

# The Missionary as Historian: William Miller and the Baha'i Faith

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A review of William McElwee Miller's  
*THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH: ITS HISTORY AND TEACHINGS*  
(S. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1974), 358 pages, appendices, index.

"We are dealing ... not with what we would like to believe, but with historical facts established beyond a doubt which we cannot but accept." — William Miller

William McElwee Miller is a man with an obsession. Although by profession a Presbyterian clergyman, and for forty years employed in that Church's missions in Persia, Rev. Miller has focused a great part of his energies as a writer and as a public lecturer on the subject of the Bahá'í Faith. The two books he has written are both on that topic<sup>(1)</sup>, as are a third work on which he collaborated with the Reverend E. E. Elder,<sup>2</sup> and a number of articles published in the religious press. His most recent book, *The Baha'i Faith: Its History and Teachings* may be fairly regarded as the final flowering of this lifetime preoccupation.

To say this should not suggest that Rev. Miller regards his subject with any affection. He briefly acknowledges that the Baha'i Faith has become a worldwide religious force to be taken seriously. In speaking of *The Bahá'í World*, the fourteen-volume summary of the Faith's activities since 1925, he says: "Whoever peruses [these volumes] ... will be impressed by the fact that the Bahá'í Faith is indeed a world Faith." He groups it in this respect with Christianity and Islam, whose "field is the world."<sup>3</sup> Such a judgment is in itself no small admission. In his initial assessment, written in 1931, Rev. Miller dismissed the Bahá'í Faith as "a dying movement," a minor "sect" which was on the point of disappearing entirely from the world scene: "It is only a matter of time until this strange movement ... shall be known only to students of history."<sup>4</sup> His latest book would, therefore, have benefited greatly from even a brief explanation of so startling a change of mind.

What has not changed is Rev. Miller's very negative view of the youngest addition to the world's religions. Essentially, the Bahá'í Faith which he pictures for his readers is a product of a century-long conspiracy conceived by persons of the basest character and motive. Its present-day followers (whose own spiritual life Rev. Miller assesses as in no way distinguished) are entirely deceived as to their Faith's real nature. Its laws and teachings are either superficial, harmful, or irrelevant to mankind's needs. Its administrative order is "a dictatorship."

To be sure, Rev. Miller does not advance these opinions as succinctly or as candidly as they are summarized above. In all of his writings he has earnestly sought to present his views as a detached commentary on a body of neutral "facts" gathered by a dispassionate "scholar" through years of patient research. The concluding effort of his career is no exception. The book begins with an assertion that it was written "for the purpose of presenting in a concise and orderly fashion the facts which have been established by [Edward G.] Browne and other trustworthy scholars ..."<sup>5</sup> It ends with the measured question "can the Bahá'í World Faith be an adequate religion for the world today, and for the millennium to come?, and the magisterial judgment that the answer is "decidedly negative."<sup>6</sup>

No one who has read Rev. Miller's earlier writings will be distracted even momentarily by the introduction of these academic conventions. The author's highly partisan opinion of the Bahá'í Faith was formed over forty years ago and was expressed in his first major publication on the subject, written at that time. To what extent those views then represented the results of a study of objective reality and to what extent they were the spontaneous reaction of a Protestant missionary in the barren fields of the Islamic Middle East against what he saw as a successful rival faith is impossible for anyone to know. What does emerge clearly in this final work is an effort to deal with the entirely unexpected developments of the intervening decades and to draw together whatever materials have been turned up in the same period which might be used to reinforce the original argument. The purpose, presumably, is to counteract the demonstrated capacity of the Bahá'í community to attract growing numbers of adherents in nominally Christian lands.

In this aim the book may enjoy a measure of success over the short run. The very scope suggested by the title, together with the historical approach that is taken, the photographs, and the accompanying narrative detail, give the work an air of thoroughness and authority. Where matters of belief and religious practice are discussed, the author's own opinions are closely woven into the fabric of quotation and reference. The most damning conclusions

are presented in a tone of surprise and regret. Throughout, the book is heavily footnoted, drawing on an apparently wide range of sources. While a degree of animus that was much less apparent in Rev. Miller's earlier writings has now become unmistakable, the author also pays an occasional conventional tribute to the sacrifices which Bahá'ís have made for beliefs which he himself regards as misguided or positively dangerous. No doubt the fact that the author is a Presbyterian clergyman will also lend the book special weight with Christian readers who can be expected to assume that such a profession is itself a guarantee of moral credentials.

When Rev. Miller's work is examined at closer range the carefully constructed scholarly illusion begins to rapidly fall apart. The most serious shortcoming, indeed the fatal one, is the use which is made of the sources. The problem takes several forms, the first of which appears in the opening pages of the Introduction. As has already been indicated, Rev. Miller presents his book as an attempt to provide "in concise and orderly fashion the facts which have been established by Browne and other scholars." Had such an effort been undertaken it would have had a rich body of material on which to draw. The rise of the Bahá'í Faith very early attracted an impressive group of scholars and observers: Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau, A.L.M. Nicholas, Clement Huart, E.G. Browne, Alexander Tumansky, Baron Victor Rosen, Mirza Kazem Bek, and Hermann Roemer, to mention only the most important.<sup>7</sup> Rev. Miller is obviously familiar with the names of most of these writers, as he lists several of them in his Introduction. Apart from E.G. Browne, however, whose work is extensively used, and occasional rather ill-digested references from Gobineau, the author elliptically confides that he has not "been able to benefit" from direct knowledge of these sources.<sup>8</sup> Who, then, are the "scholars" to whom he refers?

The source on whom Rev. Miller most depends is the late Jelal Azal, a descendent of the notorious Mirza Yahya, Subh-i-Azal. Contrary to Rev. Miller's suggestion, Mr. Azal was not a recognized scholar, nor was he in any sense independent. Rather, he was a person who had long been engaged in a personal vendetta against the religion he is alleged to have been "studying."<sup>9</sup> His tendentious unpublished "notes," endorsed by Rev. Miller as "the results of ... scholarly research," are used as the basis for some of the most important passages of the author's thesis.<sup>10</sup>

Fortunately, Rev. Miller has provided a detailed index of these notes and documents on which they are purportedly based, and he has deposited copies of much of the material in the library at Princeton University. There, in time, it will no doubt be subjected to such careful examination as circumstances may warrant. For those familiar with the history of the Bahá'í Faith, however, the entire performance has a depressing air of *deja vu*. The long series of exposures of forgeries and misrepresentations perpetrated by an earlier generation of Azali writers places the onus squarely on any modern writer who seeks to make use of such sources, to demonstrate their reliability beyond any possible doubt.<sup>11</sup> Rev. Miller, on the contrary, places himself entirely in the hands of Mr. Azal, especially so far as the post-Bábí period of his narrative is concerned, reproducing quite uncritically whatever his correspondent sent him, and turning large sections of his book into little more than an Azali tract.<sup>12</sup> The result is a work in which gross errors of fact undermine the value of every chapter.

Where responsible sources are drawn upon, the use which is made of them often seems remote from the accepted methods of historical writing. Edward Granville Browne suffers particularly in this respect. Professor Browne, a Cambridge orientalist, travelled extensively in the Middle East during the latter part of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century, met many of the early Bábís and Bahá'ís, and produced a number of translations and scholarly commentaries as a result of his several years' research.<sup>13</sup> These are extremely valuable documents and have been heavily used by various scholars, both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í, in succeeding decades. As a professional scholar, however, Professor Browne himself would have been the first to recognize that his work would inevitably be subject to revision, as later generations freed themselves from the particular political and cultural context in which he was working, and as further historical evidence surfaced. Indeed, the process of revision has been recognized as an integral part of the writing of history ever since historiography moved out of the nineteenth century's naive belief that it could write "scientific history," "history as it really happened."

The most thorough and recent revisionist work on the writings of Professor Browne related to the Bahá'í and Bábí Faiths is a critique by Mr. H.M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith* (London: George Ronald, 1970). Entirely apart from the meticulous scholarship of his study, Mr. Balyuzi treats his subject with a courtesy and respect which could well serve as a model for writing of this nature. It is, therefore, astonishing to note Rev. Miller's reaction to the Balyuzi critique: "It is indeed regrettable that now after sixty years, when Edward Browne is no longer able to defend himself, his competence as a scholar, and even the integrity of his character, should be thus called into question."<sup>14</sup>

This, of course, is humbug. If taken seriously it would suggest that a scholarly study like that of Professor Browne should be seen not as a building block in the gradual erection of a comprehensive and many-sided view of a major historical development, but rather as a kind of talisman which endows a particular contemporary point of view with authority and which is itself exempt from examination. So simplistic a view of the nature and function of

historical writing has no place in serious study, and its persistent use in the work in question neither advances the author's argument nor does credit to the source thus misused.

