 20 per cent of the 4.7 million Baha'is worldwide lived in Africa.³

This paper is organized as follows. After exploring the connections with Africa during the periods of the two founders of the Baha'i Faith, taking us to 1892, we will consider the history of the Baha'i Faith in Egypt and South Africa. These two histories take us through the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Baha and the early part of the guardianship (until 1950). Developments of the Baha'i Faith in Africa became much more complex and varied after 1950. These developments fall under the separate plans that have governed the work of the Baha'is in Africa: first, the 'Africa Campaign' (1951–3), and, second, successive expansion and consolidation plans: the Ten Year Plan (1953–63), the Nine Year Plan (1964–73), the Five Year Plan (1974–9) and the Seven Year Plan (1979–86). We will look first at the systematic spread of the Baha'i Faith in Africa and then at a number of other topics: mass conversion, opposition and recognition, ethnic and linguistic diversity, apartheid, social and economic development, and finances and Baha'i properties.

1 The paper was written in 1986 as an entry for the Baha'i Encyclopedia project. It was subsequently decided to have individual articles for each country in that Encyclopaedia. It has been adapted for publication here. I wish to thank Dr M. Momen and an anonymous reviewer for their suggestions and help.

2 Universal House of Justice, *The Seven Year Plan, 1979–1986: Statistical Report*, Haifa, Ridván 1986 (hereinafter abbreviated to *Seven Year Plan*), p. 42.

3 Seven Year Plan 48.

General Baha'i significance

Africa owes its Baha'i significance to a number of aspects found in the Baha'i Faith and its history. First, the continent and its peoples are specifically mentioned in the Baha'i writings. Second, historical events associated with the lives of the founders of the Baha'i Faith – the Bab (1819–50) and Baha'u'llah (1817–92) – as well as 'Abdu'l-Baha (1844–1921) and Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957) are closely linked to the continent. Finally, Africa constitutes the first area in the world with mass enrolments of Baha'is.

Aside from a very few scholarly attempts to chronicle the Baha'i history, such as the articles written for the Baha'i Encyclopedia project,⁴ and also some other works on such places as South Africa⁵ and Nigeria,⁶ there is a paucity of such works for the rest of Africa. The West Africa Centre for Baha'i Studies, established in 1982 in Nigeria, may in due course shed more light on the history of the Baha'i Faith in this continent.

References to Africa and Africans in the authoritative Baha'i texts

Baha'u'llah referred to African peoples as the 'black pupil of the eye . . . through which the light of the spirit shineth forth.'⁷ 'Abdu'l-Baha predicted the 'awakening of the peoples' of Africa, and the 'ultimate triumph of His Father's Faith among its . . . peoples.'⁸ 'Abdu'l-Baha's *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, which lay the groundwork for the spread of the Baha'i message throughout the world, makes mention of nine African territories, virtually all of them islands.⁹

For Shoghi Effendi, the aim of establishing of the Baha'i Faith in Africa meant that for the first time, in 1951, national spiritual assemblies (the national elected Baha'i administrative councils) had to collaborate in a single international project. Such a collaboration would eventually pave the way for the 'ultimate organic union' of these assemblies through the Universal House of Justice.¹⁰ For him, Africa was an international testing ground of Baha'i cooperation among national spiritual assemblies. Africa became an example upon which other international programmes of action could be modelled. It was also significant, Shoghi Effendi stated, that the initial plan systematically to open up Africa to the Baha'i Faith coincided with the formation of the International Baha'i Council in 1950, the precursor of the Universal House of Justice.¹¹ In a message addressed to the Baha'is of the British Isles, Shoghi Effendi speaks of Africa as 'vast, that promising and slowly awakening continent'.¹² The fact that materialism had not yet held much sway in Africa meant that the continent would more easily and quickly respond to the Baha'i message.¹³ Once awakened, Africa would make a great contribution 'to

4 A number of articles were written for this project: for example by Roberta Al-Salihi (The Gambia), Susan Kouchekezadeh (Sierra Leone) Goghasht Mossafá'í (Benin) and Parvine Djoneidi (Niger).

5 Lowell Johnson, *The Bahá'í Faith in Africa: The Early Days*, n.p., n.d. [196-].

6 Loni Bramson-Lerche, 'The Bahá'í Faith in Nigeria', in *Dialogue & Alliance*, vol. 6 no. 4 (Winter 1992–93), pp. 104–25.

7 Cited in Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1969, p. 413.

8 Cited in *ibid.* 251.

9 The territories are: Canary Islands, Cape Verde, Madagascar, Madeira, Mauritius, Réunion, St Helena, South Africa, and Zanzibar.

10 Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community: The Messages of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of the British Isles*, London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1981, p. 257.

11 Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny* 261.

12 *ibid.* 262.

13 Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl* 413.

the advancement of world civilization.¹⁴ In a message to the 1953 Intercontinental Conference in Kampala, Shoghi Effendi referred to Africans as ‘pure-hearted’ and ‘spiritually receptive.’¹⁵

Shoghi Effendi had gained personal familiarity with Africa much earlier. In the autumn of 1929, he undertook a journey, mostly overland, from Cape Town to Cairo and 11 years later, in 1940, he once again travelled south–north through Africa (this time, he travelled with his wife, Ruhyyih Khanum (1910–2002)), to Stanleyville (in what was then known as the Belgian Congo), to Juba (Sudan), down the Nile to Khartoum, and on to Cairo. There is no doubt that his love for Africa and its peoples was greatly heightened by his familiarity with, and direct knowledge of, the continent.¹⁶

The Baha’i Faith and Africa in the nineteenth century

The ministry of the Bab (1844–50)

The Bab neither visited Africa nor sent Babis there. Most wealthy families in southern Iran had, however, African slaves, who became household servants. The Bab’s family had acquired in 1842 such a servant, an Ethiopian by the name of Mubarak (1823–c.1863)¹⁷ and a young girl, Fiddih (c.1834–81).¹⁸ Mubarak welcomed Mulla Husayn (1813–48) into the home of the Bab on 22 May 1844, the night that Mulla Husayn became the first to profess his belief in the Bab’s claims. The Ethiopian also accompanied the Bab on his pilgrimage to Mecca. Fiddih was trained to attend the Bab’s wife, Khadijih Bagum, and a deep bond of affection developed between them. Neither Mubarak or Fiddih became Babis. Another such black servant was Mas’ud who was acquired by the Bab’s uncle and who became a steadfast Baha’i. Originally from Zanzibar, his fame in Shiraz as a sportsman and excellent cook was well established.¹⁹ To assuage Mas’ud’s separation from Baha’u’llah during the latter’s imprisonment in Akka, Mas’ud was persuaded to marry a young Ethiopian woman, Gulchihrih.

The ministry of Baha’u’llah (1853–92)

The household of Baha’u’llah was also served by such a black servant, Isfandiyar (d. c.1862), who had been entrusted with ‘all of the confidential affairs’ of Baha’u’llah.²⁰ He was scrupulous in paying off his debts before the household asked that he move to safety during the period when Baha’u’llah was first imprisoned.

In the course of his exiles, Baha’u’llah touched the shores of Africa when he anchored in Alexandria, Egypt, on 26 August 1868 and changed ship for a liner to Haifa; the next port of call was Port Sa’id.²¹

It was during the ministry of Baha’u’llah that both Egypt and Sudan were opened to the Baha’i Faith. Sayyid Husayn Kashani and Haji Baqir Kashani were the first two Baha’i merchants to settle in Egypt in about 1866 and they were shortly joined by Haji Mirza Haydar ‘Ali (d. 1920) as well as Ja’far-i-Tabrizi (d. 1868). A Persian merchant in Alexandria, Mirza Abu’l-Qasim Gulistanih (of

14 Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny* 330.

15 *The Bahá’i World*, vols. 1–12, 1925–54. rpt. Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1980, (hereinafter abbreviated as BW) 12: 121.

16 Rabbáni, *The Priceless Pearl* 180–81.

17 Abu’l-Qasim Afnan, *Black Pearls: Servants in the Households of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh*, 1st edn., Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1988, pp. 3–18.

18 *ibid.* 21–26.

19 *ibid.* 34–43.

20 *ibid.* 27–32.

21 Hasan M. Balyuzi, *Bahá’u’lláh, The King of Glory*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1980, p. 265.

Shiraz) (d. 1939) became the first to become a Baha'i on African soil,²² followed by another merchant, Haji Muhammad Hasan Kaziruni.²³ Baha'u'llah had sent the famed Baha'i historian, Nabil A'zam (1831–92), to Egypt in 1868 to appeal on behalf of seven Baha'is, including Haji Mirza Haydar 'Ali,²⁴ who were all imprisoned in Alexandria. By the time Baha'u'llah anchored in Alexandria, Nabil was, too, cast in prison.

The Persian Consul General caused Mirza Haydar-'Ali and a few others to be exiled to Khartoum where they experienced great hardships. At first Khartoum officials and people had hardened attitudes towards these seven Baha'is, but, in the course of the nine-year exile in Sudan, they came to show respect and admiration for them.²⁵ Baha'u'llah dispatched Haji Jasim-i-Baghdadi, and later Haji 'Ali Yazdi, to visit the Baha'is in Sudan. Haji 'Ali stayed in Khartoum and opened a trading centre.²⁶ Ilyas Effendi, a local Christian friend of the Baha'is, declared his faith in Baha'u'llah.²⁷ In 1877, through the assistance of General Gordon, the Baha'is were allowed to leave Sudan.²⁸

Sudan, however, was not the only place which was opened to the Baha'i Faith by means of Egypt. The first persons to have brought the Baha'i message to North America, Ibrahim Khayru'llah (Kheiralla, 1849–1929) and Anton Haddad chanced upon the Baha'i Faith in Egypt, taught by Haji 'Abdu'l-Karim Tihrani around 1887, one of the Persian Baha'i merchants.²⁹ They both converted to the religion in about 1889. Haddad left for Chicago in June 1892 and Khayru'llah joined him there the following year.

The Baha'i Faith and Africa, 1892–1950

The first half of the twentieth century saw the spread of the Baha'i Faith only to North and South Africa.

North Africa: Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia and Ethiopia

More regular and consistent contact with Africa was established by 'Abdu'l-Baha (1844–1921), both through his own extended stays in Egypt and his direct encouragement of Baha'is settling in South Africa.

Bahiyiyih Khanum (1846–1932) was so deeply grieved after the ascension of Baha'u'llah that 'Abdu'l-Baha had encouraged her to travel to Egypt where she stayed for five months in Cairo during 1894.³⁰ It was during her stay in Egypt that a Berber, Salih Aqa, became employed in her service. He soon thereafter began serving in 'Abdu'l-Baha's household.³¹

22 Africa Teaching Committee Records (hereinafter abbreviated AFR with box number/folder number), Box 9, Folder 29, February 1953; see also 'In Memoriam', BW 8: 678 and Hájí Mirzá Haydar-'Ali, *Stories from the Delight of Hearts* (tr. A. Q. Faizi), Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1980, p. 31.

23 Haydar-'Ali, *Delight of Hearts* 31.

24 AFR 11/30, February 1953.

25 Hasan M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh: with Some Historical Background*, Oxford: George Ronald, pp. 237–50; a personal account of their stay in Sudan appears in Haydar-'Ali, *Delight of Hearts* 48–66.

26 Haydar-'Ali, *Delight of Hearts* 64.

27 *ibid.* 61.

28 *ibid.* 65.

29 Richard Hollinger, 'Ibrahim George Kheiralla and the Bahá'í Faith in America', in *From Irán East and West* (ed. Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen), Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History, vol. 2, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1984, pp. 95–133.

30 Afnan, *Black Pearls* 45.

31 *ibid.* 45–54.

However, it was in 1900 that the first Egyptian became a Baha'i, Ibrahim 'Ali.³² Ten years later, in August 1910, 'Abdu'l-Baha went to Egypt, staying primarily in Port Sa'id, Alexandria, and Cairo, before embarking on his first Western trip to Europe on a steamer bound for Marseilles on 11 August 1911. After three months in London and Paris, 'Abdu'l-Baha returned to Egypt in December 1911 and stayed until 25 March 1912 when he left for his second journey for the West on the SS *Cedric* bound for New York. Upon completing his well-publicized journey to Europe and North America, he returned to Egypt, namely Port Sa'id on 17 June 1913. He then stayed in Egypt until 2 December 1913. Other places where he stayed included Isma'iliyyah and Ramlih. He thus spent one and a half years in Egypt in all. During this time, a number of Western Baha'is visited him.

During 'Abdu'l-Baha's absence from Egypt, the first local spiritual assembly (elected local Baha'i administrative council) in Africa was established in Cairo in 1912.³³ Two of the most prominent early Baha'is, Lua Getsinger (1871–1916) and Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani (1844–1914) are buried side by side in Cairo. Lua Getsinger was named by 'Abdu'l-Baha as 'The Herald of the Covenant' and 'The Mother Teacher of the West'. She was on her way to America after a visit with 'Abdu'l-Baha when she became ill in Cairo. While lying ill in Cairo World War I broke out and she spent two years nursing soldiers back to health and teaching the Baha'i Faith in Egypt. Mirza Abu'l-Fadl became a teacher at the famous al-Azhar University and was responsible for the conversion of a number of Egyptian students there.

The Baha'i community of Egypt became sufficiently strong to elect its national spiritual assembly, which included Sudan, in 1924. In the following year, on 10 May 1925, a significant milestone was reached when a Muslim court in Egypt recognized the Baha'i Faith as an independent religion. The death of a Baha'i, Muhammad Sulayman of Isma'iliyyih, and the refusal by the Muslims to allow Baha'is to establish their own cemetery led to this court decision.³⁴ A spiritual assembly was established in Alexandria in 1925, the second in Africa; the Baha'is of Port Sa'id formed the third assembly in 1925.³⁵

The National Spiritual Assembly of Egypt and Sudan was incorporated in 1934, but in the same year, the Sudan Baha'i community was deemed of sufficient strength and size to merit the election of its own national spiritual assembly. The first local spiritual assembly of Khartoum, Sudan, was formed in 1946.³⁶

Tunisia became the recipient of a Baha'i settler during 'Abdu'l-Baha's ministry in 1921. Tunis formed its first local spiritual assembly in 1937. There were already Baha'is in Ethiopia by 1933, and the first assembly was formed in Addis Ababa in 1947.

South Africa

A small group of Baha'is, including a Mrs. Agnes Cook, was holding Baha'i meetings in Cape Town as early as 1911. In June 1920, Miss Fanny A. Knobloch (1859–1949) sought permission from 'Abdu'l-Baha to settle in South Africa – an idea to which he readily consented.³⁷ Miss Knobloch

32 AFR 11/30, February 1953.

33 *ibid.*

34 It was the death of Muhammad Sulaymán of Ismá'iliyyih that prompted the courts to take these successive actions (BW 8: 680).

35 A picture of the Port Sa'id Baha'is is found in BW (*Bahá'í Year Book*) 1: 44.

36 AFR 11/30, February 1953.

37 The section that deals with the early history of the Baha'i Faith in South Africa is largely taken from 'The Early Days of the Faith in Africa', *Bahá'í African Newsletter*. 3 parts, publ. by National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa, August–October 1959 (AFR 10/19). See also Viola Ioas Tuttle, 'In Memoriam – Fanny A. Knobloch', BW 11: 473–76.

arrived in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1920³⁸ and received a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Baha.³⁹ Already during the first week of her stay in Cape Town, Miss Knobloch met Miss Busby who within a very short time became the first Baha'i in South Africa. From Cape Town, Miss Knobloch went to Johannesburg and to Lourenço Marques where the pastor of the Methodist Church arranged for her to speak before 300 Swazis, the first time that the Baha'i message was given to sub-Saharan Africans.

Inspired by the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* authored by 'Abdu'l-Baha, and through the constant encouragement of Shoghi Effendi, Miss Martha Root (1872–1939) undertook a number of global journeys, one of which took her to South Africa in December 1924. She gave the first African radio broadcast about the Baha'i Faith in Cape Town. Moreover, she gave over 30 lectures in 31 days. On 30 March 1925, Miss Knobloch's sister, Pauline Hannen arrived from Germany to spend time with her ailing sister. It was during this time that the first male Baha'i, William Fraetas enrolled. Mr Fraetas had heard of the Baha'i Faith from 'Abdu'l-Baha when he was in New York in 1912. William's wife later also became a Baha'i. Another Baha'i, Mrs Agnes Carey (1879–1958), was part of the Pretoria community which formed its assembly in 1925.⁴⁰ After a few years, however, the assembly dissolved. Miss Fanny Knobloch, after a prolonged stay in America on account of ill health, resumed her activities in South Africa in 1928. Through her work, groups were established in Cape Town, Johannesburg, the Orange Free State, Natal, Bulawayo, and Salisbury (Rhodesia). Her money ran out, and she left South Africa on 2 July 1929, after a total of seven years.

Loulie B. Mathews (1869?–1966), an itinerant Baha'i teacher, visited South Africa for ten days, 3–14 February 1937, finding Mrs Carey and visiting Cape Town, Bulawayo, and Durban.⁴¹ Despite her efforts to maintain contact with the groups she left behind, the groups dissolved, and by 1938, there were only three groups left (Cape Town, Pretoria, and Salisbury). By 1946, there were only three Baha'is in all of South Africa: Mrs Carey in Natal, Mr Jack Dee of Salisbury, and Mr Reginald Turvey (1882–1968) who had come to Johannesburg from England in 1940. Mr Turvey, a South African, had heard of the Baha'i Faith in England, and was a prominent South African artist.⁴² Shoghi Effendi bestowed upon Mrs Carey and Mr Turvey the designation, 'the Mother and Father of South Africa'. In 1948, Loulie Mathews undertook her last visit to South Africa, finding only Agnes Carey, who had not seen a Baha'i in over ten years.⁴³

The systematic spread of the Baha'i Faith in Africa (1951–86)

The Africa Campaign (1951–3)

By 1951, the time of the gradual establishment of the rudiments of the Baha'i administrative order in the Baha'i world was over. A time of testing its international character had arrived. Shoghi Effendi seized upon the need to systematically establish the Baha'i Faith in Africa as a means to foster

38 Viola I. Tuttle states that Miss Knobloch went to South Africa in 1923 (BW 11: 473–75). Given the fact that other events related to Miss Knobloch in South Africa took place before 1923, we must assume that 1920 is the more correct year.

39 Quoted by L. Mathews in 'African Experience', BW 7: 788–92. See also Fanny Knobloch, 'South African Mission', *World Order Magazine*, 12 (1946–47), pp. 247–52, 281–88; a portion of the text of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet is found in BW 7: 788.

40 Florence Norman and William B. Sears, 'In Memoriam – Frederika Agnes Carey', *The Bahá'í World (1954–1963)*, vol. 13, Haifa: The Universal House of Justice, 1970, pp. 943–44.

41 Loulie B. Mathews, *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls*, 2nd printing, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1963, pp. 159–61; Mathews, 'African Experience'.

42 Lowell Johnson, 'In Memoriam – Reginald Turvey', *The Bahá'í World (1963–1968)*, vol. 14, Haifa: The Universal House of Justice, 1974, pp. 385–87; see also Lowell Johnson, 'Reginald Turvey: An Appreciation of the Man and his Art', *The Bahá'í World (1976–1979)*, vol. 17, Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1981, pp. 634–638; idem, *Reginald Turvey – Life and Art*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1986.

43 Mathews, *Not Every Sea* 163–70.

international collaboration among five national spiritual assemblies, namely that of the British Isles, Persia, Egypt, the United States, and India. The campaign, according to Shoghi Effendi was ‘destined to exert an incalculable influence on the fortunes of the Faith throughout the world,’ having ‘far-reaching repercussions among the two chief races’ in North America.⁴⁴ The Baha’i Faith was to be spread throughout Africa by pioneers, Baha’is who would volunteer to leave their own homes to settle in another region for the purpose of teaching the Baha’i Faith, usually on an unpaid basis.

The British Baha’i community would assume overall leadership, and thus the ‘Africa Campaign’ was born in April 1951. The British Baha’is were given the task of settling pioneers in Uganda and Tanganyika. The United States Baha’is were asked to place a pioneer in the Gold Coast and Liberia, under the auspices of the British Baha’is. The Egyptian Baha’i community was given a Five Year Plan by Shoghi Effendi (1951–6). The British had already given heroic evidence of their abilities when more than 60 per cent of the Baha’is moved to establish and consolidate local assemblies within their territory. Indeed, 9 months into the Africa Campaign, 13 pioneers had already settled in 4 of the 12 African territories.⁴⁵ The first pioneer in the Campaign was Mr Jalal Nakhjavani, arriving in Dar es Salaam on 3 January 1951.⁴⁶ Miss Ethel Stephens, an Afro-American woman was the first American Baha’i to arrive in Africa, namely in the Gold Coast in 1951,⁴⁷ and Mr William Foster pioneered to Liberia in 1951. By December 1951, the first two black Africans had become Baha’is,⁴⁸ although the very first person to become a Baha’i in the Africa Campaign was Mr P. K. Gopalakrishnan-Nyar in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (then known as Tanganyika).⁴⁹ The goals and achievements of the African Campaign can be summarized as follows:

Table 1: Goals and Achievements of the African Campaign 1951–3

	Goal	Achievement
Territories settled	12	16
Local Spiritual Assemblies		26
Translation into African languages	31	13
Ethnic groups		24
Baha’is in Africa		>200

The spread of the Baha’i Faith received considerable impetus with the appointment by Shoghi Effendi of Mr Musa Banani as Hand of the Cause of God in May 1952. Mr Banani (1886–1971) was ranked among the first pioneers to settle in Africa and was named by Shoghi Effendi as the ‘Spiritual Conqueror of Africa’.⁵⁰ Uganda achieved the remarkable status of having formed 13 local spiritual assemblies, while Egypt had 9, and 1 each in Kenya, Libya, and Liberia. By 1953 all goals had been exceeded and native African Baha’is themselves set out to leave their own territories to teach the Baha’i Faith, including Mr Enoch Olinga (1926–79), a future Hand of the Cause, with the bestowed

44 BW 12: 121.

45 AFR 10/5, 15 January 1952.

46 AFR 11/30, February 1953.

47 AFR, Minutes, 3–4 November 1951.

48 AFR 11/30, February 1953.

49 AFR 2/1–7, September 1951.

50 *The Bahá’i World (1973–1976)*, vol. 16, Haifa: Baha’i World Centre, 1978, p. 84; Amin Banani, ‘In Memoriam – Músa Banani’, *The Bahá’i World (1968–1973)*, vol. 15, Haifa: Baha’i World Centre, 1976, pp. 421–23.

title of 'Abu'l-Futuh' (the 'Father of Victories').⁵¹ He became the first African Baha'i to have undertaken a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. A. Olei became the first African woman to volunteer to pioneer during the Kampala Conference in February 1953.⁵²

In September 1952, Mr Richard St Barbe Baker (1889–1982), a Baha'i and a silviculturist who was inspired by Shoghi Effendi, embarked on a scientific expedition across the Sahara.⁵³ The trip aroused great interest among both Baha'is and non-Baha'is.

The Ten Year Crusade (1953–63)

The holding of an Intercontinental Conference in Kampala, 12–18 February 1953,⁵⁴ coincided with the announcement of the tasks that lay ahead for the African Baha'is during the Ten Year Crusade (1953–63). Six national spiritual assemblies would be drawn into the African part of this campaign: British Isles, United States, Egypt, Persia, India, and Iraq. Their responsibilities were:

British Isles:

- Establishment and incorporation of the National Spiritual Assembly (NSA) of Central and East Africa, a National Haziratu'l-Quds, and a National Baha'i Endowment
- Purchase of land for a Temple in Kampala
- Opening of British Cameroons, British Togoland, Madeira, and South West Africa to the Baha'i Faith
- Consolidation of Angola, Belgian Congo, Gold Coast, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanganyika, Uganda, and Zululand
- Translation of literature into 31 African languages.

United States:

- Establishment and incorporation of the NSA of South and West Africa, a National Haziratu'l-Quds, and a National Baha'i Endowment
- Purchase of land for a Temple in Johannesburg
- Opening of the Cape Verde Islands, the Canary Islands, French Somaliland, French Togoland, Mauritius, Northern Territories Protectorate, Portuguese Guinea, Réunion, Spanish Guinea, St Helena, and St Thomas Island to the Baha'i Faith
- Consolidation of Liberia and South Africa.

Persia:

- Opening of Ashanti Protectorate, Basutoland, Bechuanaland, Italian Somaliland, Southern Rhodesia, and Swaziland to the Baha'i Faith
- Consolidation of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

51 Ruhiyyih Khanum, 'In Memoriam – Enoch Olinga', *The Bahá'í World (1979–1983)*, vol. 18, Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1986, pp. 618–34.

52 AFR 10/5, September 1953.

53 Hugh C. Locke, 'In Memoriam – Richard St Barbe Baker, O.B.E.', BW 18: 802–5.

54 A report of this conference is found in BW 12: 121–32.

Egypt and Sudan:

- Establishment and incorporation of the NSA of North West Africa, a National Haziratu'l-Quds, and a National Baha'i Endowment
- Purchase of land for a Temple in Cairo
- Opening of French Equatorial Africa, French West Africa, Morocco (Tangiers), Rio de Oro, Spanish Morocco, and Spanish Sahara to the Baha'i Faith
- Consolidation of Abyssinia, Algeria, Eritrea, Libya, French Morocco, Somaliland, Sudan, and Tunisia
- Establishment of a National Baha'i Court in Cairo
- Formation of a National Baha'i Publishing Trust in Cairo

India, Pakistan and Burma:

- Opening of the Comoros Islands, French Cameroons, Gambia, Ruanda-Urundi, and Socotra to the Baha'i Faith
- Consolidation of Madagascar, Mozambique, and Zanzibar.

Iraq:

- Opening of the Seychelles Islands to the Baha'i Faith.

In summary, 3 new national spiritual assemblies were to be formed, 34 new areas opened to the Baha'i Faith and 25 areas to be consolidated.

African Baha'is themselves rose up to fill goals allocated to the above-mentioned national Baha'i communities, establishing the Baha'i Faith in Ruanda-Urundi, Belgian Congo, French Equatorial Africa, and the British Cameroons.⁵⁵ A detailed list of the first Baha'i to settle in each country follows this article. By the end of the first year (1953-4) of the Ten Year Plan only three areas were still left not opened to the Baha'i Faith: Spanish Guinea, the Comoros Islands, and Sao Tomé. Nearly 80 persons were honoured with the designation of 'Knights of Baha'u'llah' for their part in achieving these goals. It is impossible in a short article on Africa to recount in detail the events surrounding the lives of, for example, the elderly Afro-American couple, the Washingtons, who died at their post in 1959, leaving their Liberian farm as a national endowment, or of Mr Ali Nakhjavani in Uganda who taught the Faith through example, or of Mr Philip Hainsworth of England, the 'Temple-builder' of the House of Worship in Kampala.

To offset the effects of renewed persecution of the Baha'is in Persia, Shoghi Effendi announced on 23 August 1955, that as a 'supreme consolation' Africa would raise its first House of Worship, to be situated in Kampala.⁵⁶ The foundation stone was laid on 26 January 1958, and its dedication took place on 5 October 1967.

Halfway through the Plan, in April 1957, the United States had 63 pioneers in 22 goals, that is to say in 11 more areas than called for.⁵⁷ Where other national Baha'i communities were not able to fill their posts on account of circumstances beyond their control, the United States Baha'i community

55 BW 13: 283.

56 BW 13: 285.

57 AFR 1/6, 15 June 1957.

filled the pioneer vacancies. As a result of these activities, three new regional national spiritual assemblies came into being in 1956 which, together with the reorganization of the territory covered by the existing National Spiritual Assembly of Egypt and the Sudan, would administer the Baha'i Cause in Africa. These were as follows:

Regional National Spiritual Assembly of Central and East Africa, with its headquarters in Kampala, Uganda. Its jurisdiction extended over Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya, Belgian Congo, Ruanda-Urundi, French Equatorial Africa, Zanzibar, Comoros, and Seychelles. In 1964, it changed its name to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Uganda and Central Africa, while creating, as well, two new national spiritual assemblies, namely that of Kenya, and that of Tanganyika and Zanzibar.

Regional National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa, comprising Baha'i communities in the vast southern Africa region with its seat in Johannesburg, South Africa. Its area of jurisdiction covered the Union of South Africa, Basutoland, Zululand, Swaziland, Bechuanaland, South West Africa, Angola, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Mozambique, Madagascar, Réunion, Mauritius, and St Helena. It in turn formed in April 1964 the National Spiritual Assembly of the Indian Ocean, and that of South Central Africa. In 1964 it changed its areas of jurisdiction to South Africa, South West Africa, Zululand, Angola, St Helena, Basutoland, Swaziland, and Mozambique. In April 1967 it also formed the National Spiritual Assembly of Zambia, and that of Swaziland, Lesotho, and Mozambique. Its area of jurisdiction changed again: South Africa, South West Africa, Angola, St Helena, and Zululand. In April 1980, it helped form the National Spiritual Assembly of Transkei; in April 1981 it created the National Spiritual Assembly of South West Africa/Namibia, and that of Bophuthatswana.

Regional National Spiritual Assembly of North West Africa (with its seat in Tunis) covered Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco (International Zone), Spanish Morocco, French Morocco, Rio de Oro, Spanish Sahara, French West Africa, the Gambia, Portuguese Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gold Coast, Ashanti Protectorate, Northern Territories Protectorate, British Togoland, French Togoland, Nigeria, British Cameroons, French Cameroons, Spanish Guinea, St Thomas Island, Cape Verde Islands, Canary Islands, Madeira. In April 1964 it created two national spiritual assemblies: West Africa and West Central Africa and its areas of jurisdiction changed to Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Rio de Oro, Spanish Sahara, Ifni, Madeira, and Canary Islands. It was dissolved in April 1967 with formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of North Africa, headquartered in Tunis.

Regional National Spiritual Assembly of North East Africa was formed in April 1956 from the territory under the jurisdiction of the former National Spiritual Assembly of Egypt and Sudan and expanded to cover Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Eritrea, French Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, Ethiopia, and Socotra Island. 'When, in 1960, difficulties made it impossible to directly administer the Baha'i Faith in territories outside Egypt a regional administrative committee was formed.'⁵⁸ Under its auspices the National Spiritual Assembly of Sudan was established in April 1971. This administrative body was dissolved in April 1974.

A later administrative body by the same name of the Regional National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of North East Africa was formed in April 1974 with its seat in Addis Ababa, constituting the Baha'i community of Ethiopia and covering all of the territories administered by the first Regional National Spiritual Assembly, except for Egypt. In April 1975, however, this administrative body was redesignated as the National Spiritual Assembly of Ethiopia.

58 BW 13: 287.

Successive Expansion and Consolidation Plans (1963–86)

In the 1950s, but especially in the 1960s and 1970s, Africa began to emerge as a continent of independent states, freed from colonizers. This period of transition caused social, economic, and political upheavals. It is at such times that new ideas are more likely to be born, accepted, and cultivated. The rapid expansion of the Baha'i Faith in Africa is an evidence of that continent's emergence as a new force in the world, within and outside the Baha'i Faith. Between 1964 and 1973, for example, 239 pioneers were drawn to Africa to participate in the rise of Africa, and 40 travelling teachers from Malaysia, Persia, India, Philippines, and Canada arrived in East Africa in 1972.⁵⁹ Just a few years earlier Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Baha Ruhiiyyih Khanum and her travelling companion, Mrs Violette Nakhjavani, spent nearly four years in several stints traversing this great continent, between August 1969 and January 1973, arousing both Africans and pioneers to the great challenges during this time of transition.⁶⁰ They met with some 20 Heads of State or Government, more than 20 other leading officials, such as Commissioners, and 4 mayors. She spoke to 'university students and sophisticated audiences in the capital cities as well as to tribal chieftains and illiterate and isolated villagers or nomads'.⁶¹

It was the Universal House of Justice in its message to the Baha'is gathered at the Continental Conference in Monrovia, Liberia, in January 1971, that reminded the Baha'is of the great part they must play in abating the forces of racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice, disunity of nations, the scourge of political factionalism, poverty, and lack of education.⁶² The other positive facets of Baha'i community life which has contributed to the development of African society after decolonization include non-involvement in politics, and Baha'i electoral and administrative experience.

Mass Conversion

During the 1950s–1980s, Africa was one of the fastest-growing regions of the Baha'i Faith. Between 1979 and 1986, for example, Africa saw an increase of 35 per cent in the number of localities in which Baha'is resided, the highest in the world, and the average annual growth for Africa was 5 per cent.⁶³ In 1986, 34 countries or territories had a Baha'i population which was 1 per cent or higher of its total population; 4 of them were in Africa.

In 'The Challenging Requirements of the Present Hour' Shoghi Effendi emphasized the need to adapt teaching methods to the various backgrounds of people.⁶⁴ Throughout the course of the Baha'i work in Africa since 1950, it became apparent that the methods would vary from those employed by westerners in either Europe or North America. Shoghi Effendi, in particular, stressed the need for Baha'i teachers and pioneers to insist on matters of the heart, rather than overwhelming new adherents with administrative procedure. His approach can be summed up as loving education.⁶⁵ During the early part of this period, North American Baha'is would often prepare special booklets to advance Baha'i administrative understanding. This approach, however, was abandoned in favour of approaches more effective for cultivators or rural people. The use of mobile institutes, the promotion of

59 BW 15: 184.

60 A full account of this journey appears in BW 15: 593–607 and a book has recently been published: Violette Nakhjavani, *The Great African Safari: The Travels of Amatu'l-Bahá Ruhiiyyih Khanum in Africa, 1969–73*, Oxford: George Ronald, 2002.

61 BW 15: 594.

62 BW 15: 318.

63 Seven Year Plan 38.

64 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America: 1947–1957*, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1965, p. 25.

65 See 'Some Excerpts from the Writings for Bahá'is in Africa', Compilation by British Africa Teaching Committee. [1952?], unpublished, 15pp.

correspondence courses, the holding of local or regional institutes, lasting one or two days – and some even nine days – and a more intensive drawing on the appointed arm of the Bahá'í administration, the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members, provided some of the means by which fast-growing communities could become more quickly consolidated.

The most remarkable progress of the Faith occurred in Central and East Africa where within the first two-year period (1951–3), the number of Bahá'ís increased to over 900; Uganda, Zaire, Kenya, and Tanzania in particular saw sustained mass-teaching work. The British Cameroons also achieved memorable results following its opening to the Bahá'í Faith in October 1953 by Mr Enoch Olinga after an impressive journey across Africa from Uganda. Shoghi Effendi called this whole region 'so promising and privileged', spanning all manner of climate and terrain, from the Indian to the Atlantic Oceans.⁶⁶ Uganda, in particular, saw an overwhelming response to the Bahá'í Faith, where thousands enrolled. In 1984, the village of Bundingoma, Uganda, was reported as an all-Bahá'í village.⁶⁷ By April 1963, however, approximately half of the 40,000 African Bahá'ís could be found in the Congo.⁶⁸ These victories, the first evidence of full-scale enrolment in the Bahá'í community had a profound impact on Bahá'í communities around the world.

While Central and East Africa undoubtedly continued to maintain its strength in mass enrolments, other parts of Africa also showed promise of such growth. Between 1968 and 1973, thousands were enrolled in the south-eastern region of Ethiopia.⁶⁹ Other areas, such as in Ghana in 1971, began to see the adoption of the Bahá'í Faith by the majority of people in a village.⁷⁰ In Botswana, Bonwapitse became the first all-Bahá'í village in Africa.⁷¹

The pace of Bahá'í teaching work, so characteristic of the earlier phases, slowed in later years. Difficult social and political conditions, as well as the lack of steady consolidation work has meant that the number of local spiritual assemblies could not always be maintained. The presence of pioneers in countries with large Bahá'í populations has been indispensable: Zaire, Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Nigeria, and Uganda. Thinly settled areas rely entirely on pioneers: Cape Verde Islands, the Guineas, Gabon, Somalia, Djibouti, and St Helena.⁷² Demographics also play a role in consolidating Bahá'í communities. As a rule, the majority of new adherents in Africa are men, although there has been a steady increase in the enrolment of women since 1975. In Rwanda, the child and youth Bahá'í population exceeded that of the adults in 1979.⁷³

Opposition and Recognition

Opposition

The opposition to the Bahá'í Faith in Africa stemmed from both clerical and secular authorities. Muslim communities have, in varying degrees, opposed the Bahá'í Faith, particularly in North Africa. Colonial authorities, too, were responsible for the sufferings and hardships of a number of Bahá'ís. The post-colonial era (since 1960) also brought its share of difficulties for the Bahá'ís, although seldom as harsh as under colonial regimes.

66 BW 13: 286.

67 Seven Year Plan 52.

68 BW 13: 287.

69 BW 15: 187, 16: 143.

70 BW 15: 192.

71 BW 15: 200.

72 BW 18: 170.

73 BW 17: 143.

Muslim opposition in North Africa

The first historical evidence of opposition to the Baha'i Faith took place, as we have seen, in Egypt and the Sudan, when Haji Mirza Haydar-'Ali and six other Baha'is were imprisoned for nine years until 1877. In 1925, a case was brought before the Appellate Religious Court of Beba in the province of Beni Suef in Upper Egypt, being appealed from two previous cases in 1923 and 1924. In this case, several Muslim women of the village of Kawmu's-Sa'ayidih asked for divorce on the grounds that their husbands had become Baha'is. On 10 May 1925, the judge, Mahmud 'Abdu'llah Sa'ad, in the presence of the secretary of the Court, Shaykh Muhammad Sayyid Ahmad delivered a lengthy judgement stating that the men had become heretics and therefore their marriages were dissolved. The most important aspect of this judgement was its recognition of the Baha'i Faith as a religion separate from Islam.⁷⁴

In Egypt a ban was put into effect in 1960 prohibiting all Baha'i activities. Interrogations, arrests, confiscations, imprisonments, and fines were carried out by the authorities. Despite the fact that, in the early 1970s, the government had stated that the 1960 ban was unconstitutional, in 1975 the Supreme Constitutional Court of Egypt reversed the decision and Baha'i activities were, once again, subject to serious restrictions.⁷⁵ Earlier that year, the Arab Boycott Office had decided to blacklist the Baha'is in Arab lands.⁷⁶ In 1979 there were still outstanding court cases, including one in Tanta. In February 1985, 41 Baha'is were arrested, but were later released.⁷⁷ Increased Islamic fundamentalism has caused increasing difficulties for the Baha'i community, living already under constraints. Developments in Egypt are closely followed by other Muslims for it is considered to be the centre of both the Arab and Muslim worlds.⁷⁸

Baha'is in Morocco were also the focus of opposition.⁷⁹ As early as 1956, a Roman Catholic priest lodged a complaint with the Moroccan Security Service. On 12 April 1962, 14 Baha'is were arraigned before the Regional Court of Nador on a variety of charges, including rebellion and disorder. Despite the fact that the prosecution did not prove any of the charges, the Criminal Court on 10 December 1962 found nine of them guilty, with three sentenced to death, five for imprisonment for life, and one for 15 years. World public opinion was mobilized, including efforts made through the United Nations. On 13 December 1963 all of the Baha'is were exonerated, and sentences rescinded and prisoners released. In 1968 two other Baha'is were sentenced to imprisonment for four years and six months, respectively. Despite appeals to authorities by selected national spiritual assemblies, the Baha'is had to serve their full sentence before being released.⁸⁰ In April 1983, the government once again prohibited all Baha'i meetings, followed by the arrest of individuals in December of that year. Sentencing has varied.⁸¹

Difficulties were also experienced in Algeria where in 1968, following the participation of Algerian Baha'is in the Palermo Conference in Sicily, some new Algerians Baha'is and some Persian pioneers were either interrogated or expelled from the country. Others were imprisoned or banned to

74 BW 3: 49–50.

75 BW 16: 137.

76 BW 17: 78.

77 Seven Year Plan 16.

78 BW 15: 172–73.

79 A brief account of this incident can be found in BW 13: 289, 14: 97–98.

80 BW 15: 172.

81 Seven Year Plan 24.

the interior of the country.⁸² Although restrictions against the Baha'is were eventually relaxed somewhat, there were still no Baha'i institutions in that country in 1986.⁸³

In Mali, authorities imposed restrictions on the Baha'i community in May 1976, despite the Faith's earlier recognition.⁸⁴ In Mauritania, a national spiritual assembly was formed in 1978 and functioned until March 1983 when the first pioneers were arrested and held briefly in prison. No Baha'i electoral or administrative functions have been held since then.⁸⁵

In Tunisia, the Baha'i community was slow in developing and in 1953 there was still only one Baha'i in that country, but by 1960 there were three local spiritual assemblies, five groups, and four isolated centres.⁸⁶ Baha'i activities were curtailed in October 1984 despite the fact that Baha'is had been free to practise their religion previously.⁸⁷ Opposition from Muslims, and in particular the Ahmadiyya, was also encountered in Djibouti and Mauritius.

Colonial Africa

Despite the fact that much of Africa was under colonial rule when the Baha'is had started to settle the continent in the 1950s, opposition to the Baha'i Faith was not uniform. British-held territories were more moderate in their attitude towards the Baha'is, although caution still had to be exercised. This relative freedom may have been partly due to the cordial relations established by the British Africa Teaching Committee with the British Colonial Office. Perhaps a more weighty influence was the fact that these territories were generally covered by Protestant missionaries. Occasionally, British colonial authorities were hesitant to grant Baha'is unconditional freedom to hold conferences, and opposition from missionaries in, for example, British Cameroons and Kenya posed difficulties. Nyasaland did not allow Baha'i travelling teachers to enter the country. In St Helena, a Baha'i couple had experienced some difficulties from the Anglican Church. In Northern Rhodesia no Baha'is were granted an entrance visa.