The failure of the book to come to terms with the Balyuzi critique makes it impossible for the uninformed reader to consider intelligently and dispassionately Professor Browne's own use of the sources available to him at the turn of the century. Professor Browne leaned heavily, one could say safely preferentially, on the views of a small band of men who at the time were involved in a bitter and protracted campaign to destroy the influence of Bahá'u'lláh. These men were Azalis, nominally supporters of Bahá'u'lláh's younger half-brother Mirza Yahya Subh-i-Azal. Unlike the mass of their fellow believers they had rejected Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be "He Whom God Will Manifest," Whose advent the Báb had promised. Professor Browne himself estimated their number to be no more than three or four in every hundred Bábís, all the remainder having recognized in Bahá'u'lláh the signs of the Báb's "Promised One."<sup>15</sup>

Against the virtually unanimous voice of the followers of the Báb, who knew the circumstances and the central personalities in the dispute at first hand, Professor Browne gave preference to the statements of the Azalis. What is the explanation for such a departure from historiographical methods and standards to which Professor Browne had earlier demonstrated his commitment?

He himself does not tell us. He presents no evidence from independent sources which would support the Azali claims, and he makes it clear that he has an equal measure of respect for the integrity of both parties. Obviously, some very powerful influence had intervened. Thus one of the invaluable contributions of Mr. Balyuzi's recent work is that it has identified this influence, with the help of documentation which has since come to light. The Bábí Revelation did not exercise only a spiritual and emotional influence on Professor Browne, powerful as that effect obviously was. Beyond this, Professor Browne insisted on seeing the new movement in the context of Victorian democratic and nationalistic hopes. He loved Persia, and he ardently looked to the Bábís to become the chief force in the political liberalization of the country. Persia was at the time in the grip of a protracted struggle between the reactionary elements supporting the feudal autocracy of the Shah and a combination of somewhat ill-assorted radical and revolutionary elements temporarily united under the title "Constitutionalists."<sup>16</sup> Naively seeing in the latter a kind of Persian equivalent of the British Liberal and Labor Parties, Professor Browne made himself one of their leading spokesmen in Britain and worked ardently to mobilize Western opinion in their support.

Perhaps even more important than his liberal ideals in impelling Professor Browne along this course were nationalistic convictions which held almost the force of a religion for him. Persia in the nineteenth century had become the key to one of the great international power struggles of the late nineteenth century, the contest of British and Russian empires for control of the land route to India and the Orient. Each side sought clients on the Persian domestic political scene. As Tsarist Russia increasingly supported the congenial despotism of the Qajar monarchy, English patriots like Professor Browne began to urge on their government the potential value of the Constitutionalists as British allies.<sup>17</sup>

To Professor Browne's intense disappointment the Bábí community, the most vital, disciplined, and progressive element in Persian society, refused to be drawn into either the domestic or the international conflict. The reason was Bahá'u'lláh's assumption of His Prophetic role and His refusal to compromise the universal nature of His message for political ends. Professor Browne's reaction may be read in his own commentary on Bahá'u'lláh's oft-quoted statement on the oneness of mankind:

Bahá'ísm [*sic*], in my opinion, is too cosmopolitan in its aim to render much direct service to that revival [i.e., of Persian political life]. "Pride is not for him who loves his country," says Bahá'u'lláh, "but for him who loves the world." This is a fine sentiment, but just now it is men who love their country above all else that Persia needs. [emphasis added]<sup>18</sup>

Only one small handful of Bábís were prepared, indeed eager, to assume the political role which Professor Browne had envisioned for them. These were the Azalis, who had by this time abandoned their erstwhile leader, Mirza Yahya, to his lonely exile on Cyprus, and had suddenly metamorphosed into political ideologists, journalists, and underground agents. In the process they entered into intimate correspondence with Professor Browne and became his trusted collaborators. It was from these men, intensely ambitious for public careers, and blocked by Bahá'u'lláh from utilizing the Báb's legacy to this end, that Professor Browne received the "documents" and commentaries which Mr. Balyuzi has convincingly exposed.

The only other non-Bahá'í sources whose assistance Rev. Miller acknowledge are an improbable collection of avowed opponents of the Bahá'í Faith, including several Protestant missionaries, a number of individuals who were at one time or another expelled from Bahá'í membership (and whose various reflections on one another's integrity is an aspect of their view not touched on in Rev. Miller's highly selective citations from their writings), and

two amateur American polemicists who lack even these modest credentials. Most of these persons are presented as independent “inquirers,” and only a very careful reading of the book reveals that, in fact, they represent a group of persons with varying grievances against the Bahá’í Faith, several of whom have long maintained a close correspondence on the congenial subject of attempts to “expose” its claims. In no sense can any of them be regarded as independent, nor their writings as scholarly. One is left to assume that the explanation for the failure of the book to draw on the works of any of the recognized scholars, except for Browne and, in a small way, Gobineau, is Rev. Miller’s ignorance of European languages other than English. Whatever the cause may be, the lack cannot explain the similar neglect of several basic Bahá’í sources which are available in the latter language. Limitations of space prevent a thorough examination of the subject, but one or two of the more glaring examples will illustrate the magnitude of the gap.

It is impossible that any responsible examination of the Bábí era could be undertaken without making extensive use of *THE DAWN- BREAKERS: NABIL’S NARRATIVE*, the detailed history of that period written by the one person who was both a firsthand observer and a recognized historical writer.<sup>19</sup> For those events which he did not personally witness, Nabil provides in exhaustive detail, the identity of the observers from whom he received the accounts and very often the circumstances surrounding the transmittal. To understand the significance of such a work one would have to imagine the importance to Christian history of a similar, meticulously annotated record kept by one of the immediate companions of Jesus Christ, and covering all the significant events of the latter’s ministry. This unique body of primary documentation is dismissed by Rev. Miller without further explanation as not “reliable.”<sup>20</sup>

In its place, the principal source used for this period (apart from Mr. Azal) is an extraordinary manuscript produced by unknown writers some time between 1852 and 1863, under the title *Nuqtatu’l Kaf*.<sup>21</sup> In his study on the work of Professor Browne, Mr. Balyuzi has demonstrated the unreliability of this strange *mélange* of historical narrative, superstition, nihilistic thought, and naive partisan propaganda. He also rescues the reputation of Mirza Jani, the merchant and Bábí martyr whose name and memoirs were misused by the compilers of the work.<sup>22</sup> For a modern writer to discuss the subject, therefore, would again have required coming to grips with the argument contained in the Balyuzi critique. The challenge is particularly acute for Rev. Miller, as the thesis of the section of his book which deals with the Bábí period rests squarely on the authenticity of the *Kaf* manuscript. Rev. Miller seems aware of the seriousness of the problem, but the one lengthy footnote which he devotes to the Balyuzi study is both superficial and essentially off the topic.<sup>23</sup> Ignoring the obstacle, he simply attributes the manuscript to Mirza Jani and asserts that it is “the earliest and best history” of the Bábí movement.<sup>24</sup>

Rev. Miller’s presentation of the period dominated by the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá’í Cause (1921–1957), suffers from a similarly unacceptable neglect of major sources. As with the Bábí era, there is one detailed, comprehensive source, this time provided by the person who, next to Shoghi Effendi himself, had the most intimate knowledge of the events of those thirty-six years. The book is *The Priceless Pearl*, the biography of the Guardian written by his widow and long-time secretary, Rúhíyyih Khánum, the former Mary Maxwell of Montreal, Canada, and published two years before Rev. Miller’s book went to press.<sup>25</sup> It is, by any standard, an extraordinary achievement in biography, in which an intricately crafted structure gives form and balance to the wealth of detail and documentation provided for every phase of the subject’s life and work. It is not merely that *The Priceless Pearl* is the best account of the events with which it deals. It is the only comprehensive account in existence. One is free, if one wishes, to regard it as “official history” (to use Rev. Miller’s disparaging phrase), but to disregard it is to demonstrate either an ignorance of the role of the Guardianship in Bahá’í history or a purpose so partisan as to produce the same effect.

To be precise, Rev. Miller does not entirely disregard Rúhíyyih Khánum’s writings. Rather, he extracts brief excerpts from moving, personal accounts which the author gives of her marriage and Shoghi Effendi’s death. These fragments lend color and an appearance of authenticity to Rev. Miller’s presentation of the writer (who in contrast to the male writers quoted is tastelessly referred to merely by her first name, “Mary”) as an emotional woman whose range of understanding and even interest goes little beyond a personal attachment to the man who was her husband.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from these highly misleading references, the invaluable biographical work which Rúhíyyih Khánum has contributed to an understanding of one of the most critical periods in the development of the Bahá’í Faith, the period of its global expansion, is passed over in silence. Yet the next chapter of Rev. Miller’s book finds space for nearly a dozen pages of quotations from the writings of Charles Mason Remey, formerly a figure of prominence in the Bahá’í Faith, who was expelled when he attempted to set himself up as “the hereditary Guardian” of the Faith in 1960.<sup>27</sup> From an objective point of view, and particularly in the light of subsequent events, on which Rev. Miller had fully informed himself, Mr. Remey’s role in Bahá’í history could hardly be regarded as a major one. His unsuccessful efforts to create a rift in the membership of the Faith is no doubt relevant to any comprehensive

discussion of modern Bahá'í history, but could have been more than adequately dealt with in a paragraph, illustrated by an extract from one of Mr. Remy's statements, if that seemed necessary to the writer's argument.

To present a figure of this kind as a major historical source is unacceptable in any serious work. Mr. Remy was an aged man at the time he produced the writings in question, one whose condition made him a pathetic figure and whose mental state could not have been unknown to anyone in even limited contact with him.<sup>28</sup> His statements throw no light whatever on the extraordinary expansion of the Bahá'í Faith in the past four decades, which had caused Rev. Miller so completely to revise his estimate of the Faith's capacities. Indeed, Mr. Remy wrote very little on this subject.

Inevitably, introduction of such material embroils its user in serious problems. After a lengthy review of Mr. Remy's pronouncements, Rev. Miller suddenly asks, "Did it ever occur to Mr. Remy that in claiming to be the Guardian [of the Bahá'í Faith] he was himself violating the Will of Abdu'l-Bahá", which required that the successor of the Guardian be 'the first born of his [Shoghi Effendi's] lineal descendants,' ..."<sup>29</sup> The point seems so obvious that one wonders why it is included at all. Few people, either within the Bahá'í Faith or outside, took seriously Mr. Remy's pretensions, and he died in his hundredth year, at about the time Rev. Miller's book was going to press, bereft of supporters or attention. Having given the subject extensive space, however, Rev. Miller seems to lose entirely the thread of his argument. Nine pages after the statement just quoted, the Hands of the Bahá'í Cause are criticized for having failed to "create a new Guardian," a step for which, as had just been noted, there was no authority in the Writings of their Faith.<sup>30</sup> Rev. Miller's judgment is most severe:

Unabashed ... and undeterred by the appeals of the Hand of the Cause and President of the First International Bahá'í Council, Mason Remy, to continue the Guardianship, the remaining Hands of the Cause proceeded with their plans [to arrange for the election of the Universal House of Justice].<sup>31</sup>

A discussion of Rev. Miller's use of sources is rendered extremely difficult by the fact that except for the brief opening chapters on Islam, he fails to provide a bibliography. Next to Nabil-i-A'zam and Rúhíyyih Khánúm, the most serious omissions that are readily apparent are the biographies of the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá which have been produced by Mr. Balyuzi (London: George Ronald, 1971 and 1973, respectively). Both books deal in some detail with a number of the most complex and contentious issues taken up by Rev. Miller. Both are extensively documented and make use of archival material which has only come to light in recent years. So far as *The Bahá'í Faith: Its History and Teachings* is concerned these two most current and basic texts might as well not exist. Where Rev. Miller does use Bahá'í sources, his editorial comments on them are uniformly hostile and unfair. The writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi especially suffer in this respect. In marked contrast long-time enemies of the Faith are treated with elaborate deference.

Although a wholesale misuse of sources is the book's most serious flaw, it is by no means the only one. Where congenial sources fail, Rev. Miller leans heavily on the "it is not too improbably to suggest" narrative method. Throughout the book, major gaps are filled in with this insubstantial connective. The far from impressive result is worth a moment's attention because of the revealing glimpse it provides of the historiographical methods and objectives underlying the book. Without exception, these glosses, none of which is supported by a reference to the usual "documentation," depreciate the significance of some important event or personality of Bahá'í history.

Occasionally, they are even used to force some unrelated Christian theological message into the narrative. The Báb's teachings on kindness, for example, are attributed to the influence on Him of the Christian scriptures: "*It is probable* [emphasis added] that in order to save his life Baha denied he was a Babi, as the Bab had ordered his disciples to do at the time of his execution. This is not improbable ..."<sup>33</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh's assumption of His divine mission is attributed to a recognition on His part of certain practical necessities within the Bábí movement: "Baha ... probably [emphasis added] realized that the Babi Cause in order to survive needed stronger leadership than his brother Azal was able to give."<sup>34</sup> Not even Muhammad escapes, although in His case, the vast body of existing scholarly comment imposes a greater degree of caution in the use of the method:

It was probably, in part at least [emphasis added], as a result of this contacts with them [Jews and Christians] that a strong conviction came to Muhammad ... that he had been appointed by Allah.... Therefore, in the Koran, in accordance with the supposed pattern of the books of previous prophets, ... we find regulations for marriage and divorce, ... The Prophet of Arabia probably [emphasis added] took Moses as his model of what a prophet should be and say and do, for he knew more of him than he did of Jesus.<sup>35</sup>

The results of this wholesale manufacturing of history are unedifying and occasionally grotesque. One of the most firmly established facts of Bahá'í history is the Báb's recognition of the title which Bahá'u'lláh chose for Himself and those which He conferred on His fellow Bábís. Nabil, who had the details at first hand from those present describes the scene at the conference of Badasht:

Upon each He [Bahá'u'lláh] bestowed a new name. He Himself was henceforth designated by the name of Bahá; upon the Last Letter of the Living was conferred the appellation of Quddús, and to Qurratu'l-'Ayn was given the title of Tahirih. To each of those who had convened at Badasht a special Tablet was subsequently revealed by the Báb, each of whom He addressed by the name recently conferred upon him.<sup>36</sup>

The Báb's recognition of the title of Bahá'u'lláh (Glory of God) was particularly significant since He had used precisely this term in the Bayan to allude to the promised "Him Whom God Will Manifest." On the eve of His departure for Tabriz where He was executed the Báb reiterated this recognition in a remarkable Tablet which He forwarded to Bahá'u'lláh. Nabil, who was himself a witness of the transmittal, describes the document as:

...a scroll of blue paper, of the most delicate texture, on which the Báb, in His own exquisite handwriting, which was a fine *shikastih* script, had penned, in the form of a pentacle, what numbered about five hundred verses, all consisting of derivations from the words "Bahá." ... So fine and intricate was the penmanship that, viewed at a distance, the writing appeared as a single wash of ink on the paper. We were overcome with admiration as we gazed upon a masterpiece which no calligraphist, we believed, could rival.<sup>37</sup>

The scroll was duly delivered to Bahá'u'lláh at Tehran. The most cursory research would have cleared up any question which a modern student of the Bahá'í Faith might have on the subject. Instead, Rev. Miller ignores Nabil's account in favor of an entirely fictitious version of events in which the Báb Himself, in some fashion not explained, conferred titles on all the other Badasht participants except Bahá'u'lláh. The latter then undertook a sedulous search through the Christian and other Scriptures for a title which would advance His own plans: "Mirza Husayn Ali [Bahá'u'lláh] no doubt [emphasis added] spent many hours searching for this beautiful word in all the sacred writings..."<sup>38</sup>

In the same fashion Shoghi Effendi's exercise of the unique ministry conferred on him in the Bahá'í Writings, a ministry for which he alone had the authority, is attributed to a psychological insecurity on his own part: "It seems that [emphasis added] he [Shoghi Effendi] did not know how to delegate tasks to others ..." <sup>39</sup>

The freedom with which this device is used betrays an ignorance on the part of the author of basic and readily available information on his subject. The Comte de Gobineau, for example, the first Western scholar to study the facts at first hand, says of the Bábí heroine, Tahirih: "I have never heard anyone among the Muslims cast any doubt on the virtue of so unusual a person"<sup>40</sup> Presumably lacking a thorough knowledge of Gobineau's work, and having objectives other than historiographical ones, Rev. Miller's discussion of the subject casts a slur on the character of this unique woman, whose personal life is regarded by Bahá'ís as the very model of moral purity: "her freedom of travelling about the country with the Bábí chiefs scandalized many people, and there was probably [emphasis added] some ground for criticism of his disregard for convention."<sup>41</sup> The writer then quotes an obscure reference from the *Kaf* manuscript and asserts that Tahirih "was on intimate terms" with one of her male colleagues.<sup>42</sup> The implication is clear.

A similar shadow is cast on the reputation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Howard Colby Ives, himself a Christian clergyman, fully acquainted with the details of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Western trip, makes a particular point of the fact that one of the many things which confirmed him in his recognition of Bahá'u'lláh was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's refusal to accept assistance with his personal expenses from Western believers. The funds which were raised by well-meaning friends were courteously returned to them.