It was generally the Catholic territories that proved to be the most vexing for the Baha'is. The economic and political circumstances in these areas varied and this explains the specific ways each area dealt with Baha'is. These territories were held by Portuguese, Spanish, Belgian, Italian, and French authorities. In all these territories, Baha'is had no other recourse but to work quietly, hold small meetings, have no publicity or public meetings, and have no public centre.⁸⁸

The Portuguese-controlled authorities in Africa exhibited perhaps the least restrained opposition to the Baha'is. Mr Eduardo Duarte Vieira – the first African Baha'i martyr – illustrates the fierce opposition in Portuguese Guinea. The clergy urged him to recant his faith and when he had refused, he was dismissed from his governmental post, his house was raided, and Baha'i books confiscated. After brutal mistreatment which included beatings, he was arrested, and died on 31 March 1966. A metal biscuit box bears his last-scratched message to his children, 'Always be friendly towards all people.'⁸⁹ In Mozambique (formerly Portuguese East Africa) the first Persian pioneer had been imprisoned and then sent out of the country; others trying to enter met the same fate.⁹⁰ Apart from imprisonment, Baha'is also lost their jobs (for example in Sao Tomé), were called in for questioning (Canary

82 BW 15: 172.

83 BW 17: 78.

84 BW 17: 81.

85 Seven Year Plan 24.

86 AFR 9/25, 11 June 1953.

87 Seven Year Plan 25.

88 AFR 1/2, 8 July 1953.

89 BW 14: 389–90; see also 'Errata', BW 16: 568.

90 BW 13: 290.

Islands), and were closely watched by the Church and police (Cape Verde Islands). In Sao Tomé, a Baha'i's car was engineered to have an accident.

Baha'is in Spanish territories were also known to have experienced difficulties, although not as severe as in Portuguese areas. Nevertheless, in Spanish Guinea, a Catholic bishop was instrumental in jailing an African Baha'i after holding a meeting with 16 Baha'is. This Baha'i was beaten and pressured to confess his allegiance to the Baha'i Faith. His confession led to the eventual expulsion of the other pioneers after being handcuffed, arrested, and threatened with being shot.

In the case of Belgian-held territories, the position of the Baha'is was certainly not as troublesome as in Spanish colonies. In some instances, it amounted to simply a refusal of a visa being granted to a Baha'i, rather than imprisonment. In 1955, 22 African Baha'is were expelled from the Belgian Congo. Italian security officers would occasionally question Baha'is in Italian-held Somaliland.

Of the so-called Catholic territories, the French were more likely to accept the Baha'is in their colonies. This may have been partly due to the fact that the Baha'is were concentrating in rural areas – a region the French showed little interest in. By contrast, the Portuguese and Spanish made extensive use of rural areas as a source of labour for mines and plantations; the activities of such unknown groups as the Baha'is would have been seen as a threat to the economic arrangements that were already in place. In more remote areas, such as in Réunion, it was reported that both a mayor and a priest attempted to remove the Faith from the island.

Only in Liberia was it possible for Baha'is to hold public meetings without any fear, although there was initial resistance and even threats to expel the Baha'is.⁹¹

Post-colonial Africa

In post-colonial Africa, there were also situations where Baha'is and Baha'i institutions either suffered or have had to function under restricted conditions, although generally not as severe as under colonial regimes. For example, the civil war in Nigeria (1967–70) had a negative effect on the growth of the Baha'i community, and the Baha'i administrative institutions in Burundi were dissolved in 1972 because of political disturbances in the country. In 1975 the president of Burundi withdrew the ban on Baha'i activities after it had become clear that the Egyptian government had, through its chargé d'affaires in Burundi, circulated highly inaccurate and abusive information about Baha'is.⁹² However, after official recognition was once again suspended and over 90 per cent of the Baha'is (who were Congolese refugees) returned to their homes, progress was halted.⁹³ Sometimes, a ban on Baha'i activity was temporary, such as in the Central African Republic (from November 1970 to February 1971).⁹⁴ Between 1977 and 1979, the Idi Amin regime banned Baha'i activities in Uganda. In Congo, also, the Baha'i Faith was banned in early 1978, the assemblies dissolved and properties confiscated.⁹⁵ In 1981, the National Spiritual Assembly of Zaire (Congo Kinshasa) was dissolved temporarily and became three administrative committees. It was usually the case that the more traditional religions were permitted to continue. Of particular note are the efforts of an international lawyer, Dr 'Aziz Navidi, who in such instances would clarify any misunderstandings, leading to the Baha'i Faith being officially recognized once again. He was also often instrumental in assisting Bahá'í communities to gain their initial legal recognition.

91 AFR 1/4, 11 December 1955.

92 BW 16: 137.

93 BW 17: 142.

94 BW 15: 207.

95 BW 17: 141.

Local Recognition

The Local Spiritual Assembly of Addis Ababa was the first to achieve incorporation in Africa in 1955. The death of a Persian pioneer, Mrs Zarrintaj Afrukhtih, on 29 June 1954, resulted in Baha'is acquiring the first burial ground in Dar es Salaam and achieving formal recognition.⁹⁶ The Salisbury Assembly was incorporated on 6 May 1957. As of 1986, there were 289 incorporated local spiritual assemblies in 17 countries. Of these, Nigeria had the lion's share, namely 215. Tanzania and Uganda had 17 and 10, respectively.⁹⁷

National Recognition

The decision of Swaziland's Paramount Chief's Council to recognize the Baha'i Faith in 1958 was perhaps the Faith's first formal national recognition in sub-Saharan Africa, although Baha'i holy days were recognized in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) as early as 1956. The newly formed Regional National Spiritual Assembly of North East Africa (1961) was officially registered at the High Court of Addis Ababa on 10 July 1961.⁹⁸

During the teaching and consolidation plans under the aegis of the Universal House of Justice, there were a number of national official recognitions of the Baha'i Faith. During the Nine Year Plan (1964–73), seven national Baha'i communities were officially recognized: Dahomey (now Benin) on 24 November 1967,⁹⁹ Swaziland (and Lesotho and Mozambique) on 14 July 1969,¹⁰⁰ and Réunion,¹⁰¹ Togo, Niger,¹⁰² Congo Republic,¹⁰³ and Botswana¹⁰⁴ in 1972–3. Holy days were recognized in Ghana and Liberia during the Nine Year Plan.¹⁰⁵ Baha'is were formally permitted freedom of worship in the Gambia in January 1973.¹⁰⁶

During the Five Year Plan (1974–9), five more national communities achieved recognition. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Gambia was registered as a religious body, in addition to gaining tax-exempt status for its national Baha'i centre.¹⁰⁷ The other countries were Ghana, Upper Volta, Senegal (1975),¹⁰⁸ and Gabon (1977).¹⁰⁹ During the Seven Year Plan between 1979 and 1986, the following national Baha'i communities were incorporated: Bophuthatswana (April 1981), Cape Verde Islands (July 1985), Gabon (February 1985), Sierra Leone (April 1981), Namibia (August 1982), and Transkei (October 1980).¹¹⁰ In the Central African Republic, the Baha'i community was regularly invited to participate in Independence Day parades.¹¹¹

A special form of recognition of the Baha'i community was granted through the offices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi where Baha'is frequently participated in

96 AFR 1/37.

97 Seven Year Plan 88.

98 Information pertaining to the 1954–63 period is gathered from BW 13: 287–90.

99 BW 15: 189.

100 BW 15: 201.

101 BW 15: 199.

102 BW 15: 190.

103 BW 15: 206.

104 BW 16: 150.

105 BW 15: 192, 195.

106 BW 15: 193.

107 BW 16: 168–69.

108 BW 16: 168, 169, 174.

109 BW 17: 147.

110 Seven Year Plan 88.

111 BW 16: 141.

various conferences and seminars. The swearing-in of Mr Albert Lincoln on 1 November 1975 as the first non-French lawyer in the Central African Republic marked a recognition of the services of this pioneer had rendered to that nation.¹¹² The paintings of Reginald Turvey as a major artist and a Baha'i as referred to above, secured considerable recognition for the Baha'i Faith in southern Africa. Social recognition often came in the form of civil authorities and dignitaries being present during the openings of Baha'i teaching institutes, centres, and the like. In Swaziland, for example, members of the royal family frequently attended such Baha'i functions.¹¹³

The persecution of the Baha'is in Iran (1979–) afforded opportunities, through the media and visits to heads of state and other officials, to ask these officials to record a vote at the United Nations on behalf of the Baha'is in Iran.¹¹⁴

Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity

Over 2,100 ethnic groups were represented in the Baha'i world community in 1986; Africa's share was 1,300. Whereas the initial teaching work of the Baha'is in such continents as Europe, North America, Central America, South America, and Australia concentrated almost exclusively on urban populations, the work in Africa, by contrast, was almost immediately taken to the rural areas. Thus, within a very short time, Baha'i teachers in Africa reported the enrolment of members of the diverse ethnic minorities. Ethnic and linguistic diversity was systematically built into all of the Africa teaching campaigns, such as the emphasis on the translation of Baha'i literature into many of the African languages and dialects. Ethnic diversity became an important part of the 'psyche' of Baha'is in Africa, probably more so here than anywhere else.

Some ethnic groups were attracted to the Faith more than others: the Teso of Uganda, the Jola in the Gambia¹¹⁵ and the Mtoko and Mrewa of Zimbabwe.¹¹⁶ The Baha'i teachings were also well accepted in the Selebi–Pikwe area in Botswana¹¹⁷ and among the Basotho in Lesotho.¹¹⁸ Signs of sporadic mass enrolments of new Baha'is were evident in some places such as in the Ife and Port Harcourt area of Nigeria and in Chad.¹¹⁹ During 1979–83, the Ukererwe Islands of Lake Victoria, Tanzania, and members of the Gourma ethnic group in Togo embraced the Baha'i Faith with particular enthusiasm.¹²⁰ Similar reports concerned the Bangolo area in the Ivory Coast.

Significant small ethnic groups enrolled in the Baha'i Faith include the Herero in 1970 and the Shua Bushmen in 1971.¹²¹ In Botswana, the first Kalahari Bushmen accepted the Baha'i Faith in 1971.¹²² Important work was undertaken among the pygmies of Central Africa¹²³ and near Goma, Zaire, who took it upon themselves to build homes, adopt agriculture, and learn to read. These pygmy Baha'is named themselves the Bayanda.¹²⁴

112 BW 16: 147.

113 BW 16: 158.

114 BW 18: 163–65 contains fuller details.

115 BW 15: 193, BW 16: 166.

116 BW 15: 201.

117 BW 16: 150.

118 BW 16: 151.

119 BW 17: 148.

120 BW 17: 165.

121 BW 15: 197.

122 BW 15: 200.

123 BW 15: 204.

124 Seven Year Plan 91.

As was noted above, the linguistic diversity of Africa was recognized at the outset of the Africa Campaign when Shoghi Effendi immediately encouraged the translation of Baha'i literature. The first Baha'i publishing trust was in Uganda (1959), with later ones being established in Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and Kenya. An international audio-visual distribution centre in the Ivory Coast promoted the wide use of audio cassettes. As of 1986, Baha'i literature had been translated into 249 African languages.¹²⁵

Apartheid

Apartheid was the system of legal separation of the races practised in southern Africa. Apartheid violated the Baha'i principles of racial equality and unity. Combating apartheid politically was, however, inconsistent with the Baha'i principle of strict adherence to non-involvement in the political affairs of any country and the principle of a non-violent approach to solving problems.

Shoghi Effendi was deeply sensitive to the ravages of apartheid and his guidance to Baha'is and Baha'i communities provided the only means by which Baha'is could be prepared for an apartheid-free society. In 1955, he cabled the Baha'is of Johannesburg to 'avoid all risk'.¹²⁶ This advice held that there would be no 'mixed' local spiritual assemblies. To meet his request, assemblies were more often constituted of all-black members, rather than whites, a practice which Shoghi Effendi preferred. For example, in April 1955, there were seven all-black assemblies formed, three mixed (in areas not controlled by apartheid), and one European. In this manner, the Baha'i community followed the law to the letter, but yet had all-black assemblies govern Baha'i communities comprising of whites, 'coloureds', and blacks. However, when the opportunity rose for the Baha'is in southern Africa to elect its own national spiritual assembly, Shoghi Effendi insisted that its members should be elected on the basis of merit, not colour. For national conventions and teaching conferences, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of South Africa managed to find venues where the Baha'is could associate freely.

Shoghi Effendi was very firm that the pioneers teach black Africans, not the whites. In the meanwhile, a number of Baha'i pioneers wanted to live on farms where there was more freedom and privacy to teach the Baha'i Faith. Shoghi Effendi did not allow black pioneers from the United States to go to southern Africa which would have complicated matters for the Baha'is.¹²⁷

Social and Economic Development

From the time that a systematic plan was put into place to expand the Baha'i Faith into Africa in 1951, there have been repeated attempts to initiate and develop social and economic development projects. The earliest on record can be found in Tangiers where a group of American pioneers, including Elsie Austin, started a local pharmacy, and a garden to finance schooling for a few Arab children.¹²⁸ Another example was 'Auntie Claire's School', an interracial kindergarten established in 1957 by Miss Claire Gung, whom Shoghi Effendi called the 'Mother of Africa'.¹²⁹

125 *ibid.* 116.

126 Most of the material used for this section are gleaned from the AFR and found under 'Apartheid' in Will. C. van den Hoonard, *An Annotated Index of the Africa Teaching Committee Records, 1953-1964*, DBASE III Plus Database and 400 pp. 'hard copy', 1991.

127 In 1991, the National Spiritual Assembly of South Africa submitted a brief to a new Constitutional Committee. The president of that Committee commented that the Baha'i brief was the only submission to the Committee that provided a spiritual and moral basis to the reconstitution of South Africa in its attempts to rid itself of apartheid.

128 AFR 7/37 19 April 1954.

129 Seven Year Plan 112.

Aside from the practical expertise brought in by Baha'i pioneers (such as in irrigation and well-digging), the most consistent contribution to social and economic development was the emphasis that African Baha'is gave to the development of schools. Education in agriculture, health, literacy, and rural technology, along with the study of Baha'i subjects have been some of the main features of these schools.

In Tchedegbé (Benin), local Baha'is established a school in 1970.¹³⁰ Two Baha'i schools (up to Grade 7) were set up in Tilling and Odusai, Uganda.¹³¹ In Kivu province, Zaire, there were 60 Baha'i schools, including many primary and some secondary, by 1979.¹³² Between 1979 and 1986, there were 188 schools in Africa (the Baha'i world total was 1,880)¹³³ and in 1986, 46 per cent of students in these Baha'i schools were not Baha'is.¹³⁴

Naturally, the holding of weekly Baha'i children's classes with the aim of inculcating the highest possible ethical standards in the lives of children constituted another contribution to the social and material well-being of Africans.

The participation of Baha'i women in social and economic development projects steadily increased in Africa, and virtually all of the projects and programmes referred to above involved women in leadership capacity. The 1975 International Women's Year served as a catalyst for increasingly involving women in all affairs of the Baha'i community. Nevertheless, Baha'i women also found it necessary to drawn on each other for mutual support and encouragement, such as through the Kobwin Baha'i Women's Union (Uganda, from October 1970). Baha'i women's conferences were organized annually in many national Baha'i communities. Practical training was provided in the area of conservation, health, nutrition, and sewing.¹³⁵

In terms of community development, a number of Baha'i communities in Africa, such as that of Zaire, organized cooperatives, making available scarce goods at fair prices, or helping farmers and craftspeople obtain a reasonable income for their work. In Chad and Burkina Faso, Baha'i village health centres were established.¹³⁶

Construction began in December 1985 on a Baha'i radio station in Liberia, thus introducing a new element in the gradual upliftment of society. The use of radio was also followed in such places as the Seychelles where there were regular 15-minute broadcasts,¹³⁷ or in the Central African Republic where a regular weekly radio programme was sponsored by the Baha'is from 1971 onwards, followed in late 1975 by regular television programming.¹³⁸ The National Television Network of Ghana permitted several Baha'i-sponsored programmes during 1974 and 1975, including music with Baha'i themes.¹³⁹

Non-Baha'i agencies also regularly enlisted the Baha'is to help in the development of society. The Baha'is of Swaziland were asked by the Canadian International Development Agency to distribute relief funds directly to victims of a cyclone in 1984.¹⁴⁰

130 BW 15: 190.

131 BW 15: 204.

132 BW 17: 143.

133 Seven Year Plan 101.

134 *ibid.* 110.

135 BW 17: 154.

136 Seven Year Plan 114.

137 BW 15: 198.

138 BW 15: 207, BW 16: 141.

139 BW 16: 168.

140 Seven Year Plan 94.

Table: Social and Economic Development Projects, Africa, 1986*

	Agriculture & Forestry	Community Development	Education	Health & Social	Radio Stations
Africa	28	57	307	33	0
World	70	144	1148	87	5

* Source: Universal House of Justice 1986, 109 (corrected)

Finances and Baha'i Properties in Africa

The Universal House of Justice reported a four-fold increase in the number of national assemblies achieving financial self-sufficiency (i.e. no longer being dependent on the Baha'i International Fund) in Africa during the Seven Year Plan.¹⁴¹ During the same period, 15 national Baha'i communities in Africa achieved tax-exempt status.¹⁴²

The following indicates the extent to which Baha'i communities in Africa acquired properties in relation to the Baha'i world as a whole. In various parts of the continent, Baha'i communities took measures to protect and enhance land, such as in Rwanda where the Baha'is planted over four thousand trees, and in Benin where title was acquired after fruit trees had been planted.¹⁴³

Table: Baha'i Properties, Africa and World, 1989**

	Permanent Institutes	Temple Sites	Endowments	National HQ	District & Local HQ
Africa	22	38	46	45	1067
World	75	127	170	149	1813

** Source: Universal House of Justice 1986, 84-85, 86, 101

Concluding Thoughts

The history of the Baha'i Faith in Africa has been, from its inception, tied to the lives of the founders of the Baha'i Faith. There are many favourable references in the Baha'i writings to that continent and, compared to other regions of the world, Africa played a unique role in the development of the worldwide Baha'i community. Africa became the anvil, or prototype, upon which later international Baha'i teaching plans took shape by providing many opportunities for national spiritual assemblies to collaborate in opening and consolidating new areas. Africa became the home of one of the first modern mass conversions to the Baha'i Faith, no doubt due to the close working together of African and non-African Baha'is. Unlike other continents, it was the rural areas, rather than urban ones, that were the bulwark of Baha'i teaching activities (and it was mainly here that the mass enrolments occurred). The remaining distinctive features in Africa relate to the legacies of colonial society (which defined the opposition to the Baha'i Faith), the ethnic and linguistic diversity among the Baha'is, and the unintended impact of apartheid (which fostered the means to create all-African Baha'i assemblies). Finally, the emergence of Baha'i social and economic development projects in Africa has placed that continent at the forefront in the international development arena.

141 Seven Year Plan 65.
 142 Seven Year Plan 91.
 143 Seven Year Plan 86.

APPENDIX A

Reference list of pioneers and first Baha'is in Africa*

In the following table, the former names of some countries are given. This is to reflect both the situation when the first Baha'is moved to these territories and also the goals given in the Ten Year Crusade. Similarly, the sub-sections under some names reflect parts of a country that were separate goals in the Ten Year Crusade.

Country	First Baha'i to settle (Date)	First native Baha'i (Date)
Algeria	Mr and Mrs Attar (11 June 1952)	Mr 'Abdu'l-Karim Amin Khawja (1953)
Angola	Mr António and Mrs Ema Rocha, Mrs Guedes DeMelo Rocha, Mrs D. Laura Rodriguez (1951)	António Francisco Ebo, Joaquim Sampaio (1956)
Benin (formerly Dahomey)	David Tanyi (1954)	Atanley II and Cosme Kponton (1954)
Botswana (Bechuanaland)	John and Audrey Robarts**, Patrick Robarts**, (February 1954)	Mr Stanlake Kukama (1955)
British Indian Ocean Territories (Chagos Archipelago)	Mr Pouva Murday (May 1957)	
Burkina Faso (Upper Volta)	Mr Gerald (Jerry) Van Deusen (9 September 1968)	Mr Mohammed Brimer (Mohammed Braimah Belem) (November 1968)
Burundi (Ruanda-Urundi)	Rex and Mary Collison (20 June 1953) ¹⁴⁴	Grant Mensah
Cameroon Republic British Cameroons French Cameroons	Enoch Olinga** (October 1953) Samuel Njiki** (April 1954) Mehrangiz Munsiff** (April 1954)	Enoch Ngompek
Canary Islands	Gertrude Eisenberg** (18 September 1953)	Juan Gonzalez (19 June 1954)
Cape Verde Islands	Howard and Joanne Menking** (3 January 1954)	Armindo Santos (November 1956)
Central African Republic	Samson Nkeng (January 1956)	Charles Morgan, Pierre Sangha
Chad	Qudratu'llah A'zamikhah (c. 1959)	Cleophas Koko Vava
Comoro Islands	Mihriban Suhayli** (28 August 1954)	
Congo Brazzaville (French Equatorial Africa)	Max Kenyerezi** (October 1953)	
Congo Kinshasa (Belgian Congo)	Mr Rajah Ali Vahdat, (1940s), Mme Marthe Molitor (1948), Sampson Mungona, Bernard Kabwe (September 1953)	
Djibouti	Fred Schechter** (2 August 1953)	Ali Abdu'llah (20 November 1954)
Egypt	Sayyid Husayn Kashani, Haji Baqir Kashani (c. 1866)	Mirza Abu'l-Qasim Shirazi (c. 1867)

144 AFR 10/2, 12 August 1953. BW 13: 455 has May 1953.

SURVEY OF THE BAHA'I FAITH IN AFRICA

Country	First Baha'i to settle (Date)	First native Baha'i (Date)
Equatorial Guinea (Spanish Guinea)	Elise Schreiber (May 1954)	Jose Ramos Espinosa
Macias Nguema (Fernando Poo)	L. McKay (19 June 1955)	T. Uwak (September 1955)
Mandyi (Corisco)	Joseph Besong (May 1955)	
Eritrea	Dr and Mrs Hesmatullah Farhoumand (c. 1955)	Azmatch Seyoum
Ethiopia	Sabri Elias (1933)	
Gabon	Isaac Eziukwu (June 1964)	
Gambia	Fariburz Ruzbihyan** (February 1954)	Nicola Banna (1954)
Ghana		Mr Albert Nyarko Buapiah (October 1953)
Gold Coast	Mrs Ethel Stephens (23 October 1951)	
Ashanti Protectorate	Benedict Eballa** (April 1954)	
British Togoland	Edward Tabe** Albert Buapiah** (April 1954)	
Northern Territories Protectorate	Julius Edwards** (4 September 1953), Martin Manga** (April 1954)	
Guinea Conakry (French Guinea)	Shidan and Susan Kouchekezadeh (1 January 1975)	
Guinea Bissau (Portuguese Guinea)	José and Hilda Xavier E. Rodrigues** (25 August 1953)	Duarte Vieira (February 1961)
Ivory Coast	Labib Isfahani (1955)	Uri Bodo (1960)
Kenya	Mrs Marguerite Wellby Preston (August 1945), Ted Cardell (11 October 1951)	S. Musa (June 1953)
Lesotho (Basutoland)	Frederick & Elizabeth Laws** (13 October 1953)	Chadwick and Mary Mohapi ¹⁴⁵ (October 1953)
Liberia	William Foster (2 January 1952)	B. Miller ¹⁴⁶ (2 June 1952)
Libya	Dr Gollestanah (21 February 1952)	Muhammad Al Ghedamsi (15 June 1952)
Madagascar	Mehrangiz Munsiff (February 1953)	Mr Robert (December 1955)
Madeira Is.	Ada Schott**, Elizabeth Hopper**, Sara Kenny**, Ella Duffield** (20 September 1953)	
Malawi (Nyasaland)	Dudley Kutendele (July 1952)	Dudley Kutendele ¹⁴⁷
Mali	Marion Magnée (1966)	Adama Fall, Abdou Diallo (1968)
Mauritania	Dr Amin Bakhshandigi (1964)	1970
Mauritius	Ottillie Rhein** (16 September 1953)	Yam-Lim (21 February 1955)

145 Carole J. Allen, 'In Memoriam – Chadwick Mohapi, Mary Mohapi', BW 17: 449–52.

146 An Afro-American from Cincinnati who moved to Liberia and became a member of the Uai ethnic group.

147 Dudley Kutendele was a native of Malawi who became a Baha'i in Dar es Salaam and then brought the Baha'i Faith to Malawi – hence he figures in both columns.

WILL C VAN DEN HOONAARD

Country	First Baha'i to settle (Date)	First native Baha'i (Date)
Morocco International Zone (aka Tangiers)	Manuchihr Hizari**, Hurmuz Zindih** (30 September 1953)	
French Morocco	Mr Sibony (1928) Marie Claudet (1947) Claudette Colbert (before 1952), Mansur and 'Attiyyih Masrur (November 1952)	1953
Spanish Morocco	Fawzi Zaynu'l-'Abidin and family**, Luella McKay**, Alyce Janssen**, John and Earleta Fleming** (October 1953)	Mr and Mrs Perez? (December 1958), 'Abdu'l-Salam Salim Al-Sbinti (1955)
Mozambique (Portuguese East Africa)	Enayat Sohaili (25 March 1953)	Festas Chambeni (March 1955)
Namibia (South West Africa)	Ted Cardell** (October 1953)	Hilifa (April 1957)
Niger	Ridvan Sadeghzadeh and family, Parvine Djoneidi and family (1 August 1965)	Jazy Souleymane (12 November 1965)
Nigeria	Enoch Olinga (1953)	Thomas Beresford Macauley (1940s)
Reunion	Opal Jensen** (9 October 1953)	Paul and Françoise Tayllamin (8 February 1955)
Rwanda	Dunduzu Chisiza** (June 1953)	
Sao Tomé & Príncipe	Elise Schreiber** (February 1954)	C. da Silva (May 1954)
St Helena	Elizabeth Stamp** (May 1954)	Mr and Mrs Evans (November 1956)
Senegal (formerly French West Africa)	Labib Esfahani (November 1953), Habib Esfahani (April 1954)	Mr N. Thomas (1957)
Seychelles	Kamil 'Abbas** (November 1953), Mr 'Abdu'l-Rahman Zarqani (15 January 1954)	Marshall Delcy (18 June 1954)
Mahé Island	Lionel Peraji** (October 1953)	
La Digue Island	J. Rioux (October 1957)	
Sierra Leone	Arthur W. Cole (June 1952)	Joseph Hingston (15 November 1955)
Somalia		
British Somaliland	Miss Foiwzeih (August 1955)	Mahmud Arduh
Italian Somaliland	Suhayl Samandari** (March 1953)	Sa'id 'Ali Masqati (1953)
South Africa	Fannie Knobloch (August 1920)	Agnes Cook (1911), Miss Busby ¹⁴⁸ (1920)
Zululand	Emeric and Rosemary Sala (16 July 1954)	Maxwell Ndlovu (January 1955)
Sudan	Mirza Haydar-'Ali (1868)	Ilyas Effendi (c.1875)

148 The first African to accept the Baha'i Faith in South Africa was Klaas Mtsweni, Pretoria, 13 July 1954.

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Country	First Baha'i to settle (Date)	First native Baha'i (Date)
Swaziland	Bula Mott Stewart**, John and Valera Allen** (April 1954)	Isaiah Phala, Maxwell Ndlovu, and Paul Motsieloa (1954)
Tanzania (Tanganyika)	Jalal Nakhjavani (3 January 1951) Mr Khodadad Irani (1954)	P. K. Gopalakrishnan-Nyar (July 1951)
Zanzibar	Salim Mwanga, Miss Emma Matola (1955)	
Pemba Island		
Togo (French Togoland)	David Tanyi** (April 1954)	Carl Allotey (June 1954)
Tunisia	Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din Sabri (1921)	Muhammad Wahbi Kasrawi, 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khimiri (1921)
Uganda	Musa and Sami'ih Banani, Violette and 'Ali Nakhjavani, Philip Hainsworth (2 August 1951)	Fred Bigabwa, Crispin Kajubi (18 December 1951)
Western Sahara Rio de Oro	Amin Battah** (October 1953)	
Spanish Sahara	Muhammad Mustafa Sulayman** (October 1953)	
Zambia (Northern Rhodesia)	Eric and Terry Manton (10 February 1952)	Mr and Mrs Sandikonda, Eliam Chisengalumbwe, Mr Musonda (1954)
Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia)	Mr and Mrs John ('Jack') Dee (1933), 'Izzatu'llah Zahra'i** (June 1953), Claire Gung** (October 1953)	Mr Ndovi, Nathan Shamyarira, Charles Zauyamakando

* Sources: *Baha'i World* 13: 449-57; Hoonaard, *An Annotated Index*

** Knight of Baha'u'llah

APPENDIX B

Statistical summary of African territories

Year	Baha'is	LSAs*	Groups*	Localities*	NSAs*
1952		12	9		
1953	200	16			
1954	800	24	20		
1955	1300	90	>120	300	1
1957	3000	197	124?		4
1963	40000	1076	2900		
1964		1361	3277		10
1968		664	1775	6918	14
1973		1012	4538	14585	30
1979	603000	1120	5376	26111	37
1983		1250	5125	28570	37
1986	969000	7258	17373	35657	43

Sources: *The Bahá'í Faith, 1844–1963: Information Statistical and Comparative*, Haifa, 1963; *The Nine Year Plan, 1964–1973: Statistical Report, Riḍván 1973*, Haifa, 1973; *The Seven Year Plan, Statistical Report: 1979–1986*.

* LSAs – Local Spiritual Assemblies; Groups – any area with between 2 and 9 Baha'is;
Localities – any place where at least one Baha'i resides; NSAs – National Spiritual Assemblies

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The family and early life of Tahirih Qurrat al-‘Ayn

MOOJAN MOMEN

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to bring together a large amount of information about the ancestry and immediate family of the Babi heroine, poetess, and martyr, Tahirih Qurrat al-‘Ayn, that has become available in Persian and Arabic, mainly in biographical dictionaries of Shi‘i religious scholars and from family sources. Among the interesting points that emerge is the fact that Tahirih, whom the Babis regarded as the return of Fatimih, the daughter of the prophet Muhammad, was also descended from this lady on her mother’s side. The paper also tries to sketch out what these sources say about the early life of Tahirih, her education, her marriage and her introduction to the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa‘i, up to the time that she first heard of the Bab and became a Babi. The paper describes some of the tensions in the paternal family of Tahirih, which must have affected her as she grew up.

Tahirih Qurrat al-‘Ayn, the Babi heroine, poetess, and martyr, has become something of a legendary figure – both among Iranian women who regard her as one of the initiators of the women’s movement in Iran¹ and among Baha’is who see her as a proto-Baha’i role model for women.² This paper, written partly to commemorate the 150th anniversary of her death, seeks not to add to the legend but rather to bring to the fore a certain amount of historical material that is not currently part of the historical picture that we have of Tahirih, thus serving to bring into sharper focus the picture that we have of her.³ This new material is mainly material derived from the descendants of Tahirih’s family who have in recent years either directly or indirectly published a certain amount of new information about the family and early life of Tahirih, in biographical dictionaries of Shi‘i scholars and other places.⁴ This

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- 1 See, for example, Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992.
 - 2 See, for example, Susan Maneck, ‘Tahirih: A Religious Paradigm of Womanhood’, *The Journal of Bahá’í Studies* 2: 2 (1989) 35-48.
 - 3 For a bibliography on Tahirih, see *Khūshih-hā az Kharman-i Adab wa Hunar* 3 (1992): 135–42 listing 180 works in oriental languages; 4 (1993): 205–22 listing 206 works in Western languages. Some of these are only passing references, however.
 - 4 This information is mainly from ‘Abdu’l-Ḥusayn (‘Abbūd) Šāliḥī, a descendant of one of Tahirih’s brothers. Among the items frequently cited in this paper, he wrote the Introduction to Muḥammad Šāliḥ Baraghānī, *Mawsū‘a al-Baraghānī fī Fiqh al-Shī‘a*, and is the source of the information in al-Wardī, *Lamahāt Ijtimā‘iyyah* and almost certainly also the source of the information in Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A‘yān al-Shī‘a*. ‘Abdu’l-Husayn Šāliḥī is a scholar specializing in the biography of Shi‘i clerics. He is the biography editor of a Shi‘i encyclopaedia, the *Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif-i Tashayyu’* (see below). He appears to have written a book entitled *Qurrat al-‘Ayn ‘alā Haqīqatihā wa Wāqī‘ihā*, which has not been published but to which ‘Ali al-Wardī had access. Āghā Buzurg Ṭīhrānī, who was the foremost scholar in the field of Shi‘i biography of the last century, also appears to have been close to the family and wrote an account of the family, *Sīrat Āl Baraghānī*, which only exists in a manuscript with the family, and hence was not accessible to the present author. Various volumes of his biographical series, *Tabaqāt A‘lām ash-Shī‘a*, and his monumental bibliography, *adh-Dharī‘a ila Tasānīf ash-Shī‘a*, are cited below. Thus most of the sources cited in this article come back one way or another to the family of Tahirih.

new information is both complementary, in the sense of confirming from different sources, and supplementary, in the sense of adding new facts, to some of the information previously published in Persian in Nosratollah Mohammadhoseini's Persian biography of Tahirih, which is the most comprehensive account yet written of her.⁵

In the course of this paper, mention will be made of two rival schools of law in Shi'ism, the Usulis and the Akhbaris. Briefly, the Akhbaris maintained that rulings on religious law could only be made on the basis of the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Imams, while the Usulis widened the bases of religious law by maintaining that rulings could also be given based on the principles of consensus and on the application of reason. During the late Safavid period (approximately the 17th century), the Akhbaris had predominated, but towards the end of the period between the fall of the Safavids in 1722 and the rise of the Qajar dynasty in 1794, the Usulis, under Shaykh Muhammad Baqir 'Vahid' Bihbihani (1706–92), had triumphed in the shrine cities of Iraq (Najaf and Karbala) and were prevailing in most Iranian cities – this school is followed by the majority of Shi'is today. The third movement that will be mentioned is the Shaykhi movement, based on the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (1753–1826), which was to become an important foundation for the movement of the Bab (1819–50). The Shaykhi movement was, at the time that Tahirih lived, only just emerging as a separate movement. There is evidence that, at least in some cities, many Akhbaris became Shaykhis, as this new movement spread throughout Iran.

The Safavids forced Shi'ism upon the people of Persia. Most of the 'ulama of Iran were Sunni at the start of the Safavid period and so the Safavid kings were compelled to bring Shi'i 'ulama from Lebanon and elsewhere to teach the people Shi'ism. Qazvin was one of the most important cities of Iran during the Safavid period, especially during the first half of this period when it was the capital of the empire. As the Safavid era progressed, a new generation of Iranian Shi'i 'ulama began to emerge and Qazvin was one of the cities to which they were attracted. Tahirih's ancestors, on both her mother's and father's side, were among those families of 'ulama who migrated to Qazvin during Safavid times.

Tahirih's maternal family

Aminih Khanum, the mother of Tahirih, was descended from some of the leading families of Qazvin. Her mother, Fatimih, was a member of a distinguished Qazvin family of Sayyids (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) and 'ulama. They trace their ancestors to the Imam Husayn and from him to Fatimih, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, and Imam 'Ali, and hence to the Prophet Muhammad himself. Thus it is of some interest that Tahirih, whom the Babis regard as the return of Fatimih, the Prophet's daughter, was descended through her mother and grandmother from Fatimih herself. This family of Qazvin Sayyids appears to have originally resided in Tabriz. Amir Muhammad Ma'sum Husayni Qazvini (1007–1091 AH/1598–1680 AD), son of Amir Muhammad Fasih, grandson of Amir Awliya and great-grandson of Sayyid Safi'u'd-Din, moved as a child with his father to Qazvin, where he lived as a religious scholar during the second half of the Safavid era.⁶ His son, Sayyid Amir Ibrahim was a student of Mulla Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, the foremost scholar of the end of the Safavid period. Sayyid Amir Ibrahim lived for about 80 years and died in about 1149 AH/1736 AD.

5 *Haqrat-i-Tahirih*, Dundas, Ont.: Association for Baha'i Studies in Persian, 2000. The material presented here complements and supplements the material in chapters 2–7 of the second section of this book.

6 *Tihri-ni, adh-Dhar'i'a ila Tasanif ash-Shi'a* (25 vols., Qumm: Isma'iliyyah, 1408/1987), 22: 438, no. 7784; Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali Gulriz, *Minudar ya Bab al-Jannat Qazvin*, Tehran: Chapkhanih Danishgah, 1337 Sh/1958, pp. 337–38; Hasan al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shi'a*, (10 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Ta'arruf li'l-Matbū'āt, 1408/1987–1410/1989), 9: 281–82.

He was a scholar and poet and some 14 works of his are known.⁷ He had five sons, the youngest of which was Sayyid Husayn Qazvini, the great-grandfather of Tahirih, about whom it was written: ‘his knowledge was not confined to jurisprudence but he had perfected many skills’. He was a teacher of Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Bahr al-‘Ulum (d. 1212/1797, who went on to become one of the foremost ‘ulama of his age) and his biographer lists some 26 works of his. He died in Qazvin in 1208/1793.⁸ The family were Usulis and opposed the Akhbaris.⁹

Sayyid Husayn Qazvini’s daughter, Fatimih, the grand-mother of Tahirih, was born in Qazvin in 1172/1756. She studied under her father and her uncle Sayyid Hasan. When she grew up she married Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali and she continued her studies under him. She memorized the Qur’an as well as studying commentaries upon it. She also studied the Islamic Traditions and religious jurisprudence. She is stated to have excelled in all of these. She is also said to have had a voice that carried well and she was known for the lectures she gave from the pulpit. Many of the women of the town gathered around her and listened to her classes. She died in 1260/1844.¹⁰

Aminih’s father was Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali Qazvini. Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali could trace his ancestry back to a long line of ‘ulama of Qazvin. Rafi’ud-Din Muhammad, the son of Fathullah, was the author of a book *Abwāb al-Janān* and died in 1089/1678.¹¹ His son was Muhammad Shafi’ who completed his father’s book. The latter’s son, Mulla Muhammad Yahya Qazvini, wrote a work called *Tarjumān al-Lughat*, translating into Persian and explaining the famous Arabic dictionary *al-Qāmūs* of al-Firuzabadi for the Safavid king, Sultan Husayn – a work that took over two years and was completed in 1705 and later published in 1273/1856.¹² His grave became a shrine in Qazvin.¹³ The latter’s son, Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Karim (d. 1134/1721) was also among the ‘ulama of Qazvin and wrote several works explaining the terminology of the sermons and letters of Imam ‘Ali.¹⁴ One of Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Karim’s sons, Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali, was the grandfather of Tahirih. Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali was one of the ‘ulama of Qazvin.

The paternal family of Tahirih

The paternal family of Tahirih claim descent from the Buyids, an Iranian Shi‘i dynasty from Mazandaran who, in the 10th and 11th centuries, were among the first to challenge successfully the dominance of the ‘Abbasid caliphate and to establish a fiefdom throughout Iran and Iraq. In later times, however, the ancestors of Tahirih settled in the rural area known as Talaqan,¹⁵ a cluster of some

7 Muhsin al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* (11 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Ta’arruf li’l-Matbū‘āt), 2: 227–28, no. 433; Ṭihirānī, *adh-Dharī’a ila Tasānīf ash-Shī’a* 12: 209–10, no. 1390.

8 Muhsin al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* 5: 414–15, no. 893; see also the biography of his son, Sayyid Javād or ‘Abdu’l-Javād, Muhsin al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* 3: 117, no. 134.

9 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 9: 281–82.

10 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 3: 159, no. 214.

11 Al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* 10: 96, no. 314. For the date of his death, see Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 3: 191, no. 240.

12 Āghā Buzurg Ṭihirānī, *adh-Dharī’a ila Tasānīf ash-Shī’a*, 4: 72, no. 296. With regard to another book he wrote, see Ṭihirānī, *adh-Dharī’a* 5: 146, no. 617. See also Al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* 10: 98, no. 324.

13 Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 683.

14 The best known of these is called *Naẓm al-Ghurur wa Naqad ad-Durar*, Ṭihirānī, *adh-Dharī’a* 24: 214, no. 1134. See also 4: 121, no. 578 and 14: 133, no. 1973.

15 The prophecies to be found in Shi‘i sources speak of a number of figures who will appear at the time of the advent of the Mahdī. One these, Muhammad Nafs Zakīyiyh (the pure soul), was identified by Babis with Quddus. Another, the Khurasani, was identified as Mulla Husayn Bushru‘ī. It would seem likely that a third figure who is called al-Talaqani in the sources could have been identified as Tahirih (albeit that al-Talaqani is the masculine form) but the present writer has not seen this in any of the Babi sources.