... He constantly refused the slightest remuneration, and even when entertained by solicitous and generous hosts He was punctilious in seeing to it that gifts to both hosts and servants of the household far outweighed what He received.<sup>43</sup>

Mr. Ives' book is a commonplace item in any Bahá'í library, and although a number of other sources make precisely the same point, Rev. Miller casually creates an entirely fictitious version of events: "in the spring of 1912 'Abdu'l-Bahá no doubt [emphasis added] at the invitation and the expense [emphasis added] of the believers in America, set forth on a journey which lasted nearly two years."<sup>44</sup>

Almost no aspect of Bahá'í history escapes this treatment. A well-to-do philanthropist like Mrs. W. Sutherland Maxwell of Montreal, and professional people such as Keith Ransom-Kehler and Dr. Susan Moody, whose dedication of their funds and skills to the work of the Bahá'í Faith was an inspiration to their coreligionists all over the world, are described as "paid pioneers."<sup>45</sup> The open and emphatic declaration of her faith as a Bahá'í by Queen Marie of Rumania, in letters to newspapers and to the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith (some of which were published with her consent in photostat form in Volumes VI and VIII of *The Bahá'í World*)<sup>46</sup> is passed over in silence, and a letter from the Queen's daughter, a member of a Christian religious order, is used to raise doubt about the "alleged" conversion of the Queen.<sup>47</sup> Countless other examples could be cited.

Moral insensitivity, indeed, is another glaring weakness of the entire work. The shortcoming is unfortunately one which requires some attention here, if for no other reason than the fact that moral sensitivity is so important a requirement in anyone who seeks to write on matters as central to human conscience as is faith. It is also an attribute to which Rev. Miller lays formal claim by virtue of his profession. A single example will perhaps stand for the numerous lapses which tarnish every chapter of his book. It concerns the character of Mirza Yahya, Subh-i-Azal, the half-brother and persistent enemy of Bahá'u'lláh, and a figure whom Rev. Miller's book presents in the most favorable possible light as an unworldly soul, utterly devoted to the memory of the Báb, and incapable of any form of self-assertion.<sup>48</sup> The picture is one which would have astonished the nineteenth-century Bábís who knew Azal at first hand over a period of many years and whose assessment of his character is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that almost without exception they came to despise him.<sup>49</sup> As his character steadily deteriorated under the influence of a consuming ambition and the manipulation of a former student of Muslim theology, Siyyid Muhammad, who was his closest associate, no single piece of grossness on Azal's part so revolted those in contact with him as did his treatment of the widow of the Báb. The Báb had prescribed the marks of respect due her and had explicitly forbidden any man to presume to seek her in marriage after the Báb's own death. In the turmoil which followed the martyrdom of the Báb and the dispersal of the Bábí community, Azal surpassed his other infamies to that date when he first took this lady as one of his several wives and later "gave" her to Siyyid Muhammad. Rev. Miller's incapacity to understand the nature of the events which he is discussing is nowhere more clearly revealed than in the complacent passing reference which he makes to a subject which Bahá'í historians regard with abhorrence: "The blame for the opposition of Subh-i-Azal to Baha's claims has been laid by the Bahá'ís on Siyyid Muhammad of Isfahan, who had been an intimate friend of the Báb, and had married the Báb's widow Fatima."<sup>50</sup>

A parallel shortcoming is Rev. Miller's ignorance of Bahá'í thought itself. It is not to be expected that a Presbyterian clergyman would be sympathetic with theological concepts central to a Faith that he considers to be false. If he chooses to write a book on the subject, however, it is reasonable to expect that he will at least understand these concepts and, as a result of such understanding, presumably make a creditable effort at refuting them in a work written for that purpose.

That Rev. Miller does not understand what the Bahá'í Faith teaches on subject which are absolutely central to its message becomes apparent as soon as he moves from his historiographical pastiche to conceptual questions. The problem affects his efforts to deal with almost every major issue, including the nature of God, the nature and function of revelation in history, the role of the Messenger of God, the Bahá'í view of the station of the Báb, life after death, and the relationship of each revelation to those which precede and follow it. The subject is far beyond the scope of this review, but one example will perhaps illustrate the seriousness of the problem.

The Bahá'í Faith teaches that religion is progressive. Islam is a fuller revelation than Christianity, and those revelations since Muhammad, the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, incorporate and develop the elements which appeared for the first time in Islam, as well as unfolding yet other aspects of the divine purpose. What sets the latter three Faiths apart from Christianity is that they include moral teachings which relate to the organization of society as well as those which govern purely individual conduct. Far from leaving unto Caesar "the things that are Caesar's," Islam contained a wide range of moral instruction related to the state's administration of human affairs. The extraordinarily beneficial effect of such moral instruction on the conduct of governments was repeatedly demonstrated by the marked contrast between the way in which Islamic and Christian societies carried on warfare, conducted diplomacy, encouraged intellectual advancement, and administered the daily life of the peoples entrusted to their care, throughout the several centuries in which these two religious cultures were locked in their great historic struggle.

It is not surprising in this context, therefore, to find that the Writings of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh contained extensive teachings directed at the conduct of institutions and states, teachings which necessarily differ greatly from those intended to guide the life of the individual believer. Bahá'u'lláh states that mankind has now entered the era of "divine justice," and that it is the duty of governments of the world to administer justice, in accordance with divine principles. Similarly, He creates institutions for the administration of the life of the Bahá'í community and provides these institutions with specific guidance designed to enable them to mold a community

which can provide a practical example for the organization of man's social life. While making it clear that loyalty to government and the strict avoidance by Bahá'ís of involvement in any kind of political activity are fundamental principles of His Faith, He insists that all forms of human organization are today under the judgment of God and will rise or fall depending on whether they conform their philosophies of government and patterns of behavior to the central principle that the time has come for the unification of humankind in one race and one global society.<sup>51</sup>

On the individual believer, however, the divine command lays the duty of acting with love, mercy, forbearance and forgiveness. Going one step beyond the so-called "Golden Rules" of earlier stages in mankind's moral evolution, Bahá'u'lláh calls upon the individual to "prefer others" to himself and teaches that such a standard is the only basis upon which the Bahá'í principle of "unity in diversity" can be realized, with all its implications for the protection of individual identity.

Few if any of the Christian missionary writers who have chosen to attack the Bahá'í Faith over the past several decades have shown the patience to try to grasp this fundamental distinction. For them faith is essentially an individual matter. The individual is saved alone, and society as such is irredeemable. The "coming of the Kingdom" is an event outside history, so far outside indeed as to occur in another world entirely. To be sure, these basic elements of Christian theology have been so muddled by conflicting sectarian interpretations and by twentieth-century attempts to create a "social gospel" that they probably have little relevance for the average member of most Christian churches. Yet Pauline theology itself has not changed. However weakened or inarticulate, it continues to appear in habits of thought and in assumptions which reveal their presence when a mind conditioned by them tries to grapple with new elements in religious truth.

Rev. Miller is a victim of these limitations. While ostensibly aware that the Bahá'í Faith has dimensions other than those related to the moral life of the individual, he clearly has not grasped the implications.<sup>52</sup> In discussing the ministry of the Báb, he sketches briefly the kinds of authority which the Bábí Scriptures gave to the Bábí state, in preparation for the coming of "Him Whom God Will Manifest." Although inadequate and distorted, the discussion touches on such subjects as regulations governing military activity, the rights of the state in private property, the rights of citizens who have embraced the new Revelation, and one or two related subjects.<sup>53</sup> The passage then continues:

It is not clear how these regulations about conquest of countries and divisions of booty [*sic*] were to be reconciled with other commands in the Bayan [the Babi Scriptures], such as: "No one is to be slain for unbelief, for the slaying of a soul is outside the religion of God ... and if anyone commits it he is not, and has not been, of the Bayan."<sup>54</sup>

The explanation, of course, lies in the distinction which the three Faiths under discussion make between the moral responsibilities of states (or institutions) and those of the individual soul. The extent to which Rev. Miller has failed to understand the distinction is demonstrated by the fact that the chapter which he devotes to the teachings of the Báb indiscriminately mixes up laws and principles which fall into these two very different categories.

The same conceptual problem handicaps Rev. Miller's efforts to understand the emphasis which Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the Guardian of the Bahá'í Cause (Shoghi Effendi) placed on the integrity of the community entrusted to them. One of the most impressive achievements of the Bahá'í Faith is its success in maintaining its unity during the first critical century of its existence, the period in which schism has divided every religious movement in the past. Rev. Miller seems to some extent appreciative of this achievement, as he devotes considerable attention to the various efforts made over the years to introduce schism into the ranks of the Bahá'í community without at any point coming to grips with the implications of the Faith's success in overcoming this age-old enemy of men's efforts to work together in harmony.

The factor responsible for the achievement has been the conveyance of authority known as the "Covenant," by which Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá endowed the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice with the powers necessary to govern the community which They had brought into existence.<sup>55</sup> At each stage in the development of the Bahá'í Faith this conveyance of authority was challenged by various elements who sought to advance parties or objectives of their own. These challenges were successfully surmounted only because of the firmness with which the central institutions of the Faith insisted upon the authority established under the Covenant, called upon the entire community to unite in support of one single program, and where necessary did not hesitate to expel from the ranks of the community those few persons who refused to accept the conditions which Bahá'u'lláh Himself had placed upon membership in His Faith. One is at liberty, if one chooses, to criticize this element in the building of a global community, but any such criticism must be founded on an understanding of the theory involved and of the distinction between these principles of social organization and those which relate to the spiritual life of the individual.

Rev. Miller's inability to grasp the distinction inevitably leads him into a tangle of argument which misses entirely one of the most interesting and important features of the development of the religion he is attempting to describe. In his chapter on the teachings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for example, he quotes the latter as saying:

You must love humanity in order to uplift and beautify humanity. Even if people slay you, yet you must love them. ... We are creatures of the same God, therefore we must love all as children of God even though they are doing us harm.<sup>56</sup>

Rev. Miller then goes on to introduce the question of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vigorous denunciation of those who attempted to break the Covenant established by Bahá'u'lláh, to which they had committed themselves:

After reading these beautiful words it is disappointing to discover in other utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that he found it impossible to love certain people. It appears that he to the end of his life cherished great bitterness toward the "Covenant-breakers," the leader of whom had been his own brother Mirza Muhammad Ali.<sup>57</sup>

In fact, one of the features of the lives of both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi which profoundly impressed those in close contact with them and served as a powerful example to the conduct of the members of the Faith at large, was the patience and forbearance which they demonstrated as individuals in the face of almost daily harassment from those whose personal ambitions they had blocked.<sup>58</sup>

Conceptual weaknesses of such dimensions are difficult to understand in a writer whose professional training is in the field of theology and who holds distinguished credentials in this highly specialized discipline. Questions of prejudice aside, they arise presumably from a failure to take seriously the intellectual foundations of the Faith being studied. There is no more risky lapse in the examination of beliefs other than one's own.

Certainly there is evidence that Rev. Miller frequently flagged as his pursuit of his private white whale carried him on through growing masses of information. Taken as a whole, the book is uneven. While some sections are closely argued and demonstrate the author's command of a large body of detail, other betray signs of hasty writing and a very superficial familiarity with the sources used. In some cases Rev. Miller's material seems entirely to escape his control. An example is his treatment of the subject of the powerful impression which Bahá'u'lláh made on persons of capacity who met Him. Rev. Miller seems to resist coming to terms with this incontrovertible fact of the history he is recounting. In an apparent effort to reduce the problem to more manageable proportions, he introduces an explanation which Muslim theologians and other opponents of the Bahá'í Faith early developed to account for the extraordinary impact of the Messenger of God upon human consciousness. Rev. Miller paraphrases their explanation in his introduction of the story of the interview which Bahá'u'lláh granted to Professor Browne:

Each visitor was carefully prepared for his audience with the Manifestation of God. He was told that what he saw when he came into the Divine Presence would depend on what he was himself—if he was a material person he would see only a man, but if he was a spiritual being he would see God. When his expectations had been sufficiently aroused, the pilgrim was led into the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and was permitted to gaze for a few moments upon "the Blessed Perfection" ...The almost magical effect of such visits is seen in the account which Professor Browne has given of his experience in Akka in 1890.<sup>59</sup>

The explanation is nothing if not ingenious, and taken by itself would no doubt seem quite persuasive to persons who lacked any other information on Bahá'u'lláh's life. Almost immediately afterward, however, Rev. Miller quotes the memorable words of Professor Browne's own version of events. Describing his entrance in Bahá'u'lláh's room, Professor Browne says:

Though I dimly suspected whither I was going and whom I was to behold (for no distinct intimation had been given to me) [emphasis added], a second or two elapsed ere, with a throb of wonder and awe, I became definitely conscious that the room was not untenanted. In the corner where the divan met the wall sat a wondrous and venerable figure ... The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow ... No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!<sup>60</sup>

Since the explanation had been introduced to account for the impact of Bahá'u'lláh's personality on Browne, and since Browne himself states that, far from being told whom he was to see, he had only inferred himself that he might be entering the room of Bahá'u'lláh, one can only conclude that this section of the book, like a number of others, represents a very hasty assembling of material gathered from contradictory sources and quite unintegrated in the writer's own mind. Ironically, the passage of Professor Browne's writings which immediately precedes the section quoted by Rev. Miller is devoted to correcting *precisely* the kind of story which Rev. Miller has carelessly retailed.

Finally, some attention must be given here to one further theme, if for no other reason than the weight of emphasis placed on it by Rev. Miller. This is the charge, brought against the Bahá'ís by Azalis and subsequently picked up by others of their enemies, that the success of the Bahá'í Faith was secured in large part by the murder of persons who opposed it. The Founders of the Faith are accused, if not of initiating these crimes, at least of conniving at them.<sup>61</sup>

The charge derives much of what force it possesses from a tragic incident which tarnished the name of the Faith early in Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment in 'Akká, and which caused Him intense indignation and grief.<sup>62</sup> The full story is given in Shoghi Effendi's *God Passes By* and has long served as an object lesson to a persecuted community of the importance and the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on nonviolence.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, Bahá'í writers have insisted that similar charges which Azalis and other opponents hastened to heap on top of this incident have no basis whatever in fact. Professor Browne, although he sought to avoid discussing the subject, appears to have accepted at least some of the charges leveled against the early Bahá'ís by his Azali acquaintances.<sup>64</sup> At no time were any of the charges supported by independent evidence, nor were they pursued by Ottoman civil authorities who eagerly took advantage of every excuse to persecute the new religion. In retrospect it is obvious that the charges were conceived not simply to blacken the reputation of the Bahá'ís, but to provide an explanation for Bahá'u'lláh's success which had so precisely fitted the assurances of the Báb and which had created an inescapable dilemma for Azal and his supporters.<sup>65</sup>

These charges have since been taken up and given wide currency by the several Christian missionaries who have written against the Bahá'í Faith. For the most part these missionaries have contented themselves with simply advancing the charges on the basis of the otherwise unsupported statements of the Azalis. Against this background it is interesting, therefore, to examine how Rev. Miller handles the subject.

The most complete treatment of one such incident occurs in his chapter on the life and work of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It concerns a certain Mirza Yahya, who had abandoned his pledge under the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and had become the agent of Muhammad Ali in the latter's efforts to set up a party of his own.<sup>66</sup> For this, Yahya was severely rebuked by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and warned in the strongest language that God would defend the unity of His Faith and that unless Yahya desisted he would suffer in both this world and the next. Undeterred, Yahya continued his activity. The following is the account of his subsequent death as written by his father-in-law, Haji Mulla Husayn, and reproduced together with other related documents by Professor Browne in his 1917 work *Materials For The Study of the Bábí Religion*.<sup>67</sup> The Haji felt he had witnessed a fulfillment of "prophecy" and was writing to share the details with a friend:

Touching the Tablet which was vouchsafed from the Land of Heart's Desire [i.e. 'Akká, the home of 'Abdu'l-Bahá], in truth if anyone should possess the eye of discernment, these same Blessed Words which were thus fulfilled are a very great miracle... I read the Tablet to Mirza Yahya and he listened. ... Then he rose up and departed to his own house. A few nights later towards the dawn one knocked at the door of my house. "Who is it?" I cried. Then, seeing that it was a maid-servant, I added, "What wilt thou?" She replied, "Mirza Yahya is done for." I at once ran thither. Hajji Muhammad Baqir also was present. I saw that blood was flowing from his (Mirza Yahya's) throat, and that he was unable to move. By this time it was morning. I at once brought thither an Indian doctor. He examined him and said, "A blood-vessel in his lung is ruptured. He must lie still for three days and not move, and then he will recover." He then gave him some medicine. The hemorrhage stopped for two days, and his condition improved. In spite of this he was not admonished to return to the Truth. After two days there was a second flow of blood from his throat and he was nearly finished. The doctor came again and gave him medicine, but ultimately it profited him nothing. Twice again he vomited undiluted blood, and then surrendered his spirit. ...<sup>68</sup>

Rev. Miller provides an abbreviated excerpt from the above account, the only document in the series published by Professor Browne which he quotes. He entirely omits, however, that section of the passage that describes the summoning of the doctor, the diagnosis which the latter gave, and the details of the remissions and final hemorrhage which killed Yahya.<sup>69</sup> Instead, he provides a brief summary of the contents of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's letter to Yahya and

the efforts of the latter's father-in-law to admonish him, concluding: "A few nights later Mirza Yahya was found in the house in a serious condition with blood flowing from his throat, and after several days he died."<sup>70</sup>

Even more startling is the use which Rev. Miller makes of the fact that Professor Browne has translated and reproduced the document: "Not only did Abdu'l-Baha and his followers not remain silent, they went beyond angry words. Browne has published evidence which proves conclusively [emphasis added] that at least in one instance the old Bábí method of assassination was resorted to by Abdu'l-Baha to get rid of a dangerous enemy."<sup>71</sup> In sum, we are told by Rev. Miller that Mirzá Yahya was murdered in a particularly horrendous manner (presumably by having his throat cut), that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, acting in the traditions of his Faith, had ordered this odious crime, and that the authority for all these charges is Edward Browne who subsequently published his findings. Not one of these allegations is true.