78 villages situated along the valley of the Shahrud River and its tributaries to the east of Qazvin – the river eventually becomes the Sifidrud River and flows into the Caspian. Hamd Allah Mustawfi, a 14th-century writer from Qazvin, states in the *Nuzhat al-Qulūb* that the inhabitants of Talaqan at that time although outwardly appearing to be Sunni were secretly inclined towards the Isma'ili sect of Shi'ism¹⁶ (the Isma'ili stronghold of Alamut had been close by before it was destroyed by the Mongols). The area, along with most of the rest of Iran, came to adhere to Twelver Shi'ism under pressure from the Safavid dynasty in the 16th and 17th centuries.

It is during the latter part of the Safavid era that we find the first of Tahirih's known paternal ancestors. Shaykh Muhammad Kazim Talaqani (henceforward referred to as Shaykh Kazim) was a cleric who was educated in Isfahan under some of the leading Shi'i 'ulama of his age: Shaykh-i Baha'i, Mir Baqir Damad, and Mir Findiriski. From this list of teachers, we may assume that he was somewhat interested in the school of mystical philosophy that was, at that time, reaching its peak in Isfahan. Shaykh Kazim then established himself in Qazvin, the first of the family to migrate from Talaqan to Qazvin. He built a madrasah (religious college) in Qazvin called the Madrasah-yi Navvab (now called the Madrasah Imam as-Sadiq) and taught there. A contemporary of his, al-Hurr al-'Amili, considered him one of the great scholars of that age.¹⁷ He is known to have written a commentary on the Qur'an. He died in Qazvin in about 1683.¹⁸

Shaykh Kazim's son, Shaykh Muhammad Ja'far Talaqani, known as Firishtih (angel), also received his education from the leading religious scholars of his time. He received a certificate of completion of his education in the year following his father's death from the great Shi'i scholar Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, the author of the *Bihār al-Anwār*. Among other writings, he wrote a work on *fiqh* (religious jurisprudence) and is the first of the family to be called an Usuli. He died in 1133/1720 just at the end of the Safavid era and was buried in Talaqan.¹⁹

Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Talaqani, the son of Shaykh Muhammad Ja'far, studied philosophy (*hikmat*) and theology (*kalām*) under Mirza Hasan Lahiji in Qumm, and then went on to Iraq, where he studied at Najaf, Karbala and Kazimayn. He was present in Najaf when Nadir Shah held a meeting there to try to reconcile Sunnism and Shi'ism. He died in 1161/1748.²⁰

Shaykh Muhammad Taqi had three sons and at least one daughter: one son was named Muhammad Ja'far after his grandfather, about whom little is known (but a son of his, Mulla Aqa Hikami, taught philosophy to Tahirih); one son was named Muhammad Na'im and was known as Mulla Na'ima (d. 1180/1766), who specialized in philosophy and mystical philosophy (a grandson of this man, Mulla Yusuf Hakami, also taught philosophy to Tahirih); a third son was named Shaykh Muhammad, who was known as Mala'ikah (angels). This last named was the grandfather of Tahirih. He studied under Mulla Isma'il Khaju'i (d. 1173/1760) in Isfahan during the turbulent years after the Afghan invasion had ended the Safavid dynasty. He is stated to have gained his title Mala'ikah on account of his extreme piety.²¹ Mah Sharaf Khanum, a sister of these three brothers, after studying at Isfahan and the shrine cities, was taken into Fath-'Ali Shah's household to act as secretary, on account of her excellent composition and calligraphy. According to one account she assisted in particular with

16 Cited in Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, Supplement, p. 11 and 'Alī-Akbar Dihkhudā, *Lughat-nāmih*, CD-ROM published by Intishārāt Dānishgāh Tīhrān, see under Ṭālghān.

17 Al-Hurr al-Amīlī, *Amal al-Āmil*, (2 vols., Baghdad: al-Andalūs, 1385/1965), 2: 295, no. 888.

18 Introduction, written by 'Abd al-Husayn Ṣāliḥī, a descendant of Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Baraghānī, to Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Baraghānī, *Mawsū'ah al-Baraghānī fī Fiqh al-Shī'a*, Tehran: Namāyishgāh Da'imī-yi Kitāb, 1985, pp. 12–13. Also Āghā Buzurg Ṭīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (11th century), Tehran: Intishārāt Dānishgāh Tīhrān, [1367/1988], p. 463 and Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 301.

19 Al-Ṣāliḥī, 'Introduction', pp. 13–14. Ṭīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (11th century), p. 463

20 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 301–2.

21 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 286, no. 168.

the correspondence with the ‘ulama,²² according to another account she was the personal secretary of Tāj as-Salṭānīh, a wife of Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah.²³

Shaykh Muhammad Mala’ikah was, by the middle of the 18th century, established as the leading Usuli cleric in Qazvin. He was not, however, in a very strong situation since the town of Qazvin had since the time of his great grandfather, Shaykh Muhammad Kazim, been dominated by the rival Akhbari school of jurisprudence. Sometime in about 1750, the great Akhbari scholar, Shaykh Yusif Bahrani, passed through Qazvin. The ‘ulama of the town took the opportunity to stage a debate between him and Mala’ikah. After the debate, an angry Akhbari mob ransacked Mala’ikah’s house and burned his library. In an attempt to quell the disturbances in the town, government officials forced Mala’ikah to remove himself from the town. He chose to go into exile to the village of Baraghan, about midway between Qazvin and Tehran and some miles north of the road between these two cities. It was as a result of this exile that the family became known as Baraghani.

We have very little information about the wife of Mala’ikah, except that her name was Fatimih.²⁴ The couple had had some children while they were living in Qazvin, but it was winter when they were forced to leave the city and their children died from the cold on their way to Baraghan.²⁵ Once in Baraghan, Mala’ikah and Fatimih had three more children, all sons (see below). Mala’ikah remained in Baraghan for the remainder of his life and died in 1200/1785.

The maternal uncles of Tahirih

The maternal grandparents of Tahirih, Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali and Fatimih, had four sons and at least two daughters. The most well known of their sons was Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab Sharif Qazvini. The designation ‘Sharif’ after his name indicates that his mother was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. He studied in Karbala, Najaf and Kazimayn and is said to have received certificates of completion of studies from more than 40 of the most learned scholars of his time. He is described as one of the most learned of the ‘ulama of his age and some 30 of his works are known.²⁶ Although all of his main teachers were Usulis, he went somewhat away from the main Usuli school and in some of his books takes up an Akhbari position.²⁷ He was put in charge of the Masjid Shah (the Shah Mosque), the second most important mosque of Qazvin by Muhammad Shah. He was a pious man and tended to be abstentious, using his wealth to make benefactions throughout the city of Qazvin, including four cisterns for public use.²⁸

22 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 222–23, no. 148.

23 Muḥammad Hasan Rajabi, *Mashāhīr Zanān Irānī va Parsī-gū’ī*, Tehran: Sourush, 1995, p. 209.

24 The name of Shaykh Muhammad’s wife is given in Muhammad Tunukabuni, *Qisas al-‘Ulamā*, Tehran: Kitābforūshī ‘Ilmiyyah Islāmiyyah, n.d., p. 32.

25 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 286, no. 168, 2: 304. Al-Ṣāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 14, 26.

26 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 3: 137–38. Tīhrānī, *al-Dharī’ah ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī’ah*, lists ten of his works: 1: 267, no. 1404; 3: 349, no. 1263; 4: 389, no. 1717; 6: 268, no. 1460; 11: 81, no. 501; 15: 75, no. 497; 15: 225, no. 1479; 15: 237, no. 1540; 16: 87, no. 12; 25: 193, no. 217. See also the compilation of his certificates of completion of education from prominent ‘ulama, 20: 59, no. 1899.

27 In the *Hidāyat al-Mustarshidīn*, he takes an Akhbari position when he opposes the standard Usuli position taken by Mulla Muhammad Baqir Shafti that, after the death of a mujtahid, it is necessary for those who follow him to choose a new living mujtahid. Tīhrānī, *al-Dharī’ah ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī’ah* 25: 193, no. 217. Another of his works, *Risālah fī ‘Adam al-Hujjiyyah al-Ḍann fī al-Ahkām* (Treatise rejecting that Opinion can be a Basis for Giving a Legal Ruling) would appear from its title to have tended to the Akhbārī position; Tīhrānī, *al-Dharī’ah* 15: 237, no. 1540. See Momen, *Introduction to Shī’ī Islam*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 223–25.

28 Parviz Varjavand, *Sīmā-yi Tārīkh va Farhang-i Qazvīn* (3 vols. Tehran: Nashrani, 1377/1998) 2: 1074–76. *Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif-i Tashayyu’* (ed. Ahmad Sadr Haj Sayyid Jawadi et al., Tehran: Bunyād Islāmī Tāhir, 1366/1987), 1: 501.

In 1230/1814, Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab travelled with his brother-in-law Mulla Salih, Tahirih’s father, on pilgrimage to Mecca. After completing the pilgrimage he travelled on to Cairo, where he studied at the al-Azhar, the foremost religious college of the Sunni world, and obtained a certificate from some of the ‘ulama of the Shafi’i school of jurisprudence. As we shall see presently, Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab became a Shaykhi and eventually even a Babi. He had at least three sons: Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali and Mirza Muhammad Hadi, who were both Shaykhis and became Babis and Letters of the Living, and Mirza Yusuf, who may have also become a Babi.

The brothers of Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab were Haji Rida (who built a caravanserai called after him) and Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Karim, known as Haji Aqa or Haj Karim (who built some baths which were named Hamam Haj Karim), who were both merchants, and Mulla ‘Ali Mardan, who was also a cleric. Manuscripts of the writings of Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab exist in the handwriting of the latter two brothers.²⁹ One sister of these brothers was Aminih, Tahirih’s mother. We know that there was at least one other sister, since the son of that sister, Mulla Javad Vilyani, played a role in Tahirih’s story and in Babi history (see below).

The paternal uncles of Tahirih

Tahirih’s father, Mulla Salih, was the middle of three brothers. The eldest was Shaykh Mulla Muhammad Taqi, known as Mulla Taqi, and was born in about 1166/1752,³⁰ the middle brother was Shaykh Mulla Muhammad Salih, who was known as Mulla Salih and was Tahirih’s father (born in 1167/1753),³¹ and the third brother was Shaykh Mulla Muhammad ‘Ali, who was called Mulla ‘Ali and was born in 1175/1761.³² All three brothers were initially taught by their father in Baraghan and then went to Qazvin and Isfahan, where they studied philosophy and mystical philosophy under such scholars as Mulla ‘Ali Nuri (d. 1246). They then went on to the shrine cities of Iraq where Wahid Bihbahani (see above) was in the process of completing the Usuli victory over the Akhbari school, and thereby setting the scene for all developments in Twelver Shi’ism up to the present day. The brothers studied under Bihbahani and under such figures as Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Bahr al-‘Ulum (d. 1212/1797), Shaykh Ja’far Kashif al-Ghita (d. 1228/1813) and his son Shaykh Hasan (1201/1786–1262/1846) and Sayyid ‘Ali al-Tabataba’i (d. 1231/1816), who were the senior students of Bihbahani.³³

After the completion of their studies, the brothers came to Tehran to establish themselves there. After a short period of time in Tehran, the brothers entered into a heated dispute with Mulla Muhammad ‘Ali Jangali at the court of Fath-‘Ali Shah and were exiled to Iraq. When Shaykh Hasan Kashif al-Ghita, a leading scholar who had been one of the teachers of the three brothers, went on a trip to Iran, they accompanied him. Shaykh Hasan interceded with the Shah on behalf of the three

29 Tihriani, *adh-Dhari’a ila Tasanif ash-Shi’a* 6: 268–69, no. 1460. Varjavand, *Sima-yi Tarikh* 2: 1074–75.

30 Most of the biographies do not give a date of birth for Mullā Taqī. I have here taken a date from al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shi’a* 2: 303, where the date and place (Baraghān) of birth of Mullā Taqī has, I think, been mistakenly given as that of his son, Shaykh Muhammad Ja’far. The Bahā’ī historian, Fāḍil Māzandarānī, states that at the time of his death in 1263/1847, he was about 80 years old, which would make his date of birth about 1183/1769. *Tārīkh Zuhūr al-Haqq*, vol. 3, Tehran: n.p., n.d., p. 309.

31 Muḥsin al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shi’a*, 9: 369–70, no. 802 gives Mullā Ṣāliḥ’s date of birth as 1200/1785. This would be more reasonable as it would make him 69 years of age at his death in 1271/1854. I have, however, given 1167/1753 as the date of birth in the text as this is based on family records and presumably more accurate. This would make him aged more than 100 years of age (in Islamic lunar years) at the time of his death. Usually, it is specifically noted and commented upon in the biographical literature when one dies at an age in excess of 100. Mullā Ṣāliḥ’s father is in any case stated to have died in 1200/1785, see above.

32 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shi’a* 2: 299, no. 181.

33 Al-Ṣāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 22–23.

brothers and gained royal assent to their remaining in Iran, provided they did not remain in Tehran. So they chose to settle in Qazvin, where they soon established themselves among the senior 'ulama of the city. They settled in the western part of the city, the Dimaj and Qumlaq quarters, which were predominantly Turkish-speaking. Here the two older brothers built mosques for themselves (Mulla Taqi in the Dimaj quarter). They themselves or their children married into the other leading families of 'ulama in the city.

Mulla Taqi was the most political of the three brothers, gaining a position of influence for himself in the city and, at the same time, accumulating a great deal of wealth. He indulged in a number of questionable activities and practices that even gave rise to claims that he was taking bribes.³⁴ He considered himself one of the leading mujtahids of the Shi'i world and had had several disputes with some of the leading scholars of his time such as Mirza-yi Qummi and Mulla Ahmad Naraqī.³⁵

Mulla Taqi had several wives including a daughter of Fath-'Ali Shah.³⁶ He had ten sons and the name of at least one daughter is known. Of these sons, the oldest was Mulla Muhammad, who married Tahirih and was later Imam-Jum'ih of Qazvin (for their children, see below). Tahirih was not his only wife, however. He also married into the Taqavi family of 'ulama of Qazvin and had a son, Mirza Husayn, who was later elected to the Majlis (Iranian Parliament) as deputy for Qazvin.³⁷ When Mulla Muhammad died, his position as Imam-Jum'ih was inherited by Mulla Taqi's second son, Shaykh 'Abdu'llah. The other sons of Mulla Taqi were Shaykh Baqir, Shaykh Hasan, Shaykh Kazim, then the sixth son, Shaykh Muhammad Ja'far (1222/1807–1311/1893) who became a Shaykhi and married one of Tahirih's sisters. The seventh son was Shaykh Sadiq (1222/1807–1311/1893), who succeeded to religious leadership in Qazvin,³⁸ and the eighth son, Shaykh Abu'l-Qasim, married another of Tahirih's sisters. The last two sons were Shaykh Mahmud and Shaykh 'Isa.³⁹ The only daughter of Mulla Taqi of whom we know is Umm Kulthum (c. 1224/1809–after 1268/1851) who married the oldest surviving son of Mulla Salih, Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab.⁴⁰

The youngest of the three Baraghani brothers, Mulla 'Ali, was very different from his eldest brother. He was more inclined towards mysticism and asceticism. During his days as a student, he used to weep at nights and put chains around his neck.⁴¹ It is even stated in some sources that he rejected the Usuli school championed by his brothers and leaned towards the Akhbaris.⁴² Once in Qazvin, he contented himself with teaching mystical philosophy at his brother's religious college, the Salihiyyih. He eventually became, as we shall see, a Shaykhi and a Babi. Some 30 works of his are known.⁴³ The exact number of his children is not known but he had at least one daughter Fatimih (d.

34 Tunukabuni, *Qisas al-'Ulamā*, p. 23. For more details on Mulla Taqi's methods in acquiring wealth and power, see Tunukabuni, *Qisas al-'Ulamā*, pp. 22–23, 27–29; Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement, 1844–1850*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, pp. 317–20.

35 Tunukabuni, *Qisas al-'Ulamā*, pp. 22, 30, 31.

36 Agha Buzurg Tihriānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (13th century), Najaf: al-'Ilmiyyah, 1954, 2: 51, no. 228. Mulla Taqi had three of his sons by this lady.

37 Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 329.

38 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 3: 92, no. 117.

39 Al-Ṣāliḥī, 'Introduction', pp. 18–19.

40 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 68, no. 37.

41 Tunukabuni, *Qisas al-'Ulamā*, p. 20.

42 He had studied under the Akhbārī scholar, Mīrzā Muḥammad Akhbārī; al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 299, no. 181. He is called an Akhbārī in Mu'īnu'd-Din Mīhrābī, *Qurrat al-'Ayn: Shā'ir-i Azādīkhāh va Millī-yi Irān*, 3rd printing, Koln: Rūyish, 1994, p. 54.

43 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 299, no. 181.

c. 1300/1882) who married the third son of Mulla Salih, Shaykh Hasan,⁴⁴ and one son Shaykh ‘Abdu’l-Husayn, who married Fatimih, a daughter of Mulla Salih.⁴⁵

Tahirih’s mother and father

Tahirih’s mother, Aminih (Āminih), was born in Qazvin in 1202/1787. She was educated by her mother and father, and also by her brother Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab. She was about 17 when she was married to Mulla Salih Baraghani in about 1219/1804. She was not his first wife as he had several sons whose dates of birth precedes his marriage to Aminih. She continued her studies in the women’s section of her husband’s religious college, the Salihiyyih, learning religious jurisprudence from her husband and his brother, and philosophy and mystical philosophy from her husband’s cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She was very pious and abstemious and had memorized the Qur’an. Later she taught in the women’s section of the Salihiyyih, becoming an authority on religious matters for the women of Qazvin and leading prayers for women in the Salihiyyih. She was also a poet and among her writings is a poem (*qaṣidah*) of some 480 lines relating the story of Zaynab, the daughter of the Imam Husayn, from the time of her arrival in Karbala and her father’s martyrdom there, to her being taken in captivity to Damascus and Medina. There also exists some of her correspondence with Sayyid Mahmud al-Alusi, the Mufti of Baghdad, during the time when her daughter, Tahirih, was confined in his house.⁴⁶

Tahirih’s father, Mulla Salih, after he had completed his studies in the shrine cities of Iraq, settled in Tehran and gathered around himself a circle of students. He and his brothers, however, fell out with Fath-‘Ali Shah who ordered their expulsion from Iran to Iraq. From there, Mulla Salih went on pilgrimage to Mecca and he remained in Medina for two years teaching Shi‘i jurisprudence. He then returned to Najaf in Iraq and settled there teaching and gaining a reputation as a scholar. We have seen above how the brothers came to return to Iran and settle in Qazvin.

In Qazvin, Mulla Salih occupied himself with religious scholarship and teaching. He built, in 1233/1817, a large religious college (*madrassih*), *Madrassih-yi Salihiyyih* in the Qumlaq quarter of the town, where he taught religious jurisprudence. It grew into a very large institution with, reportedly, 700 students at its peak, coming from all of the surrounding parts of Iran, and even from India. His oldest surviving son Mirza ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab (not to be confused with Tahirih’s maternal uncle) also taught religious jurisprudence there; Mulla Aqa Hakami (d. 1285/1868) and Mulla Yusuf Hakami (d. 1276/1859), respectively a cousin and the son of another cousin of Mulla Salih, taught peripatetic and mystical philosophy; Mir Rafi‘ Talaqani and his son, Sayyid Hibatu’llah Rafi‘i, taught medicine; Shaykh Muhammad Baqir Ashtiyani taught logic; Shaykh ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab Bihishti and others also taught there. Perhaps the most famous person who attended this college, in later years, as a student was Sayyid Jamalu’d-Din Asadabadi ‘Afghani’.⁴⁷ Interestingly, Mulla Salih was sufficiently concerned about women’s education to build a women’s section of the Salihiyyih. All of the women of the family as well as other women from Qazvin studied there.

Mulla Salih was a meticulous scholar. His most important works are 5 commentaries on the Qur’an that he wrote, amounting to some 55 volumes in all. He also wrote an important book on religious jurisprudence in 14 volumes, which is still in print at the present time, and some 48 other works.⁴⁸

44 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 68, no 37.

45 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 6: 201, no. 322.

46 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 7, no. 1; *Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif Tashayyu’* 1: 236.

47 Al-Šāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 52; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304–5.

48 Al-Šāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 29–36; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 300–5, no. 183.

The brothers and sisters of Tahirih

Mulla Salih had eight sons and at least seven daughters. Since Babi and Baha’i sources say that Tahirih had only one sister and one brother, this may indicate that these were the children of Aminih Khanum and the rest were from other wives. The sisters of Tahirih may be listed thus:

(1) Mardiyiyh Khanum (1233/1817–c.1313/1895). She is the only sibling known to be a full sister of Tahirih. She studied under her mother, her sister Tahirih, her father and both of her uncles, as well as her father’s cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She was married to Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali, the oldest son of her maternal uncle, Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab. Like her sister and her husband, she first became a Shaykhi and then, when they became Babis and Letters of the Living, she also became a Babi. She accompanied her sister to Iraq and was confined with her in the house of Sayyid Mahmud Alusi, the Mufti of Baghdad. When her husband died in the Shaykh Tabarsi upheaval, she married his brother Mirza Yusif. She left several works including some poetry. She had one daughter.⁴⁹

(2) Nargis Khanum (1240/1824–1322/1904). She studied under Tahirih, her brother, Mirza ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab, her father and both uncles, as well as her father’s cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She married Shaykh Muhammad Ja’far, the son of Mulla Taqi and had two daughters, Khadijih and Sakinih. Both she and her husband were Shaykhis and she lived out her last days in Karbala where she is buried close to the tomb of Sayyid Kazim Rashti.⁵⁰

(3) Zahra (1240/1824–1320/1902). She studied under Tahirih, her brother, Mirza ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab, her father and both uncles, as well as her father’s cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She married her cousin, Mirza Abu’l-Qasim, son of Mulla Taqi and had two sons.⁵¹

(4) Fatimih (d. 1295/1878). She studied under Tahirih, her brother, Mirza ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab, her father and both uncles, as well as her father’s cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She married her cousin, Shaykh ‘Abdu’l-Husayn, the son of Mulla ‘Ali and had one son. She taught at the Salihyiyh and used to discuss religious matters on equal terms with the men of the family. Women resorted to her for legal judgements. She wrote several works.⁵²

(5) Khadijih Sultan Khanum (d. 1321/1903). She studied under Tahirih, her father and both uncles, as well as her father’s cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She was married to Sayyid Mirza Mufid of the Shaykhu’l-Islam family of Qazvin, who were descended from Muhaqqiq al-Karaki, the foremost Shi’i scholar of the early Safavid period. She had five sons. She must have been inclined to the Shaykhi school because three of her sons, Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, known as Mirza Buzurg, Mirza Mansur and Sayyid Mirza Mahmud became Shaykhis, while two were Usulis.⁵³ Such was the dissension in the family that Sayyid Mirza Mas‘ud expressed his displeasure at his Shaykhi sons in his will and specified that only his Usuli sons should have control over his library which he left as a religious endowment (*waqf*).⁵⁴ Mirza Buzurg did however succeed to the title of Shaykh al-Islam.⁵⁵

49 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 6: 319, no. 421; Shaykh Kazim Samandar, *Tārīkh-i Samandar va Mulhaqqāt*, Tehran: Mu’assih Millī Maṭbū’āt Amrī, 131 BE/1974, p. 345.

50 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 4: 212, no. 96.

51 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 5: 218–19, no. 199.

52 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 6: 201, no. 322.

53 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 4: 104, no. 25; 6: 324, no. 430; Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, pp. 327–28 states that the couple only had four boys and names them as Mīr Sayyid ‘Alī, Mīrā Mas‘ūd, Mīrā Bahā’ud-Dīn and Mīrā Ismā’īl.

54 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 6: 324, no. 430.

55 Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 327.

(6) Rubabih Khanum (d. 1297/1879). She studied under Tahirih, her brother, Mirza ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab, her father and both uncles, as well as her father’s cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She married Mirza Hibatu’llah Rafi’i (d. 1320/1902),⁵⁶ a physician who taught at the Salihyyih. She was learned in religious matters and used to debate with male religious scholars on equal terms. Women would resort to her for legal judgements and she was known as the refuge of the poor.⁵⁷

With regard to Tahirih’s brothers, they may be listed thus:

(1) Shaykh Muhammad. He was born in Karbala, studied under his father and older uncle and under some of the prominent ‘ulama of Karbala such as Sayyid ‘Ali Tabataba’i. He was killed in 1825–6 during the attempt of the ‘ulama to raise a *jihad* (holy war) against the Russians.⁵⁸

(2) Mirza ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab (d. January 1877). He studied under his father and older uncle and under the leading ‘ulama of Najaf and Karbala. He specialized in philosophy and mystical philosophy, but was also sufficiently expert in religious jurisprudence to be regarded as a mujtahid and to be able to take his father’s place when he died. He composed poetry and was a good orator.⁵⁹ Towards the end of his life he moved to Tehran. There is an indication in Nabil that he came to believe in the Bab but ‘failed to demonstrate subsequently by his acts the sincerity of his belief’.⁶⁰ His son Shaykh Aqa Sadru’d-Din (d. 1337/1918) was also a prominent scholar, at first taking his father’s place as a religious leader in Qazvin and a teacher at the Salihyyah and later teaching at Karbala at the Madrasah Hasan Khan.⁶¹

(3) Shaykh Hasan (d. 1281/1864). He studied under his father and older uncle and was one of the senior students of Shaykh Murtada Ansari, the leading religious scholar of his age. He became a mujtahid and settled at first in Karbala where he established himself as a teacher. Later he moved to Mecca and Medina, where he taught Shi’i religious jurisprudence in accordance with the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence. He was opposed by the Sunni ‘ulama and was attacked one evening as he was walking home and died as a result of a blow to the head. He was married to Fatimih, the daughter of his uncle Mulla ‘Ali and had two sons who became prominent ‘ulama of Karbala, ‘Allamah al-Ha’iri (1249/1833–1310/1892) and Mulla ‘Ali Naqi Ha’iri (1253/1837–1320/1911) and a daughter, Sultan Khanum (d. c. 1336/1917), who married Mirza Shafi’ Shaykh al-Islam of Qazvin.⁶²

(4) Shaykh Husayn (d. 1309/1891). He studied under his father and older uncle and under the most important ‘ulama of Karbala and Najaf. He then returned to Qazvin and taught at the Salihyyah. His son was Shaykh ‘Ali Akbar.⁶³

56 Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 325.

57 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 4: 104–5, no. 28.

58 Al-Šāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, p. 48; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304. Both of these sources give the date as Dhu’l-Hijjah 1240/June–July 1825, but this is likely to be a mistake since the fighting did not begin until Dhu’l-Hijjah 1241/July 1826.

59 Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 330.

60 Nabil [Zarandī], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá’í Revelation*, Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1970, p. 285.

61 Al-Šāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 48–49, 53; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304.

62 Al-Šāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 49–50, 53–55; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304, 6: 174, no. 277.

63 Al-Šāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 50–51; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304.

(5) Mulla Shaykh Muhammad Rida (d. 1308/1890 in Karbala). He studied under his father and older uncle and under the leading 'ulama of Najaf and Karbala and became a mujtahid. He married a daughter of Shaykh Murtada Ansari and established himself as one of the senior 'ulama and teachers in Karbala. He had a son, Mulla Muhammad Husayn, known as Shaykh Aqa (1262–1333)⁶⁴ and a daughter named Fatimih (1277–1345), known as Karbala'i Khanum. The latter first married her cousin Mulla 'Ali Naqi, the son of Shaykh Hasan. After his death, she married Shaykh 'Isa, the youngest son of Mulla Taqi Baraghani and moved to Qazvin with him, where she taught in the Salihyyih.⁶⁵

(6) Shaykh Muhammad, known as Kashif al-Asrar (1240/1824–1294/1877). He studied under his father and older uncle and under the leading 'ulama of Najaf and Karbala and became a mujtahid.⁶⁶

(7) Shaykh Musa (d. 1298/1880). He studied under his father and older uncle and under the leading 'ulama of Najaf and Karbala. He then returned to Qazvin where he taught at the Salihyyah.⁶⁷

(8) Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali (d. 1315/1897). He studied under his father and older brothers and then under the leading 'ulama of Najaf and Karbala. He returned to Qazvin and taught at the Salihyyah. In his later years, he became the leading religious authority in Qazvin. He was a fellow-student of Sayyid Jamalud-Din 'Afghani' at the Salihyyah and a close friend of his. He joined him for a time in India.⁶⁸

Tahirih's early life

Some sources, including 'Abdu'l-Baha, state that the name of the eldest daughter of Aminih Khanum and Mulla Salih was Umm Salmih.⁶⁹ This was the name of one of the heroines of early Islamic history who had been one of the first women to believe in Muhammad and had been sent by him to Ethiopia when the persecutions in Mecca were at their height. Because of her loving care for all of the Muslims she was given the title 'Mother of the Believers' and much later, when her husband died, Muhammad himself married her as a way of honouring her. Other sources, including Shoghi Effendi, state that her name was Fatimih.⁷⁰ Fadil Mazandarani explains the discrepancy thus: that although she was named Fatimih at birth after her father's mother (in fact her mother's mother was also named Fatimih), she was not actually called this out of respect for her grandmother who would have been living in the same house. She was therefore called Umm Salmih. Later, when her qualities became evident, she began to be called Zarin-Taj (crown of gold). There is some doubt as to the date of her birth. Baha'i

64 Al-Şāliḥī, 'Introduction', p. 51; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 304.

65 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 9: 139.

66 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 304.

67 Al-Şāliḥī, 'Introduction', pp. 51–52; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 304.

68 Al-Şāliḥī, 'Introduction', p. 52; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 304–5.

69 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful* (trans. Marzieh Gail), Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1971, p. 190. This name is also given in a family genealogy published recently: Yahya Shahidi, *Shajarih-yi Khānivādih-hā-yi Shahīdī-Şāliḥī- 'Alavī-Shahīdī*, (2 vols, Tehran: privately published, 1376/1997), p. 931.

70 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 72–73. This name is also given in one of the Muslim sources who had access to Tahirih's family: Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 239, no. 328. It was also traditional for the first daughter of a family to be named Fatimih.

sources give the date as 1233/1817,⁷¹ but ‘Ali al-Wardi, an Iraqi historian, gives 1814, based on family sources.⁷²

She would have been only 5 or 8 years old (according to which date of birth one accepts) when, in 1822, Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa’i came to Qazvin. Her maternal uncle, Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab, who, as we have noted previously, had at first been inclined towards the Akhbari school had at some stage become an ardent student and follower of the Shaykh and had invited him to the city. He arranged accommodation for the Shaykh and his family and ceded to him his position as leader of prayers in Shah Mosque of the city, as well as asking him to teach a small religious college that he had founded. Apart from Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab, several other of Tahirih’s relatives became admirers and followers of Shaykh Ahmad, including her mother Aminih and her younger paternal uncle Mulla ‘Ali, who had also previously probably inclined towards the Akhbari school. However, Shaykh Ahmad’s presence in the city challenged the predominance of Tahirih’s older paternal uncle, Mulla Taqi, and threatened his income. So one day, when the Shaykh was paying a courtesy call on Mulla Taqi, the latter took the opportunity to question the Shaykh about some of his teachings regarding resurrection. After the Shaykh had explained that he considered that the resurrection would occur in a subtle spiritual body and not in the physical body, Mulla Taqi declared that this view was contradictory to Islam and began to denounce Shaykh Ahmad from the pulpit. The town was split between supporters and opponents of Shaykh Ahmad. Tahirih’s family was similarly split. Her maternal family was largely supportive of Shaykh Ahmad but her paternal family was split. Her youngest paternal uncle, Mulla ‘Ali supported Shaykh Ahmad, her oldest uncle was his fiercest critic and was supported by others on the paternal side, while her father remained neutral trying to mediate.

Eventually, Mulla Taqi arranged for a large conference of the ‘ulama of Qazvin to convene in his house to discuss the Shaykh’s views. Shaykh Ahmad himself came, accompanied by his sons and Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab. On the opposing side, Mulla Taqi had asked his relatives, the above-mentioned Mulla Aqa Hakami and Mulla Yusif Hakami, who were experts in philosophy and mystical philosophy, to attend. Mulla Salih and Mulla ‘Ali also attended. The discussion centred again around Shaykh Ahmad’s views on resurrection and the same disagreements emerged. At the end of the debate, Mulla Taqi issued a decree against Shaykh Ahmad of *takfir* – declaration that someone is an unbeliever. Shaykh Ahmad’s position in Qazvin became untenable and he left. Although most accounts seem to indicate that Shaykh Ahmad only passed through Qazvin, the evidence from these biographical accounts indicates that he remained there for about two years; long enough, for example, for Tahirih’s mother to obtain a certificate (*ijāzih*) from him.

Tahirih, who was only 7 or 10 years old when Shaykh Ahmad left Qazvin, was probably largely unaware of all this as she grew up. But another event probably had a stronger impact upon her. In 1241–2/1825–6, the second Perso-Russian War occurred. The ‘ulama were to a large extent responsible for this as they had pressured Fath-‘Ali Shah into war. One of the leading ‘ulama of Karbala, Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba’i, marched into Qazvin on his way to confront the Shah and insist on a *jihad* against the Russians. He had taught the Baraghani in Karbala and now stayed in the house of Mulla Salih. Several of the members of the Baraghani family joined him in his *jihad*. Tahirih’s oldest half-brother, Shaykh Muhammad, was killed in this conflict.

As with the other children of the family, Tahirih began her studies at an early age in the religious college founded by her father. She had lessons in literature and poetry from her mother and studied religious jurisprudence, the principles of jurisprudence, the Islamic Traditions and the Qur’an and its

71 Nabīl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 628; Māzandarānī, *Zuhūr al-Ḥaqq*, vol. 3, p. 311.

72 ‘Alī al-Wardī, *Lamahāt Ijtīmā’iyyah min Ta’rīkh al-‘Irāq al-Ḥadīth*, (2 vols., Baghdad, 1969), pp. 152 and 154n. Al-Wardī’s source is an unpublished manuscript by ‘Abbūd al-Ṣāliḥī, a descendant of Mullā Ṣāliḥ. See also Denis MacEoin, ‘From Shaykhism to Babism: A study in Charismatic Renewal’, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1979, p. 222, n. 76.

commentary with her father, her paternal uncles, and her older brothers, Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab and Shaykh Hasan. She studied philosophy (*falsafa*) and mystical philosophy (*ḥikmat* and *'irfān*) with her paternal relatives Mulla Aqa Hakami and Mulla Yusif Hakami (see above).⁷³ She memorized the Qur'an and excelled in all of these subjects and reached a high level of studies in them. One Muslim source describes her thus: 'When she had finished her studies, she was a female paragon of knowledge and virtues . . . She was famous for her eloquence in writing and speech (*bi 'l-faṣāḥah wa al-balāghah wa jamāl al-bayān*), in both prose and poetry, in both Arabic and Persian . . . And Qurrat al-'Ayn, with all of her knowledge and virtues, was also a paragon of beauty.'⁷⁴ Concerning the extraordinary abilities of Tahirih, her older brother Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab is reported to have said: 'We were all, her brothers and cousins, fearful to speak in her presence, so much did her knowledge intimidate us, and if we hazarded to put forward an opinion on a point of doctrine that was in dispute, she would prove to us where we were going wrong in a manner so clear, precise and magisterial that we were thrown into confusion and withdrew.'⁷⁵

Since the Baraghani family lived in the Turkish-speaking quarters of Qazvin, Tahirih almost certainly grew up speaking both Persian and Turkish. Indeed, an Azeri scholar, Azize Caferzade, cites a poem of Tahirih which she says was composed in Turkish and is preserved in a library in the Republic of Azerbaijan.⁷⁶

At the age of 14, Tahirih was married to Mulla Muhammad (d. 1296/1878), the son of her older uncle Mulla Taqi. Mulla Muhammad was eager to complete his education and so the couple left for Iraq, where they remained for about 13 years. In Karbala, the family had a residence in the Khaymgah quarter.⁷⁷ We know that during the 13 years or so that Tahirih and her husband spent in Iraq, they lived for most of the time in Karbala, but they also lived for a time in Najaf and went on pilgrimage to Mecca. In about 1841, Tahirih and Mulla Muhammad returned to Qazvin. Tahirih began to teach at the Salihyyih and, as can be seen from the above notes, was responsible for teaching all of her sisters, as well as her sons (see below) and others.

It appears that, after the departure of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i, Mulla Taqi had managed to impose his will upon the family and had silenced the supporters of the Shaykh, since, as Tahirih grew up and acquired her education, no word of the teaching of Shaykh Ahmad reached her, despite the support for these teachings by her mother and both her maternal uncle and younger paternal uncle. It is not clear when exactly Tahirih first heard of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad. Most sources are agreed that she first heard of these in Qazvin.⁷⁸ Some sources seem to indicate that Tahirih was already a follower of Shaykh Ahmad when she went to Karbala after her marriage and that she attended the lectures of

73 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 239, no. 328.

74 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 239, no. 328.

75 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a*, 6: 241, no. 328, quoting al-Wardī, *Lamaḥāt Ijtīmā'īyah*, p. 152, which in turn quotes from the Arabic translation of [Zarandī], *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 63–66 (English translation p. 84n.) which is taken from A. L. M. Nicolas, *Seyyed 'Ali Mohammed dit le Bab*, Paris: Paul Guethner, 1905, p. 273. The source of this account is probably an oral report by Mirza Hasan Adib (who was one of Nicolas' informants) who studied under Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab and who gives a similar account in a short biography of Tahirih that he wrote: 'Sharḥ-i ahvāl-i jināb-i Ṭāhirih', in *Chahar Maqālīh dar bārih-yi Ṭāhirih Qurrat al-'Ayn* (ed. Abu'l-Qasim Afnan), Wienacht, Switzerland: Landegg Academy, 1991, pp. 65–74, see pp. 68–69.

76 Azize Caferzade, *Azərbaycan'ın aşık ve Şair kadınları* (in Cyrillic letters) Baku, 1991, pp. 65–66. See also her *Zerrintac-Tahire*, Baku: Gytrk, 1996, p. 4. I am grateful to Mr Ali Nakhjavani for drawing this matter to my attention and to Necati Alkan for these references.

77 Al-Wardī, *Lamaḥāt*, p. 153.

78 The exception being Samandar (*Tārīkh*, pp. 344–45) who seems to indicate that Tahirih first studied the Shaykhi teachings by attending the lectures of Sayyid Kazim.

Sayyid Kazim Rashti, the successor of Shaykh Ahmad there.⁷⁹ This information differs from other sources that state that Tahirih never met Sayyid Kazim; only arriving for the first time in Karbala shortly after his death.⁸⁰ Since there is little doubt that Tahirih did go to Iraq after her marriage (three of her children were born in Iraq), it may be that Tahirih did not learn of the Shaykhi movement until her return from Iraq in 1841.

Putting aside the question of when it occurred, the story of how Tahirih came across the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad is told by ‘Abdu’l-Baha. He states that one day when she was visiting the house of one of her maternal cousins, Mulla Javad Vilyani, who was also a follower of Shaykh Ahmad, she happened upon a book of the Shaykh and started to read it. She became enamoured of these teachings and had soon mastered their complexities, assisted no doubt by her mother and other relatives. At some stage, Sayyid Kazim asked his followers to compose treatises in support of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad, Tahirih responded and sent him a treatise. When Sayyid Kazim read this treatise, he wrote her a letter which began: ‘Yā Qurraṭ al-‘Aynī’ (‘O Consolation of My Eyes!’). From that time forth, Tahirih became known as Qurraṭ al-‘Ayn, the name by which she is still most commonly known among Iranians.

Among her siblings, several also became Shaykhis – followers of Shaykh Ahmad, no doubt infected by Tahirih’s enthusiasm for the new teachings. Tahirih’s full sister Mardiyiyih adopted the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad as did her half-sister Nargis, who was married to a cousin, Mulla Muhammad Ja’far, a son of Mulla Taqi. Despite his father’s enmity towards Shaykh Ahmad, the latter was also a Shaykhi. Another half-sister, Khadijih Sultan Khanum, was almost certainly also a Shaykhi, since three of her five sons became Shaykhis. All of Tahirih’s maternal cousins were probably Shaykhis, under the influence of Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab, in particular Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali, son of Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab and husband of Mardiyiyih, and his brother Mirza Muhammad Hadi. Another maternal cousin who was a Shaykhi was the above-mentioned Mulla Javad Vilyani.

Soon strains had appeared in Tahirih’s marriage since Mulla Muhammad was, like his father, a strong opponent of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad which Tahirih had espoused. Eventually, this ended in divorce and Tahirih returned to her father’s house taking her children with her.⁸¹ Although her father loved her greatly, he was angered by the fact that her new beliefs had led to her divorce and so this led to some acrimonious exchanges between them.⁸² About two years after her return from Karbala, in late 1843, Tahirih decided that she had to go to Karbala, where her beloved teacher, Sayyid Kazim was. She returned her older two sons to their father and set off for Karbala with her daughter and youngest son who was only about 2 years old.⁸³ Accompanying her on this journey was her sister Mardiyiyih and her husband Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali, together with the latter’s brother, Mirza Hadi. Another of those who accompanied Tahirih to Karbala at this time was Khayr an-Nisa (1240/1824–1325/1907), the daughter of Shaykh Muhammad Ja’far Shari’atmadar Astarabadi and her husband Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Kashani (d. 1321/1903). The former had been a student of Tahirih at the Salihyyih.⁸⁴

79 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 6: 241, no. 328; Nicolas, *Seyyed ‘Ali Mohammed*, p. 274; Samandar, *Tārīkh*, p. 344–45; Māzandarānī, *Zuhūr al-Haqq*, vol. 3, p. 312n.