For anyone with some direct experience of the subject, *The Bahá'í Faith: Its History and Teachings* conveys the impression of a rather ill-tempered amateur theatrical group plodding resentfully through a performance of *Hamlet* in which no one has been assigned the title role. For what is almost totally absent from the book is the Bahá'í Faith itself. Only a mere shadow, a kind of ghost of Denmark's murdered king, is present on stage to utter the occasional muffled protest from under the masses of trivia, misrepresentation, and personal prejudice in which Rev. Miller has literally burned his subject.

One searches in vain for a presentation of the great body of ethical and devotional literature which makes up the bulk of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, and which have exercised so powerful and positive an effect on the lives of millions of persons. Its place is taken by a labored effort to paraphrase and summarize precisely the one of Bahá'u'lláh's books which its Author Himself states must be understood in the light of a vast body of supplementary Writings to most of which Rev. Miller had no access, and of the expositions of those who were named to book's sole interpreters.<sup>72</sup>

The persons of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, as Rev. Miller presents them, must be virtually unrecognizable to those who knew them at first hand. There is no trace of the great humanitarianism of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which won Him universal respect from government and public alike and which, at the time of His passing in 1921, evoked the greatest demonstration of public grief from the many religious, ethnic, and cultural communities in Haifa that modern Palestine has witnessed.<sup>73</sup> Nor is there any recognition of the reputation of integrity which Shoghi Effendi built up over the thirty-six years of his Guardianship, which made him the sole public figure in Haifa whose independence was spontaneously respected by all sides in the bitter civil wars that ravaged the country after the 1948 partition, and which made it possible for him to establish through processes of civil law which he had not himself initiated every smallest public detail of the trust which Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant had conferred upon him.<sup>74</sup>

One will search in vain, too, for an adequate presentation of the extraordinary global expansion of the Bahá'í community over the past forty years. The statistics of this expansion must be among the most impressive of any religious development in the past century.<sup>75</sup> Only fragments of the story appear in two of the later chapters, in both cases hedged about by comments which depreciate the importance of the development being described.<sup>76</sup> Since this phenomenon of expansion presumably caused the startling reversal in Rev. Miller's own assessment of the Bahá'í Faith's capacities and provoked the years of industry represented by this new book, the absence of an adequate treatment of the subject is all the more remarkable.

But what is most strikingly absent from *The Bahá'í Faith: Its History and Teachings* is any effort to communicate the spirit which, for over a century, has evoked self-sacrifice on a scale seldom equaled in religious history and which has produced the expansion already mentioned. It would be unrealistic and unfair to expect a Protestant clergyman to admire the beliefs which inspired such devotion, or even to appreciate adequately the devotion itself. The phenomenon nevertheless exists and is the feature of the Bahá'í Faith which has most deeply impressed every disinterested observer who has come in contact with it for over a century. It is almost tangible in the writings of such independent scholars as Browne and Gobineau, neither of whom himself became a believer nor felt his reputation diminished by his recognition of this spiritual force as a fact of history. In an address on "the Bábí Religion" to a scholarly audience at the South Place conference on comparative religions in 1891, Professor Browne attempted to convey something of the power of this spirit as he had experienced it at first hand. He described the Bábí-Bahá'í movement as "an heroic struggle which I do not hesitate to call the greatest religious movement of the century,"<sup>77</sup> and he concluded:

I trust that I have told you enough to make it clear that the objects at which this religion aims are neither trivial nor unworthy of the noble self-devotion and heroism of the Founder and his followers. It is the lives and deaths of these, their hope which knows no despair, their love which knows no cooling, their steadfastness which knows no wavering, which stamp this wonderful movement with a character entirely its own. For whatever may be the merits of demerits of the doctrines for which these scores and hundreds

of our fellow-men died, they have at least found something which made them ready to “leave all things under the sky, And go forth naked under sun and rain, And work and wait and watch out all their years.”

It is not a small or easy thing to endure what these have endured, and surely what they deemed worth life itself is worth trying to understand. I say nothing of the mighty influence which, as I believe, the Babi faith will exert in the future, nor of the new life it may perchance breathe into a dead people; for, whether it succeed or fail, the splendid heroism of the Babi martyrs is a thing eternal and indestructible... But what I cannot hope to have conveyed to you is the terrible earnestness of these men, and the indescribable influence which this earnestness, combined with other qualities, exerts on any one who has actually been brought in contact with them. That you must take my word for...[\(78\)](#)

What is the strange defect in the ecclesiastical form of religious organization, which so often prompts its members to seek to destroy the faith of other men? It is a vice which, to one extent or another, has characterized the priestly caste of virtually every religion in recorded history. To our shame here in the West, it has especially stained the record of the religion of Jesus Christ, the religion of which we have been preeminently the trustees. The indecent and grossly unfair slanders against Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, which for centuries were impressed upon the populations of Christian lands by those whom they trusted as their spiritual mentors have done incalculable harm to human relations and to the cause of world peace. If an accounting were ever to be demanded (and one of Bahá'u'lláh's persistent themes is that in this day God and history are demanding just such an accounting), Judaism alone could present the major Christian churches with a billing which none of them is in any moral state to meet.

In recent decades, with a vast increase in education and the simultaneous breakdown of ecclesiastical authority, the open vilification of earlier ages has given way to caution. Rev. Miller's book can fairly be considered a representative example of the new trend. But the spirit and the essential methods have not changed. Nor has the aim, which is to attack and create contempt and aversion for beliefs which differ from one's own. The perennial explanation is that truth must be served, whatever the cost to human sensitivities. It would obviously be pointless and unseemly to dignify such arguments with any serious attention in the face of the methods by which earnest polemicists such as Rev. Miller seek to serve their conception of truth.

What is especially difficult to understand is that attacks such as that of Rev. Miller against the Bahá'í Faith originate with men whose own spiritual ancestors suffered cruelly and unfairly from the same abuse. For the first two centuries after Christ the civilized Roman world was exposed to a picture of the Christian faith which was a mockery of truth, as horrifying as it is unrecognizable. In it Jesus was presented as the illegitimate offspring of a transient mercenary soldier. As the story grew, new details were invented, including a name for this entirely fictional parent. The disciples were pictured as a band of fanatical cutthroats who mixed political conspiracy with highway robbery and casual mayhem. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was portrayed as a lunatic scheme to take over the civil government. Innocently allegorical statements in the Gospels were wrenched out of context and used to hint at obscene and cruel practices. Finally, it was charged that the story of this wretched backwater uprising had then been used to manufacture a new universal religion that would appeal to the educated “Westerners” of the day, the Greeks and Romans.

These calumnies against Christianity did not originate with pagan tyrants like Nero and Domitian. The original perpetrators were clergymen, the heirs of Abraham and Moses. To their fellow Jews these priests no doubt seemed models of traditional piety and learning. Yet they collaborated with Roman civil authorities whom they considered both godless and corrupt and made use of the “testimony” of apostates like Judas whose moral character they despised.

In the long run the chief result of this effort was to awaken the curiosity of the spiritually hungry. Even before the conversion of Constantine one-twentieth of the population of the empire had already embraced the faith of Jesus Christ.

Bahá'í's can perhaps, therefore, afford to regard Rev. Miller's effort to discharge his lifelong obsession with their Faith, with a certain degree of equanimity. Whatever interest it may arouse must inevitably excite a wider discussion of their Founder's message. If at the same time it stimulates His followers to a deeper study of the implications of that message, they will surely have derived the maximum benefit from an experience which believers in all ages before them have had and which the gradual but unmistakable disappearance of the ecclesiastical profession around the world seems likely to deny to their spiritual descendants.