80 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful* 192.

81 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 6: 239, no. 328.

82 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful* 192–93.

83 We know the daughter went with her to Karbala from the biography of the daughter, see below. I am here assuming that the youngest son also went, since in the Islamic law of divorce, children under six years of age stay with their mother. However, it is possible that if he was very young, Ṭāhirih left him behind in Qazvin in view of the arduous nature of travel in those times.

84 Muḥsin al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* 6: 162, no. 243.

Tahirih arrived in Karbala in January 1844, a short time after the death of Sayyid Kazim Rashti. She was invited by Sayyid Kazim's widow to stay at the late Sayyid's house. It is customary for the Shi'i religious leaders at the major teaching centres to have regular teaching sessions at a particular place so that students would know where to go hear their lectures. After the customary 40 days of mourning, Tahirih continued the private lectures that Sayyid Kazim used to give in his own house, thus becoming in one sense his successor. She lectured to the men from behind a curtain. One source states that she also continued Sayyid Kazim's open lectures in the western side of the courtyard of the Shrine of Imam Husayn and attracted over two thousand students.⁸⁵ There were however, other claimants to Sayyid Kazim's successorship in Karbala and her bold lectures caused some degree of tension in the Shaykhi community. Of course at this time, Mulla Husayn Bushru'i also returned from his journey and retired to the mosque at Kufah with a number of the disciples and students of Sayyid Kazim. After this, they set off for Iran and accepted the Bab's claim in Shiraz. The Bab then accepted Tahirih as one of the Letters of the Living – his earliest group of 18 disciples who were elevated to the highest rank in the Bab's religion.

Of Tahirih's family, her sister, Mardiyiyh became a Babi. Mardiyiyh's husband, Mirza Muhammad 'Ali, and his brother Mirza Hadi, who were cousins of Tahirih both became Letters of the Living. In Qazvin, Tahirih's maternal uncle, Mulla 'Abdu'l-Wahhab, and her younger paternal uncle, Mulla 'Ali, who had both been Shaykhis now became Babis, as did Mulla Javad Vilyani, who had introduced Tahirih to the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad. The latter was, however, later to betray the Bab and join up with the Bab's avowed enemy, the Shaykhi leader Haji Mulla Muhammad Karim Khan Kirmani.⁸⁶

Tahirih's Children

Tahirih is said in Baha'i sources to have had three children, two boys and a girl,⁸⁷ but it appears that she in fact had four children. The first two were boys, born while she and her husband were in Karbala, then a girl when they were in Najaf and finally a boy when they had returned to Qazvin.

(1) Shaykh Isma'il (d. 1302/1884). He was born in Karbala. He is recorded as having studied under his mother Tahirih and under his father, as well as under both of his grandfathers, Mulla Taqi and Mulla Salih. He studied philosophy and mystical philosophy under his uncle Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab Baraghani and under Mulla Aqa Hakami and Mulla Yusuf Hakami. He then went to Najaf and studied under the leading scholars of his time, Shaykh Hasan Kashif al-Ghita, Shaykh Murtada Ansari and Sayyid Husayn Kuhkamari. He returned to Qazvin and was a religious authority there for a time before moving to Tehran. He was a poet and a theologian and is described in a Shi'i biographical dictionary thus: 'He had a high station in his piety, virtue, sanctity, and justice and he had a pleasing manner in his oration and a convincing manner of exposition.'⁸⁸ One of the daughters of this man, named Ma'sumih Khanum married a certain Haj Sayyid 'Azizu'llah of Urumiyyih. They lived in Tehran. Their son Sayyid Ni'matu'llah (1273 Sh/1894–1343 Sh/1964) at first took the surname Mirat and later Varta. He studied oriental philosophy under Mirza Baqir Khan Qavamu'l-Hukama Lahiji and Mirza Abu'l-Hasan Jilviih, and Western philosophy and political science under Dr Davud Hamadani.

85 Varjavand, *Sīmā-yi Tārīkh* 2: 1081.

86 Māzandarānī, *Zuhūr al-Haqq*, vol. 3, pp. 312, 387–88. Nabīl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 159–62 (Nabīl incorrectly calls him Mullā Javād Baraghānī).

87 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful*, p. 191.

88 Muḥsin al-Amīn, *A'yān ash-Shī'a* 3: 402, no. 1170; See also Agha Buzurg Tīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (14th century), Najaf: al-'Ilmiyyah, 1954, 1: 164, no. 363; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 302–3; Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 329.

He encountered the Baha'i Faith and became a Baha'i. He was a poet and wrote more than 10,000 verses of poetry.⁸⁹

(2) Shaykh Ibrahim (d. 1310/1892). He was born while Tahirih lived in Karbala. He studied philosophy and mystical philosophy under his uncle Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab Baraghani and under Mulla Aqa Hakami and then studied jurisprudence under the leading scholar of his time, Shaykh Murtada Ansari. After this, he taught for a time in Karbala before returning to Qazvin and teaching there. He is said to have been a skilled orator. He moved to Baraghan in later years and died there.⁹⁰ He had a son named Shaykh Davud (d. c.1334/1915) who studied with the prominent scholars of Najaf and then went to Samarra where he remained for 30 years studying under Mirza-yi Shirazi, the cousin of the Bab who was the leading Shi'i scholar of his time. He then returned to Baraghan and was a religious leader there until his death.⁹¹

(3) Zaynih (1253/1837–1333/1914). Born in Najaf. She studied under her mother Tahirih, her father and her maternal grandfather, Mulla Salih. She accompanied her mother on her travels. She was married to one of the Afshar family in Qazvin and had both sons and daughters. She taught in the womens' section of the Salihyyih, led prayers and was a religious authority for the women of Qazvin.⁹²

(4) Shaykh Ishaq (c.1258/1842–c.1307/1889). Born in Qazvin. He studied under his mother Tahirih and under his father; he took lessons in philosophy and mystical philosophy under his uncle Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab Baraghani and under Mulla Aqa Hakami. He travelled to Iraq where he studied under the leading scholars of his time, including Shaykh Murtada Ansari and Mirza-yi Shirazi. He then returned to Qazvin where he was a religious authority in the city and also taught religious sciences. He composed several works including some poetry.⁹³

The after-effects of Tahirih's life upon her family

We will not go into the rest of Tahirih's life once she became a Babi as that would expand this article into a book. However, we will look at what happened to her family after the advent of the Babi movement. The assassination of Tahirih's uncle Mulla Taqi by a Shaykhi on 15 Dhu al-Qa'da 1263/25 October 1847⁹⁴ had a traumatic effect on her family. Tahirih was accused of complicity in the murder of her uncle and her father Mulla Salih was forced to defend his daughter as well as his family honour. In a meeting of the 'ulama of Qazvin where his daughter's reputation was being attacked, for example, he spoke up in her defence only to be taunted by one of those present with the following lines of doggerel verse: 'No glory rests upon that house / where the cock's crow comes from the hens.'⁹⁵ Tears were observed to flow from Mulla Salih's eyes and he fell silent and left the meeting.

89 Obituary by Ni'matu'llah Dhakā'i Baydā'i in *Āhang-i Badr*, year 18, no. 7, consecutive numbering no. 199, p. 259–63; I am grateful to Mina Yazdani for this reference. See also Ni'matu'llah Dhakā'i Baydā'i, *Tadhkirih-yi Shu'arā-yi Qarn-i Avval-i Bahā'i*, (4 vols., Tehran: Mu'assih Millī Maṭbū'āt Amrī, 129 BE/1972), 4: 298–352.

90 Tīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (14th century) 1: 23, no. 56; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 303; Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 329.

91 Tīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (14th century) 2: 711, no. 1154.

92 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 174, no. 273.

93 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 3: 32, no. 48; Tīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (14th century) 1: 132, no. 297.

94 Al-Ṣāliḥī, 'Introduction', p. 17.

95 *Shukūhī namānd dar ān khāndān / kih bāng-i khurūs āyad az mākiyān*. Samandar, *Tārīkh-i Samandar*, p. 75. See slightly different translation of this verse in Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 322.

Mulla Salih found it impossible to live on in Qazvin and departed for Karbala in early 1264/1848.⁹⁶ He lived there until the end of his life, teaching and writing. He left behind in Karbala a valuable library which exists up to the present.⁹⁷ He died on 27 Jamadi II 1271/17 March 1872 while praying at the head of the tomb of the Imam Husayn.⁹⁸

The arrest of Tahirih and her confinement in the house of Mirza Mahmud Khan, the Kalantar (mayor) of Tehran no doubt weighed heavily upon her mother Aminih, who died in 1851, shortly before Tahirih's own execution in 1852 (since all of the Shaykhi members of her family became Babis, it is possible that she did also). Mulla 'Ali, Tahirih's uncle who had been both a Shaykhi and later covertly a Babi, died in 1852. The pressure of these events also led Tahirih's maternal uncle, Mulla 'Abdu'l-Wahhab, to leave Qazvin for Najaf. Here he died at the shrine of Imam 'Ali in 1270/1853. Of Tahirih's three maternal cousins whom we know had become Babis, Mirza Muhammad 'Ali, the husband of Tahirih's sister Mardiyiyih, had perished in the Shaykh Tabarsi upheaval, his brother Mirza Hadi lived on in Qazvin but hid his beliefs, and later became a follower of Azal, while Mulla Javad Vilyani had betrayed the Bab and had become a follower of Haji Mirza Karim Khan Kirmani, the main Shaykhi opponent of the Bab. Tahirih's sister was a Babi but we do not have information about her belief in later life.

Needless to say, the family of Tahirih had been split apart and heavily traumatized by the events of these years. First, the split in the family caused by the Shaykhi teachings and then by the Bab's message. The murder of Mulla Taqi had been the culminating shock. In the following years, the family of Tahirih tried to close ranks and expunge the memory of these events. In writing accounts of their family, for example, they made no mention at all of Mulla 'Ali's adherence to the Shaykhi or Babi movement, apart from listing Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i as one of his teachers.⁹⁹ Most of the descendants of all three of the brothers, including the children of Tahirih herself, are accounted as pious Usulis by the Shi'i biographical sources.¹⁰⁰

But the family has not been able to escape the growing fame of their troublesome ancestor Tahirih. Therefore, in recent years, they have even attempted to maintain that Tahirih was not a Babi at all – or that she repented of her heresy at the end of her life.¹⁰¹ Thus for example, Zaynih, the daughter of Tahirih, who accompanied her mother on her travels and was with her mother during her imprisonment in the house of Mahmud Khan Kalantar in Tehran up to the time of her execution, is stated to have maintained that her mother died a follower of Shi'ism (*'ala madhhab ash-Shi'a*) and that everything else was a false accusation against her by her enemies, the Shah and the Iranian government, who eventually brought about her death.¹⁰² Her son, Shaykh Ibrahim, is said to have stated that when he visited her during her confinement in Tehran, he found her fasting and spending her time reading the Qur'an and praying, and he therefore asserts that she died a Muslim.¹⁰³ Of course such activities as reading the Qur'an, praying and fasting were commonplace among the Babis – the

96 Al-Şāliḥī, 'Introduction', p. 25.

97 Salmān Hādī aṭ-Ṭu'mah, *Turāth Karbalā*, Najaf: al-Ādāb, 1383/1964, pp. 192–93, 241.

98 Al-Şāliḥī, 'Introduction', p. 25.

99 Al-Şāliḥī, 'Introduction', pp. 19–20.

100 The family came to use surnames derived from the three brothers: Shahidi, descendants of Mulla Taqi, who became known after his murder as Shahid Thalith, the Third Martyr, following on from two medieval Shi'i martyrs; Şāliḥī, descendants of Mulla Salih; and 'Alawī, descendants of Mulla 'Ali. Some of the latter two lines of descent also attached the name Shahidi to themselves in honour of Mulla Taqi and thus became Shahidi Şāliḥī and Shahidi 'Alawī. Biographies of these descendants can be found in al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* and Ṭīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (14th century).

101 A recent family genealogy, Yahya Shahidi, *Shajarih-yi Khānivādih-hā*, 2: 931–38, denies that Tahirih was ever a Babi.

102 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 174, no. 273.

103 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 243, no. 328.

Bab, for example, spent his time in prison praying and reading accounts of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn and other practices that would have numbered him as a pious Shi‘i. This was part of the ethos of the Babi movement.

Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made to redraw the picture that we have of Tahirih based on sources other than the Baha’i histories that are available in English and, in particular, family sources. As well as differences of facts, such as the date of birth of Tahirih and the number of brothers and sisters that she had, there are some differences in the picture drawn here as compared to the one given up to now in the Baha’i histories. For example, we see that although Tahirih was exceptional among the women of Iran at that time in being educated, she was not exceptional in this regard within her own family. It appears to have been the custom in the Baraghani family to educate girls as well as boys – of course the high levels to which Tahirih attained were exceptional. Similarly, although standard Baha’i histories depict her discovery of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad as being a fortunate chance occurrence in the home of a cousin, in fact, many members of Tahirih’s family were Shaykhis, including her mother, one paternal uncle and all of her maternal uncles and cousins. Thus it seems likely that she would have come across the Shaykhi teachings at some time from one of these sources. Similarly, the account in the Baha’i histories of her making the decision to leave her children to go to Karbala to meet Sayyid Kazim Rashti in 1843 may need to be altered in the light of the assertion that at least her daughter accompanied her on this journey and it may be that her youngest son also did.

In all, however, the sources presented in this paper confirm and even bring out in stronger relief, her towering intellectual abilities – a fact even acknowledged in accounts written by Shi‘i clerics antagonistic to the Babi and Baha’i Faiths. Despite the efforts of her family to conceal the heresy of their fiery and turbulent daughter – to ‘re-veil’ Tahirih and thus restore the family’s honour and reputation for piety – the memory of her actions and her courage lives on. Indeed, it is ironic that but for her, the family itself would now be insignificant among the masses of Shi‘i religious families.

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‘Abdu’l-Baha’s commentary on the Islamic tradition: ‘God doth give victory to this religion by means of a wicked man’ – a provisional translation and notes

NECATI ALKAN

Introduction

This paper presents a provisional translation of a short exegesis (*tafsīr*) by ‘Abdu’l-Baha in Ottoman Turkish.¹ There are many tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in various Turkic dialects.² The original text of this tablet appears in a collection of Turkish tablets and prayers of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Majmū’ih-yi Alwāh wa Munājāthā-yi Turkī* in the Arabic-Persian script, first published in 1948–9.³ It is probable that this tablet was written in ‘Akka since at least one tablet in this collection is dated 1894, and at that time ‘Abdu’l-Baha was living there. He moved to Haifa after his liberation in 1908. As in the case of some other tablets, it was probably addressed to a Sunni Ottoman official⁴ or a cleric. Its content indicates that the recipient was not a Baha’i because it does not contain the typical openings emphasizing a believer’s qualities, nor the common exhortations to servitude before God and promoting the Baha’i Faith. The recipient is addressed as ‘thine excellency’, and this tablet forms part of what can be called the ‘external affairs’ work that ‘Abdu’l-Baha carried out for Baha’u’llah. In the second part of this tablet ‘Abdu’l-Baha interprets a dream of the addressee; this, however, is discussed in another paper as it is a different topic.⁵

The *ḥadīth* (tradition) in question is from *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, which is regarded by Sunni Muslims as the most reliable of the compilations of Islamic traditions. The text of the relevant *ḥadīth* may be translated thus:

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- 1 I would like to thank Moojan Momen, Todd Lawson, William McCants, Vahid Brown and Ismael Velasco; without their very useful comments and references this article would not have developed.
 - 2 The Baha’i World Centre has a large collection of such tablets; Dr. Iraj Ayman (personal communication).
 - 3 It consists of mostly short tablets in Ottoman and Azeri Turkish to individuals and Baha’i communities in Iran and Caucasia (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia) and prayers; Tehran: Mu’assasah-i Millī-yi Maṭbū’āt-i Amrī, BE 127/1970–1; the text of this edition is used in this paper. Compare the same tablets and prayers in a publication with no title by Lajnih-yi Nashr-i Āthār-i Amrī, Tehran, BE 105/1327 Shamsī (1948–9). The latter is the first edition printed in type letters; it has some minor printing errors but contains a short Arabic tablet which does not appear in the second edition. I am not aware of other editions.
 - 4 See, for example, Moojan Momen, ‘‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Commentary on the Islamic tradition “I was a Hidden Treasure ...”’, *Bahá’i Studies Bulletin* 3: 4 (December 1985), 4–35, and at <http://www.northhill.demon.co.uk/relstud/>. ‘Abdu’l-Baha revealed this tablet when in his teens to a certain Ali Shevket Pasha; *idem*. ‘‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Commentary on the Qur’anic Verses Concerning the Overthrow of the Byzantines: The Stages of the Soul’, *Lights of ‘Irfán*, Papers presented at the ‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars, vol. 2, Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund, 2001, pp. 99–117; Necati Alkan, ‘‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Turkish Commentary of the Sura of the Fig: Introduction and Provisional Translation’, *Bahá’i Studies Review* 10 (2001), 115–29; that article gives a short overview of Turkish Baha’i studies.
 - 5 ‘Of Camels, Sheep and the Prophet Muhammad: A Dream Interpretation by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’, presented at the 48th ‘Irfán Colloquium (Acuto, Italy), 10–13 July 2003.

Narrated by Abu Huraira:

We witnessed along with God's Apostle the Khaibar (campaign). God's Apostle told his Companions about a man who claimed to be a Muslim, 'This man is one of the people destined for [Hell-]Fire.' When the battle started, the man fought very bravely and received a great number of wounds and became crippled. Upon that, a man from among the Companions of the Prophet came and said, 'O God's Apostle! Do you know what the man you described as one of the people of [Hell-]Fire has done? He has fought very bravely for God's Cause and he has received many wounds.' The Prophet said, 'But he is indeed one of the people destined for [Hell-]Fire.' Some of the Muslims were in doubt about this statement. So while the man was in that state, the pain caused by the wounds troubled him so much that he put his hand into his quiver and took out an arrow and committed suicide with it. Some men from among the Muslims went to the Apostle of God and said, 'O Apostle of God! God has made your statement true. So-and-so has committed suicide (suicide being in breach of Islamic Law).' The Apostle of God said, 'O Bilal! Get up and announce in public: None will enter Paradise but a believer, but God doth give victory to this religion (Islam) by means of a wicked man.'⁶

In his commentary on this *ḥadīth*, 'Abdu'l-Baha seems to ignore its negative context – the fact that the Prophet Muhammad referred to this person, though fighting alongside the Muslims, as one of the people of hell-fire (i.e. a person destined for hell) – and puts forth a more positive interpretation of the words '*Inna'llāha yu'ayyidu hādihā'd-dīn bi-rajulin fājirin*' – 'God doth give victory to this religion by means of a wicked man'. 'Abdu'l-Baha's *tafsīr* here is in the Islamic tradition of giving the inner meaning (*bāṭin*) of the words. Thus, for example the famous mystic 'Mawlānā' Jalālu'd-Dīn-i Rūmī states:

Know the words of the Koran are simple, but within the outward sense is an inner secret one. Beneath that secret meaning is a third, whereat the highest wit is dumbfounded. The fourth meaning has been seen by none save God, the Incomparable and All-Sufficient. Thus they go on, even to seven meanings, one by one, according to the saying of the Prophet, without doubt. Do thou, O son, confine not thy view to the outward meaning, even as the demons saw in Adam only clay. The outward meaning of the Koran is like Adam's body, for its semblance is visible, but its soul is hidden.⁷

At first glance, it may seem puzzling that 'Abdu'l-Baha is taking, not a doubtful, but what is regarded as an authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) *ḥadīth* from no less a source than al-Bukhārī and he is not questioning its authenticity, just giving it a completely new and unexpected meaning. He is making the inner meaning (*bāṭin*) have the opposite of the manifest meaning (*ẓāhir*). However, 'Abdu'l-Baha's interpretation is not unusual in terms of the tradition of Sufi interpretation of *ḥadīth*, even *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth*. 'Abdu'l-Baha often used the mystics' approach when interpreting *aḥādīth* or Qur'anic verses. An example of this is his commentary on the beginning of the Sura of Rome (sura 30).⁸

The emphasis on 'enjoining the good and forbidding evil' is an element that this commentary shares with a lot of Islamic literature. However, even notoriously wicked figures like the Pharaoh or even Satan can in Sufi interpretations be seen as the only true worshippers of God in mystical

6 *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, vol. 8, book 77, no. 603 at <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah>; Islamic Server of MSA-USC, accessed 3 November 2001; slightly modified; cf. vol. 4, book 52, no. 297; vol. 5, book 59, no. 515.

7 Jalālu'd-Dīn Rūmī, *The Masnavi* (trans. E. H. Whinfield), vol. 3 (version in the Ocean Library at <http://www.bahai-education.org>).

8 See the second article by Moojan Momen in footnote 4

exegesis. Satan’s sin, for instance, for which he was cast down from heaven, according to the Qur’an, was not to bow down before Adam when commanded by God to do so.⁹ Some mystics, such as Farīd al-Dīn Aṭṭār, have said that he declined to do this because he was a true worshipper of divine unity (*muwahhid*) and a lover of God and he refused to bow down before anyone save God, even though he be thrown into hell-fire. He accepted God’s curse as a robe of honour, saying: ‘to be cursed by Thee, is a thousand times dearer to me than to turn my head away from Thee to anything else’.¹⁰

The point of interest in our context is that, in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s commentary, the word *fājir*, usually translated as ‘disobedient’, ‘evil’ or ‘wicked’, suddenly becomes positive, meaning *fāriq*, that is ‘distinguishing’ and ‘rich’. Whereas in the *ḥadīth* it is a man who claims to be a Muslim fighting for God’s religion but is designated by Muhammad as *fājir* and a ‘man of hell-fire’; ‘Abdu’l-Baha only elucidates the word *fājir* rather than commenting on the entirety of the *ḥadīth*. Muhammad’s intention in his use of the word *fājir*, says ‘Abdu’l-Baha, is a person rich in the spiritual sense, who will aid the Cause of God by separating between good and evil, forbidden and lawful, truth and error, and one who has knowledge of the divine mysteries.

This interpretation by ‘Abdu’l-Baha may be compared to the interpretation of the same word, *fājir*, made in the commentary by Ibn al-‘Arabi on a verse of the Qur’an dealing with Noah – indeed it may be that ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s questioner was already familiar with this interpretation of this Quranic verse and here ‘Abdu’l-Baha was extending a similar interpretation to the same word appearing in a *ḥadīth*. In this verse of the Qur’an (71:27), Noah calls upon God to destroy all of the unbelievers (*al-kāfirūn*): ‘For if Thou dost spare [any of] them, they will but mislead Thy servants, and they will bring forth (give birth to) none but wicked and unbelieving ones (*fājiran kuffāran*).’ Ibn al-‘Arabi interprets this verse using alternative meanings of the two words *fājiran* and *kuffāran*. The root *f-j-r* has a basic meaning of cleaving or cutting. The usual meaning of *fājir* (of which *fājiran* is the accusative form) is that of a wicked or evil person. However the root *f-j-r* also has meanings of breaking open (of a dam or a river) in order that the waters may burst forth and also the breaking forth of the dawn and it is these usages to which Ibn al-‘Arabi refers. Similarly the root *k-f-r* is usually associated with its meaning of denying or disbelieving in God – and this is the evident meaning in this Quranic verse. But Ibn al-‘Arabi has chosen the alternate meaning of covering or concealing:¹¹

‘If you spare them’, that is leave them [as they are], ‘they will confuse your servants’, that is they will perplex them and bring them out from their servanthood into the mysteries of Lordship [that are inherent] in themselves, so that they will consider themselves as Lords after being servants. They will indeed be servants who are Lords. ‘They will only bring forth’, that is they will only bring forth and make manifest ‘one who breaks open (*fājiran*)’, that is one who makes manifest what is hidden, and ‘one who denies’, that is one who conceals what is manifest after its manifestation. They will bring forth what is hidden and then conceal it after its manifestation. And so the beholder will be perplexed, and will not know what the discloser (*fājir*) intends by his disclosure, nor what the concealer (*kāfir*) [intends] by his concealing – though they are [in truth] the same person.¹²

9 See for example Qur’an 2:28–34, 7: 11–12, 20:116.

10 Annemarie Schimmel translating Aṭṭār ‘Conference of the Birds’ in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975, p. 195. On the ambiguous image of Pharaoh and Iblis (Satan), see Peter J. Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983; and Eric Ormsby, ‘The Faith Of Pharaoh: A Disputed Question In Islamic Theology’, in Todd Lawson (ed.), *Knowledge, Love, Being: New Research in Islamic Thought in Honor of Hermann A. Landolt*, London: Institute of Ismaili Studies and I. B. Tauris, in press.

11 W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (completed by Stanley Lane-Poole), 8 vols., 1863–93, see under *f-j-r* and *k-f-r*.

12 Muhyi al-Din ibn al-‘Arabi, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. and annotated by Abu al-A‘lā Afīfī, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, no date, 1: 74; translation based on Ibn al-‘Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R. W. J. Austin, London: SPCK, 1980, pp. 80–81.

Abu al-A‘lā Afīfī, one of the foremost modern commentators on Ibn al-‘Arabī, has glossed the word *fājir* thus:

‘ilā fājiran kuffāran’ and *al-fājir* is from [the root] *al-fajr* meaning to bring out or to make appear – that is to say he who causes the secrets of Lordship to appear in their place of manifestation (*majālīhā*).¹³

In his interpretation, ‘Abdu’l-Baha also uses an alternative meaning of the root *f-j-r*. He has bypassed the usual meaning of *al-fājir* and has gone to the meaning of deviating or separating in his first explanation and that of having much wealth or property in the second explanation.¹⁴

Provisional Translation:

He is God!

Some persons have imagined that the word *fājir* in the holy tradition ‘God doth give victory to this religion (Islam) by means of a wicked man’ (*inna’llāha yu’ayyidu hādihā’d-dīn bi-rajulin fājirin*) deriveth from *fujūr* (‘disobedience’, ‘wickedness’). However, the sacred intention of our Lord, his Holiness the Prophet [Muhammad], peace be upon him, of the word *fājir* in the holy tradition, on the contrary, is *fāriq*, that is ‘distinguishing’. This means that the Lord of Grandeur will give victory to this manifest religion by means of the exertion of an honoured person who distinguisheth truth from error. Such a person is endowed with enjoining that which is approved (*amr-i ma’rūf*), and prohibiting that which is rejected (*nahy-i munkar*);¹⁵ he is the manifestation of the holy verse ‘He is fearing not the blame of any blamer’ (*lā ta’khudhuh lawmatu lā’imin*).¹⁶ It is an illustrious person who with divine power distinguisheth pious deeds from evil acts, goodness from unseemliness, knowledge from ignorance, faith from unbelief, trustworthiness from treachery, the accepted from the rejected, guidance from the state of being astray, light from darkness, reality from metaphor, truthfulness from lie, loyalty from cruelty, and the upright from the hypocrite. An honoured person, endowed with such virtues and merits is certainly one who distinguisheth, teareth apart [the veils of superstition?] and is superior.

The word *fājir* has moreover the meaning of ‘rich’ and ‘wealthy’. Therefore, the blessed meaning of the holy tradition is this: the Lord of Grandeur will give victory to this glorious *Sharī’ah* by means of a wealthy person. As thine excellency knoweth, richness and wealth are of two kinds; one is physical, and it consisteth of pure gold. In the opinion of the people it is silver which imparteth joy. This, however, has no value and quality. Even an imperfect man can attain this. The other aspect of wealth and prosperity is true prosperity. This, then, is knowledge derived from God, true faith, divine perception, human virtues, saintly merits, and spiritual honour and excellence. And to this person who manifests this heroic deed belongs ‘a day God will compensate each out of His abundance’ (*yawmun yughni’llāhu kullān min sa’atihi*).¹⁷ Therefore, the blessed meaning of the holy tradition is as follows:

13 Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* 2:43.

14 See Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, see entry for *f-j-r*.

15 *Amr bi’l-ma’rūf wa nahy ‘ani’l-munkar* (‘Enjoining that which is good and forbidding that which is evil’) is one of the most important tenets of Islam; Qur’an 3:104, 110, 114. There are also numerous traditions calling attention to this; for example, Muhammad was asked what the right road is. He replied, ‘Lowering your gaze, refraining from harming others, returning greeting, and enjoining what is good, and forbidding what is evil’; *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, vol. 8, book 74, no. 248.

16 cf. Qur’an 5:54: *lā yukhāfūn lawmata lā’imin*. This verse was a byword of the Sufi Malāmātiyyah movement, those who purposely attracted the blame of people.

17 cf. Qur’an 4:130: *Wa in yatafarraqā yughni’llāhu kullān min sa’atihi*.

the Lord of Grandeur will give victory to this glorious *Sharī’ah* with an all-wise person who is the manifestation of faculties bestowed by God, the centre of divine knowledge, the dawning-place of divine bounties, the possessor of human virtues, the revealer of the mysteries of reality, one who is cognizant of the signs of prophethood, the knower of the Hidden Mystery (*sirr-i makhnūn*), and one who is aware of the Treasured Symbol (*ramz-i maṣūn*).¹⁸ This sufficeth as an explanation.

Latinised text of the tablet:

Inna’llāha yu’eyyidu hāza’d-dīni bi-recūlin fācirin (“Allāh bu dini bir fācir vasitasiyle kuvvetlendirecektir”) hadīs-i şerīfteki “fācir” kelimesi fūcūrdan müştak olduğunu bazı zevât tasavvur etmişlerdir. Halbuki Hazret-i Nebvî, aleyhi’s-salāti ve’s-selām efendimizin hadīs-i şerīfte maksad-ı mukaddesleri bilâkis olup “fācir” kelimesi “fārik” mânasıdır, “ayrıcı” demektir. Yânî, Cenâb-ı Kibriyâ bu din-i mübînî fārik-i hak ve bâtıl olan bir zât-ı mükerrermin himmetiyle te’yîd edecektir. Böyle bir zât, emr-i mârufla ve nehy-i münkeriyle muttasıf ve *Lâ ta’huzuh levmetü lâ’imin* (“Ayıpcıların ayıplamasından korkmaz”) âyet-i kerîmenin mazharıdır. Hasenât ve seyyiâtı ve hüsn ü kubhu ve ilm ü cehli ve imân ü küfrü ve emânet ü hiyâneti ve makbûl ü merdûdu ve hidâyet ü dalâleti ve nûr u zulmeti ve hakikat ü mecâzı ve sıdk u kizbi ve vefâ ü cefâyı ve muvâfık u münâfıkı kuvve-i kudsiye ile ayırır bir şahs-ı celîldir. Ve böyle fezâil ve hasâil ile muttasıf olan bir zât-ı mükerrer elbette fārik ve hârik ve fâiktir.

Bir de kelime-i “fācir”, ganî ve mütemevvil mânasındadır. Hadīs-i şerīfin şu hâlde mâna-yı münîfi bu olur ki, Cenâb-ı Kibriyâ bu Şeriat-ı garrâyı bir şahs-ı ganî ile te’yîd edecektir. Malûm-ı âlileridir ki, gınâ ve servet iki türlü olur; biri servet-i cismânîdir ki sermâyesi zeheb-i ibrîz ve ind el-halk fidda-yı ferah-engîzdir. Bu ise o kadar meziyyet ve şerefi yoktur. Bir insân-ı nâkıs bile ona nâil olabilir. Servet ve gınânın diğer kısmı gınâ-yı hakikîdir. O ise esâsı, ilm-i ledünnî ve imânî hakikî ve basîret-i Rabbânî ve fezâil-i insânî ve hasâil-i rûhânî ve şeref ü meziyyet-i mânevîdir. Ve bu menâkıba mazhar olan zâta *Yevmün yuğni Allāh küllen min sa’atihi* (“Allah Kendi bolluğu ile herkesi zengin ettiği gün”)dür. Şu hâlde, hadīs-i şerīfin mâna-yı münîfi bu olur ki: mazhar-ı mevâhib-i ledünnî ve merkez-i maârif-i rabbânî ve matlâ-ı avârif-i sübhânî ve hâiz-i fezâil-i insânî ve kâşif-i esrâr-ı hakikat ve vâkıf-ı rümûz-ı nübüvvet ve âlim-i sırr-ı meknûn ve ârif-i remz-i masûn olan bir zât-ı hikmet-meşhûn ile Cenâb-ı Kibriyâ bu şeriat-ı garrâyı te’yîd edecektir. Ve’s-selâm.

(*Majmū’ih-i Alwāh wa Munājāthā-yi Turkî*, 2. ed., Tehran 1970/71, 138-42)

18 The terms ‘Hidden Mystery’ and ‘Treasured Symbol’ appear together in Baha’u’llah’s writings and refer to him; see, for example, the Long Obligatory Prayer in *Prayers and Meditations*, Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1987, p. 321; *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1988, pp. 47, 50. In a wider context these designations refer to all Messengers of God: man can attain knowledge of God only through recognition of His Manifestation who was hidden and becomes manifest; cf. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, vol. 4, Oxford: George Ronald, 1987, p. 139.

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Towards a definition of Baha'i theology and mystical philosophy

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Abstract

Theology is not one of those 'sciences . . . which begin with words and end with words'. On the contrary, the Baha'i writings teach a theology, which is usually defined as 'divine philosophy', and which has nothing to do with past, divisive, metaphysical hair-splitting. Its main objects are listed. Divine philosophy is not a mere intellectual knowledge of abstract ideas, but a conscious knowledge of spiritual reality, which every Baha'i is invited to achieve, so that his life may be renewed. Three fruits of divine philosophy are described: inner knowledge, spiritual progress, and an enhanced capacity of loving. These fruits are vital means for the attainment of the object of the Baha'i Faith: the oneness of humankind. Studying theology is not dangerous for the unity of the Baha'is, because the Baha'i writings provide sufficient means of security: the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice, as the head of the Baha'i Faith, and the interdiction to utter authoritative statements unless specifically authorized by the writings themselves. Since Baha'i theology is quite different from the theologies of the past, it is suggested that it be called 'divine philosophy', according to the terminology used in the writings.

A number of Baha'is think that theology is one of those 'sciences . . . which begin with words and end with words',¹ which Baha'u'llah recommends that people avoid.² Therefore they think that theology is of lesser, or of no importance in their Faith. Their idea may be justified in the light of the concept of theology they have in their minds: 'A system of theoretical principles; an (impractical or rigid) ideology',³ or 'A set of rigidly and dogmatically adopted criteria, customs and procedures'.⁴ These definitions describe a number of the features of those dogmatic theologies of the past, which were mostly elaborated by human minds, sometimes substituted for the Word of God and thus worshipped, and often imposed by churches or religious establishments as an essential element of faith to be dogmatically accepted. Those theologies are incomplete and often imperfect, inasmuch as they are of human origin, abstract, theoretical, and sometimes fruitless and imbued with superstition. They have been an important factor of disunity, discord, conflict and even of bloody wars among their own followers and between the various religious denominations. Shoghi Effendi defined them as 'Fruitless

1 Baha'u'llah, 'Tajalliyat', in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978) 52.

2 I am indebted to Rhett Diessner for helping with the English style of my paper.

3 *The Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. John A. Simpson and Edmund S. C. Weiner, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), s.v. 'theology', 17: 898.

4 Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, 20 (Turin: UTET, 2000), s.v. 'teologia', p. 910.

excursions into metaphysical hair-splitting',⁵ and said that their 'theological treatises and commentaries . . . encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth.'⁶

In this paper, it is not so much scholastic theology, which was characterized in Islam as *kalām* and which aims at a rational and intellectual analysis of religious truth, that will be the subject of our attention but rather the 'divine philosophy' or mystical theology that seeks to attain an inner spiritual knowledge.

The term 'theology' in the Baha'i writings

The term 'theology' does not appear as such in the Baha'i writings that are written in Arabic and Persian. And in the English writings and translations by Shoghi Effendi it occurs only twice,⁷ in contexts that are not relevant to the aims of this paper, which is to define theology in a Baha'i context. Shoghi Effendi also refers twice to the word 'theologian'⁸ and thrice to the adjective 'theological'.⁹ But these passages are also of little use with regard to a definition of 'theology'. The only conclusion that may be derived from them is that Shoghi Effendi does not regard highly 'the wranglings of theologians'¹⁰ and 'those theological treatises and commentaries that encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth'.¹¹

In the following list, the most important Arabic and Persian terms that are similar to the English word 'theology' and that occur in the Baha'i writings are given, followed by the way that they are translated in the Baha'i texts and then the way that they are translated in other authoritative sources:

- (1) *Ilāhīyāt*¹² is translated in the Baha'i writings as 'theology'.¹³ In Islamic literature, the Arabic and Persian word *ilāhīyāt*, which is the Arabic plural of *ilāhīyat*, 'divinity',¹⁴ is usually

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- 5 Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 15 February 1947, in *Unfolding Destiny: The Messages from the Guardian to the Bahá'ís of the British Isles* (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1981) 445.
- 6 Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual Baha'i, 30 July 1956, quoted in *Bahá'í News* 230 (April 1950) 1. After Shoghi Effendi wrote these words in 1947 and 1956 respectively, there have been interesting developments in theology in the field of inter-religious dialogue. 'Abdu'l-Baha said in 1912: 'We are considering the divine plan for the reconciliation of the religious systems of the world. Bahá'u'lláh has said that if one intelligent member be selected from each of the varying religious systems, and these representatives come together seeking to investigate the reality of religion, they would establish an interreligious body before which all disputes and differences of belief could be presented for consideration and settlement. Such questions could then be weighed and viewed from the standpoint of reality and all imitations be discarded. By this method and procedure all sects, denominations and systems would become one.' ('Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, ed. Howard MacNutt, 2nd edn. [Wilmette, Illinois: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982] 233–34). In the light of these words, a good number of those recent developments in theology could be considered as a first step in the direction suggested by Baha'u'llah. And thus they cannot certainly be viewed as 'fruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splitting', and as words that 'encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth'.
- 7 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1957) 18, 286.
- 8 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 123–24; *The Compilation of Compilations*. Prepared by The Universal House of Justice 1963–1990, (2 vols., Maryborough, Victoria, Australia: Baha'i Publications Australia, 1991) 2: 348.
- 9 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 121; *The Promised Day Is Come* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Committee, 1941) 96; Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 30 November 1932, *Compilation* 2: 411.
- 10 Shoghi Effendi, *Compilation* 2: 348.
- 11 On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 30 November 1932, *Compilation* 2: 411.
- 12 'Abdu'l-Baha, *An Nūru'l-Abhā fi Mufāvadāt-i-'Abdu'l-Bahā. Table Talks*, collected by Laura Clifford Barney, 2nd edn., (New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1983) 12.
- 13 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, trans. Laura Clifford-Barney, 3rd edn. (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1981) 15.
- 14 Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian–English Dictionary including the Arabic words and phrases to be met with in Persian literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), s.v. 'ilāhīyāt', 296.

translated as ‘theology’,¹⁵ but also as ‘Divine things . . . metaphysics; things pertaining to the supernatural’.¹⁶ Henri Corbin explains that *ilāhīyāt* means ‘*Divinalia*’ and that ‘metaphysics is usually considered as the science which deals with *Ilāhīyāt*’.¹⁷

- (2) *Al-Ḥikmatu ’l-ilāhīyah*¹⁸ translated as ‘divine philosophy’.¹⁹ In Islamic literature, *Ḥikmat* is an Arabic and Persian word usually translated as ‘Wisdom, science, knowledge; a wise saying; philosophy, physic, medicine; mystery, occult science’.²⁰ *Ilāhīyat* is the feminine form of the adjective *ilāhī* usually translated as ‘divine, of God; theological’.²¹ Corbin writes that *Hikmat* ‘is the equivalent of the Greek *Sophia*’.²² He says moreover that the Arabic and Persian locution *al-ḥikmatu ’l-ilāhīyah* ‘is the literal equivalent of the Greek *theosophia*’.²³ And he explains that after Suhrawardi (1155–91), the term has been increasingly used in the Islamic world ‘to designate the doctrine of the perfect wise man, who is both a philosopher and a mystic’.²⁴
- (3) *Falsafiy-i-ilāhī*²⁵ is translated as ‘divine philosophy’.²⁶ In the Islamic world the Arabic and Persian word *falsafah* denotes not only philosophy as a whole, but also the specific Arabic philosophy of Greek matrix, with peripatetical and Neoplatonic tendencies that flourished after the 9th century CE, whose foremost representatives are al-Farābī (872–950) and Avicenna (980–1037). Corbin remarks that ‘the terms *falsafa* and *faylasūf* . . . are not exactly the same as our concepts of “philosophy” and “philosopher”. The sharp distinction between “philosophy” and “theology” goes back, in the West, to Middle Age Scholasticism. This distinction implies a “secularization” of which Islam could not have any idea, for the simple reason that Islam had no experience of a Church, with all its implications and consequences.’²⁷ In fact, Islamic philosophy has always been strongly influenced by the teachings of the Qur’an.
- (4) *’Ilm-i-lahūī*²⁸ translated as ‘spiritual science’²⁹ and *’ulūm-i-ilāhīyih*³⁰ translated as ‘divine science’.³¹ In the Islamic literature, the Arabic and Persian word *’ilm* is usually translated as

15 Alessandro Coletti and Hanne Coletti Grunbaum, *Dizionario Persiano-Italiano* (Rome: Centro Culturale Italo-Iraniano, 1978), s.v. ‘elāhīyāt’, 76.