## Footnotes

1. William McElwee Miller, *Baha'ism: Its Origin, History, and Teachings* (Fleming H. Revell Co., 1931); William McElwee Miller, *The Bahá'í Faith: Its History and Teachings* (South Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1974).
2. Mirza Husayn Ali Bahá'u'lláh, *Al-Kitab Al-Aqdas or The Most Holy Book* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1961): an English translation of Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* with an introduction by W.M. Miller.
3. Miller, *Bahá'í Faith*, pp. 349-50.
4. Miller, *Baha'ism*, p. 9.
5. Miller, *Baha'ism*, p. xi.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 358.
7. E.G. Browne provides a valuable bibliography on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths prior to 1917 in two of his works: *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb*, trans. Edward G. Browne (Cambridge, England: The Univ. Press, 1918), pp. 175–243.
8. Miller, *Bahá'í Faith*, p. xvi. Except where otherwise indicated, further references to Rev. Miller's work are taken from *The Bahá'í Faith: Its History and Teachings*.
9. Mirza Yahya was the younger half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh and like Him a follower of the Báb. The central theme of the Báb's Teachings was that He had come to prepare the way for a Universal Messenger of God, "He Whom God Will Make Manifest." The time of the advent of this figure was known to God alone, but the Bábís were commanded to await it eagerly. At the height of the persecutions of the Bábís in the late 1840s the Báb named Yahya as titular head of the community and commanded him to set an example of fidelity. Instead, Yahya fled in disguise as soon as the persecution of the Bábí community began. When Bahá'u'lláh publicly proclaimed Himself to be the Promised Messenger, Yahya at first temporized and then refused to submit. He was promptly abandoned by virtually the entire Bábí community. His subsequent attempts on Bahá'u'lláh's life failed and deepened the abhorrence in which his former coreligionists had come to hold him. In 1867 the Ottoman government exiled Yahya and his immediate family to Cyprus where he died in 1912, abandoned even by those few Bábís who had originally followed him. Yahya named one of his surviving sons, Ahmad, as his successor, but the latter eventually repudiated his father, sought 'Abdu'l-Bahá's forgiveness for his part in the family's misdeeds, and lived the remainder of his life as a steadfast Bahá'í. Rev. Miller seems unaware of this aspect of the Azal's family story, as he is under the impression that Yahya did not name a successor (Miller, p. 107). Jelal Azal was a younger brother of Ahmad, apparently resenting the circumstances in which he found himself, he began a lifelong effort to reverse the verdict of history by reviving the Azali charges against Bahá'u'lláh and attempting to interpret events in a fashion which would restore his father's reputation. The notes and documents which he gave to Rev. Miller are the fruit of this campaign. The subject has been dealt with in detail by Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Pub. Trust, 1944), Chapters VII–XII passim, and by Browne in *Traveller's Narrative*, Introduction and Notes U, V, and W; in *Materials*, Introduction and Sections I, VIII, IX; and in Mirza Huseyn of Hamadan, *Tarikh-I-Jadid or New History of Mirza Ali Muhammad the Báb*, trans. Edward G. Browne (Cambridge, England: The Univ. Press, 1893), passim.
10. Rev. Miller states: "While engaged in the task of rewriting a book which was published many years ago [*Bahá'í Sm*] ..., the author was most fortunate in becoming acquainted through correspondence with another scholar [Mr. Azal] who was uniquely qualified to supply new historical material and to throw fresh light on many of the doctrines and the events of the Babi-Baha'i movement. ...Mr. Azal most generously made available to the author the results of his scholarly research, having supplied more than 1100 pages [of notes and documents] ..." (p. xvi). In fact (so far as the first century of Bahá'í history is concerned), it is not exaggerating the case to say that the bulk of the new primary material which distinguishes this book from Rev. Miller's earlier effort can be credited to Mr. Azal.
11. See, for example, Hasan Balyuzi's discussion of three Azali contributions in *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith* (London: George Ronald, 1970): the "Hasht Bihisht," pp. 19–21, 33–34, 80–84; the *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, pp. 70–88; and the Persian Introduction to the latter, pp. 70, 73–88. Mr. Balyuzi mentions various errors of fact in Azali manuscripts, whose authorship had been concealed and which had earlier been pointed out by Mirzá Abu'l-Fadl. Rev. Miller takes note of at least one of these flaws, although he fails to identify the source of the insights. (Cf. Balyuzi, pp. 72–73; Miller, p. 73). Rev. Miller also blandly notes the Azali authorship of the "Hasht-Bihisht" (Miller, p. 102) without a suggestion of recognition that the Azalis had attempted to pass it off as the work of one of the Báb's leading disciples, Haji Siyyid Javad. (Cf. Balyuzi, p. 20, citing Browne, J.R.A.S., n.s., vol. xxiv, p. 684.)

12. The kind of distortion which this influence produced in Rev. Miller's narrative is particularly apparent in those sections where he attempts to discuss Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be "He Whom God Will Manifest." The Báb had repeatedly stated that the central purpose of His own mission was the preparation of mankind for the advent of this universal divine Messenger. He had stated that the time of the advent was known to God alone but had assured a number of His close disciples that they would in their own lifetimes recognize and serve "Him Whom God Will Manifest." (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 28). Rev. Miller notes the reports of both Professor Browne and the Comte de Gobineau that in the anarchy which followed the martyrdom of the Báb and the massacres of many thousands of His followers, several of the more excitable Bábis had come to believe that they were the Promised Deliverer (see Miller, pp. 75-77). Indeed, the unknown authors of the *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* sought to claim the title for Mirza Yahya (see Miller, p. 73). The Báb, however, had assured His followers emphatically in the Bayan (see Miller, p. 54) that no one could falsely claim to be "He Whom God Will Make Manifest," and succeed in such a claim. Bahá'u'lláh's complete triumph, therefore, and the humiliating collapse of Yahya's pretensions (see Miller, p. 98) were extremely embarrassing to the Azali apologists. Their efforts to escape the dilemma centered on an attempt to argue that a cryptic reference in the Bayan to the word "Ghiyath," whose numerical equivalent according to one method of reckoning is 1511, indicated that the Promised One was not to appear until at least fifteen hundred and eleven years had passed. Much more explicit references by the Báb to "the year nine" and "the year nineteen" were entirely ignored.
- Rev. Miller takes up this arcane argument and makes it the organizing principle of his discussion of the relationship between the Bábi and Bahá'í Revelations. The entire presentation is far removed from the methods and purposes of historiography.
13. See notes (7) and (9) above. Browne's *A Year Amongst The Persians* (Cambridge, England: The Univ. Press, 1893) is also extremely valuable as are a number of papers published under the auspices of the Royal Asiatic Society. Interested readers are also referred to Browne's Introduction to Myron Phelps' *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi* (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1903) and the text of a lengthy address delivered in 1889 at the South Place Institute under the title "Babism" and published in *The Religious Systems of the World: A Contribution to the Study of Comparative Religions*, ed. Wm. Sheowring and Conrad W. Thies (London: Swann Sonnenschien & Co., Limited, 1902), pp. 333-53.
14. Miller, p. 113, n. 44
15. Browne, "Babism," in *Religious Systems*, p. 351, *Tarikh-i-Jadid*. p. xxiv; *Traveller's Narrative*, p. xvii, *Materials*, pp. xv-xvii.
16. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1910) and *The Persian Constitutional Movement* (London, 1918). Both works reflect the hopes which Browne placed in the Bábis, and the latter especially reflects his disappointment, as does *Materials*, pp. xv-xx.
17. I am also indebted for these insights into the nationalistic aspects of Professor Browne's motivations to Professor Firuz Kazemzadeh. See his *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914: A Study in Imperialism* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale Univ. Press, 1968), p. 247, n. 16.
18. English Introduction to *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, cited by Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne*, p. 88.
19. *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Pub. Trust, 1932). This massively documented tome runs 668 pages and is supplemented by over two hundred photographs, maps, sketches, and charts, as well as an Appendix, a Glossary, and an index.
20. Miller, p. 303.
21. The title means literally "The Point of Kaf," (that is, the letter "K"). It is no longer possible to determine the reason why this strange title was given to the manuscript.
22. In his *Tarikh-i-Jadid*, published in 1893, Professor Browne had included a translation of excerpts from the writings of the noted Persian scholar Mirzá Abu'l-Fadl, who had studied an original copy of the memoirs of Mirzá Jani. Mr. Balyuzi now published the further statement of Mirzá Abu'l-Fadl that the manuscript which appeared in an English translation in 1910 under the title *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* was a forgery (Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne*, pp. 70-73).
23. Miller, pp. 111-13, n. 44. The note includes the extraordinary statement: "Whether, therefore, the book published by Browne [i.e., the *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*] was written entirely by Mirzá Jani before his death in 1852, or whether others wrote the book after the death of Mirzá Jani and gave his name to it, the *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* is by far the earliest account in our possession.
24. Miller, p. 21.
25. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahá'í Pub. Trust, 1969).
26. Miller, pp. 295-99.
27. Miller, pp. 311-23.