16 Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘ilāhīyāt’, 296.

17 Henri Corbin, *Historie de la Philosophie Islamique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986) 14. [All English translations from the French were made by the author.]

18 Baha’u’llah, *Majmū’iy-i-Alwāḥ-i-Mubārakah* repr. (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1978) 45.

19 Baha’u’llah, ‘Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat’, in *Tablets* 145.

20 Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘Ḥikmat’, 427.

21 Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Arabic-English), ed. J. Milton Cowan, 4th edn. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1979), s.v. ‘al-ilāhī’, 30.

22 Corbin, *Historie de la Philosophie Islamique* 14.

23 Corbin, *Historie de la Philosophie Islamique* 15.

24 Corbin, *Historie de la Philosophie Islamique* 219.

25 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Majmū’iy-i-Khaṭābāt-i-Ḥadrat-i-’Abdu’l-Bahā* (Langenhain: Baha’i-Verlag, 1984) 571.

26 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 349.

27 Corbin, *Historie de la Philosophie Islamique* 13–14.

28 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Majmū’iy-i-Khaṭābāt* 387.

29 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation* 138.

30 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Majmū’iy-i-Khaṭābāt* 386.

'knowledge, learning'.³² The Arabic and Persian word '*ulūm*, which is the Arabic plural of '*ilm*, is usually translated as 'sciences'.³³ *Lāhūtī* is the adjective derived from *lāhūt*, a theological term which describes the revealed divine nature. *Ilāhīyih* is the Persian equivalent of *ilāhīyat*, the Arabic feminine form of the adjective *ilāhī*. The Arabic and Persian locution '*ilm-i-ilāhī*' is usually translated as 'theology'.³⁴

- (5) [*'Ilm*] *az mā warā'u't-ṭabī'at*³⁵ is translated as 'supernatural science'.³⁶ *Ṭabī'at* means 'nature'.³⁷ The locution '*ilm at-ṭabī'at*' is usually translated as 'physics; natural science', whereas the locution '*ilm* or *falsifih az mā warā'u't-ṭabī'at*' is usually translated as 'metaphysics'.³⁸
- (6) *Ma'ārif-i-dīnī*³⁹ is translated as 'theology'.⁴⁰ In the Islamic literature, *ma'ārif* is the plural form of *ma'rīfat* and it is usually translated as 'sciences'.⁴¹ *Dīnī* is the adjective derived from the word *dīn*, 'religion', which is usually translated as 'religious'.⁴² Therefore the literal translation of this locution is 'religious sciences'.

In other talks by 'Abdu'l-Baha 'divine philosophy'⁴³ is also called 'heavenly sciences'⁴⁴ and 'the science of Divinity'.⁴⁵

'Divine philosophy'

In the writings and talks of 'Abdu'l-Baha, 'divine philosophy' is one of the branches of philosophy. And he defines philosophy through a reference to a well-known Muslim Tradition: 'comprehending the reality of things as they exist, according to the capacity and power of man' (*idrāk-i-ḥaqāyiq-i-āshyā' ast alā mā hiya 'alayhi*).⁴⁶ The other branch is 'natural philosophy',⁴⁷ or 'material philosophy' (*ḥikmat-i- . . . ṭabī'īyih*),⁴⁸ or 'material science' ('*ulūm-i-māddīyih*),⁴⁹ corresponding to what today we

31 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 138, cf. 49.

32 Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, s.v. 'alima-'ilm', 743.

33 Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. 'ulūm', 864.

34 Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. 'ilm-'ilmi ilāhī', 863.

35 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Majmū'iy-i-Khaṭābāt* 387.

36 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 138.

37 Wehr, *Dictionary*, s.v. 'ṭabī'a', 645.

38 Wehr, *Dictionary*, s.v. 'ṭabī'a', 645.

39 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Tadhkiratu'l-Vafā' fī Tarjumat-i-Hayāt-i-Qudamā'u'l-Aḥibbā'* (Haifa: Maṭba'ah al-'Abbāsīyah, 1343 ah [1924 ad]) 268.

40 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful*, (trans. Marzieh Gail) (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1971) 180.

41 Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. 'ma'ārif', 1264-65.

42 Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. 'dīnī', 554.

43 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 31, 59, 87, 284, 326, 327; *Paris Talks* 173; 'Abdu'l-Baha, ed. by Isabel Fraser Chamberlain *Abdul-Baha on Divine Philosophy* (Boston, MA: The Tudor Press, 1918) 99, 100, 135, 152.

44 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Abdul-Baha on Divine Philosophy* 135.

45 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 326.

46 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Mufāvaḍāt* 156; English translation: *Some Answered Questions* 221.

47 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 326.

48 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Risāliyy-i-Madanīyyih* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i Verlag, 1984) 91; English translation: cf. *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1952) 77.

generically define as science. If we want to have a deeper understanding of what ‘Abdu’l-Baha meant as ‘divine philosophy’ we should, therefore, on the one hand understand what he meant as ‘philosophy’ and on the other investigate what are, in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s explanations, the method and object of philosophy.

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s definition of philosophy is reminiscent of a passage of a prayer ascribed to Muhammad and often quoted by the Sufis: ‘O Lord, show us things as they are’ (*Allāhumma arinā al-ashyā’ kamā hiya* [or *alā mā hiya ‘alayhi*]). The Sufis interpret this prayer of their prophet as a request that God may bestow upon the believer a power of perception that may enable him to see God in everything, according to the Qur’anic verse: ‘God’s is the east and the west, and wherever ye turn there is God’s face (*vajhu’llāh*).’⁵⁰ Baha’u’llah explains that ‘the face of God’ is the Manifestation of God. He writes in the *Kitāb-i-Īqān*: ‘From their knowledge, the knowledge of God is revealed, and from the light of their countenance, the splendour of the Face of God is made manifest,’⁵¹ and in the ‘Tablet to Napoleon’: ‘O ye peoples of the earth! Turn yourselves towards Him Who hath turned towards you. He, verily, is the Face of God amongst you, and His Testimony and His Guide unto you.’⁵² Since the Manifestation of God is the human manifestation of the divine Command (*amr*), the capacity to perceive the Manifestation of God in everything seems tantamount to the capacity to look ‘on all things with the eye of oneness’ and to see ‘the brilliant rays of the divine sun shining from the dawning-point of Essence alike on all created things, and the lights of singleness reflected over all creation,’⁵³ which Baha’u’llah describes in the *Seven Valleys*. It is spiritual or inner knowledge (*‘irfān* or *ma’rifat*), also called certitude (*īqān*), described not only in the *Seven Valleys*,⁵⁴ but also in the *Four Valleys*,⁵⁵ in the *Kitāb-i-Īqān*⁵⁶ and in *Javāhiru’l-Asrār*.⁵⁷ Baha’u’llah writes about this power: ‘We should with tearful eyes, fervently and repeatedly, implore Him to grant us the favour of that grace.’⁵⁸ Then he adds: ‘That city [the city of Certitude] is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muḥammad the Messenger of God the Qur’ān; in this day the Bayān . . .’⁵⁹ Therefore it seems that ‘spiritual or inner knowledge’ or ‘certitude’ may be attained only through the words of the Manifestation of God. Indeed Baha’u’llah clearly writes in another context that ‘divine philosophy (*al-hikmat al-ilāhīyah*)’⁶⁰ has been taught to human beings by the Manifestations of God and he considers Hermes Trismegistus, called Idris in the Qur’an, ‘the Father of Philosophy (*abū’l-hikmat*)’⁶¹ and numbered among the Prophets of God, and he explains that his books are the most

49 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Majmū‘iy-i-Khaṭābāt* 387; English translation: *Promulgation* 138. *Māddīyyih* is the feminine form of the adjective *māddī*, whose meaning is ‘material, natural’ (Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘maddī’, 1138).

50 Koran 2: 115 (trans. Edward Henry Palmer).

51 Baha’u’llah, *Kitāb-Īqān. The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2nd edn. (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1970) 142.

52 Baha’u’llah, ‘Suriy-i-Haykal’, in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahā’u’llāh*, Haifa: Baha’i World Centre, 2002, para. H134.

53 Baha’u’llah, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, rev. edn. 1991) 18.

54 Baha’u’llah, *Seven Valleys* 11–17.

55 Baha’u’llah, *Seven Valleys* 49–51.

56 Baha’u’llah, *Kitāb-Īqān* 196–200.

57 Baha’u’llah, *Gems of Divine Mysteries: Javāhiru’l-Asrār* (Haifa: Baha’i World Centre, 2002), para. 39 ff, 84.

58 Baha’u’llah, *Kitāb-Īqān* 199.

59 Baha’u’llah, *Kitāb-Īqān* 199.

60 Baha’u’llah, ‘Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat’, in *Majmū‘iy-i-Ahwāh-i-Mubārakah* 45; English translation: *Tablets* 145.

61 Baha’u’llah, ‘Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat’, in *Majmū‘iy-i-Ahwāh-i-Mubārakah* 48; English translation: *Tablets* 147.

important source of the ancient philosophy. 'Abdu'l-Baha says that religion is 'the truest philosophy', because it 'inculcates morality'.⁶²

As to the method to be adopted in studying the objects of 'divine philosophy', 'Abdu'l-Baha clearly explains that the criteria of human knowledge are four: 'the senses (*ḥass*)', 'reason (*'aql*)', insight or inspiration and 'tradition – that is, through the text of the Holy Scriptures (*naql, wa ān nuṣūṣ kutub-i-muqaddasih ast*)'.⁶³ Examining these four criteria, he concludes that – each one of them being limited – any single one can lead to fallacious results. Thus any object of human investigation should be studied in the light of all these four criteria. But also studying a subject in the light of these four criteria does not guarantee the results of our efforts. A method is suggested in the Baha'í writings, whereby certain standards of inner integrity of thought and behaviour should be observed.⁶⁴ Only when those four criteria are used, that method is followed and those standards are observed, then, 'Abdu'l-Baha says, '[b]y the breaths and promptings of the Holy Spirit, which is light and knowledge itself . . . the human mind is quickened and fortified into true conclusions and perfect knowledge,'⁶⁵ because 'the bounty of the Holy Spirit (*fayḍ-i-rūḥu'l-quds*) gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable . . . and this is the condition in which certainty (*yaqīn*) can alone be attained.'⁶⁶ Human cognitive powers are like eyes and the Holy Spirit like light, in the absence of which eyes cannot see.

And thus it seems that 'divine philosophy' differs from the purely rational theology, sometimes elaborated by past and present scholars, because the latter arises from a human intellect convinced that it is able to understand reality without the assistance of the Holy Spirit, whereas the former arises from a human intellect that is deeply conscious of its own limitations and thus bends all its efforts towards drawing upon itself the assistance of the Holy Spirit, whereby it may be enlightened.

As to the object of 'divine philosophy', 'Abdu'l-Baha explains that it studies *asrār-i-ḥaqīqat* (literally the secrets of reality, which has been translated as 'spiritual verities'),⁶⁷ 'spiritual realities (*ḥaqā'iq-i-ma'navī*)',⁶⁸ 'the mysteries of God (*asrār-i-ilāhī*) . . . inner significances of the heavenly religions (*ḥaqīqat-i-adyān-i-raḥmanī*) and foundations of the law (*asās-i-sharī'atu'llāh*)',⁶⁹ that is the 'phenomena of the spirit'.⁷⁰ He specifically mentions the following issues:

- (1) 'The intellectual proofs of Divinity . . . based upon observation and evidence . . . logically proving the reality of Divinity, the effulgence of mercy, the certainty of inspiration and immortality of the spirit',⁷¹
- (2) 'the essential nature of Divinity, of the Divine revelation, of the manifestation of Deity in this world',⁷²

62 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911–1912*, 11th edn. (London: Baha'í Publishing Trust, 1969) 31.

63 See 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Mufāvadāt* 207–8; English translation: *Some Answered Questions* 297–99; *Promulgation* 20–22, 253–55; *Divine Philosophy* 88–90.

64 See Baha'u'llah, *Seven Valleys* 5–8; *Gems of Divine Mysteries* para. 36–37; *Kitáb-Íqán* 192–98; and 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions* 38–39, 77.

65 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 22.

66 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Mufāvadāt* 208; English translation: *Some Answered Questions* 299.

67 'Abdu'l-Baha, in *Majmū'iy-i-Khaṭābāt* 386; English translation: *Promulgation* 138.

68 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Majmū'iy-i-Khaṭābāt* 387; English translation: *Promulgation* 138.

69 'Abdu'l-Baha, in *Majmū'iy-i-Khaṭābāt* 387; English translation: *Promulgation* 138.

70 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 326.

71 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 326.

72 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks* 174.

- (3) ‘the intrinsic oneness of all phenomena (*vaḥdat-i-kā'ināt*)’,⁷³ which is the equivalent of the well-known Arabic locution *waḥdat-i-wujūd*, the oneness of being, theorized by ‘Ibn-‘Arabī and considered as a pantheistic statement, and which ‘Abdu’l-Baha explains in a quite different way than pantheism, as it is usually intended, in his ‘Tablet on the Unity of Existence’,⁷⁴ as well as in one of his American talks;⁷⁵
- (4) the concept of existence being ‘composition’ and non-existence ‘decomposition’;⁷⁶
- (5) the assertion that ‘the world of nature is incomplete . . . nature seems complete, it is, nevertheless, imperfect because it has need of intelligence and education’;⁷⁷
- (6) ‘the problem of the reality of the spirit of man; of the birth of the spirit; of its birth from this world into the world of God; the question of the inner life of the spirit and of its fate after its ascension from the body’,⁷⁸ which also includes the Plotinian concept of the circle of existence;⁷⁹
- (7) such ethical teachings of revealed religions as ‘faith in God, the acquirement of the virtues which characterize perfect manhood, praiseworthy moralities’,⁸⁰ the issue of good and evil and of its dependence on law and reason,⁸¹ etc.;
- (8) last, but not least, there is ‘the Bahá’i philosophy of progressive Revelation’,⁸² mentioned by Shoghi Effendi.

These subjects include all the issues that are traditionally ascribed in the West to theology in its wider meaning: ‘man, the world, salvation, and eschatology (or the study of last times)’.⁸³ ‘Abdu’l-Baha mentions moreover a number of fundamental principles of ‘divine philosophy’. He lists among those principles the well-known eleven (or twelve) social principles of the Baha’i Faith, that is: independent investigation of truth; balance between religions and science; equality between men and women; etc. And he says that among them ‘the unity of mankind . . . the tie of love which blends human hearts’ is the ‘the most important’.⁸⁴

Therefore, on the grounds of these quotations, theology may be defined as ‘a systematic study of spiritual phenomena, or of spiritual or metaphysical reality’, whereas science may be defined as ‘a systematic study of material or physical reality’. The Baha’i writings describe a spiritual, metaphysical, subjective, transcendent, inner, invisible, celestial, heavenly or ideal reality and a physical, material, objective, contingent, outer, visible, earthly, sensible or phenomenal reality. This distinction should not, however, suggest a dualistic vision of reality. Indeed ‘Abdu’l-Baha clearly

73 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Majmū‘iy-i-Khaṭābāt* 387; English translation: *Promulgation* 349.

74 cf. Keven Brown, ‘‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s response to the doctrine of the unity of existence’, *The Journal of Bahá’i Studies* 11.3/4 (September–December 2001) 1–29.

75 cf. ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation* 284–89.

76 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation* 87.

77 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation* 329.

78 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Paris Talks* 174.

79 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions* 285–86.

80 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation* 403.

81 cf. ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions* 266–67.

82 Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 12 November 1933, in *Unfolding Destiny* 432.

83 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. ‘theology’.

84 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation* 31.

states that 'reality is one and cannot admit of multiplicity (*ḥaqīqat yikī ast ta'addud qabūl nimīkunad*)'.⁸⁵ A corollary of this statement is that we should use the scientific method to investigate not only material reality but also spiritual reality.

The importance of theology in the Baha'í Faith

If theology is 'a systematic study of spiritual reality' its fruit is a conscious knowledge of spiritual reality. But 'conscious knowledge'⁸⁶ also is one of the definitions of faith given by 'Abdu'l-Baha. Therefore theology, far from being banished from the Baha'í Faith, is its essential part. Each Baha'í is expected to achieve a deeper and deeper conscious knowledge of spiritual reality, so that he may more and more effectively contribute to the 'achievement of a dynamic coherence between spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth'⁸⁷ through the practical expression of his faith, that is 'the practice of good deeds.'⁸⁸ This concept is seemingly confirmed in one of the American talks by 'Abdu'l-Baha. In that talk, after having extolled the great development of material civilization in America, he augurs a corresponding development of spiritual civilization and states that its achievement requires a 'readjustment' of human morals, through an improvement of 'the world of intellectuality.' Then he adds:

We must . . . render service to the world of intellectuality in order that the minds of men may increase in power and become keener in perception, assisting the intellect of man to attain its supremacy so that the ideal virtues may appear. Before a step is taken in this direction [1] we must be able to prove Divinity from the standpoint of reason so that no doubt or objection may remain for the rationalist. Afterward, [2] we must be able to prove the existence of the bounty of God – that the divine bounty encompasses humanity and that it is transcendental. Furthermore, [3] we must demonstrate that the spirit of man is immortal, that it is not subject to disintegration and that it comprises the virtues of humanity.⁸⁹

And finally he says: 'This is, in reality, the science of Divinity.'⁹⁰ Therefore the Baha'í Faith requires that each individual should achieve a conscious knowledge of spiritual reality so that the final goal of humankind may be attained: the realization of the oneness of humankind.

Achieving a conscious knowledge of spiritual reality

The conscious knowledge of spiritual reality can be achieved only 'in the spirit of search (*taḥqīq*), not in blind imitation (*taqlīd*)'.⁹¹ *Taqlīd* and *taḥqīq* (or *ijtihād*) are a well-known dyad in Islamic theological disputations. In the Sufī world *taqlīd*, from the root *qlḍ*, 'to copy, to counterfeit, to imitate

85 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Muntakhabātī az Makātīb-i-Ḥadrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahā* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'í Publishing Trust, 1979) 287; English translation: *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahā*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Baha'í World Centre, 1978) 298.

86 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* (New York: Baha'í Publishing Society, 1909) 549.

87 The Universal House of Justice, to the Bahá'ís of the World, 20 October 1983, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963–1986: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age*, ed. Geoffrey W. Marks (Wilmette, IL, Baha'í Publishing Trust, 1996) 602.

88 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* 549.

89 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 325–26 [numbers added].

90 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 326.

91 Baha'u'llah, *Seven Valleys* 24.

(in a pedestrian way),⁹² denotes ‘a blind submission to the *magister dixit*,⁹³ which is very common among Christians as well. *Tahqīq*, which derives from the Arabic word *ḥaqq* (truth), means not only ‘philosophical search’,⁹⁴ but also ‘realization (of Truth) . . . metaphysical, initiatory, spiritual realization . . . verification’.⁹⁵ In other words, *tahqīq* means the achievement of spiritual or inner knowledge or certitude, as the result of one’s independent investigation of truth. This dyad is the foundation of two Baha’i principles: the independent investigation of truth and the abolition of prejudice, prejudice which often arises from a blind submission to tradition. Baha’u’llah describes search in the Valley of Search in the *Seven Valleys*,⁹⁶ in the Garden of Search in *Javáhiru’l-Asrár*,⁹⁷ as well as in a passage of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* which the Baha’is sometimes call the ‘Tablet of the True Seeker’,⁹⁸ and ‘Abdu’l-Baha explains it in a passage of *Some Answered Questions*.⁹⁹ It is ‘the Path of Positive Knowledge (*manāhij-i-’ilmu’l-yaqīn*)’,¹⁰⁰ ‘the snow-white path (*manhaju’l-bayḍā*)’ that leads ‘unto the Crimson Pillar (*ruknu’l-ḥamrā*)’,¹⁰¹ the ‘school of Divine Unity (*miṣṭabiy-i-tawḥīd*)’,¹⁰² the school where ‘the science of the love of God [is taught]’ (*dabīristānu’r-raḥmān*), lit.: the School of the Merciful.¹⁰³

The ‘independent investigation’ of truth implies a sound reading of the books which God has given to humankind for its upliftment: the Book par excellence, that is the Scriptures; the ‘book of existence (*daftar-i-dunyā*)’,¹⁰⁴ or of Creation,¹⁰⁵ or ‘of Life (*kitābu’l-wujūd*)’,¹⁰⁶ the ‘book of . . . [one’s] own self (*kitāb-i-nafs*)’¹⁰⁷ or of man, defined as ‘the Book of Creation (*kitāb-i-takvīn*)’.¹⁰⁸

- (1) A first fruit of the ‘independent quest’ is a form of knowledge, which, inasmuch as it is an experiential knowledge of the spiritual reality of things, could be defined as spiritual or inner knowledge or gnosis (*’irfān*). Baha’u’llah describes it in his ‘Tablet of the True Seeker’, in

92 Antonio Campisi, *Lessico della teologia islamica* (Soveria Mannelli, Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 1994), s.v. ‘qld’, p. 106.

93 Marcello Perego, *Le parole del sufismo. Dizionario della spiritualità islamica* (Milan: Mimesis, 1998), s.v. ‘taqlīd’, p. 239.

94 Corbin, *Historie de la Philosophie Islamique* 14.

95 Perego, *Parole del sufismo*, s.v. ‘taḥqīq’, 233.

96 Baha’u’llah, *Seven Valleys* 5–8.

97 Baha’u’llah, *Gems of Divine Mysteries* para. 36–37.

98 Baha’u’llah, *Kitáb-Íqán* 193–99.

99 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions* 38–39.

100 Baha’u’llah, *Kitáb-Íqán* 195.

101 Baha’u’llah, *Seven Valleys* 58.

102 Baha’u’llah, *Seven Valleys* 34.

103 Baha’u’llah, *Seven Valleys* 52.

104 Baha’u’llah, ‘Kalimāt-i-Firdawsīyyih,’ in *Alwāih Mubarakīy-i-Ḥadrat-i-Bahā’u’llāh, Jalla Dhikrihu’l-A’lā (Shamilih: Ishraqāt wa Chand Lawḥ-i-Dīgar*, n.d.) 60; English translation: ‘Kalimāt-i-Firdawsīyyih (Words of Paradise),’ in *Tablets* 56, cf. ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Tablets* 170.

105 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Makatīb-i-’Abdu’l-Bahā* [Collected Letters] 1, Cairo: Kurdistān-i-’Ilmīyyih, 1912), 436.

106 Baha’u’llah, *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 69. cf. ‘*daftar-i-’ālam* (lit.: the book of the world),’ Baha’u’llah, *Muntakhabātī az Āthār-i-Ḥadrat-i-Bahā’u’llāh* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha’i-Verlag, 1984) 91; English translation: ‘the book of life’, Bahā’u’llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā’u’llāh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, rev. edn. (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1952) 133; ‘*kitāb-i-ijād* (lit.: book of creation),’ ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Muntakhabātī* 225; English translation: ‘Book of Life’, *Selections* 232.

107 Baha’u’llah, *Seven Valleys* 48.

108 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Mufāvaḍāt* 166; English translation: *Some Answered Questions* 236. cf. ‘the book of Thy creation (*kitābu’l-ibdā*)’, Baha’u’llah, *Munājāt, Majmū’at Adhkārīn wa Ad’iyatin min Āthāri Ḥadrat-i-Bahā’u’llāh* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Baha’i-Brasil, 1981) 38; English translation: *Prayers and Meditations*, comp. and trans. Shoghi Effendi, (London: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1957) 36.

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the Valleys of Knowledge and of Unity, in the second and in the fourth of the *Four Valleys* and in several passages of *Javāhiru'l-Asrār*. This spiritual or inner knowledge implies three fundamental achievements.

- (a) First, it implies a deeper and deeper awareness of 'the intrinsic oneness of all phenomena (*vahdat-i-kā'ināt*)', a 'subtle principle appertaining to divine philosophy and requiring close analysis and attention'.¹⁰⁹ 'Abdu'l-Baha confirms the statement by the Arabic philosophers that 'all things are involved in all things (*kulli shay' dar kulli shay' ast*)',¹¹⁰ and says that 'the phenomena of the universe find realization through the one power animating and dominating all things, and all things are but manifestations of its energy and bounty'.¹¹¹ The expansion of the awareness of 'the intrinsic oneness of all phenomena' is an essential part of the spiritual journey of each individual, since Baha'u'llah himself describes it as a fundamental element of the spiritual journey which he describes in the *Seven Valleys*.¹¹² It is a goal to be pursued both at the inner level (search, studies, prayer, and meditation) and at the outer level (work, community life, and administrative service).
- (b) Second, experiential knowledge creates a deeper awareness of the ephemerality of the self before God, a condition which Baha'u'llah describes in the Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness.
- (c) Third, this knowledge also implies the awareness that 'all the Prophets and the Messengers of God [are] as one soul and one body, as one light and one spirit', that

they have all arisen to proclaim His Cause and have established the laws of divine wisdom. They are, one and all, the Manifestations of His Self, the Repositories of His might, the Treasuries of His Revelation, the Dawning-Places of His splendour, and the Daysprings of His light. Through them are manifested the signs of sanctity in the realities of all things and the tokens of oneness in the essences of all beings. Through them are revealed the elements of glorification in the heavenly realities and the exponents of praise in the eternal essences. From them hath all creation proceeded and unto them shall return all that hath been mentioned.¹¹³

The awareness of this concept is very important, because it is the necessary prerequisite for the abolition of the existing conflicts among religions, which are the reason most Western people do not rely on religions as remedies for the present problems of humankind.

- (d) Fourth, this knowledge finally implies an inner urge to act according to the principles of 'divine philosophy', which are the kernel of morality.

109 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 284, cf. *Majmū'iy-i-Khaṭābāt* 267; English translation: *Promulgation* 349.

110 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Khaṭābāt-i-Mubārakah Ḥadrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahā dar Urūpā va Imrīkā* (n.d., n.p.) 208; English translation: *Promulgation* 349.

111 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 286.

112 According to John S. Hatcher, the Valley of Unity is a transitional stage 'between the two sets of three valleys, the first three pertaining to the acquisition of fundamental belief of faith, and the last three relating to the ineffable delights of certitude, confirmation and detachment which result from direct experience of spiritual realities'. John S. Hatcher, *The Arc of Ascent: The Purpose of Physical Reality II* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1994) 71.

113 Baha'u'llah, *Gems of Divine Mysteries* para. 44.

- (2) A second fruit of 'independent investigation', strictly connected with the first one, is a progressive inner transformation that implies a deeper and deeper knowledge of reality and a greater capacity to create fruits of harmony, love, unity and peace. It is 'spiritual progress', of which 'Abdu'l-Baha says: 'Spiritual progress is through the breaths of the Holy Spirit and is the awakening of the conscious soul of man to perceive the reality of Divinity.'¹¹⁴
- (3) A third fruit is the capacity of manifesting spiritual love towards all creation, a capacity which is so important that spirituality is also defined as 'love in action'.¹¹⁵

Therefore the principles of Baha'i theology, that is, divine philosophy or conscious knowledge of spiritual reality and thus also of the intrinsic oneness of all phenomena and of the ephemerality of the self, are the kernel of Baha'i life. They are in the writings. The Baha'is should study them and try to understand their real meaning, in such a way that they may be in harmony with their fellow believers. While exerting this effort, they should rely on the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, 'the supreme organ of the Baha'i Commonwealth',¹¹⁶ which is empowered to enable the Baha'i Faith 'even as a living organism, to expand and adapt itself to the needs and requirements of an ever-changing society'¹¹⁷ and thus, Baha'is believe to infallibly guide the Baha'i community towards its promised spiritual achievements.

The protection of the Faith

Baha'is should feel free to devote themselves to their theological studies with full confidence. Indeed Baha'u'llah has created in his writings the conditions that enable them to avoid the pitfalls into which most past theologians have fallen, elaborating those fruitless sciences from which Baha'u'llah enjoins human beings to keep away.

Baha'u'llah has clearly stated that God, the central subject of each theology, is absolutely unknowable. He wrote: 'Whoso claimeth to have known Thee hath, by virtue of such a claim, testified to his own ignorance; and whoso believeth himself to have attained unto Thee, all the atoms of the earth would attest his powerlessness and proclaim his failure.'¹¹⁸ Baha'u'llah has moreover explicitly stated that most of the issues cherished by the ancient theologians, issues from which in the past have risen fruitless disquisitions, are beyond human understanding and thus it is useless trying to completely explain them. Therefore, they will not be a fundamental part of Baha'i theology. With these statements he has forever shut up any self-styled theologian who may claim a role of spiritual leadership among his fellow beings.

Baha'u'llah has, explicitly and in detail, dealt in his writings with most theological issues which have been an object of contention in the past. These issues have been explained by 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi. All these explanations given by the three Central Figures of the Baha'i Faith¹¹⁹ are the kernel of Baha'i theology. The Baha'is should but systematize them and Baha'i theology will be in their hands. The Canadian Baha'i writer Jack McLean defines this kind of theology thus:

114 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 142.

115 'Abdu'l-Baha, in 'Join the Army of Peace', *Star of the West* 13.5 (August 1922), 112.

116 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1955), 7.

117 Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 23.

118 Baha'u'llah, *Prayers and Meditations* 123.

119 The Baha'i International Archives have up to now collected about seven thousand of the fifteen thousand tablets reckoned to have been revealed by Baha'u'llah, more than fifteen thousand of the thirty thousand tablets thought to have been written by 'Abdu'l-Baha, and sixteen thousand of the more than thirty thousand letters sent by Shoghi Effendi.

Source theology or *revelation theology* . . . the authoritative, objective, and normative truths of the Bahá'í sacred writings or those elucidated by its duly appointed interpreters. Authoritative means that the teachings are binding on believers; objective means that the truths of source theology are commonly perceived as true by the community of believers; normative means that the teaching is recognized by believers as the standard of truth.¹²⁰

In this vast literature, the writings by 'Abdu'l-Baha occupy a vital position. In the first place, they clarify a number of concepts revealed by Baha'u'llah from which may have risen misunderstandings. In the second place, although those writings are considered infallible, they come from the pen of a human being, and not of a Manifestation of God. Therefore they are a perfect example of a Baha'i theological study.

Baha'u'llah has very clearly established that no one has the right to release an authoritative interpretation of the writings, unless he has an explicit authorization in the writings themselves. And this authorization has been granted only to 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi.¹²¹ Therefore although the Baha'is may express personal interpretations of the theological issues dealt with in the writings, while they are systematizing them, no one will ever be expected to give a normative value to those interpretations. And the body of personal opinions of the Baha'is on the theological issues dealt with in the writings, which McLean defines as '*derivative theology*', will be but 'the subjective, relative, and non-binding elucidation of Baha'i teachings by competent scholars. Subjective here means that the commentary is particular to the viewpoint of the writer.'¹²²

Baha'u'llah has clearly forbidden any dispute whatever, and especially on religious issues. Therefore any Baha'i who raises a theological dispute will automatically lose any credibility.

Baha'u'llah condemned those sciences 'which begin with words and end with words'.¹²³ Therefore Baha'i theology should certainly have important practical aspects. These are, first of all, the 'rewards of excellence' which, in 'Abdu'l-Baha's words, come from any 'true philosophy (*hikmat-i-haqiqi*)'.¹²⁴

Therefore it is likely that in the future there will be as many theologies as there are individuals who will more or less systematically study theological issues. However, there will also be a Baha'i theology developed by the Baha'i community at large, and which will reflect the level of understanding of the writings achieved by the community as a whole. Of course, such a publicly expressed theology will be both indirectly, and sometimes directly, guided by the Universal House of Justice.

Features of Baha'i theology

Thus we may think that some of the features of the future Baha'i theology will be as follows:

- (1) Theologians will never lose sight of the three fruits of divine philosophy – inner knowledge, spiritual progress, and an enhanced capacity of loving – that may be obtained only through the help of the Holy Spirit.

120 Jack McLean, 'Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology', in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 5.1 (March–June 1992): 36.

121 cf. Baha'u'llah, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 82; Baha'u'llah, 'Kitáb-i-'Ahd', in *Tablets* 221; 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1944) 11.

122 McLean, 'Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology', in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 5.1 (March–June 1992): 36.

123 Bahá'u'lláh, 'Tajalliyāt', *Tablets* 52.

124 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tadhkiratu'l-Vafá* 143; English translation: *Memorials* 92.

- (2) It will be evolutionary, in the sense that Baha'i theology will reflect the growing awareness of reality achieved by the community under the protection of the Universal House of Justice.
- (3) Theologians will gradually pass from individual interpretations of Scripture, to a deeper understanding of Scripture 'in its pure form', free from 'all sorts of ideas that are their own'.¹²⁵
- (4) A relatively simple language will evolve, fit to express the non-definitive and relative character of the concepts.
- (5) There will be an absence of conflicts.
- (6) Different schools of thought, in the sense of general tendencies, will be present. These schools of thought will not be authoritative and therefore they will not be conflicting, because the authority will remain in the writings and in their authoritative interpretations.

The fruit of the development of this theology will be that 'divine civilization (*madīnat-i-ilāhī*)'¹²⁶ which will characterize the future world civilization. Nay, its development will be one of the three signs of the maturity of the human race, which are listed as follows:

- 'the emergence of a science which is described as that "divine philosophy" which will include the discovery of a radical approach to the transmutation of elements';
- 'the selection of a single language and the adoption of a common script for all on earth to use';
- 'no one will accept to bear the weight of kingship'.¹²⁷

After these thoughts, we may suggest calling theology only the 'derivative theology', which will develop in the course of time, and to continue calling 'revealed theology' 'divine philosophy' according to the terminology used by both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. It will be thus more clearly recognized that, far from being dangerous, useless or unimportant, theology or 'divine philosophy' is a central aspect of Baha'i life.

125 Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 25 August 1926, in 'The Importance of Deepening Our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith', *Compilation* 1:212

126 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Muntakhabāt az Makatīb* 129; English translation: *Selections* 132.

127 Baha'u'llah, *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 250–51, note 194.

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Styles of piety

Notes on the relationship between Baha'i scholars and the Baha'i institutions with reference to academic methodology¹

TODD LAWSON

Abstract

This paper addresses very broadly a number of issues in contemporary Baha'i scholarship. The approach here is allusive rather than categorical. Starting from the denigration of 'blind faith' by Baha'u'llah, the intellectual heritage of the Islamic world is held up as both mirror and example (both positive and negative) for approaching current problems and questions arising from an encounter between scholarship and administrative authority. Some thoughts are expressed touching upon the role of the scholar in the community. The phenomenon of the Internet is briefly discussed. The article ends with some reflection on the idea or institution of the Covenant.

On the subject of methodology one can do no better than draw attention to a sacred tradition that the Bab was fond of quoting; the prophet Muhammad is reported as having said: 'The Paths to God are as numerous as the very breaths of His creatures'. One of the more appealingly progressive, if not 'postmodern' features of the Baha'i Faith is the institutionalized self-consciousness that is built into the teachings. Such calls to mind the striking and perhaps even troubling image of the aware foetus introduced a half-century ago by the science-fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke. Baha'is believe that the Baha'i Faith of today is evolving or developing into what it is destined to become; and what it is destined to become is intimately connected with something referred to as a New World Order. While there is no precise blueprint or clear and precise image for this future, the Universal House of Justice has indicated its 'apophatic' nature in a statement largely devoted to the nature of deepening:

A detailed and exact knowledge of the present structure of Bahá'í administration, or of the bylaws of national and local spiritual assemblies, or of the many and varied applications of Bahá'í law under the diverse conditions prevailing around the world, while valuable in itself, cannot be regarded as the sort of knowledge primarily intended by deepening. Rather is suggested a clearer apprehension of the purpose of God for man, and particularly of His immediate purpose as revealed and directed by Bahá'u'lláh, a purpose as far removed from current concepts of human well-being and happiness as is possible.²

Baha'i teachings indicate that the 'organs of perception and consciousness' of this 'embryonic world order' are the various consultative and deliberative institutions of the Faith. Thus, esteeming and honouring the idea of multiple paths to the truth taught by the Bab and Baha'u'llah is destined to lead

1 This essay is a development of a talk given at the conference on 'Foundational Issues in the Baha'i Faith' held under the auspices of the Baha'i Society of Oxford University at Merton College, April 2000. I would like to thank the editors of *Baha'i Studies Review* for their valuable suggestions and would especially like to thank Gary Fuhrman, Arash Abizadeh and Udo Schaefer for reading earlier drafts and making valuable comments and criticisms.

2 *Wellspring of Guidance*, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1976, p. 113.

to the ultimate and complete transformation of human life on the planet. This transformation will, we feel, characterize a time when the important Baha'i principle of the harmony of science and religion is so etched into the cultural mind of that far-off time that the thought of a conflict between Baha'i scholars and Baha'i institutions will be unformulable. Among the paths to the truth so considered, then, there seems to be no compelling reason to omit academic methodology. A methodology is a tool, it can be used well or it can be used badly. As for the path to truth, there is no guarantee that everyone who esteems themselves treading it, is actually doing so. It is possible to stray from such a path, just as it is possible to stray from any path. But this does not mean that the whole notion of a scientific method or academic *modus operandi* should be demonized.

There are then at least two ways of speaking about the relationship between Baha'i scholars and Baha'i institutions: (1) in terms of the very desirable state of affairs that will characterize the living and working conditions of the New World Order, and (2) in terms of the current stage in the development towards that goal. My comments will address only this second item, and I will take for granted that the ideal conditions towards which we are all working are generally agreed upon, even if we remain ignorant of precise details. My comments will also take for granted that among the most important factors that condition the ideal relationship between Baha'i scholars and Baha'i institutions are those spiritual – moral and ethical – virtues all Baha'is are called upon to embody. These are frequently the same as the basic prerequisites of civilized society in general: honesty, humility, generosity, patience, sincerity, mutual respect, a sense of humour, and so on. It is true that every Baha'i is in some sense a Baha'i scholar when attempting to apply the teachings to a lived experience or to study the Baha'i writings. Indeed, because of the sacramental status of intellect in the Baha'i view of things, it could be said that any time a mind is 'deployed' Baha'i scholarship ensues, no matter where that mind might find itself. Such a mystico-philosophical view is, I think, directly related to a basic anti-clerical motif running throughout the writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. This anti-clerical motif is one of the more foundational and formative themes in the writings and has helped to energize a characteristic Baha'i impulse towards a kind of democratization, if you will, of religion. This is the bright side. But my comments are not about the scholarship that comes under this category, the 'every Baha'i is a Baha'i scholar' proposition, although what is said on the topic here could have relevance for that category.

The dark side of such anti-clericalism sometimes manifests itself in a robust anti-intellectualism and mistrust of the ways and methods of today's secular clergy and their church – academics and the academy. Anyone who has spent any time at all in an academic milieu knows that this mistrust is surely a healthy thing in certain circumstances, just as a small dose of poison can frequently save a life. Mistrust of 'intellectuals' is not new to the world and may be seen full-blown as a polemical topos in such apocryphal tales as that of the burning of the library of Alexandria by the invading Muslim hordes who, so the tale goes, were commanded to burn it because it either contained knowledge that was already in the Qur'an and was therefore redundant and superfluous, or it contained knowledge that was not in the Qur'an and was therefore unnecessary and (*eo ipso*) wrong. In either case, the library was to be destroyed. This never happened, by the way. It is yet another of the seemingly endless examples of Crusades-inspired cultural slurs against Islam.

A person might counter this assertion of anti-intellectualism in the Baha'i community by pointing out that Baha'is are frequently highly educated people and that indeed the Baha'i Faith appears to be a religion for intellectuals (a criticism I am sure we have all heard). But one of the prime inspirations for the calling of this conference is the desire to address some of the issues and problems that have emerged from the recent history of the relationship between Baha'i scholars and Baha'i institutions. I will speak about the type of scholarship that I know best and the type with which I have the most sustained experience: scholarship as a vocation, a profession. Furthermore, the species of scholarship

about which I am interested and most qualified to speak is a type that may be thought to play a particular and distinctive role in the Baha'i community, and according to a recent communication from the World Centre, perhaps a negative one.³ While there are dozens of Baha'i scholars who pursue careers in various disciplines such as law, literature, physics, philosophy, and the sciences, the type of scholarship that has given thoughtful Baha'is more pause for thought is precisely Middle Eastern or Islamic Studies and Religious Studies and History.

It is natural and obvious that this be so. Baha'i scholars who perform scientific research in literature, physics, engineering, medicine, and even philosophy are unlikely to publish books and papers that directly connect with or pertain to Baha'i history and teachings in a primary way. This is not to suggest that the work of such scholars is irrelevant to the Baha'i Faith. Nothing could be further from reality. Because of the basic Baha'i teaching that posits no disjunction or disagreement between 'religion' and 'science', all intellectual endeavour is potentially pertinent to the Baha'i Faith, even if only to continue to demonstrate the soundness of such a principle.

It is sometimes pointed out that some recent Baha'i scholarship is devoid of references to unseen forces and the pivotal function of prophethood in the unfolding of civilization and culture. On the problem of an appropriate methodology in the study of history, one observer has indicated that today it would not be possible for a professional Baha'i intellectual historian to publish assent to the historically problematic statement of Baha'u'llah: 'The sages aforesaid acquired their knowledge from the Prophets, inasmuch as the latter were the Exponents of divine philosophy and the Revealers of heavenly mysteries.'⁴ Presumably, the point being made here is that since it is not *yet* possible for a Baha'i scholar to be completely honest in a professional milieu because the conclusions such a scholar is under obligation to uphold are 'unfashionable', it is better for Baha'is to avoid altogether such professions. But, if that Baha'i scholar were living and working in Afghanistan or Iran or Libya, it would be not only possible but also probably expected (and certainly unexceptionable) to publish such a statement.⁵ Except, of course, in this instance the Baha'i scholar would be constrained to avoid mentioning Baha'u'llah in connection with such an assertion. It is thus quite possible that the kind of research results published by a scholar of Islamic studies may at times challenge the Baha'is to ask new questions about the history and teachings of their Faith, because the subject matter of this field of inquiry is intimately connected with the rise, development and establishment of the Faith and intersects the assertions of Baha'i history as written and elaborated by the Guardian. In such cases Baha'is need to keep in mind that Shoghi Effendi was, as has been pointed out by the House of Justice, completely dependent upon his sources for the information that he conveyed and interpreted.

The infallibility of the Guardian is confined to matters which are related strictly to the Cause and interpretations of the Teachings; he is not an infallible authority on other subjects, such as economics, science, etc.

The Guardian's infallibility covers interpretation of the revealed word, and its application. Likewise any instructions he may issue having to do with the protection of the Faith, or its well being must be closely obeyed, as he is infallible in the protection of the Faith. He is assured the guidance of both Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, as the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly reveals.⁶

3 See Bahá'í Canada, April 1999.

4 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978, pp. 144-45.

5 See the notes of a talk by John Hatcher: 'The new role of the scholar in Baha'i society' at <http://bahai-library.org/conferences/role.scholar.html>.

6 From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 25 July 1974.

It is unlikely, for example, that scholars of American history or musicology will, in the course of their professional duties, come across data which challenge or disagree with assertions made in the standard Baha'i histories. The scholar of Islamic studies and Middle Eastern studies may run into such a problem. The Baha'i scholar who studies the history of the Baha'i Faith according to the canons and methods of the discipline of history as it is now configured will find, for example, that colleagues will raise eyebrows, and perhaps even question competency, if that historian does not take into account all the variants of a pertinent historical tradition. There can be no *prima facie* privileging of sources simply because someone, no matter how many people think he or she is divinely guided, has said, 'This is the truth.'

Styles and tastes in contemporary scholarship are such that questions of divine guidance, revelation, and absolute truth are treated with great scepticism. And, it may be that a given Baha'i scholar chooses to write about the events of history without capitalizing the pronouns referring to the Central Figures of the Faith, or to write in a style that many Baha'is might deem dry and 'intellectual' (a subjective matter of taste?). Furthermore, it may be that such a scholar, in analysing (say) the proclamation of the Bab, seeks to understand such an event by taking for granted that the Bab was a Manifestation of God – a spiritual and confessional proposition that is quite beyond the reach of syllogistic proof or disproof by anyone's standard – and still proceeds to discuss the event by coordinating it with what is known about the state of society at the time, its economics, its sociology, its religious atmosphere and political and religious institutions. It may be that such a scholar after such an analysis concludes that the event of the Bab's proclamation and the subsequent development of the Baha'i Faith and its institutions make perfect sense when studied in such a manner. Does such a conclusion indicate that this scholar is any less a believer than the Baha'i who simply asserts that the Bab was a Manifestation of God and that we know this because he said so? Or are we dealing here with two different styles of piety?

Piety is a tricky topic; for those foolish enough to claim authority for their views upon it demonstrate thereby that they are unequal to the task. But piety is an important topic because it denotes the seriousness towards life, meaning, and truth that religion, and therefore the Baha'i Faith, requires of believers. But what is such seriousness truly about? Does it mean that true believers should never laugh? Certainly some have suggested this in the past. Does it rather mean that human dignity is intimately connected with faithfulness towards the Ten Commandments or, if you will, religious law? Human dignity is seen as preserved, paradoxically, in the submission of the human being to a higher purpose or law. But in the unfolding of history, true piety has been expressed in many different ways. There is a purely civic piety – the term, incidentally, stems from the Latin *pietas*: 'sense of duty'. And there is the purely religious piety. This latter has frequently found itself the butt of jibes and jokes by secularists or even more 'moderate' religious types because of an a priori view of piety in this sense as being self-righteous, irrational, stubborn, pompous, and fanatical. Thus Seneca:

The difference between us and the Etruscans is the following: that whereas we believe lightning to be released as a result of the collision of clouds, they believe that clouds collide so as to release lightning: for as they attribute all to the deity, they are led to believe not that things have a meaning insofar as they occur, but rather that they occur because they must have a meaning.⁷

Where are the Baha'is to be placed along this implied continuum? It would seem that the Senecan attitude is more in line with such Baha'i principles and axioms as the essential harmony of science and religion. Yet, there are strong, clear traces of the 'Etruscan mode' in the Faith. It is perhaps not a

7 Seneca, *Questiones naturales* (trans. Thomas Corcoran), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971, vol. 1, II.32.

question of either/or, but of emphasis, proportion, taste, and the ever-elusive wisdom that dictates which mode is to be privileged at a given time, or in which combination and ratio the two apparently irreconcilable modes are to be joined together in a specific noetic and/or moral and ethical circumstance. Baha'i institutions recognize, of course, that matters of temperament, style, and taste are not the same as matters of faith; that one's relationship to the Covenant cannot be determined solely on the basis of the manner in which one expresses oneself. For after all, tastes and styles in expression and speech change over time and according to cultural presuppositions. But it is not always the case that all of us recognize this. A person who is so impressed by the Baha'i view of things that they wish to attempt to discover how such a beautiful and compelling teaching came to be should not be penalized for this interest. To examine the circumstances under which Baha'i teachings evolved and the lives of the Central Figures of the Baha'i Faith unfolded is something, according to the writings themselves, that is encouraged by the Baha'i institutions. After all, 'Abdu'l-Baha has said that we can be greedy for knowledge:

[G]reed, which is to ask for something more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is used suitably. So if a man is greedy to acquire science and knowledge, or to become compassionate, generous and just, it is most praiseworthy. If he exercises his anger and wrath against the bloodthirsty tyrants who are like ferocious beasts it is very praiseworthy; but if he does not use these qualities in a right way, they are blameworthy.⁸

Seeking to gain a more profound understanding of how the Baha'i religion came to be, then, must not be confused with explaining it away. What is the difference? Better ask, 'Where is the difference?' A phobic reaction to the mindset which scientists and historians must have in order to do their work indicates that inner resources are not up to the task. The 'where' in question then is precisely the soul; a faculty, according to the Baha'i writings, which is best left to err on the side of magnanimity (lit: 'capacious of soul'). Why, otherwise, should anyone fear the truth, be pusillanimous (lit: 'small of soul'). Countless examples from history – including the origin and development of Baha'i teachings themselves – demonstrate that the greatest truths were born as heresies.

I would like to present an example from a cognate problem in another realm of discourse. It may be difficult to imagine, but it is nonetheless true that the various disciplines and fields of study in the academy have spawned their own histories of orthodoxy versus heterodoxy. Even the study of poetry – of all things – shows this pattern. When John Ciardi published what was destined to become a very influential book, it was met with virulent opposition. The book, *How Does A Poem Mean?*,⁹ was thought by some representatives of the literary establishment to violate the sanctity of the poetic by explaining in precise and accurate language the various elements that combine in a successful poem to produce the 'ineffable experience of poetry'. So the author was chastised and condemned by the academic establishment for having taken the magic out of poetry, for explaining it away. (That Ciardi was also at the same time hounded by the FBI seems to have been a coincidence having nothing to do with his scholarly preoccupations.) The author, therefore, was constrained to offer a word of apology. Here is an apposite excerpt:

A poem is a formal structure in which many elements operate at the same time. In analysis, each element must be discussed separately. By nature, analysis is plodding at best. Were an aeronautical engineer to analyse the flight of a gull, for example, he would find himself involved in a great deal of crabbed detail. No one, however, would be tempted to believe that

8 *Some Answered Questions*, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1981, p. 215.

9 John Ciardi, *How Does a Poem Mean?* (ed. Gordon N. Ray), Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959, pp. 663–64.

the analysis tried to take the place of the gull, or that it damaged the gull in any way . . . Analysis is never in any sense a substitution for the poem. The best any analysis can do is to prepare the reader to enter the poem more perceptively. By isolating for special consideration some of the many simultaneous elements of the poem, analysis makes them more visible in one sense, and less interesting in another. It is up to the reader, once the analysis is completed, to re-read the poem in a way that will restore the simultaneity and therefore the liveliness and interest of the poetic structure. The only reason for taking a poem apart is that it may then be put back together again more richly.¹⁰

There is a tendency to focus on relationships between Baha'i scholars and the Baha'i institutions only when problems and difficulties arise. We all have a vision of what the relationships between these two will be in the hereafter of the New World Order, and we should, of course, maintain such a vision as it will inevitably nourish and cultivate relations as they exist now. Before we conclude this brief exploratory consideration of the current intellectual culture of the Baha'i community, I would like to digress by presenting a very brief sketch of the history of the relationship between scholars and institutions in Islamic culture and history. After all, the Guardian instructs us to study such things in our continuing efforts to determine what the Baha'i Faith is and what it is not. In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, dated 27 April 1936, the following is found:

The Bahá'í view . . . is that the Dispensation of Muḥammad, like all other Divine Dispensations, has been fore-ordained, and that as such forms an integral part of the Divine Plan for the spiritual, moral and social development of mankind. It is not an isolated religious phenomenon, but is closely and historically related to the Dispensation of Christ, and those of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. It was intended by God to succeed Christianity, and it was therefore the duty of the Christians to accept it as firmly as they had adhered to the religion of Christ.

. . . Islám constitutes a fuller revelation of God's purpose for mankind. The so-called Christian civilization of which the Renaissance is one of the most striking manifestations is essentially Muslim in its origins and foundations. When medieval Europe was plunged in darkest barbarism, the Arabs regenerated and transformed by the spirit released by the religion of Muhammad, were busily engaged in establishing a civilization the like of which their contemporary Christians in Europe had never witnessed before. It was eventually through Arabs that civilization was introduced to the West. It was through them that the philosophy, science and culture which the old Greeks had developed found their way to Europe. . . It is wholly unfair to attribute the efflorescence of European culture during the Renaissance period to the influence of Christianity. It was mainly the product of the forces released by the Muḥammadan Dispensation.

From the standpoint of institutionalism Islám far surpasses true Christianity as we know it in the Gospels. There are infinitely more laws and institutions in the Qur'án than in the Gospel. While the latter's emphasis is mainly, not to say wholly, on individual and personal conduct, the Qur'án stresses the importance of society. This social emphasis acquires added importance and significance in the Bahá'í Revelation. When carefully and impartially compared, the Qur'án marks a definite advancement on the Gospel, from the standpoint of spiritual and humanitarian progress.

10 John Ciardi, *How Does a Poem Mean?: Part Three of An Introduction to Literature*.

. . . The Bahá'ís should try to study history anew, and to base all their investigations first and foremost on the written scriptures of Islám and Christianity.¹¹

And Shoghi Effendi himself wrote the following:

[The Bahá'ís] must strive to obtain, from sources that are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islám – *the source and background of their Faith* – and approach reverently and with a mind purged from pre-conceived ideas the study of the Qur'án which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá'í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God. They must devote special attention to the investigation of those institutions and circumstances that are directly connected with the origin and birth of their Faith, with the station claimed by its Forerunner, and with the laws revealed by its Author.¹²

With such guidance as inspiration, I would like to divert the focus for a moment to offer one instance of how it may be helpful to refer to the history and culture of Islam when attempting to employ a Baha'i paradigm in the pursuit of answers to pressing social and intellectual problems. By the time Islamic history began to be officially sponsored – that is to say written – in Muslim realms, the community had developed and acquired many of the characteristic institutions and vocations that would continue to work themselves out over the course of time. One of the key historiographical principles that informs this early history has to do with the function of various severe crises in early Islamic history. Some of these crises have been characterized as political and some religious. From a Baha'i point of view, it may be suggested that the early crises might have been avoided had the specific provisions of Muhammad's will and testament, his covenant, been universally observed. This is an assertion based on faith and, if you will, ideology. It is a proposition that Baha'is find congenial, but one that contemporary historians would criticize. It is an assertion that cannot at present be upheld according to the strict demands of contemporary historical and historiographical methodology.

So, we must say that for whatever reasons, these social, political and religious crises occurred and left in their wake a number of groups with varying theologies and visions of the 'true Islam'. By the early 9th century, as a result of the vast wealth and power accumulated during the Abbasid dynasty, the court mounted one of the most impressive state-sponsored scholarly enterprises up to that time: the attempt to collate and classify all the knowledge in the world, and of course to translate it into Arabic. This project brought Muslims into direct contact with Greek (pagan) philosophy, and the Muslims – supremely confident of their place in the world as followers of the most recent divine revelation – set about coordinating this foreign knowledge with Qur'anic revelation. It was the supreme confidence of Islamic society that allowed it to take truth from whichever quarter it might be found. After all, according to Islam, all knowledge comes from God, a God who communicates such knowledge and truth to humans through specially chosen messengers. Therefore, truths and knowledge found outside of the Islamic cultural sphere might be imported, as long as it is recognized that these too will have their ultimate source in revelation, even if there exists no historical record of God's revelatory activity in the foreign culture. The all-important epistemological presupposition is: if it is true, it must have its source in prophecy, and if there is no record of such, say in ancient Greece, then it must be the case that the traces of such an event have been lost forever, the Greeks travelled to the Holy Land (Israel) for knowledge at some stage, or that emissaries from the Holy Land travelled to pagan lands to

11 *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File* (comp. Helen Hornby), New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 2nd edn., 1988, no. 1664, pp. 495–96.

12 *Guidance for Today and Tomorrow*, London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1973, p. 226 (italics added).

enlighten them. It is absolutely untenable that any truth could occur outside the system of monotheistic prophecy. (Thus my earlier comment that Baha'u'llah's assertion, while clearly unacceptable in the post-enlightenment West, would find an assenting readership in some of the more so-called fundamentalist Muslim countries today. The thesis is basically an Islamicate one.) This supreme confidence that evidence can confirm belief but can never contradict it typifies the Rationalist style of piety.¹³

The proof of Islam's own truth was precisely the prosperity and triumph of Islam over the previous religions of Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau. It was in such a euphoric atmosphere that Islamic philosophy began. Having clearly nothing to fear, official scholars such as al-Kindī (d. c. 870 CE) serenely asserted that it was the scholar's duty to take knowledge and truth wherever it was found, even if this be in the midst of the most godless of people. His successor al-Fārābī (d. c. 950 CE), in a characteristic expression of Islamicate cosmopolitanism, asserted unflinchingly that all religion is the same, but varies only according to language, history, weather or geography – which factors give rise to different articulations of the same basic truths. So sanguine and powerful was the Abbasid court that it eventually attempted to impose on the populace what it esteemed the most rational (and therefore, according to the prevailing court mood, most godly) interpretation of Islam. One of the mottoes of this 'inquisition' was that God is constrained to behave in a way that never conflicts with reason. But this inquisition resulted in the eventual triumph not of so-called Islamic Rationalism, but rather Islamic Traditionalism/Fundamentalism. The Traditionalists were scandalized by the arrogance of the philosophers who presumed to set limits, no matter how abstract and metaphysical, to the nature of God. Possibly even more crucial, such philosophic discussions appeared to take too scant notice of Islamic scripture. That is to say, the words of the philosophers were presented by their critics as forming something of a self-serving new scripture intended by their authors to supersede the sacred verities of the Qur'an and Hadith. Consequently, the Islamic Rationalists lost more and more credibility and authority until they all but disappeared from view and the Traditionalists grew in influence.

In addition to these two modes of Islamic piety, Rationalism and Traditionalism, several others were in operation. The activity of the philosophers qualifies as religious on the grounds that they sought to justify the theological and cosmological claims of the Qur'an and the Hadith with the axioms of Hellenistic philosophy and science. There were also the Sufis and mystics, and the experts in Islamic law – and then of course there were the fissiparously burgeoning Shi'i movements that would eventually issue in the Fatimid political experiment and the Twelver or Imami intellectual tradition out of which the Baha'i Faith would eventually grow.

The achievement of Islam may in part be spoken of in connection with the way Islamic society ultimately came to accommodate such different modes or styles of piety within it.¹⁴ Amongst those who expressed their piety through the Law, such statements ascribed to Muhammad as 'Difference of opinion with my community is a divine mercy' and 'My community will never agree on an error' tended to reassure even this least flexible of piety-minded Muslims that unity was not the same as uniformity.¹⁵ As seen above, the accommodation was not always without conflict. But, even in the

13 I am grateful to G. Fuhrman for this sentence and several other formulations.

14 See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 volumes, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974: vol. 1, book 2, ch. 4, pp. 359–409.

15 It is interesting here to recall the words of 'Abdu'l-Baha apropos the legalistic mode of piety: 'No obstacle should be placed before any soul which might prevent it from finding the truth. Baha'o'llah [*sic*] revealed his directions, teachings, and laws so that souls might know God, and not that any utterance might become an obstacle in their way. Holding to the letter of the law is many times an indication of a desire for leadership. One who assumes to be the enforcer of the law shows an intellectual understanding of the Cause, but that spiritual guidance in them is not yet established. The alphabet of things is for children, that they may in time use their reasoning powers. "Following the spirit" is a guidance by and through the heart, the prompter of the spirit. The Pharisees were extremely orthodox, holding strictly to the law. They

absence of a universally honoured covenant, this was by any measure a remarkable development. Despite the various and frequently competing spiritual hues, emphases and doctrines, the Islamic polity may be thought to have achieved a degree of universalism established throughout a vast geography on a scale previously unknown and probably unpredictable. This is what may be referred to as catholic Islam. In the process, philosophy, which started life in Islamic culture under a very auspicious star, was eventually demonized by the 'orthodoxers' of Islam. And rationalism and the philosophic spirit sought refuge in the Shi'i movement and some Sufi movements. This led to what has been described as an intellectual stagnation during the middle periods of Islamic history. Because there was not a single universally recognized source of spiritual and political authority, the various trends in Islamic intellectual history were, by and large, left to seek their own destinies and levels.

It is true that scholars and scientists continued to be patronized by the various caliphs and sultans whose careers punctuate Islamic history and that there never seems to have been any doubt that one could also be a Muslim and be interested in science and scholarship.¹⁶ It seems as if the more the Muslim seekers of knowledge penetrated the mysteries of creation, the more they exulted in and celebrated the mysterious and elegant workings of an all-powerful Creator. Thus the earliest histories of the Prophet (9th century CE) are full of minute details describing the conditions and the causes that led to various revelations of verses in the Qur'an. This knowledge, far from being considered dangerous to faith, was embraced as its constituent and prime element. The intricacies by which the Divine Will made itself known were never seen as a proof for an assertion that 'as soon as one understands the influence of these "intricacies" one is no longer required or permitted to believe in a Higher Intelligence'. There was Qur'anic support, e.g. 41: 53, from the very beginning for the view that contemplating (*tadabbur/tadhakkur/tafakkur*) the Signs of God (i.e. the natural realm) is an act of piety. According to this naturalistic (and semiotic) style of piety, understanding (*fahm*) the workings of nature and society is a desideratum for anyone who would call themselves believer.

But then Islam – catholic Islam – cultivated and nurtured these various modes of piety from a position of near-absolute strength. Islam had defeated the old and venerable civilizations even as it had incorporated many of their achievements into its own culture, and it was clear that Islam had

were the cause of the condemnation and ultimate crucifixion of Jesus. . . . The ones in real authority are known by their humility and self-sacrifice and show no attitude of superiority over the friends. Some time ago a tablet was written stating that none are appointed to any authority to do anything but to serve the Cause as true servants of the friends – and for this no tablet is necessary; such service when true and unselfish requires no announcement, nor following, nor written document. Let the servant be known by his deeds, by his life! To be approved by God alone should be one's aim. When God calls a soul to a high station, it is because . . . that soul has supplicated to be taken into His service. No envies, jealousies, calumnies, slanders, plots, nor schemes, will ever move God to remove a soul from its intended place, for by the grace of God, such actions on the part of the people are the test of the servant, testing his strength, forbearance, endurance, and sincerity under adversity. At the same time those who show forth envies, jealousies, etc. toward a servant, are depriving themselves of their own stations, and not another of his, for they prove by their own acts that they are not only unworthy of being called to any station awaiting them, but also prove they cannot withstand the very first test – that of rejoicing over the success of their neighbor, at which God rejoices. Only by such a sincere joy can the gift of God descend unto a pure heart. Envy closes the door of Bounty, and jealousy prevents one from ever attaining to the Kingdom of Abha. No! Before God! No one can deprive another of his rightful station, that can only be lost by one's unwillingness or failure to do the will of God, or by seeking to use the Cause of God for one's own gratification or ambition. No one save a severed soul or a sincere heart finds response from God. By assisting in the success of another servant in the Cause does one in reality lay the foundation for one's own success and aspirations. Ambitions are an abomination before the Lord! How regrettable! Some even use the affairs of the Cause and its activities as a means of revenge on account of some personal spite, or fancied injury, interfering with the work of another, or seeking its failure. Such only destroy their own success, did they know the truth.' *Star of the West*, vol. 6, no. 6 (June 24, 1915).

16 This is why the formulation of Islamic fundamentalism is so problematic, because at least as far as the study of the natural sciences is concerned, Islamicate culture never spawned the kind of allergy to 'science' we see arising in the 19th century in response to Darwinism and other developments. Indeed, it was in response to Darwinism that the term 'fundamentalism' was born when a group of Christians sought to distinguish themselves with it for the purposes of asserting their faithfulness to the letter of the cosmogonic myth presented in Genesis.

nothing to fear from knowledge of any kind. Thus, the euphoria continued more or less unabated until the Mongol ‘occupations’ at which time the fictional centre of the Islamic world was finally exposed for what it was and the self-confidence of Islam was profoundly shaken. After 1258 CE, the year of the destruction of Baghdad and the execution of the Abbasid caliph, much of the progress in the intellectual tradition was halted and there was a mass exodus, once again, into the conservatism of Traditionalism. It is as if Muslims felt that the Mongol invasions were a punishment from God for their having strayed from the true path – perhaps through the kinds of intellectual experimentation and cultivation indicated above.

So from the 13th century until the rise of the Safavids at the beginning of the 16th century, the main spiritual and intellectual pursuits were frequently found amongst the Sufis, the mystics. Not necessarily because of the mysticism, but because Sufism was reconfiguring itself in numberless and sometimes competing organizations (lit. ‘paths’, *turuq*) to respond to the profound identity crisis resulting from the Mongol devastations. The unthinkable had occurred: Islam was defeated. Alexander’s wall had been breached and the forces of Gog and Magog set loose upon the lands of Islam – the Land of the Covenant (viz. ‘civilization’). Sufi organizations now spoke of a Land of the Covenant that was inaccessible to barbarians because it was located in the spiritual realm. In much the same way, various Shi’i groups speak of the Hidden Imam, the focus of all authority whether spiritual or political, as residing in an inaccessible, mysterious, unseen realm from which he exercises his rule.¹⁷ At the same time, these same organizations constructed numerous earthly institutions through which this Land of the Covenant could be travelled to and inhabited. Islam was once again inviolable and the confidence of the Sufi brotherhoods, together with their altruism and commitment to the noble ideals of Islam, influenced and helped heal the terrible psychological dislocations of the Mongol conquests . . . to such a degree that the conquerors themselves eventually embraced Islam and helped re-establish its health. This was the triumph of the Sufi style of piety.

In the 16th century the remarkable Safavid dynasty was established and triumphed over Iran. The vast wealth that flowed to the capital was used in the promotion of high culture and the consolidation, in a new era, of the Twelver Shi’i religion. This religion elevated to the highest possible level the mystic devotion to and love of the Imams. In the process, and in the context of historical and religious factors which would take us too far afield, Safavid Shi’ism also elevated ‘sacred hatred’ to the highest possible level.¹⁸ Such ‘sacred hatred’ was directed precisely to those deemed unfaithful to the Covenant – the majority Sunni Muslims. Most alarmingly, it was a perversion of the sacred duty of scholarship that was ultimately responsible for the thoroughness of this development. In large measure, it was against the deleterious and culturally exhausting effects of this ‘sacred hatred’, that Baha’u’llah first raised his voice. And since it was in large part the religious scholars who laid the foundations and propagated this hatred, a large part of the Baha’i critique of society is aimed at them, the mullas and mujtahids, the religious authorities first of Islam and by extension, the clerical class in all religious traditions.

So, for better and for worse, throughout its history, Islam never despised the activity of the individual independent scholar. Indeed, the tradition holds that a scholar is amongst the most valuable of citizens. The Safavid instance reminds us that not everything that goes by the name of scholarship is necessarily so, for in the Baha’i view, scholarship and truth are proven in the fostering of a social unity thought to be an earthly reflection of divine unity. In other words, and as Baha’u’llah has

17 e.g. al-Ghayb (the Unseen Realm), Jābalsā, Jābalqā, two mysterious cities inhabited by the Hidden Imam and his cohort. Hūrqulyā, another name for a mysterious, spiritual realm sometimes used as a synonym for Jābalsā and Jābarqā, and sometimes used to indicate a separate but related phenomenon, especially in the works of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsā’ī and the Shaykhī school in general.

18 Muhammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, pp. 87–88.

insisted, if religion causes disunity then it is better done without, no matter how compelling it might otherwise be.

Because of the nature of 'truth' partly delineated above, knowledge and learning has from Islam's inception until the present day performed something of a sacramental function with practical implications and ramifications. It is because it is so highly esteemed that it is also susceptible of perversion and manipulation for selfish political ends. There have been times when a certain intellectual attitude or theology was imposed upon the Muslims: the inquisition referred to above, the Wahhabi movement of the Arabian peninsula, the Khomeinist regime in Iran, the Taliban of Afghanistan. But these seem to stand out in intaglio against the guiding ethos of a classical age that was one of relative intellectual freedom and scientific experimentation. And this was a result (indeed no doubt possible only because) of the deep certitude Islam felt about its rightful place in the world. As this certitude fluctuates through history, we can see that intellectual attainment also rises and falls. Today, for example, as Islam feels itself besieged on all sides by hostile forces, it has circled its wagons and, in some cases, apparently abandoned the noble tradition of liberalism and research that once characterized its most prosperous periods. This is, I think, something that the Guardian wanted the Baha'is to observe in their study of Islamic history, so that Baha'i history might renew its nobler qualities and avoid the baser – such as the occasional tendency to defend the Faith against opposition by attacking certain styles of piety.

Despite the eradication by Baha'u'llah from the religious repertoire of anything resembling 'sacred hatred', tensions have developed between some Baha'i scholars and Baha'i institutions in recent years. They are, in some ways, the reappearance of typical relationships that everyone knows well from the experience of other religious communities. It makes sense to assume that the institutions of the Faith are evolving as the individuals who serve on assemblies also evolve and mature spiritually and intellectually. The Baha'i vision is one that assumes gradual and perhaps even slow development towards its destiny. But Baha'i institutions as sensory organs and the conscience of the infant Baha'i community are infallibly designed to guide. It is the degree to which the individuals serving on these assemblies are able to establish a cognitive and contemplative distance between their divergent, distinct (but mutually energizing) roles as simultaneous members of the infant community and participants in the collective mode of consciousness and perception that is designed to lead the community, that these institutions will be permitted to acquit themselves of this unique calling – 'to enter the poem more perceptively'. The destiny, as is well known, is something that must be won by the Baha'is through mutuality, cooperation, intellectual honesty and liberality, detachment and work. This victory is unlikely to be won without recognition of, and genuine respect for, diverse styles of piety.

These days, part of the tension may arise from uneasiness with the somewhat anarchic nature of the Internet. Fear of the new is an occupational hazard of institutions. Indeed, the closest word for heresy in Islamic theology is precisely 'innovation'. The Internet is new but definitely here to stay, so institutions have to adjust to its presence. Tools are neither good nor bad in themselves, but are only made so as a result of the way they are used. It is much too early to think about how the Internet might eventually function within the Baha'i community, but it is certain that it will continue to play a larger and larger role.¹⁹ If that role can be worked out through trial and error, in a spirit of cooperation, with goodwill and humour it will clearly enhance the quality of Baha'i community life to an unforeseeable

19 See now David Piff's 'The Globalisation of Information: Bahā'ī Constructions of the Internet', a paper read at the recent 'Bahā'ī and Globalisation' conference held under the auspices of the Research Network on New Religions and the Department of the History of Religions, University of Copenhagen, Tune Landboskole, 22–24 August 2001.

degree.²⁰ The proper relationship between all Baha'is and the sources of authority in the Faith is characterized in the writings as one of love, mutuality, cooperation, trust, obedience and respect. If the epithet 'Baha'i scholars' means 'scholars who identify themselves as Baha'is', then this relationship should include them as well. That the organizers of this conference have included this general topic among the few 'foundational issues' is a direct result of the somewhat vexed, more or less public, relationship between some Baha'i scholars and 'the institutions' of late. These recent developments are in some ways typical of the historical relationship between an intelligentsia and authority-wielding institutions in general, and as long as authority is wielded, there will be challenges to it. This is not the same as saying that as long as there is an intelligentsia, there will be challenges to authority.

The brighter and more mature future that we as Baha'is can and should look forward to is not necessarily one in which Baha'i scholars and intellectuals will cease questioning the institutions about interpretations and applications of Baha'i teachings. The conception of authority developed in the Baha'i writings is itself an evolving idea. It is an authority of magnanimity, of patience, of love, of strength, of generosity. It is in some ways the authority of a parent, or of a spouse (male or female) who by virtue of a commitment to a marriage acquires authority in the relationship commensurate with such a commitment. Individual believers – scholars included – as constituents of the Baha'i institution of community are called upon in their authority to be no less magnanimous, loving and generous than their counterparts in the Faith.

Many of the recent difficulties in the relationship we are discussing came about because of insecurity, fear and a lack of fair play. I think chief amongst the lapses was gossip – replacing dialogue with storytelling. Difficulties will never cease, either inside or outside the Faith. But we can perhaps strive for ever more interesting and engaging difficulties, and even more importantly, more elevated and worthy ways of coming to some harmonious outcome.

Finally, there seems to be a confusion between the pious and the pietistic, especially in styles of writing about the Faith and its history. Faithfulness to the Covenant is sometimes confused with a style which advertises its own faithfulness by repetition of pietistic formulas, while the scholarly style which places facts before self-expression is regarded with suspicion. But these different styles simply reflect different styles of piety, neither of which is inherently more faithful to the Covenant than the other. The community needs both styles; and from its academic members, the community needs scholarship on Faith-related matters in which it remains tacitly understood that God is the author of creation and that Baha'u'llah is a Manifestation of God and that the House of Justice is infallible. Writing which constantly interrupts the investigation to make these assertions explicit would defeat the sacred purpose of scholarship.

20 On the importance of humour see Arash Abizadeh's recent paper in political philosophy: 'Engaged Detachment, Comic Detachment: Modernity and the Mystic's Last Laugh', an unpublished paper presented at the Harvard Political Theory Research Workshop, February 2000, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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Efforts to preserve the remains of the Bab: Four historical accounts

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Abstract

The execution of the Bab and his companion, Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Zunuzi (Anis), took place at noon on Tuesday, 9 July 1850, but it was not until 21 March 1909 that their mangled bodies were entombed in their permanent shrine on Mount Carmel, Haifa. During this interval of 59 years, fearing destruction by entrenched enemies, these remains were concealed in a number of places, often unknown to the generality of Baha'is. The object of this article is to outline the background of this episode of Baha'i history based on early documents. Even though these accounts occasionally overlap in their descriptions of the events, yet each contains an important perspective that has warranted its inclusion. Four accounts are here translated for the first time into English.

Introduction

Immediately after the execution of the Bab and his companion Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Zunuzi (Anis), on Tuesday,² 9 July 1850,³ their remains were cast by the edge of a moat outside the city of Tabriz. 'Four companies, each consisting of ten sentinels, were ordered to keep watch in turn over them. On the morning following the day of martyrdom, the Russian consul in Tabriz, accompanied by an artist, went to that spot and ordered that a sketch be made of the remains as they lay beside the moat.'⁴ One of the early Baha'is, Haji 'Ali 'Askar Tabrizi (d. 1874), reported the following to Nabil Zarandi:

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- 1 This article is dedicated to the loving memory of Colonel 'Izzatu'llāh Nūr. I am grateful to Sepehr Manuchehri for suggesting inclusion of the passage from *al-Kawākib al-Durriya*.
 - 2 Nabil [Zarandi], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation* (trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi), Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1970, p. 517, indicates that the day of martyrdom was a Sunday. However, more accurate calendars as well as several Qajar histories, such as Muhammad Taqi Sipihri, *Nāsikh at-Tavārīkh*, Tehran: Kitāb-furūshī Islāmiyyih, 1353 AHS, vol. 3, p. 305; and Mīrzā Muḥammad Ja'fār Ḥaqāyiq-Nigar, *Ḥaqāyiq al-Akhhbār Nāshirī*, vol. 1, section on 1266 AHQ events, Tehran: Dar at-Tab'ih Dawlati, 1284 AH, clearly indicate that 9 July was a Tuesday.
 - 3 There is consistent disagreement between the Baha'i and other histories on the day of martyrdom of the Bab. The Baha'i histories maintain that it took place on 9 July, while the Qajar histories place this event a day earlier. For example, 'Abdu'l-Baha in many tablets, including *A Traveller's Narrative* (trans. E. G. Browne), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891, vol. 2, pp. 44–45, and Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By*, rev. edn., Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974, p. 52; and Nabil in *Dawn-breakers* 517, mark 9 July 1850 as the day of martyrdom. However, *Nāsikh at-Tavārīkh* 3: 304–5, *Ḥaqāyiq al-Akhhbār Nāshirī* (1266 AH events), *Seyyid Ali Mohammed dit le Báb* (Persian translation of A. L. M. Nicolas' history by 'Ali-Muḥammad Farih-vashi), Tehran, n.p., n.d. pp. 403, 407; Mirza Yahya Azal, *Mujmal Badī' dar Vaqāyī' Zuhūr-i Manī'* (supplement to Mirza Huseyn of Hamadan, *Tārīkh Jadīd or New History of Mīrzā 'Alī-Muḥammad the Báb* [actual title as published], (trans. E. G. Browne), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893, have indicated that it took place a day earlier. Perhaps more significantly, the British diplomat in Tabriz, Richard Stevens, who discusses the execution of the Bab in his 24 July 1850 report to Justin Sheil, the British ambassador in Tehran, marks the day of martyrdom of the Bab as 8 July 1850 (see Moojan Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1981, p. 78).
 - 4 Nabil, *Dawn-Breakers* 518.

An official of the Russian consulate, to whom I was related, showed me that same sketch on the very day it was drawn. It was such a faithful portrait of the Bab that I looked upon! No bullet had struck His forehead, His cheeks, or His lips. I gazed upon a smile which seemed to be still lingering upon His countenance. His body, however, had been severely mutilated. I could recognize the arms and head of His companion, who seemed to be holding Him in his embrace. As I gazed horror-struck upon that haunting picture, and saw how those noble traits had been disfigured, my heart sank within me. I turned away my face in anguish and, regaining my house, locked myself within my room. For three days and three nights, I could neither sleep nor eat, so overwhelmed was I with emotion. That short and tumultuous life, with all its sorrows, its turmoils, its banishments, and eventually the awe-inspiring martyrdom with which it had been crowned, seemed again to be re-enacted before my eyes. I tossed upon my bed, writhing in agony and pain.⁵

Nabil gives a useful outline of the events after the martyrdom of the Bab, which is summarized here to provide a frame of reference for the later discussion.⁶ According to Nabil, it was some days earlier that through his contacts in the government circles, Haji Sulayman Khan Tabrizi (son of Yahya Khan) – an ardent believer in the Bab – learned that the Prime Minister had issued orders for the execution of the Bab. Together with some close friends, he immediately left Tehran for the purpose of the Bab’s deliverance, arriving in Tabriz a day too late. He went directly to Bagh-Mishih, a suburb of Tabriz, the home of Haji Mirza Mihdi, the kalantar of Tabriz, one of his friends and confidants, who was a dervish belonging to a Sufi mystical community. Haji Sulayman Khan was ready to take immediate action but the kalantar, being a seasoned and wise officer, advised against a rash decision and suggested to him to wait in another house for the arrival that evening of Haji Allah-Yar, a well-known gang leader in Tabriz and feared by the generality of the people.

At the appointed hour, Haji Sulayman Khan met Haji Allah-Yar and several of his armed men. That very night, they set out for the location where the remains of the Bab were left and when the guards saw the approaching men, recognizing their determination and fearing for their own lives, they quickly withdrew and allowed Haji Allah-Yar and his men to take the precious remains. Later, apprehensive that their superiors would accuse them of dereliction of duty, the sentinels announced that wild beasts had consumed the remains, a view that found currency in majority of the Qajar court histories and some European reports, but was effectively refuted by Nicolas.⁷

The remains were taken to the silk factory owned by one of the Babis of Milan. Next day, it was laid in a specially constructed wooden case, and transferred then, according to Haji Sulayman Khan’s directions, to a place of safety. The latter immediately reported the matter to Baha’u’llah, who was in Tehran and who instructed Aqa Kalim to dispatch a special messenger to Tabriz for the purpose of transferring the bodies to the capital.

Nabil leaves the rest of the story untold, only suggesting that the sacred remains were taken to Tehran, first to Imamzadih Hasan, and from there to a secret location, which he strongly hints to be

5 Nabil, *Dawn-Breakers* 518.

6 Nabil, *Dawn-Breakers* 518–21.

7 The majority of Qajar court histories indicate that the remains of the Bab were left unguarded to be destroyed. However, the French diplomat/historian, Nicolas, cogently argues the inaccuracy of this statement (A. L. M. Nicolas, *Seyyed Ali-Muhammad dit le Bab* 378): ‘M. de Gobineau, in agreement with the authors of the *Nasikh at-Tavarikh*, of *Rawdat as-Safa*, of *Mir’at al-Buldan*, in a word with all the official historians, relates that after the execution the body of the Bab was thrown in a moat of the city and devoured by dogs. In reality it was not so, and we shall see why this news had been spread by the authorities of Tabriz (little eager to draw upon themselves a rebuke of the government for a favour dearly sold) and by the Babis, desirous to prevent any further investigation by the police. The most reliable testimony of the actual witnesses of the drama or of its actors do not leave me any doubt that the body of Sayyid Ali Muhammad was carried away by pious hands and, at last, after various incidents which I shall narrate, received a burial worthy of him.’

Imamzadih Shah ‘Abdu’l-‘Azim, just south of the city (imamzadihs are shrines where a descendant of one of the Shi‘i Imams is buried). He concludes his account by noting that through Baha’u’llah’s instructions, Aqa Jamal, a well-known believer of the period, searched and located that spot, but Nabil says: ‘That spot is, until now, unknown to the believers, nor can anyone conjecture where the remains will eventually be transferred.’⁸

Therefore on this important question of what befell the remains of the Bab and at what locations they were kept until their safe transference to the Holy Land, the *Dawn-Breakers* – generally very informative and reliable – provides little or no help. However, fortunately there are other accounts that provide a substantial insight into the sequence of events and they are the object of our study.

Four Historical Accounts:

In this article we will consult four accounts that fill the gaps in Nabil’s comprehensive history:

- (1) The first account is by Mirza Hasan Adib Taliqani, who was appointed by Baha’u’llah to the high office of the Hand of the Cause of God and who provides an outline of the events from the period of the martyrdom of the Bab until 1867 when two prominent believers, at the behest of Baha’u’llah, delivered the casket to Tehran. This account is significant by virtue of the fact that Mirza Hasan Adib, as a Hand of the Cause resident in Tehran, was well positioned to learn of the details.
- (2) The second account is by the renowned historian of the Baha’i Faith, the Hand of the Cause of God Mirza Asadu’llah Fadil Mazandarani, which appears in his *Tarikh Zuhur al-Haqq*.⁹ As it will be noted, this outline is congruent with Nabil Zarandi’s narrative of the same events.
- (3) The third account is by ‘Abdu’l-Husayn Avarih, who in his history of the Babi and Baha’i Faiths, *al-Kawakib al-Durriyyah*,¹⁰ records a detailed outline based on the recollections of the Hand of the Cause of God Haji Mulla ‘Ali-Akbar Shahmirzadi, whom Baha’u’llah had appointed and charged with the safekeeping of the remains of the Bab.
- (4) The fourth and final account is based on memories of Aqa Husayn ‘Ali Nur. It was in his house in Tehran that the remains of the Bab were kept for nearly five years.

To be sure, there are similarities and divergences among these four narratives, in comparison with one another and with Nabil’s narrative. Where they diverge, however, is only in minor details and otherwise they seem complementary. All four accounts appear to be extremely reliable giving a great insight into the sequence of events. It is most helpful to read all four together in order to fully comprehend the sequence of occurrences.