28. Mr. Remy was honored by the Guardian of the Bahá'í Cause by appointment as a Hand of the Cause of God in 1951. Subsequently, in preparation for the eventual election of the Universal House of Justice Shoghi Effendi created an advisory body to assist him in his work, to which he gave the name the International Bahá'í Council. Mr. Remy was appointed President of the Council, although what may be considered to be the ranking position, "liaison with the Guardian of the Faith," was assigned to Rúhíyyih Khánum. Mr. Remy later stated that the Council's role was purely honorary (Miller, p. 292), although he subsequently attempted to use his position in it to advance his bizarre claim to be the "hereditary Guardian" of the Faith.
29. Miller, p. 318.
30. The position of the Hand of the Cause of God was created by Bahá'u'lláh to distinguish certain believers who possessed unusual capacity in the field of Bahá'í service. 'Abdu'l-Bahá defines their role in his *Will and Testament* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Pub. Trust, 1944), and Shoghi Effendi relied heavily on them to assist him with delicate and important missions and as formal representatives of the Faith at major functions. He also named them "Stewards" of the Faith, thus enabling them to make the necessary preparations for the election of the Universal House of Justice, following Shoghi Effendi's death in 1957.
31. Miller, p. 327.
32. Ibid., p. 62.
33. Ibid., p. 80.
34. Ibid., p. 81.
35. Ibid., pp. 2-4.
36. Nabil, *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 293.
37. Ibid., p. 505.
38. Miller, p. 120. As is the case so often throughout his book Rev. Miller advances an alternative explanation, without any attempt to resolve the contradiction or indeed even any clear indication that he recognizes the problem it creates for his argument. In the case of Bahá'u'lláh's title, Tahiri is alleged (p. 119) to have given it to Him "to comfort him." Bahá'u'lláh is pictured as "hurt" because alone of all the participants at Badasht He had been ignored by the Báb.
39. Ibid., p. 298.
40. "Je n'ai jamais entendu personne parmi les musulmans mettre en doute la vertu d'une personne si singuliere." Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau, *Les Religions et philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale* (Paris: Perrin, 1865), p. 155.
41. Miller, p. 31.
42. Ibid.
43. Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom*, rev. ed. (London: George Ronald, 1962), p. 135.
44. Miller, p. 204.
45. Ibid., p. 285.
46. The full text of most of these letters can be found in Volume 8 (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Pub. Committee, 1942), pp. 595-98, including those printed at Queen Marie's request in the *Toronto Star* (May 4 and Sept. 28, 1926) and the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* (Sept. 27, 1926). In addition to her several public declarations of faith, Queen Marie arrived in Haifa in March of 1930 to make a pilgrimage to the Shrines of the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She was prevented from doing so by intense political pressure, and subsequently wrote (June 28, 1931) to Martha Root: "Both Ileana [her daughter] and I were cruelly disappointed at having been prevented going to the holy shrines and of meeting Shoghi Effendi, but at that time we were going through a cruel crisis and every movement I made was being turned against me and being exploited politically in an unkind way." (cited in *Priceless Pearl*, p. 115). Rúhíyyih Khánum quotes the full texts of most of the letters in Chapter IV of *The Priceless Pearl*.
47. Miller, pp. 304-05, n. 41.
48. Ibid, pp. 71, 75, 82.
49. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Chapter X; Browne *Tarikh-i-Jadid*, p. xxii.
50. Miller, p. 98.
51. Interested readers are referred to Shoghi Effendi's *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Pub. Trust, 1974) and *The Promised Day Is Come*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Pub. Trust, 1961) for a complete development of the theme. Both works quote extensively from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
52. Miller. p. ???
53. Ibid., pp. ???
54. Ibid., p. ???

55. For a complete discussion of the subject see Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 143–57.
56. Miller, p. 229.
57. Ibid.
58. See, for example, H.M. Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh* (London: George Ronald, 1971), Chapters IV and V, Rúhíyyih Khánum, *Priceless Pearl*, Chapters V and VI; Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, passim; Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh: Baghdad*, Vol. I (Oxford: George Ronald, 1974), Appendix I, Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Chapters IV, XVII, XXIII.
59. Miller, p. 126.
60. Ibid., p. 127, quoted from *Traveller's Narrative*, p. xiii and *Materials*, p. 4, n. 1.
61. The charges may be found in the writings of such Christian ecclesiastics as Samuel Graham Wilson, *Bahaism and Its Claims: A Study of the Religion Promulgated by Baha Ullah and Abdul Baha* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1915); John Richards Richards, *The Religion of the Bahá'ís*, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (London: The Macmillan Co., 1932); William M. Miller, *Baha'ism*; Robert P. Richardson, various articles published in *Open Court*: “The Persian Rival to Jesus, and His American Disciples,” 29 (Aug. 1915), 460–83; “The Precursor, the Prophet, and the Pope,” 30 (Oct. 1916), 617–37; “The Rise and Fall of the Parliament of Religions at Greenacre,” 46 (Mar. 1931), 129–66.
62. “My captivity can bring on Me no shame. Nay, by My life, it conferreth on Me glory. This which can make Me ashamed is the conduct of such of My followers as profess to love Me, yet in fact follow the Evil One.”: Bahá'u'lláh, cited by Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 190.
63. Ibid., pp. 189-90.
64. See, for example, *Tarikh-i-Jadid*, p. xxiii. Browne, however attributes the “murders” to the actions of “too zealous Beha'is” and exempts the Founders of the Faith from complicity, though he reports the Azali charges on the latter point.
65. See note (12) above.
66. Mirza Yahya was no relation to the Mirza Yahya Subh-i-Azal referred to extensively above. Muhammad Ali was a half-brother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Following the death of Bahá'u'lláh he rebelled against the authority conferred on 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Bahá'u'lláh's Will and attempted to usurp the leadership of the Bahá'í Faith. He briefly enjoyed some success, attracting to his side various members of the household as well as Ibrahim Khayrullah, who had been the leading exponent of the Bahá'í Faith in America and who also fretted under the authority of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The organization which Khayrullah attempted to establish perished with him. Muhammad Ali died in 1936 having failed in his efforts to create a sectarian group of his own.
67. Browne, MATERIALS, pp. 155-???
68. Ibid., pp. 165-66.
69. Miller, p. 184.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid., pp. 183-84.
72. The Universal House of Justice, governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, has continued the codification of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, which was begun by Shoghi Effendi. The first stage of this vast program was the publication of *A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book of Bahá'u'lláh*, comp. Universal House of Justice”, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1973). Contrary to Rev. Miller's suggestions (Miller, pp. 143–44, 323–26) the Bahá'í world has had constant access to the *Aqdas* through the translations of various sections as well as the extensive interpretations and commentaries provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá (and after him, Shoghi Effendi). This was the mode of access prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh. A labored translation which is often misleadingly inaccurate was produced by Rev. E.E. Elder and is now reproduced by Rev. Miller as an Appendix to his present book. It seems unlikely to add anything of value to mankind's appreciation of this unique work. Perhaps in an effort to overcome the lack of interest which has been shown in the Elder translation (in which he himself collaborated) Rev. Miller provides an endorsement by the ubiquitous Mr. Azal: “The translators ... are to be congratulated on their excellent work.” (Miller, pp. 326.)
73. Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Chapter 24.
74. Rúhíyyih Khánum, *Priceless Pearl*, Chapters XI and XII.
75. The details of the expansion can be traced in volumes VII through XIV of *The Bahá'í World*, covering the period from 1937 to 1968, and in the several statistical summaries of the successive Plans published by the World Centre of the Bahá'í Faith in 1953, 1963 and 1968: *The Bahá'í World: 1844–1952* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Pub. Committee, 1953); *The Bahá'í World: 1844–1963* (n.p., n.d.); and the Universal House of Justice; *The Bahá'í World: Statistical Information* (n.p.: 1968).

76. In the second of these two chapters (pp. 336–41) Rev. Miller publishes the results of what was apparently a personal survey he undertook by correspondence. The burden of his “findings” is that the Bahá’í Faith is not as widely known or well established in certain countries as its own publications assert. Rev. Miller opens this strange sequence with the statement: “the author sought information from non-Bahá’ís [emphasis added] in a dozen different countries...” (Miller, p. 336). These ostensibly independent sources are then introduced one by one: “A correspondent who has...travelled widely, in all the North African countries”; “an authority on the religious situation in Burma”; “A long-time resident of Korea”; “A person well acquainted with East Pakistan”; “long-time residents in Japan, India, Yucatan, Indonesia, Lebanon and other lands” (this latter list of addressees failed to respond). Footnotes give the names of the respondents: “Mr. H.W. Stalley”; “Dr. Paul Clasper”; “Dr. F. Dale Bruner”; “Dr. Samuel Moffett”; “Mr. Waren Webster”; and so on. There is no suggestion as to the professions of these gentlemen or as to the nature of their connection with Rev. Miller. The question inevitably arises as to whether in fact they, too, are Christian missionaries, and if indeed they are, why Rev. Miller did not forthrightly state this fact so that the degree of the disinterestedness of their contributions could be examined by his readers.

77. Browne, “Babism,” in *Religious Systems*, p. 350.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 352–53.