Taliqani’s account provides a perspective about the days immediately after the martyrdom of the Bab that are somewhat at variance with Nabil’s. For instance, Taliqani suggests that the remains were left in the middle of the city square, whereas Nabil insists they were taken outside the city and left by the moat. Taliqani’s information is consistent with the practice of public execution during the Qajar period when the remains of the offenders were often kept on public display as a lesson to others. Another divergence of Taliqani’s account from Nabil’s is that the former reports that upon the arrival of the remains in Tehran they were kept in Imamzadih Ma’sum, whereas Nabil suggests Imamzadih

8 Nabil *Dawn-Breakers* 522.

9 *Tārīkh Zuhūr al-Haqq* (for the purpose of this translation a manuscript copy in the possession of the translator was employed; this history is also published electronically by H-Bahai at: <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/arabic/vol4/2tzh/2tzh.htm>) 2: 501–3.

10 *Al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah*, 2 vols. Cairo: Sa’adah, 1923, vol. 1, pp. 368–71.

Hasan. It was kept there for some years, before being taken briefly to Masjid Masha'u'llah, then to the residence of Aqa Mirza Sayyid Hasan Vazir in Tehran, and then to the home of Aqa Husayn 'Ali Nur.

The second narrative by Fadil Mazandarani covers the same contour as Nabil's, but provides richer details, such as the exact names, dates and locations. Given that Fadil's history had benefited from a close consultation of Nabil's narrative, it can be surmised that he was using the latter's information to construct his outline, but filled in the details to make his account more accessible to the reader.

The third account by Avarih is particularly useful in understanding events surrounding the transference of the remains from Imamzadih Ma'sum to the Tehran residence of the aforementioned Vazir.

The final account is focused very much on the period from 1890 to 1895 when the remains of the Bab were kept in the Nur's house in Tehran and should be considered as a stand-alone document.

To sum up, if one were to construct a time line for the journey of the remains of the Bab, it would be as follows:

July 1850	Martyrdom and rescue of the remains
Summer 1850–67	Imamzadih Ma'sum (south of Tehran, also known as the Shrine of Ibn Babuyyih)
1867 (a few days)	Masjid Masha'u'llah (south of Tehran)
1867–8 (14 months)	Residence of Aqa Mirza Sayyid Hasan Vazir (in Tehran)
1868–90	Imamzadih Zayd (near Tehran)
1890–5	Residence of Aqa Husayn 'Ali Nur (in Tehran)
1895–9	House of Muhammad Karim 'Attar (in Tehran)
1899	Transported by way of Tehran, Isfahan, Kirmanshah, Baghdad, Damascus and Beirut, and then by sea to 'Akka
31 Jan. 1899–March 1909	House of 'Abdu'llah Pasha (in 'Akka)
21 March 1909	Shrine of the Bab (in Haifa)

1. Taliqani's Account

Mirza Hasan Adib Taliqani's account covers the period of the martyrdom of the Bab until the time when Jamal Burujirdi and the Hand of the Cause Haji 'Ali-Akbar Shahmirzadi, known as Haji Akhund, delivered the casket to Tehran. We are fortunate that his fellow Hand, Mirza Asadu'llah Fadil Mazandarandi, preserved this narrative in his monumental history of the Baha'i movement,

Tarikh Zuhur al-Haqq (The History of the Manifestation of Truth).¹¹ The date of composition of this account is given by Taliqani as Muharram 1326¹² AH (February 1908):

The investigations carried out by this ephemeral servant about the sacred remains of His Holiness the Primal Point [the Bab] – may my spirit be a sacrifice unto his sanctified resting place – has revealed that after his martyrdom, the holy remains of the Bab and Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali were left abandoned in the same city square [where the execution had taken place]. This afforded the citizens the opportunity to insult and heap abuse on the remains and the hoodlums were instructed to prevent its burial.

At that time, Aqa Siyyid Ibrahim Khalil and Dhabih, who numbered among the Bab’s close companions and secretaries, together with a number of other believers, had taken refuge in a textile factory owned by Haji Ahmad Milani. They were engaged in planning various ways to rescue the sacred remains, or in the event of failure to do so, at least to learn of their whereabouts.

They decided to dispatch to the city square two Milani believers disguised as beggars and lunatics to watch over the situation. Since people tend to avoid such madmen, they were able to spend the night at the same location and in fact another believer, under the disguise of charity, was appointed to occasionally bring them food and water. They remained in the square for the first and the second days, during which time rank upon rank of the public came to see the remains. Some shed tears of remorse while others heaped all manner of abuse.

On the third day, orders were issued for the remains to be unceremoniously thrown by the city’s moat. That day the Russian consul had remarked to the local authorities: ‘In our country it is customary that when a captive survives an execution attempt, he is then pardoned and freed. Therefore, the second attempt at executing this personage [the Bab] was illegitimate. I wish to visit his remains.’

That afternoon the consul, accompanied by an artist, went by the moat where the artist made a pen-portrait of the Bab. The consul then offered a gratuity to the soldiers to bury the two corpses. The officers had moved some of the earth by the moat, buried the two bodies, and had departed.

That night Haji Sulayman Khan led a group of men, including the kalantar [and] Haji Allah-Yar, to that location. Allah-Yar stood watch to respond to opposition, while Haji Sulayman Khan, assisted by others, recovered the remains and placed them in a bag. Thereupon they left post-haste and were not followed.

After journeying for a while, Haji Allah-Yar was sent home and the rest set out towards the textile factory of Haji Ahmad Milani where Aqa Sayyid Ibrahim was awaiting their arrival. Siyyid said to them, ‘The dawn is well nigh here and I am too impatient to observe caution. We must conceal the remains immediately.’ A casket that was about a metre long was ready. With his own hands, Haji Sulayman Khan wrapped the sack containing the remains in a cloth and placed it inside the casket. From what has been learned, apparently one of the hands of Mirza Muhammad-‘Ali [Anis] was separated from his body. Haji Sulayman Khan placed a bouquet of flowers commonly found in the homes of Tabrizis next to the sanctified countenance of the Bab. They quickly sealed the casket and placed it in the wall cavity, covering it with mortar.

11 *Tarikh Zuhur al-Haqq* (for the purpose of this translation a manuscript copy in the possession of the translator was employed; this history is also published electronically by H-Bahai at: <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/arabic/vol3/tzh6/tzh6.htm>) 6: 490–92.

12 The actual date is hard to read and may be Muharram 1316.

After a few days, a tablet was received from the Ancient Beauty [Baha'u'llah] addressed to Aqa Siyyid Ibrahim, the text of which is presently extant. This tablet instructed the transfer of the remains to Tehran. The believers removed the casket from its hiding place, wrapped it in cotton and disguised it as merchandise ready for dispatch to Tehran. Haji Sulayman Khan accompanied the remains to the capital pretending to be an importer of goods from Europe.

When they arrived in Tehran, the Ancient Beauty [Baha'u'llah] was in Shimran. The believers attained his presence and reported what had transpired. Baha'u'llah dispatched Mirza Husayn Isfahani with specific instructions to take delivery of the casket. Obedient to his mandate, Mirza [Husayn] took the casket to Imamzadih Ma'sum which was located in middle of the desert [south of Tehran]. He placed the casket in an abandoned building, raised a wall in front of it, and undertook minor repairs of the surrounding walls.

No believer, man or woman, was aware of this secret, except that Baha'u'llah had informed the honoured Maryam.¹³ A few years passed in this fashion during which the honoured Maryam had disclosed the matter to her nurse-maid. Later, others learned of this secret and soon the number of pilgrims arriving at the Imamzadih Ma'sum grew notably, providing it with considerable income. In no time it became the meeting place for the friends and strangers. Gradually much talk was taking place about this matter, which allowed many to learn of this well-guarded secret.

About then, another tablet was received from the Ancient Beauty instructing the immediate and secret removal of the holy casket to another location. After consultation, the believers decided to take the sacred trust to the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-'Azim and hide it in one of the abandoned buildings in that region. In the middle of night, Hasan Aqa and his brother went to Imamzadih Ma'sum, opened up the wall, removed the casket and made their way towards the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-'Azim, to a house to which they had previously sent their wives on the pretext of a pilgrimage.

Aqa Jamal [Buruji] and the honoured 'Ali-Akbar [Hand of the Cause Haji Akhund] came in the morning to pay homage to the sacred trust. Everyone was proposing different thoughts and suggestions. Eventually unanimity was attained by deciding to hide the sanctified consignment in one of the rooms of the Masjid Masha'u'llah, on the edge of the desert. They opened the casket, wrapped the bag in a silk cloth and since the original box was fragile, built another box of the same size from plane-tree timber, and placed the first box inside the new one.

At night, they transferred the casket to the Masjid Masha'u'llah and placed it in one of the smaller rooms and, using the discarded bricks, raised a new wall in front of the precious trust. They returned to the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-'Azim and that afternoon departed for Tehran. On the way, once more they came by the Masjid and one of the men went inside to pay his respects when he noticed that some of the bricks on the newly erected wall had been tampered with. Greatly perplexed by the turn of events, they decided to remove the casket and take it with them to Tehran.

When they reached the capital, they became anxious thinking that the officers could discover the true identity of their cargo through inspection at the city-gate. They thought of leaving the wooden box temporarily by a moat while they devised a plan, when suddenly and unexpectedly a severe thunderstorm began. Immediately everyone in the vicinity rushed towards the gate and the honoured 'Ali-Akbar, who had the casket in front of him on his mount, was caught in their midst and was hurried through the gates without anyone inquiring of his load. They proceeded to the home of the late Aqa Mirza Siyyid Hasan Vazir, which

13 A devoted cousin of Baha'u'llah, who was also a sister of Mahd-'Uliya, Baha'u'llah's second wife. Maryam lived in Tehran.

they considered safe, and on the pretence of depositing a trust, hid the casket in the basement [with Haji ‘Ali-Akbar Akhund remaining in the house for the next 14 months].

After some time, once more the news of the event became widely known among the believers. No matter how they tried to dissuade the friends from visiting that location, it had no effect. Finally, the late Haji Amin wrote to Baha’u’llah about the situation and in response a tablet was revealed instructing him that without the least hesitation and with great urgency he should undertake the care and protection of the sacred casket and to keep the matter strictly confidential.

This matter was kept secret until the passing of Haji Amin.¹⁴ At that time, the honoured Mirza Asadu’llah Isfahani was appointed to receive the casket and he moved it to the home of Aqa Husayn ‘Ali Isfahani at Sar Qabr Aqa district. In the year 1314 AH [1896 AD], he returned and retrieved the sacred trust which eventually he transferred to Haifa at ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s behest. The Master is presently raising an edifice for this purpose, which soon will be completed and will be the point of adoration of the entire world.

2. Mazandarani’s Account

The Hand of the Cause of God Mirza Asadu’llah Fadil Mazandarani provides the following account, which appears in his *Tarikh Zuhur al-Haqq*.¹⁵ As the reader will note, this outline is congruent with Nabil Zarandi’s narrative of the same events:

Before the instructions of Mirza Taqi Khan, [the prime minister], for the martyrdom of the Primal Point reached Tabriz, [Haji] Sulayman Khan, son of Yahya Khan Tabrizi, who ranked among the noblemen of the nation and was a devotee of the Bab, learned of this decision. In utmost haste and accompanied by several other Babis, he left Tehran for Adharbayjan with the object of achieving the deliverance of the Bab from the clutches of the authorities and the guardsmen. However, when he arrived in Tabriz, two days had already passed from the martyrdom of the Wronged One [the Bab] and overwhelmed with grief and consternation, Sulayman Khan inquired of the circumstances from a number of the prominent Babis of that province. In the course of their consultation, they resolved that unmindful of the consequences, they would rescue the remains of the Bab from the edge of the moat where they were left with a band of soldiers who stood guard over them.

Subsequently, Sulayman Khan apprized Haji Mirza Mihdi, the kalantar of Tabriz, who was a righteous man belonging to a Sufi mystical order, of this secret decision and sought his assistance. The kalantar spoke with great sympathy and compassion, and summoned a certain Haji Allah-Yar, who was one of the gang-leaders and fearless rogues of Tabriz, and instructed him to accompany the Babis that night on this mission.

In the middle of night, which corresponded to the second evening since the martyrdom – and for a complete day and night the remains, unclad and unprotected, had been left exposed to the elements – the aforementioned group, which included Haji Allah-Yar, Sulayman Khan, Haji Muhammad-Taqi Milani, Husayn Milani and some others, went by the moat. They were all properly armed. They retrieved the abandoned remains, wrapped them in an ‘*abā* [cloak], placed it over their shoulders and quickly left the site.

14 Shoghi Effendi (*God Passes By* 274) writes: ‘Assisted by another believer, Hájí Sháh Muḥammad [i-Manshādī] buried the casket beneath the floor of the inner sanctuary of the Shrine of Imám-Zádih Zayd, where it lay undetected until Mirzá Asadu’lláh-i-Isfáhání was informed of its exact location through a chart forwarded to him by Bahá’u’lláh.’

15 *Tārīkh Zuhūr al-Haqq* 2: 501–3.

With great haste, they proceeded to the silk factory of the above-mentioned Haji Muhammad Taqi [one of the Babis of Milan] and concealed their treasured trust in that location. Sulayman Khan and Haji Muhammad Taqi gifted a sum of money to Haji Allah-Yar for his services and rested that night with ease. Next day, they prepared a casket in the fashion of a wooden case used by merchants, wrapped their precious cargo in white silk and placed it in that container and, in accordance with Sulayman Khan's direction, transferred it to a place of safety. Sulayman Khan also informed Baha'u'llah of what had transpired and awaited his instructions.

That night after the remains were taken to the silk factory, the aforementioned Husayn Milani proceeded post-haste to Milan and washed the blood-soaked 'abā in the pool of Haji Muhammad-Taqi's home and for some time the Babis were grief-stricken and bitterly sobbed over the martyrdom. When the letter of Sulayman Khan reached the presence of Baha'u'llah in Tehran, he instructed the honoured Aqa Mirza Musa Kalim to select an able, trustworthy and brave messenger and to dispatch him forthwith to Tabriz.

At the time when the Primal Point was being conducted under guard to Adharbayjan and had reached the vicinity of the village of 'Abdu'l-'Azim, out of his love for Tehran, he had revealed a visitation tablet for the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-'Azim in the course of which he had unambiguously expressed his wish to be entombed in that location.¹⁶ In light of this, it was decided to transfer the casket to Tehran. Hasan Aqa Tafrishi, who was among the devoted believers and served as the second-in-command in the custom office of Adharbayjan, was enlisted for this important task. Despite all the difficulties and obstacles in conducting shipments of merchandise across the borders and within the country, and the strict regulations of the authorities trying to prevent thievery and larceny at the custom offices, and mindless of all the dangers in conducting such a mission, Hasan Aqa succeeded in safely transferring the casket to the Shrine of Imamzadih Hasan in the vicinity of Tehran. He then informed Baha'u'llah who immediately dispatched Aqa Mirza Musa Kalim and Aqa Mulla 'Abdu'l-Karim [Qazvini], known as Mirza Ahmad Katib, to receive the casket and with utmost caution and vigilance securely deposit it at the Shrine of Ibn Babuyyih, near the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-'Azim. Secretly they completed this important charge and no one was aware of its details.

During the time of Baha'u'llah's stay in Edirne [Adrianople], about the year 1283 AH [1866 AD], Aqa Mirza Munir Kashani, was informed of the location of the burial site by the Shrine of Ibn Babuyyih, but despite his best efforts was unable to find the exact location. However, shortly thereafter, in accordance with the instructions of Baha'u'llah, Aqa Jamal Burujirdi proceeded to the same location and found the burial spot.

For their necessary protection, the remains were transferred from one place to another in Tehran and during this long period, their location was kept a well-guarded secret. At last, in the year 1317 AH [1899 AD], they were moved from Iran to Palestine and the Holy Land and eventually were laid to rest on Mount Carmel, in a magnificent and splendid shrine, which is the focus of attention of the friends and others.

16 According to Nabil, 'This decision was prompted by the wish the Báb Himself had expressed in the "Ziyárat-i-Sháh-'Abdu'l-'Azim," a Tablet He had revealed while in the neighbourhood of that shrine and which He delivered to a certain Mírzá Sulaymán-i-Khaṭīb, who was instructed by Him to proceed together with a number of believers to that spot and to chant it within its precincts. "Well is it with you," the Báb addressed the buried saint in words such as these, in the concluding passages of that Tablet, "to have found your resting-place in Rayy, under the shadow of My Beloved. Would that I might be entombed within the precincts of that holy ground!"' *Dawn-Breakers* 520-1.

3. Avarih's Account

'Abdu'l-Husayn Avarih in his history of the Babi and Baha'i Faiths, *al-Kawakib al-Durriyyah*,¹⁷ records the following outline based on the recollections of the Hand of the Cause of God Haji Mulla 'Ali-Akbar Shahmirzadi, whom Baha'u'llah had appointed and charged with the safekeeping of the remains of the Bab. Avarih states that after Haji Sulayman Khan rescued the remains of the twin martyrs from Tabriz, he safeguarded them in his own house in the Sar-Chashmih district of Tehran. After some time, the casket was taken to the Shrine of Imamzadih Ma'sum, where it remained concealed until 1867. Avarih further indicates that the reason for keeping the location of the Bab's remains a secret were twofold: (a) the authorities were intent on the discovery and destruction of the remains, therefore their whereabouts had to be kept from the authorities' spies; and (b) the believers were intent on a pilgrimage to these remains and were not very discreet in their actions.

In the year [12]84 AH [1867], Baha'u'llah revealed a tablet addressed jointly to the Hand of the Cause of God Haji Mulla 'Ali-Akbar Shahmirzadi and Aqa Jamal Burujirdi, the renowned teacher of the time. Therein instructions were given for them to remove the remains of the Bab from Imamzadih Ma'sum to another location. Those two believers immediately set out to the said location and without any assistance dismantled the wall, which housed the precious casket. They quickly carried the casket and left for the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-'Azim. Apparently, at the time there was no custodian present at the Imamzadih Ma'sum, or perhaps there was a custodian and he was not very strict. Another possibility is that usually such custodians can be approached with a little bribe. At any rate, they placed the holy casket on a mule and travelled to the vicinity of the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-'Azim. At first their search did not identify a safe location. Consequently, they continued with their journey towards Chishmih-'Ali.

On their way they came across an abandoned building known as Mas'jid Masha'u'llah. They concluded that this location was suitable for their purpose and entered the mosque at night-time and deposited the holy casket. Prior to hiding the casket, they opened its cover and noticed that the treasured remains of the Bab were wrapped in cotton cloth used for shrouding the dead. They also discovered that a flower bouquet had been placed on the Bab's chest, which had been sprayed with bullets. The flowers were now dry and appeared to have been there for years. The assumption of this author [Avarih] is that it was Haji Sulayman Khan who had placed the flowers [in the casket] years earlier.

They removed the flowers and wrapped the sacred remains in silk, which earlier had been prepared for this purpose. Once again they placed the sanctified bodies in the casket and placed the casket under an arch-wall standing next to a near-collapsed wall. They quickly repaired the vicinity of the arch with similar bricks. During this construction activity one of the Babis resident in the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-'Azim assisted in supplying them with mortar.

Afterwards the two left for the village of Quch-Athar, where they remained until the afternoon of the following day. On the way back to Tehran, upon reaching the junction at Chishmih-'Ali, they became worried and concerned about the safety of the casket and returned to the mosque to ensure that their trust had remained undisturbed. This concern was well-founded as a number of farmers had seen the two men during the evening hours and following their departure had dismantled the wall and broken into the casket. However the holy remains had not been touched. The present author [Avarih] believes that the farmers had not recognized the identity of the bodies because if they had, they could have disturbed or abused the sanctified remains which may in turn have stirred up trouble in that precinct. The farmers must have thought the casket contained treasures stolen from another location and when they found that it contained just bones and flesh, they left it alone.

17 1: 368-71.

Haji Akhund [Shahmirzadi] has explained, ‘Once we decided to return to the mosque, Aqa Jamal accelerated at once because he had a faster mule. I reached our destination an hour later. When I came upon the mosque, I found him in a state of bewilderment. I asked what had caused him such anguish, and he replied that the wall had been damaged and the casket broken into. I was similarly distressed and rushed towards the wall. As I moved the casket, I noticed that its weight had not changed. I informed Aqa Jamal that the remains were still intact. He was elated and we lifted the broken casket onto his mule and accompanied it towards Tehran. Prior to arrival at the city-gate, we were apprehensive as the gatekeepers could inspect our load. If the true identity of the contents were discovered, not only the holy remains, but also our lives would be at peril.

At this time an astonishing incident occurred. A short time before our arrival at the city-gate, a rainstorm had begun and it quickly developed into a thunderstorm. Severe gusts of wind and rain forced all travellers from the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-‘Azim to rush forward towards the gate. This enabled us to use the crowd as a cover and take the casket safely through the gate and into the city to the house of Aqa Mirza Hasan Vazir.’

Haji Mulla ‘Ali-Akbar rented that house and stayed there for 14 months solely to protect that casket. In a short time, however, unfortunately the believers learned of this secret and arrived from far and wide to pay their respects. As hard as he tried, Haji Akhund was unable to keep this matter concealed. Some Baha’is even offered to purchase the house and turn it into a permanent Shrine of the Bab! As this was not possible and could provoke the authorities, the Hands [of the Cause of God] wrote a supplication to Baha’u’llah, seeking his guidance. Soon a response was received and they followed the instructions therein.

4. Memoirs of Aqa Husayn ‘Ali Nur

Aqa Husayn ‘Ali’s father was Aqa ‘Ali, a deeply religious Muslim who would observe his religious obligations to the point of fanaticism. When Aqa ‘Ali first heard of the Baha’i Faith, he decided to investigate its veracity, promising himself that should he find it to be the truth, he would walk to the presence of its author. Some time passed and one night he dreamt of Baha’u’llah and the Bab. Through this vision, he was confirmed in his belief and ecstatically began his journey to ‘Akka. With utmost difficulty, he reached his destination, only to be told, after a prolonged search, that Baha’u’llah was incarcerated in the city’s prison and all were barred from meeting with him. Desperate to see Baha’u’llah, Aqa ‘Ali ascended a nearby hill and from its top was able to briefly gaze on the face of Baha’u’llah who waved at him from the window of his prison cell. Thrilled with this blessing, Aqa ‘Ali wrote to Baha’u’llah and was honoured with a response in which the surname ‘Nur’ (light) was bestowed upon him. Aqa ‘Ali Nur returned to his native town of Isfahan and commenced teaching the Baha’i Faith.¹⁸

Aqa Husayn ‘Ali was born in 1861 in Isfahan. When he was 18 years old, two prominent and wealthy Baha’i merchants of the city, Mirza Hasan and Mirza Husayn, surnamed the King of Martyrs and the Beloved of Martyrs, were wrongfully accused, seized and after considerable tortures, put to death. This event took place at the instigation of the leading ‘ulama and with the knowledge and collusion of the governor, Zillu’s-Sultan.¹⁹ During the evening following these martyrdoms, Husayn ‘Ali and his older brother, Hasan ‘Ali, together with three other believers who served the King of Martyrs, secretly left the city and through unfrequented routes and after enduring great hardships eventually reached Tehran.

18 ‘Izzatu’llah Nur, *Khāṭirāt-i Muhājirī az Isfahān dar Zamān-i Sulṭānu’l-Shuhadā va Mahbūbu’sh-Shuhadā*, Tehran: Mu’assisih Matbu’at Amri, 128 BE/1971, pp. 79–80.

19 For details see H. M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá’is in the Time of Bahá’u’lláh*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1985, pp. 33–51.

Gradually, they were able to re-establish themselves in the capital where Husayn ‘Ali became a successful merchant, his seed-money having been granted by Baha’u’llah. He bought a parcel of land on the south side of Bagh Firdaws (presently a women’s hospital), next to the Bazar Madar-Aqa, where he built a nine-room house. It was in this house that for four years the remains of the Bab were kept.²⁰

Some time later, Aqa Husayn ‘Ali committed to paper his fascinating memories of the King and the Beloved of Martyrs and the events leading to their slaying, and he included a chapter on the concealment of the remains of the Bab in his house in Tehran.²¹

About the year 1269 AHS [1890], Mirza Asadu’llah Isfahani and his wife arrived in Tehran from Isfahan and came to the residence of this servant, which was located south of the present Bagh Firdaws. After a few days, he mentioned, ‘We intend to continue our journey to the Holy Land, but certain objects have been left in our trust which we have placed in a box and we now wish to leave them in your care. After our return, we will come and retrieve our trust, but you must exert your utmost to ensure the protection and safekeeping of these items.’

I accepted this charge and the following day, he and his wife returned to our house carrying a wooden box. With utmost reverence, they placed the box in the room near the courtyard and asked that the room be locked and no one be permitted inside until their return the subsequent day. They took the key with them.

The next day Aqa Mirza Asadu’llah and his wife returned and this time they brought with them an iron container (known as Hishtar-khun Sanduq), which was lined with iron sheets from both outside and inside. They opened the room and the two of them entered and closed the curtains so carefully that nothing could be seen from outside and we had no idea what they were doing within the room.

They stayed inside for four hours. Finally, they emerged from the room and, summoning me forward, stated, ‘This is the trust that we would like to leave in your charge.’ I looked inside and noticed that the new iron container was locked and sealed, and placed in the centre of the room. A strong aroma of attar and musk was emanating from the container and perfuming the air. We left the container in the large, built-in pantry of the room and later, one of the Baha’i youth, who was a builder, came and brick-walled the front of the pantry.

Of course, caring for an entrusted object is a very difficult task, particularly when one believes it to be a box of the writings of the Bab and Baha’u’llah. As such, after Aqa Mirza Asadu’llah’s departure, I was protecting that trust with my own life. Even at nights, I would stand guard in the room till morning and be watchful. In fact, early on, for many nights I would sleep in that room, but after a while refrained from doing so.

It went thus for two years, until once more the people of rancour and enmity in Tehran raised the standard of sedition and some of the believers, including Ibn-i Abhar, Haji Amin and Haji Mulla ‘Ali-Akbar were arrested. News was spreading throughout the city that the homes of Baha’is were being targeted for pillage and plunder. This rumour greatly disturbed me and I worried that the enemies may rush our home and steal the trust. Therefore, we convened a family consultation and it was decided to hide the entrusted container more securely.

20 ‘Abdu’l-Husayn Avari, *al-Kawākib al-Durriyah*, 2: 49, states, ‘Aqa Husayn ‘Ali was among the devoted Baha’is who because of persecutions in Isfahan had taken refuge in Tehran and was dwelling in a neighbourhood known as Sar Qabr Aqa. It was in this house that for some six months the remains of the Primal Point were kept. Presently the aforementioned believer, in old age and with various infirmities, including blindness, lives in the same house.’

21 This book considerably supplements A. H. Ishraq-Khavari’s *Nūrayn-i Nayyirayn* about the two martyrs of Isfahan and contains many tablets of Baha’u’llah and ‘Abdu’l-Baha. It was published through the efforts of Aqa Husayn ‘Ali’s son, Colonel ‘Izzatu’llah Nūr. This excerpt is from pages 68–75 of this book.

Quickly we moved the container from the pantry on the western side of the house to a location on the eastern side, where we removed a portion of one of the thick walls and vertically inserted the container in the cavity. That night, we raised a wall in front of the cavity and covered it with plaster, which was heated all night by a fire so by the morning it was completely dry and looked identical to the other portions of the room.

That very day, I wrote to Mirza Asadu'llah Isfahani, stating, 'Great uproar reigns throughout Tehran and rogues and ruffians are determined to harm and persecute this innocent community [i.e. Baha'is], and may even succeed in pillaging the homes of believers. Since safekeeping a trust is one of the important ordinances enjoined upon the people of Baha, until now I have protected your trust with my life. However, now there is the possibility that hoodlums may rush our house and, God forbid, harm your trust. Therefore, at your earliest, kindly arrange for your return to Tehran to retrieve this trust.'

I sent the above letter and some time later received a reply from Mirza Asadu'llah which stated that, at an opportune time, he would acquaint the Master ['Abdu'l-Baha] with the situation and after receiving his permission, would come to Tehran to regain the entrusted container.

A year later, Aqa Mirza Asadu'llah came to Tehran, arrived at our house and asked for the container. We removed it from its hiding place inside the walls and returned it to him. After carefully inspecting it, he moved it to another location, which apparently was the home of Aqa Muhammad Karim 'Attar.²²

Six months had passed when one day the postman brought a letter from Kirmanshah. Upon examining it, I noticed that it was from Aqa Mirza Asadu'llah. I quickly opened it and read that he had expressed much appreciation and gratitude for the safekeeping of the trust that had been left in my charge for nearly four years. He had further written, 'However, your efforts in protecting this trust are not without their due reward. Indeed, they have won a prize such that even your progeny, generation after generation, will pride themselves upon your service. Your house will forever be honoured that at one time it was the repository of such a sacred trust.' At last, he revealed, 'Know that this trust was none other than the sanctified remains of the Wronged of the World, the Primal Point, may my soul be a ransom for his martyrdom. Know the worth of this charge as your house will one day be the site of pilgrimage of millions of people and indeed it will be regarded as one of the Faith's holy sites.'

... On reading this letter, immediately the friends were invited to our house and the above letter was read for them. It was a majestic feast that rarely one similar to it had been seen before. All the friends and lovers of that Manifestation of Divinity perfumed their nostrils with the musk of the spot where the sacred remains had been deposited and prostrating themselves on that threshold, used its dust as the kohl of their eyes. It was a feast conducted in the utmost magnificence and splendour. The lovers of that Beloved of the World composed enchanting odes and sang enthralling songs. From that day, that spot was designated as one of the Faith's holy sites. In accordance with 'Abdu'l-Baha's wish, a picture of the house and that room was taken and sent to the Holy Land.

22 According to Shoghi Effendi (*God Passes By* 274): Mirza Asadu'llah first 'removed the remains to his own house in Tihrán, after which they were deposited in several other localities such as the house of Husayn-i-'Aliy-i-Isfahání and that of Muhammad-Karim-i-'Attár, where they remained hidden until the year 1316 AH (1899), when, in pursuance of directions issued by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, this same Mírzá Asadu'lláh, together with a number of other believers, transported them by way of Isfahán, Kirmánsháh, Baghdád and Damascus, to Beirut and thence by sea to 'Akká, arriving at their destination on the 19th of the month of Ramadán 1316 A.H. (January 31, 1899), fifty lunar years after the Báb's execution in Tabriz.' *Al-Kawākib al-Durrīya* 2: 49 states that while in Tehran, the remains had been kept in the home of Aqa Muhammad-Karim 'Attar, Imamzadih Hamzih and for six months in the residence of Aqa Husayn 'Ali Isfahani.

EFFORTS TO PRESERVE THE REMAINS OF THE BAB

Some time later, when I was privileged to be in the presence of the Master on pilgrimage, one afternoon, along with a group of believers I was invited to the home of Mirza Asadu'llah. Once more, Mirza Asadu'llah reiterated, 'Protect that house since it is one of the Baha'i holy sites!'²³

23 In listing the Baha'i properties acquired in Iran, Shoghi Effendi (*God Passes By* 338) recorded, 'Other acquisitions that have greatly extended the range of Bahá'í endowments in that country include . . . the house owned by Mírzá Husayn-'Alíy-i-Núr, where the Báb's remains had been concealed.'

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The Holy Land 1918–1922: Some Historical Letters

The following are four letters written from the Holy Land in the period 1918–22. The first three deal with the efforts that were made to save 'Abdu'l-Baha at the end of World War I, when his life was threatened by Jamal Pasha, the Ottoman military commander of Palestine.¹ The last letter relates to the period immediately after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha and records Lady Blomfield's impression of being in Haifa during the opening days of Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship. These letters were found among Lady Blomfield's papers (held in the Archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom) as copies of the original letters and are reproduced exactly as they exist in the archives, including all omitted passages marked '...'

Copy of letter from Captain W. Tudor Pole² addressed to Ethel J. Rosenberg,³ received Nov. 4th, 1918:

My dear E.J.R.

Events in the last few weeks have been so extraordinary that there has not been time to follow out all the consequences in detail and unfortunately I have no time to write at length at present. This is simply a short line to confirm my cablegram to the effect that Abdul Baha is extraordinarily well and has suffered very little during the past year or nine months. Before that period, however, the harvests were bad and the locust's trouble caused some starvation. There is no immediate shortage of food now and I have sent up a sum of £600 for his use.

I am due in Haifa on the 27th or 28th Oct. and then shall be in a position to write in detail. Meanwhile I should like you and all those who took the trouble to act on my suggestion last February to know that the result of that work has proved invaluable. As a consequence of the Foreign Office intervention and of my personal interviews with the Chief Administrator⁴ and the Chief Political Officer,⁵ everything was made easy for Abdul Baha and his family when we occupied Haifa and his house property was protected and he was given facilities to receive and send letters through this Department. A large number of cables were sent over and the letters that accumulated at Port Said are gradually being delivered in Haifa. Next week I expect to receive further news from him and meanwhile I have sent to Haifa by an Officer from my Department letters and everything needed by him. Will you make this known and thank Mrs. Stannard⁶ for her Cable gram to which I replied yesterday and tell her I will write to her as soon as possible.

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- 1 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, pp. 304, 317; H. M. Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, London: George Ronald, 1971, pp. 412–14, 425–30; for more details on this episode, see Roderic Maude and Derwent Maude, *The Servant, the General and Armageddon*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1998.
 - 2 An early British Baha'i (d. 1968) who was instrumental in warding off the danger that threatened 'Abdu'l-Baha at the end of World War I. He later developed his interest in esoteric matters and became involved in the development of Glastonbury through the setting up of the Chalice Well Trust; see P. Benham, *The Avalonians*, Glastonbury: Gothic Image, 1993.
 - 3 Early British Baha'i – see Robert Weinberg, *Ethel Jenner Rosenberg: The Life and Times of England's Outstanding Bahá'í Pioneer Woman*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1995.
 - 4 Major-General Sir Arthur Money (1866–1951), see Moojan Momen, *Bábi and Bahá'í Religions*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1981, pp. 341, 343–44, 513.
 - 5 General Clayton (1875–1929), see Momen, *Bábi and Bahá'í Religions* 334–37, 497.
 - 6 Early British Baha'i who spent most of her Baha'i life outside Britain, in Egypt, India and Switzerland.

THE HOLY LAND 1918–1922: SOME HISTORICAL LETTERS

The horizon is clearing and by the time you get this I hope that the end may be in sight.

I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

(signed) W. Tudor Pole

C.E.T.A. 2nd Echelon, G.H.Q.

Cairo, 8th Oct., 1918

MEMORANDUM from Maj. W.T.P.

I strongly advise the friends in the West to combine in sending a Memorandum both to General Allenby (General Sir E. H. H. Allenby, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., Commander-in-Chief, E.E.F.)⁷ and to General Sir Arthur Money, K.C.B., C.S.I., etc., Chief Administrator, Jerusalem, expressing gratitude for the courteous consideration shown to Abdul Baha Abbas and his friends since the British occupation, and at the same time a Memorandum should be sent to the Rt. Hon. A. J. Balfour, O.M., M.P.,⁸ Foreign Office, London, who was responsible for instructing the Military Authorities out here to safeguard Abdul Baha and to give him full protection. Copies of these Memoranda might be sent to the Foreign Office officials in Washington, and also through the Master himself.

(signed) W.T.P. [Tudor Pole]

Copied by E.J.R. [Rosenberg] March 20th 1919

W.T.P. also says: – Any literature in English or French that can be spared should also be despatched direct to Shoghi Rabbany, c/o H.E. Abdul Baha Abbas, Haifa, Syria, who is forming a small lending library for the use of many people out here who wish to understand what this movement stands for.

The news received from friends in India and Persia is satisfactory, where Bahais are increasing very rapidly in numbers under the new political and social conditions now developing in those countries. Friends throughout the near and middle East look to friends in England and America to show by their example a united and harmonious front, so that the news of the Movement may spread without the danger of sectarian or other differences springing up.

I am happy to be able to report that the health of the Master is good: that he is receiving every consideration from the Authorities: that he is taking part in a quiet way in the reconstructive and regenerative work in Palestine: that he is cheerful about the future: that he is about to call certain friends to Haifa from various parts of the world and that there is no cause for anxiety regarding his future welfare under British protection.

7 British General, Commander-in-Chief of Egyptian Expeditionary Force (1866–1936); see Maude and Maude, *The Servant, the General and Armageddon*; Momen, *Bábi and Bahá'í Religions* 332, 340–43, 491.

8 British Foreign Minister (1848–1930).

THE HOLY LAND 1918–1922: SOME HISTORICAL LETTERS

Letter from Major W. Tudor Pole to E. J. Rosenberg:

Cairo, Nov. 29th, 1918

Dear Miss Rosenberg,

Your letters of the 8th, 22nd Oct. and 7th Nov. all reached me on my return from Haifa yesterday. I am passing on your letter to the Master, and he should receive it next week. I have written a full account of my visit to my people in Ireland, Rock Cottage, Port Stewart Derry, and as it is impossible to copy this out in full, I have asked my sister to make a copy for all of you in London to see and to keep. I am pleased to report that I found Abdul Baha both well and vigorous and quite cheerful, and looking forward to the possibility of visiting Egypt in January. His daughter Monever was in Beyrout, and I was unable to see the other members of his household, who were away. I found the Master at Acre, and spent some days with him before going to stay a while in his house on Mt. Carmel. His grandson and Mr. Sohrab were very kind, and did every thing possible to make me feel at home. I have made all the necessary arrangements, military and governmental, for the comfort and security of the Master and his household, and you can advise all concerned, both in England and America, that there is no danger of the Persian Colony in Palestine running short of provisions this winter, or of receiving adequate protection. I am arranging for Abdul Baha to visit Jerusalem as the military Governor's guest (!), and hope to see him again before the year is out.

... I have unfortunately mislaid Lady Blomfield's address, also Mrs. Cropper's,⁹ and have therefore relied on the cables and letters sent to you and Mrs. Stannard being shared by all interested.

I hope your brother is quite fit again, and that you are both much better. I shall take great pleasure in coming to see you, as soon as I am able to secure leave, which at present, unfortunately, is impossible. I am too rushed at the moment to write more, but will do so directly the way clears.

Yours very sincerely,

(signed) W. Tudor Pole.

Hotel Grimaldi,
Nice,
Alpes Maritimes,
France.

21st June 1922

Dear Mirza Dawud,¹⁰

... What a wonderful time it was in Haifa! Important Bahais came from every part of the world, bringing messages of steadfastness and loyalty from their various Spiritual Assemblies. Letters and telegrams poured in to an enormous extent! Shoghi Effendi could not answer each one separately of course, but his general letters have given great satisfaction, and called forth the greatest devotion to the wonderful young Guardian of the Cause. Middle-aged men of experiences and intellect, such as

⁹ Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper, an American who was the first Baha'i in Britain.

¹⁰ A Persian Baha'i of Jewish extraction who moved to Britain and was an active member of the British Baha'i community for a number of years.

THE HOLY LAND 1918–1922: SOME HISTORICAL LETTERS

Monsieur Dreyfus,¹¹ Mr. Mountford Mills,¹² Mr. Remy,¹³ Mr. Roy Wilhelm,¹⁴ and many others, expressed themselves as astounded at the amazing way in which so young a man was able to solve difficult problems, work for so many hours a day, sometimes till 3 or 4 a.m.! showing always a sincerity, a dignity and a wisdom, which could only exist through Divine Inspiration. We all felt in him the Manifestation of the untrammelled Spirit of our Beloved Master. His lowliness, too, was very touching. Never would he allow any remark, likening his actions in any way to what the Master would have done!

And now, I must tell you a little of the treacherous enemy of the Divine Cause. He and his brother presumably thought, when the Master had left the life of earth, and his bodily protection was thus withdrawn, it would be a suitable time to plan fresh persecutions.

God will, of course, frustrate the intrigues of all opposers! But that the enemies should be ‘of the Master’s kindred, and his own Father’s house’ is naturally a bitter sorrow to the dear Guardian, as well as to the other members of the beloved family. The unprecedented work, and this sorrow combined with the shock he had sustained, proved so great a burden that he at length yielded to appeals from us all, to go right away out of it all – to go into a kind of Retreat, where he would have time and opportunity to rest, meditate, pray, and concentrate upon the stupendous task which lies before him, gaining at the same time the physical strength necessary for so important a work. Until this period is ended he replies to no letters. Many of these, naturally, can be dealt with by the various local Assemblies, and it is well that these bodies should now grow accustomed to take upon themselves the burden of deciding such questions, and generally administering the Cause: other questions must await Shoghi’s return.

Now that the Master has returned to the shelter of Heaven, it behoves us to show a firm loyalty, and a steadfast unity, which no enemy will have power to injure or to lessen. I think that we all feel that the Work for which our Beloved suffered so terribly, should now be carried on all the more earnestly, that we are not called upon for such sacrifices.

The Spiritual Assembly at Haifa is doing wonderful work in all love and energy and sincerity. The Greatest Holy Leaf, the Holy Mother, and those dearly beloved Daughters of the Master are being wonderful. I could write reams about their lives of self-sacrifice!

... I met Mirza Ahmad, son of Subh-i-Azal, who came to see me and told me a very interesting story of how he came, at last, to know the Truth. I have my notes and will tell you all about it when we meet,¹⁵ it is an amazing history of how the Divine worked in his case!

... What an enormous amount there accumulates for us to do for the Cause. I look forward to great progress in London!

... With Bahai Greetings and love to all,

Yours sincerely in His Service,

(signed) Sitarieh Blomfield

11 The first French Baha’i (1873–1928).

12 An American Baha’i (d. 1949); see *Bahá’i World* 11: 509–11.

13 Charles Mason Remy (1874–1974), American Baha’i, appointed a Hand of the Cause of God by Shoghi Effendi in 1951, but subsequently declared a Covenant-breaker in 1960.

14 American Baha’i (1875–1952); see *Bahá’i World* 12: 662–64.

15 Lady Blomfield wrote about her meeting with Mirza Ahmad in *The Chosen Highway* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1967), pp. 237–38.

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Extracts from the Baha'i writings on the subject of the importance of collecting and safeguarding the Baha'i writings

Compiled by the Archives Office, Baha'i World Centre
October 1986

Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh¹

In regard to thy mention of the setting in order of the verses and epistles – this undertaking is accounted one of the greatest of deeds by Him Who is the All-Sufficing, the Exalted . . . The greater portion of the writings and verses have fallen into the hands of the infidels whether in the Land of Ṭá² or other lands. The people of God should do all that lieth within their power to protect and preserve the Tablets. In the Land of Ṭá whatever there was in the homes of the friends was taken and fell into the hands of the heedless. We have commanded all to safeguard that which hath proceeded from the Pen of the Most High. We ask God to aid them to act in accordance with His wish and desire, and to draw them nigh to Him. He, verily, is the Almighty, the Powerful.

We have commanded all to observe wisdom, but from the friends we see heedlessness and negligence. They should guard the Tablets as they guard their eyes, nay with greater vigilance, if they be of them that comprehend.

Truly, none must be careless in the matter of safeguarding the divine Tablets. In former times, when plans were laid to seize some of the friends, before all else it was the writings that fell into the hands of the enemy. This is not permissible. The friends should designate a strong, secure place for storing the divine verses so that they may not be exposed to the touch of unworthy hands, even though these verses are, and shall always be, such as 'none shall touch but the purified'.³

Guard thou the verses of thy Lord as thou wouldst guard thine own eyes. He, verily, is the Preserver, the Mighty.

The treatment of the Tablets should be such that they remain preserved in their original immaculacy. When being read they should be placed within a second sheet, and thereafter deposited in some special place for safe keeping.

Extracts from the letters of Shoghi Effendi

Another necessary and highly commendable undertaking is the founding of a Bahá'í Archives in each of the Bahá'í provincial administrative centres . . . Anyone who, spontaneously and of his own free will, donates material to the Archives of his National Spiritual Assembly – whether this be Tablets, books, pictures, objects or the like – and especially if his inheritors are not accounted of the people of Bahá, or are not considered by him as trustworthy or reliable, will have performed a highly meritorious act in the sight of God, and his name will be perpetuated in the records of the Spiritual Assemblies and his memory enshrined in the Archives for ever.

1 All extracts are from previously untranslated tablets.

2 Tehran.

3 Qur'an 79:56.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLECTING AND SAFEGUARDING THE BAHÁ'I WRITINGS

An Archives has also recently been established in the Holy Land, and whatever Sacred Writings and precious relics the individual believers and the Spiritual Assemblies donate voluntarily to this Archives – in particular those items that are more suitably and profitably collected together in one place, and whose dispersal would be a source of loss and detriment – will remain guarded and preserved in their name in a place set aside for the purpose. With the passage of days, visitors to the Holy Land from all quarters of the globe will have the privilege of viewing these items, and, remembering those faithful servants of the Threshold of Grandeur, will commemorate their mention and offer up prayers on their behalf.

July 1925 to the Bahá'ís of the East – translated from the Persian [11]

Another essential requirement is the expediting of the tasks of transcribing, collecting and despatching the Sacred Writings to the Holy Land, and recording the general history of the Cause of God. The Western believers in the far-flung reaches of the free world, who have set about prosecuting important plans, are anxious and expectant that these two tasks be speedily completed and the necessary preparations for their forthcoming projects be made without delay, thus enabling them to give concrete expression to their hopes and plans for the future, and to impart a great momentum to the spread of the Holy Cause.

September 1926 to the Bahá'ís of the East – translated from the Persian [12]

In one of the Tablets, the Pen of the Most High, referring to this foundation,⁴ which provides the best and surest, the soundest and most perfect means of collecting, safeguarding and classifying the scattered, but growing body, of Sacred Writings and relics, states: 'It is the concern of the True One to reveal, and the concern of men to spread what hath been revealed. He will, verily, promulgate His Cause by the hands of His scattering and well-favoured angels. Spiritual souls will assuredly emerge from behind the veil of divine protection who will gather together the tokens and verses of God and put them into the most excellent order. This is His sure and irrevocable decree.'

Naw-Rúz 1954 to the Bahá'ís of the East – translated from the Persian [13]

Extracts from Letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Last year . . . the matter of collecting the originals or photographic copies of the Tablets addressed to the . . . friends (with translations) was mentioned. The meeting was entirely favourable to the suggestion and . . . offered to see that all Tablets or copies of Tablets or other interesting Bahá'í relics or treasures sent to him would be properly stored in safe-deposit.

. . . Such a matter requires someone who is keenly interested and sufficiently energetic, tactful and persistent to overcome the apathy or dilatoriness of friends who are in possession of the materials, to see the thing through.

28 October 1925 to an individual believer [14]

Shoghi Effendi received . . . a few days ago a letter dealing chiefly with two matters which he has very much at heart:

- 1) the collection by the National Spiritual Assembly of the originals or photographic copies of all available Tablets sent to friends in . . . , with translations, with a view to their safe preservation and the publication of the translations.
- 2) the preparation for the press . . . of the talks given to . . . by the Master in Palestine, with full notes regarding the circumstances under which these talks were given.

4 The International Archives Building.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLECTING AND SAFEGUARDING THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS

Shoghi Effendi warmly approves of both these suggestions and hopes the friends will co-operate in carrying them out as speedily and thoroughly as is practicable.

... If the Tablets (originals) were presented to the National Archives, then the donors might receive one or more photographic copies, while if the owners did not wish to part with the originals the committee could have photographic copies prepared for the Archives and return the original to the owner.

31 October 1925 to a National Spiritual Assembly [15]

The work of collecting and publishing the Tablets is one of the most important tasks that this generation has to undertake for upon it depends our true understanding of the Cause and its principles. The more we put it off, the more we are apt to lose some of the original writings.

Yet, important as this task may be, it is fraught with difficulties. The early translations are far from being accurate, no matter who the translator may be. Shoghi Effendi firmly believes that only Tablets with the Master's signature and in the original tongue should be recognized. Any translations or copies of them fail from having real authority. This shows the importance of collecting the original Tablets that bear the Master's signature.

20 August 1929 to an individual believer [16]

I am directed by the Guardian to express his grateful appreciation for your letter ... with the volume containing copies of the Tablets revealed to the friends in ... by the Master and Bahá'u'lláh.

In accomplishing this task you have rendered a most valued and permanent service to the Cause in ... and posterity will owe you a debt of gratitude very hard to repay.

Furthermore this compilation shall be of indispensable value and use to the Guardian and to all International bodies that may meet in Haifa whether in the distant or near future. You are quite aware, of course, with the fashion in which both Bahá'u'lláh and the Master gave some of their most important teachings as part of their Tablets addressed to far-away friends. Hence the necessity of such compilations throughout the world.

29 March 1930 to an individual believer [17]

... has suggested to the Guardian that he should ask your NSA to address an appeal to the ... believers urging them to co-operate with the National and local Bahá'í Archives ... in their efforts for the collection of Bahá'í sacred relics, and specially the Tablets, and their safe preservation.

As this is undoubtedly one of the most urgent tasks facing the believers at present, he strongly feels it advisable that your NSA should once more impress upon the friends the necessity of their giving full and continued support to the truly valuable work which the National as well as the local Archives Committees are accomplishing for our beloved Faith ...

Now that the Cause is rapidly passing through so many different phases of its evolution is the time for the friends to exert their utmost in order to preserve as much as they can of the sacred relics and various other precious objects that are associated with the lives of the Founders of the Faith, and particularly the Tablets They have revealed.

Every believer should realize that he has a definite responsibility to shoulder in this matter, and to help, to whatever extent he can, in rendering successful the valuable work which National and local Bahá'í Archives Committees are so devotedly accomplishing for the Faith in ...

25 September 1936 to a National Spiritual Assembly [18]

... has safely delivered the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which you forwarded to the Holy Land, and the Guardian has read them, and will place them in the International Archives. It is indeed a miracle that you were able to protect these precious things during the long and dangerous years of the war, and the ... Bahá'ís must be very grateful to you for doing so. The Guardian was happy to hear that photographs have been made of them and kept in ...

16 March 1953 to an individual believer [19]

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The Babi Question You Mentioned . . . : The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of the Netherlands, 1844–1962. By Jelle de Vries. *New Religious Identities in the Western World*, vol. 3. Leuven: Peeters, 2002, 362 pp. ISBN: 90-429-1109-3

In the past two decades, the craft of writing histories of the Baha'i Faith's introduction into specific countries has started to come into its own. Robert Stockman's two volumes on *The Bahá'í Faith in America* (vol. 1, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1985; vol. 2, Oxford: George Ronald, 1995) and Will van den Hoonard's *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898–1948* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1996) are prime examples of ground-breaking work by authors with academic standing, built upon original research and other scholarly articles about aspects of North American Baha'i history. Authors in other countries have contributed a handful of initial forays into their communities' Baha'i development, including *Brisa en el Amanecer: La Fe Bahá'í en España – Orígenes (1874–1957)* by Navid Mohabbat (Terrassa: Editorial Baha'i de España, 1997), pictorial histories of Baha'i communities in Japan and South Africa, and a handful of academic theses on the Baha'is in locations such as New Zealand. The writing shows a range of approaches from the simple catalogue of people and events, to the relatively sophisticated analysis of the reasons for Baha'i successes in a given locale. Once an author has published a history of the Baha'i community in a country, it is important that the reader of the book can, after having digested it, answer the question: 'So what?' A mere list of players and activities cannot provide to the inquiring reader the dramatic thrill of discovering a bigger picture, a wider relevance, an exciting model. Historical writing needs to demonstrate what makes the people, places and events significant.

Most of us would be surprised that the Netherlands Baha'i community's history could be not only highly engrossing, but even the key to understanding how the Baha'i Faith has developed in Europe. Those who choose to invest in this intriguing historical study will be rewarded.

Vries prepared *The Babi Question You Mentioned* as his doctoral dissertation. He makes clear, as a Dutch Baha'i, that he has a personal subjective interest in pursuing the history of his Dutch co-religionists. The more important reason, however, is that, despite the large number of new religious movements that have appeared in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the twentieth century, the Baha'i Faith demonstrates certain differences. It is successful, international, and independent. The ability of the Baha'i 'enterprise' to succeed and to 'export its product' strikes the author as an important rationale for examining its introduction into the Netherlands. Vries also takes on the question of how non-Baha'is classify the Baha'i Faith, giving a glimpse of the confusion that reigns among academic and polemical writers who call it a 'syncretic religion', 'Islamic sect', 'new religious movement' or 'old new religion' to name a few. Vries questions why few of the classifiers regard it as a world religion, since it is one of the few religious movements that is not only successful and international, but also independent – that is, it is not a subdivision of another religious tradition.

The author's stated aim and scope for the book are 'to write a scientific work which fills the gaps in our knowledge concerning the history of the introduction of the Baha'i religion in the Netherlands; to discover as much Dutch source material . . . as possible . . . ; and to improve the chances for survival of this often unique material by publishing it' (p. 10). Vries is too modest about his intentions, for he fails to mention the real interest of his book – that he draws careful, modest, conclusions about Dutch Baha'i history that very likely have a high correlation with the experience of other European Baha'i communities, and therefore may tell us a great deal about how certain non-indigenous religious forms enter, grow and ultimately thrive in the European environment. He

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couches these findings in a fascinating and orderly narrative structure that makes the reader want to read on.

Vries provides an important section in his introduction that should not be overlooked. He discusses his methodology, and specifically his submission of the manuscript to various kinds of review processes, including review by a panel appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the Netherlands. The existing requirement that Baha'is submit their books and articles on their religion for review – a provision that is currently included in all national Baha'i constitutions – has been turned into a cause célèbre by some disaffected former Baha'is and a few Baha'is in Academe who label it censorship and believe that it disqualifies the academic work of Baha'is from being considered properly independent. Vries argues, first, that the Baha'i Faith 'favours a scientific attitude' and that freedom of expression is 'a fundamental principle' of the Baha'i Faith. He points out that it would be a gross distortion to consider pre-publication review as censorship, since such review implies no authorization and is a temporary procedure to prevent misrepresentation. Any Baha'i whose work is submitted for review may recommend individuals to act as reviewers, thus providing the author direct involvement in arrangements for the review. One might also note that critics cite no case of sanctions being applied for failure to submit a manuscript on the Baha'i Faith to pre-publication review. Such review is not a typically or solely Baha'i phenomenon. All professionals and scholars see their submissions to academic and scientific journals undergo a process of peer review. Many archives, including those in the Netherlands in which Vries carried out research, require the signing of an agreement to submit any work prepared from the archives' resources for review. While a reader may decide that the present work does not meet the standards for proper 'scientific historiography', Vries's view is that the reader cannot reject his work a priori on suspicion of bias or censorship since to do so would exhibit a prejudice.

Vries fully vindicates his methodology within the work itself, where various review requirements have in no way detracted from or damaged the findings of his research. He divides Dutch Baha'i history into three periods: (1) a survey of contacts and eyewitnesses before the existence of a Netherlands Baha'i community; (2) a study of the handful of early Baha'is who operated primarily as individuals; and (3) the post-war period in which a systematic programme of pioneering, expansion and consolidation resulted in the creation of an institutional framework that sustains a community.

The first period, 'Bystanders: Dutch eyewitnesses of early Iranian Baha'i history (1844–1910)', investigates the contacts between Dutch citizens and Baha'is before the existence of a Baha'i community in the Netherlands proper. The Dutch were interested in trade relations, and were useful to the Shah in his effort to play the larger European powers against each other. The Dutch obtained information about and made contacts with the Baha'i community primarily through those engaged in commerce and the diplomatic corps. As Momen demonstrated in *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, the primary interests that occupied such individuals (commerce and national interests), along with their general Christian chauvinism, did not predispose them to Baha'i conversion, although many of them were sympathetic to the plight of Iran's Baha'is. Albert Hotz of the J. C. P. Hotz & Son Persian Trading Company set up a number of agents in Iran to handle his business and he himself travelled there. One or another of these agents informed a new Dutch Consul in 1890 about the 'Babis', wrote about the seven martyrs of Yazd in 1891, met well-known Baha'is in Shiraz and Tehran in the 1890s, and obtained Babi and Baha'i manuscripts which were offered to E. G. Browne, who declined because he already owned a significant collection of such manuscripts already. T. M. Lyklama à Nijeholt wrote a French-language travelogue that included several pages on the Babis. All added slowly to Dutch awareness of the Baha'is. Hotz's agent, Henri Dunlop, whose Baha'i manuscripts E. G. Browne declined to purchase, gave them later to Browne's friend Professor M. J. de Goeje of Leiden University. Goeje was responsible for the appearance in the 1890s of what were probably the most thorough and accurate articles about the religion in Dutch up to that time. Through this history of contacts between the Iranian Baha'is and Dutch businessmen and diplomats, Vries offers the reader a significant overview of the Dutch presence in Persia between 1890

and 1910, and reveals the trail of interactions that began to make the Baha'i Faith visible in the Netherlands.

The second period, 'Supporters and Adversaries: the first Baha'is in the Netherlands (1910–1945)', details the activity of the social and religious circles from which the few early Dutch Baha'is emerged. He includes here the visits by Jamal Effendi and Siyyid Mustafa Rumi to the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) and the modest early beginnings of its Baha'i community. His primary focus is on the Theosophical Society as a transmitter of the information about Baha'i Faith and as an incubator for a small group of individuals who formed the core of the first Netherlander believers. Secondly, he also demonstrates how Esperanto connections and the delivery of 'Abdu'l-Baha's 'Tablet to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace in the Hague' provided avenues for Baha'i diffusion in the country. The Theosophical connection is interesting for its parallels with the early development of the Baha'i Faith in some other countries. Dr Peter Smith posited that most early believers in the United States emerged from a 'cultic milieu' within which theosophy was prominent. Although Dr Robert Stockman's view of the early American Baha'is as primarily influenced by Protestantism is probably more accurate than Smith's, there is no doubt that theosophy was a doorway for the spread of the Baha'i Faith in both America and Europe. This was primarily so since 'theosophy', being the 'hidden common nucleus of all religions', naturally led to investigation of many religions and a recognition of their common foundation. Theosophical publications were some of the first in the Netherlands to portray the Baha'i Faith in its spiritual rather than historical aspect, thus opening the door for the possibility of adherence to its teachings. According to Vries, theosophy and the Baha'i Faith more or less shared the characteristics of messianic promise and inclusiveness, resulting in their recruiting from the same strata of society. They were 'competitors' for the same spiritual 'market', with the theosophists better established than the Baha'is. This meant that problems for theosophy could prove to be problems for the Baha'i Faith. The most obvious example of this effect was the World Teacher debacle, in which the Theosophical Society leadership had selected the boy Jiddu Krishnamurti as the one who would become the great messiah or World Teacher. Krishnamurti as an adult renounced this role and left the Theosophical Society, resulting in a significant decline in Theosophical Society membership. Initial Baha'i growth lagged significantly in the same period after Krishnamurti's renunciation, which suggests that the occurrences in theosophy may have been contributory. That theosophy provided a means for disseminating the Faith in the Netherlands is clearly established. It published the first Baha'i literature in Dutch, provided several of the earliest Dutch Baha'is, and was a source for an important portion of the modern Dutch Baha'i community as confirmed by records that some 8 per cent of post-World War II Dutch Baha'is were of theosophical background.

Vries notes that occurrences within the Baha'i Faith may also have contributed to the slow growth and ultimate dissolution of the inter-war Dutch community, particularly the opposition to the provisions of 'Abdu'l-Baha's will and testament evinced by Ruth White and Ahmad Sohrab. White succeeded in influencing a prominent German Baha'i, Wilhelm Herrigel, whose defection negatively affected the German Baha'is and those in bordering countries. Sohrab's 'New History Society' and 'Caravan of East and West' were active in Europe, and Sohrab spoke a number of times in Dutch venues, but it would appear that his negative influence was far less than White's.

During this inter-war period, pioneer L. D. Wright managed to get *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* translated and published in Dutch, but no Baha'i institutional framework could be created. Most Dutch Baha'is operated as isolated individuals or small groups. While Vries is clearly correct about the status of theosophy and the Baha'i Faith in the Dutch spiritual marketplace in the 1920s and 1930s, he might have addressed more thoroughly this question of lack of systematization and institution-building, which, along with the underlying spiritual predispositions of the earliest believers, would appear to be likely reasons for retarded growth. Opposition, per se, was not a significant factor, although a handful of Christian theological critics published rebuttals of the Baha'i Faith at a time when the Baha'is in the Netherlands and in Europe were so few as to be scarcely a target. The appearance of such theological attacks at that time suggests that they may have been

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related to the wider issue of the Netherlands' non-church religious environment. This non-church environment had been engendered by the reaction to nineteenth century materialism and intellectualism. The secularization that grew in the nineteenth century is intimately connected to the question of religious pluralism. While this question is beyond the scope of Vries' work, he points it out as a factor in Baha'i development that deserves study.

Vries calls the third period of Dutch Baha'i history: 'Participants: the systematic development of the Dutch Baha'i community (1945–1962)'. In this period the tentative and intermittent individual efforts exerted before the war were replaced by the systematic prosecution of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Divine Plan. It was the European Teaching Project, largely financed and staffed by North American Baha'is, that was to rebuild the Baha'i communities of Europe on a broader foundation. In 1946, Baha'i pioneers – mostly women – settled in the Netherlands, and made connections with the few surviving Dutch Baha'is. The systematic routing of itinerant Baha'i teachers and pioneers through the country, the consolidation of communities and the election of local Baha'i institutions led first to a Benelux Regional Spiritual Assembly in 1957 and finally to a National Spiritual Assembly of the Netherlands in 1962. Pioneers also went out from the Netherlands and elsewhere to Dutch New Guinea and Indonesia during the 1950s.

This systematization and laying of the institutional groundwork was neither neat nor undisturbed. Very human characteristics interfered with unity among the pioneers, according to primary sources quoted by Vries. Charlotte Stirrat wrote that 'had there been unity and love among the pioneers in Holland, the Faith would have gone ahead at an amazing speed.' Additional growing pains arose from the attempts of local Baha'i institutions to administer justice according to Baha'i law within the community. Vries deals frankly with the specific instance of a homosexual couple in The Hague who were finally deprived of their administrative rights. He notes that this was not because of their homosexuality per se, since other homosexuals remained in the community and never lost their rights. The action was because they defended their lifestyle and attempted to win others to their position, thus threatening a serious split in the community.

Vries deals thoroughly with the effect of the 1960 Mason Remey affair on the Dutch Baha'is. Three individuals in The Hague finally gave allegiance to Remey's claim to Guardianship, and while this was a minor diversion in the Baha'i programme, ultimately eight of the Netherlands Baha'is of the time broke the Covenant. The Remey episode never posed an organized threat to the Baha'i community, but it impeded development and growth.

Vries summarizes six aspects of the development of the Netherlands Baha'i community that are worthy of attention:

- (1) None of the Dutch citizens living in Iran converted. They were not there as seekers but for commercial purposes.
- (2) Theosophy played a paradoxical role. Theosophy and the Baha'i Faith share major themes. Their competition for a particular group of like-minded people and the negative effects of the World Teacher debacle on the willingness of the Dutch to join religious organizations, had a dampening effect on Baha'i growth.
- (3) Women were prominent in Baha'i development in the Netherlands. This role within most Western Baha'i communities was noticed by outsiders, such as the Dutch pacifist De Ligt.
- (4) There were significantly different growth rates before and after World War II. Early Dutch believers were highly individualistic, but after the war, the introduction and spread of the religion was planned and carefully directed by institutions.
- (5) The Dutch Baha'i community remained small in size, circa 1,000 adult members. 'New Religious Movements' (NRMs) that function within a Christian paradigm have had a significant success – Jehovah's Witnesses had 12,000 Dutch members by 1962, the Latter-day Saints had some 7,500 by 1996. NRMs from outside the Christian fold were smaller, e.g.

the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission with 300 members in 1997. Vries asks whether the Baha'i Faith might have grown more dramatically with a Christian emphasis in its teaching rather than the largely social reform content.

- (6) There has been a relative absence of opposition. The small size of the community is one reason for the paucity of opposition. The tendency to stress unifying social themes in public talks and the non-threatening nature of its method of growth also kept the community from becoming a target. Vries does not look at the generally very liberal and tolerant society that the Netherlands represents, which may also contribute to this lack of opposition.

Of these six aspects, the first five may be said to apply to much of the rest of Europe. By and large, Europeans in Iran did not convert to the Baha'i Faith – the one possible exception being A. L. M. Nicolas, who considered himself a kind of Babi, not a Baha'i. Theosophy was an important avenue for introducing the Baha'i Faith in a number of countries, although additional study is needed to determine the extent to which Baha'i growth was stunted by either direct competition with it or the negative effect of the World Teacher affair. Women were prominent in establishing the Baha'i Faith in much of Western Europe – a reflection of the principle of gender equality, as well as social developments in the West at the time. There was significant acceleration in growth rates in the post-war period for all of Western Europe, and a proper analysis of the psychological and social effects of the war on Baha'i growth in Europe remains to be undertaken. The European Baha'i communities remain quite small in size, virtually all well under ten thousand. Only in the relative amount of opposition is there a disparity in relation to the Dutch case.

The few criticisms of this work are relatively superficial. Vries is to be commended for writing in English rather than Dutch. If his work is to have a wide distribution, it needs to be in English. Sadly, on almost every page there are stylistic quirks and mistakes that tell the reader that the author's native language is not English. Peeters should have done a better job of removing these annoying glitches.

Vries gives too little attention to why World War II made a larger number of people receptive to the Baha'i message. While he touches on this, the effect of the psychological, social and spiritual changes wrought by the war called out for more attention. It may be that a clearer apperception of the role of the war will emerge as other histories of European Baha'i communities are written.

Every author who henceforth writes a history of a European Baha'i community will now have to refer to Vries, whose ground-breaking thoroughness and careful conclusions hold up a high standard. Future European Baha'i histories will deal with aspects of initial development identical or very similar to those in the Dutch case. Vries' work virtually demands their attention.

William Collins
Library of Congress

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Jesus and Early Christianity in the Gospels: A New Dialogue. By Daniel J. Grolin.
Oxford: George Ronald, 2002. 522 pp. + 2 indexes (21 pp.) ISBN 0-85398-462-X.
Price: £19.95, \$38.95

What is the value of scholarship for interfaith dialogue? Ideally, scholarship can provide a common ground of expertise from which dialogue might proceed. Scholars may be regarded as arbiters (but not the sole judges) of textual authenticity and of the contemporary–historical interpretation of sacred text. These experts themselves are in dialogue. Their investigations, which are methodologically self-conscious, virtual discussions, constitute a ‘community of discourse’ within a given ‘research tradition’. While their personal beliefs are supposed to be ‘bracketed’ in favour of achieving a ‘critical empathy’ for the religious traditions they study, biases may be disguised and insinuated into research results. Still, one could hardly ask for a more dispassionate inquiry into matters of sacred text. In Baha’i parlance, one might say that academic scholarship is a corporate form of the ‘independent investigation of truth’. And it is into this world of scholarship that author Daniel Grolin invites us to participate as active spectators – in preparation for both a search after truth and a Baha’i–Christian dialogue.

Jesus and Early Christianity in the Gospels is an introduction to the gospel narratives (both canonical and apocryphal), with an overarching interest in interfaith dialogue, as indicated by the subtitle, *A New Dialogue*. A dialogue actually begins in the foreword contributed by Jens Buchwald Andersen, University Chaplain of the University of Southern Denmark in Odense, who rightly observes that the figure of Jesus does not belong to Christianity alone. Andersen states that ‘the person of Jesus Christ [not only] plays a role in other religions and faiths such as Judaism, Islam and Bahā’ī but also in Hinduism, for instance in the figure of Mahatma Gandhi . . . or most recently in Buddhism, say in the reading of the gospels by the Dalai Lama’ (pp. xiii–xiv). While Judaism played a formative role in the life and thought of Jesus, one might ask what role Jesus plays in Judaism? In any event, the figure of Jesus is no longer the exclusive interest of Christians.

One may even speak of a certain ‘globalization’ of the figure of Jesus, as theologians in nearly every major world religion have reflected on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus has become universalized in ways quite unanticipated by the evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – and Thomas. ‘*The Gospel of Thomas*’, Grolin states, ‘is undoubtedly the most significant discovery in recent times for New Testament studies’ (p. 7). *Thomas* is a collection of 114 sayings of Jesus, and is the first solid evidence we have of a primitive gospel that must have been a source (or ‘Q’, after the German term *quelle*, ‘source’) common to Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount and Luke’s Sermon on the Plain.

Any interfaith dialogue in which Jesus is at the heart of the matter necessarily involves Christians as a party to the discussion. For the dialogue to be meaningful, each party must ‘witness’ to his or her own understanding of the salvific and vivifying role of Jesus Christ. For interfaith dialogue to be constructive and productive, it must agree to rules – ideally, to a certain procedure for reaching common ground. As the Revd Andersen states, Grolin’s intention is ‘to find a neutral platform for the discussion of the figure of Jesus Christ,’ by using ‘the methods and the insights of the Historical Jesus research’ (p. xiii).

Grolin adapts the so-called ‘Third Quest for the Historical Jesus’ as his framework of analysis (p. xiii); that is, he draws heavily on the methodology of New Testament scholarship. The author’s purpose, therefore, is to provide ‘a study guide’ that is ‘intended to be used in a study of the actual text’ of the four Gospels. While ‘[e]xegesis is one of the primary interests of this book’ (p. viii), *Jesus and Early Christianity in the Gospels* is ‘not intended as a commentary’ per se, ‘for its purpose is not merely to comment on specific verses but rather to demonstrate a type of methodology’.

A methodology is really a philosophical orientation, while the discrete methods that are undertaken represent the application of the overall approach. Grolin’s own procedure is to interrogate the gospel narratives by means of three investigative questions: (1) What is the origin of a given

gospel tradition and how was it understood? (2) How has the evangelist taken up that tradition and used (and possibly transformed) it for his own purposes? (3) ‘How was the tradition, as we find it in the gospels, used later by Christians?’ (p. xi).

Christian interpretation extends the authority of scripture but, in a very real way, supplants whatever its ‘original intent’ may have been in favour of a current interpretation that accords with a contemporary understanding of who Jesus was and what it means to be a Christian. ‘Interpretation creates meaning’, as the present writer states in the opening paragraph of *Symbol and Secret* (1995). Interpretations of sacred text amount to a separate *textus receptus*. In any given tradition, the body of interpretations are really a matter of historical record. Christian theology has a developmental history and may thus be subjected to historical scrutiny. History, in a sense, then becomes a judge of authenticity whenever a particular interpretation claims pre-eminence and arrogates authority – rightly or wrongly – to itself. Grolin’s instinct in asking his third question is precisely along these lines.

As a self-professed Baha’i author (p. iv), Daniel Grolin initiates a new dialogue, which is by no means restricted to the Baha’i–Christian encounter. The author proposes that each party takes cognizance of the ‘science of religion’ and utilize scholarship to rethink basic assumptions about Jesus and what the real purpose his life and teachings served. In his first chapter, ‘The Critical Sciences’ (pp. 1–13), Grolin reviews the methods current in New Testament scholarship. Here, the author introduces the reader to source criticism, redaction criticism, form criticism, historical criticism, textual criticism, patriology (known in North America as patristics, or a formal study of the Church Fathers), and ‘the sociological perspective’ (referring to sociology of religion). Grolin’s objective is to provide an introduction to the gospels informed by the methods of what used to be termed ‘Higher Criticism’, extended to non-canonical texts as well, such as the Gospel of Thomas (sometimes referred to as the ‘Fifth Gospel’) as mentioned above, and an early Christian manual of religious practice known as the Didache. (See Appendix 3, ‘The Origin of the Didache.’) Other New Testament apocryphal texts are mentioned as well.

Chapter 2 covers ‘The Jewish Context’. This is a fairly straightforward treatment of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Samaritans, and various popular and prophetic movements (pp. 14–53) in the first century. (This is not exhaustive, as Rechabites and equally obscure groups are not mentioned.) In other words, Grolin establishes the historical context – the world Jesus knew. Chapter 3, ‘The Birth of a New Dispensation’ (pp. 54–85), begins with an excursus on Christological controversy sparked by Arius at the end of the 3rd century which resulted in the Nicene Creed as an articulation of orthodoxy (literally, ‘correct belief’), and heterodoxy. Here, some reference to Walter Bauer’s classic, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* – which calls into question the very categories of orthodoxy and heresy – would have been welcome.

Grolin explains the Logos (‘Word made flesh’) Christology of the Prologue of John in light of Philo of Alexandria, and critically compares the genealogies of Matthew and Luke. The author also compares and contrasts the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, without attempting to achieve a ‘gospel harmony’ as many theologians have laboured to produce, as early as Tatian’s *Diatessaron* (the earliest gospel used by Syriac-speaking Christians, a text that Grolin mentions on p. 216).

Chapter 4, ‘Baptism’, covers the four gospel accounts of John the Baptist, prior to an analysis of Jesus’ baptism. Grolin’s excursus on ‘The Baptismal Sacrament’ precedes an interesting treatment of ‘the Temptation of Christ’, with reference to the theoretical document ‘Q’ (mentioned above). The author invokes Elaine Pagels’ *The Origin of Satan* (1995) to suggest that Christ’s tempter was not an evil principality, as the Christian tradition assumes, but rather an adversary sent by God to test Jesus. Here, Grolin might have extended the discussion to include references in the Rabbinical tradition to Satan as a personification of the *yetzer ha-ra*, or ‘corrupt inclination’ – an idea derived from Gen. 8: 21, ‘the imagination of the heart of man is evil from his youth’ – for which the figure of Satan is merely a personification. (Strange to say, but evangelical Christianity requires a belief in Satan as well as in Christ. For Baha’is, belief in Satan amounts to superstition, put bluntly – although Baha’u’llah rhetorically treats ‘Satan’ as the personification of human evil.)

‘The Proclamation of Christ’ is the focus of Chapter 5 (pp. 114–51), one section of which deals with ‘Parables’ (pp. 133–48). Again, Grolin ties in Q-scholarship in a close analysis of selected parables. ‘The Mighty Works’ (Chapter 6, pp. 152–90), covers the miracle traditions, including the Transfiguration. This is an important chapter for Grolin, who, in his conclusion, states: ‘The category that the present work has promoted above most others has been the Elijah-Elisha model’ (p. 344). Grolin perceptively points out that the ‘sayings tradition’ effectively ‘rejects the visual, faith-generating miracles’ (p. 185). The author partly bases this conclusion on what has come to be known as the ‘Sign-Refusal Saying’ of Jesus (Mark 8: 12; Matt. 12: 38–40; and Luke 11: 29–30), a concept that Grolin discusses without recourse to this technical term.

Chapter 7, ‘Jerusalem’, looks at Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and his cleansing of the Temple. In ‘The End Foreshadowed’ (Chapter 8, pp. 204–45) Grolin examines the ‘passion predictions’ or Jesus’ foreknowledge of his impending crucifixion (which systematic theology refers to as the ‘passion’ of Christ). This chapter includes sections on the Farewell Discourse (John 14–16) as well as the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13, Matt. 24–25, and Luke 21), also known as the Minor Apocalypse. Instinctively drawing on philological discussions of such texts, Grolin frequently glosses key Koine Greek words in each gospel pericope.

‘The Lord’s Last Supper’ is the subject of Chapter 9 (pp. 246–63), with a section on ‘The Eucharist’. Here is where the author brings the earliest Christian worship manual, the *Didache*, into relevance, for its reflexive value in illuminating the origins of this central Christian sacrament. The chapter ends with an excursus on ‘The Eucharist Sacrament’, giving a brief survey of the various ways in which the Eucharist was understood to work, including the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and the Lutheran notion of ‘consubstantiation’ (although the author does not use the latter term).

Grolin makes the transition to ‘The Crucifixion’ (Chapter 10, pp. 264–99) with an excursus on ‘The Crucifixion from the Middle Ages to the Reformation’. The penultimate Chapter 11, ‘The Resurrection’ (pp. 300–40) is, in many ways, Grolin’s most important chapter insofar as his critical commentary on the gospel narratives is concerned, for on it hinges a cosmic event that is the crux of Christian faith and, by extension, a key concern of Baha’i–Christian dialogue. The author devotes a section to ‘The Empty Tomb’, with a more extended treatment of ‘The Appearances’. This is a particularly masterful overview of the competing traditions and the complex issues they raise. Grolin includes the findings of the Jesus Seminar in his discussion. There is then a short section ‘Concluding Thoughts’ (pp. 341–45).

While the author is a professed Baha’i author, publishing through a privately-owned Baha’i publisher, he judiciously reserves everything connected to a specifically Baha’i perspective for Appendix 1, ‘Interpretation and Rewriting of the Gospels in the Bahā’ī Writings’ (pp. 346–72). In Appendix 2, ‘A New Inter-Religious Dialogue’, Grolin makes it clear that ‘we are here specifically interested in dialogue between Bahā’īs and Christians,’ and that ‘Bahā’īs have explicit doctrinal interest in a dialogue’ (p. 373). What, then, is Grolin’s contribution to this dialogue? His answer is twofold: (1) the author has chosen to ‘highlight many of the important social and ethical issues’ that arose within early Christianity; and (2) his methodology ‘treats the gospels not as a divinely dictated text but as an inspired and spiritually living religious text’ (p. 375). Grolin’s ‘new dialogue’, therefore, is a quest for common ground, ‘to unite diverse religious traditions to form a coherent message for humankind’ (p. 376), with a view ‘not to seek conversions, but to gain mutual understanding’ (p. 377).

What is the significance of this book for interfaith dialogue in general and Baha’i–Christian encounters in particular? Note how Grolin characterizes scholarship in the opening paragraph of Chapter 1, ‘The Critical Sciences’:

The last two centuries have seen a remarkable development within the field of biblical scholarship, much of which has been kept in scholarly circles. This is partly because scholarship itself has been divided over the legitimacy of these new sciences but also because of the vast tradition of the exclusiveness of scholarly knowledge. Some of the pioneers of

these sciences were ostracized, persecuted or even excommunicated from their churches or synagogues and sometimes charges of heresy were laid against them. The fact that secularization promoted these sciences made the delineation even more distinct. Today the warring factions have made their arena public and the media is used more relentlessly, so the existence of these sciences is generally known but their significance is still generally poorly grasped. (p. 1)

As Grolin points out in the opening paragraph, the results of scholarship have either been unavailable to the general population, or have existed in perceived tension (or even in conflict) with basic tenets as popularly understood within a particular faith community. This has all too often led to unfortunate results, in which the enterprise of scholarship has been seriously questioned, notwithstanding its role in posing critical questions and venturing possible solutions that amount to new ways of looking at sacred texts. And the scholars themselves have occasionally been stigmatized or otherwise marginalized. It is frankly safer to be a computer systems engineer than a specialist in the academic study of religion or in Middle East studies. Notwithstanding, scholarship is of huge importance in establishing a common ground of understanding that is objectively based and from which constructive dialogue might proceed.

Does the Baha'i principle of the harmony of science and religion apply to what the Germans call '*religionwissenschaft*' ('science of religion')? If so, then should Baha'i self-understanding itself be constrained by scientific principle? It is hard to say. What, then, is the authority of scholarship? It has no religious authority in Baha'i terms, except that, at least in pilgrim's notes, Shoghi Effendi would sometimes say that Baha'is ought to tentatively accept the results of scholarship in the absence of definitive pronouncements in the Baha'i writings. Here, Grolin is careful to disclaim any authoritative value in that 'the present work can in no way claim to be a final product but must remain a temporary result based on the author's personality and the information available to him' (p. 381).

The results of Grolin's research can hardly be described as 'temporary'. *Jesus and Early Christianity in the Gospels* is no *Thief in the Night* (a famous Baha'i apologetic work that has tremendous verve but is oblivious to New Testament criticism). What Grolin has done is to say to both Christians and Baha'is that scholarship may provide the basis for a 'new dialogue'. Certainly Grolin has broken new ground in offering to Baha'is and Christians alike an accessible introduction to the world of New Testament scholarship.

Of even greater significance is Grolin's underlying message that scholarship, while 'safer' in secular environments, ought to be embraced by religious communities as well. Grolin makes it clear that his book 'seeks to be historical and exegetical rather than mythic and theological' (p. x). This is why all the Baha'i material is reserved for Appendix 1. This was a mature and disciplined decision. As the present writer has endeavoured to do in *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha'i Faith* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), Daniel Grolin has attempted a meaningful comparison of the Baha'i Faith and Christianity on a methodologically sound basis. What I have called 'symbolic transformation' of Christian leitmotifs in Baha'i texts, Grolin has aptly characterized as 'Interpretation and Rewriting of the Gospels in the Bahā'ī Writings' (p. 346).

Some of Grolin's interpretations are quite novel, such as his explanation of the shorter ending of Mark (pp. 339–40), as well as his interpretation of Q's temptation narrative (pp. 102–13), and his thoughts on the construction of the Historical Jesus (pp. 343–45). Within the reflective sphere of his originality, Grolin maintains a distinction between theology and exegesis: 'The exegete attempts to recover the lost hidden image behind the symbol' (p. viii). Theology, according to St Anselm, is 'faith seeking understanding'. In Grolin's more vital interest in exegesis, he achieves, as it were, an 'understanding seeking faith' – especially an insight into the faith of primitive Christians dimly limned in the shadows of pre-gospel sources. *Jesus and Early Christianity in the Gospels* is a

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testament to Grolin's faith in scholarship. Ultimately, Grolin shows how faiths can achieve a mutual understanding – first through historical and then by comparative quests.

Grolin is an independent scholar who has written a relatively mature work applying his scientific acumen (his formal training is in computer studies) to the problems of New Testament criticism. While the book lacks a grand thesis, it has a definite framework of analysis. While shy of the polish of a seasoned writer (English is the author's second language), the reviewer as well as the reader must bear in mind that this is Grolin's first book. It is a major undertaking that deserves our attention. *Jesus and Early Christianity in the Gospels* stands out as the most valuable Baha'i contribution to Baha'i-Christian dialogue to date. A proactive rather than a reactive work, this book has made the quantum leap from the 'search after proof' to the 'search after truth'. Those who purchase *Jesus and Early Christianity in the Gospels* will have done likewise.

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Biographical Notes

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William P. Collins has master's degrees in librarianship and social sciences. He is the former director of the Baha'i World Centre Library and is currently at the Library of Congress. He is the author of a major Baha'i bibliography and numerous articles and specializes in millennialism and Mormonism in relation to the Baha'i Faith.

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