

BAHĀ'Ī FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF THE BĀBĪ MOVEMENT

Denis MacEoin

It is something of an occupational hazard for academics working in the field of religious studies to find themselves on the receiving end of impassioned criticism from fundamentalist believers outraged by their accounts or interpretations of sacred events, persons or texts. Those whose work involves them in the study of small communities, sects, or new religious movements are probably most familiar with this phenomenon, which is, perhaps, inevitable in a context where any version of history or doctrine that does not correspond to an officially-approved line will be seen as a 'distortion' or an 'attack' and judged by internal criteria rather than those pertaining in the academic world, or indeed in the world at large. Sectarian confines are extremely cramping, and sectarian reality must of its very nature diverge widely from that of most people. But, however prepared one may be for the appearance of theologically-motivated refutations of one's work, it still comes as something of a shock to find such an onslaught in the pages of a respected academic journal, in the form of what is meant to seem to most readers as a straightforward scholarly discussion.

Just such a refutation of my work on Babism has appeared in a recent issue of *Religion* [15 (1985): 29–49], in the shape of an article entitled 'Western Islamic Scholarship and Bahā'ī Origins'. Penned by two Bahā'ī writers, Muhammad Afnān and William Hatcher, the article claims to correct what they see as misconceptions about the Bābī religion contained in an earlier article of mine, 'The Bābī concept of holy war' [*Religion* 12 (1982): 93–129].

Ordinarily, I should have let the matter stand or contented myself with a long letter to the authors responding to the various criticisms they have raised and explaining why I cannot accept their arguments. But I feel compelled to make a more formal and public response than that, for several reasons. First, their article does not restrict itself to an academic discussion of the arguments in my paper, but contains several sweeping allegations about my work on Babism and Baha'ism as a whole: indeed, it is, in my view, in some measure, an exercise in character assassination, implying, as

it seems to me to do, that I have somehow set out to misrepresent the matters about which I write. Second, it is evident to me, for reasons that I hope to make clear, that the article in question is motivated, not by strictly academic criteria, but by purely theological considerations which may not always be apparent to the uninitiated reader. This point can, perhaps, be most simply and forcefully conveyed by observing that, in every single instance where the authors take issue with me and supply a 'corrective' view, their conclusions correspond exactly to the orthodox Bahā'ī position and are, in most cases, supported by late historical materials emanating from or approved by official Bahā'ī sources. To put this another way, they have not carried out any independent original research on which to base their conclusion that my findings are invalid — not, in itself, an illegitimate undertaking, but one open to serious criticism. Third, I cannot escape the conclusion that the authors have taken advantage of the fact that very few non-Bahā'ī academics have any specialized knowledge of the field and that many readers may well be unable to recognize essentially fundamentalist arguments as such. It is unlikely that amateur fundamentalist critiques of the work of, say, Bultmann or Wells would be given space in an academic journal, but that seems to be the equivalent of what has happened here, which is why I feel it to be imperative to look more closely at their arguments and motives. I cannot, at the same time, but feel that my hand has been rather forced by the appearance of such an article in a scholarly journal, making it necessary for me to engage in what has, at a certain level, to be a sort of apologetic for my work. Ordinary academic arguments on their own are obviously inadequate in such a situation, where other considerations lurk, possibly unseen and unsuspected by those unfamiliar with the context, beneath the surface of the debate.

Perhaps I can best underline what seems to be happening here if I draw attention to the fact that neither of my critics is, in my view, academically qualified to engage in a discussion of what is, in effect, a very specialized research area. Afnān is a former professor of clinical bacteriology and infectious diseases who has made an amateur study of the history of his religion. He may well be quite well-versed in this field, but he has not, to my knowledge, contributed any serious work on the subject, and the few articles of his that I have seen have been written explicitly for Iranian Bahā'ī audiences. In particular, I doubt seriously if he has much understanding of the methodology employed in academic work of this kind or whether he would be sympathetic to it. Hatcher is a professor of mathematics who has written some general material on Baha'ism and has, as far as I am aware, no knowledge of Persian and Arabic—certainly not the kind of knowledge necessary to a study of the notoriously difficult Bābī texts. He has carried out no original research on early Bābī or Bahā'ī

history, nor is he apparently qualified to do so. Both authors are active members of the Bahā'ī community.

I do not wish to appear churlish or to be pleading professional immunity of some kind. Amateur scholars often present insights and suggest conclusions that professionals overlook or refuse to consider, and their work may often be of real value to scholarship. Believers are often sensitive to things the outsider can never appreciate and may provide important correctives to his possibly obtuse judgements. But most of us will, I think, be aware of the risks inherent in amateur scholarship when difficult texts and complex methodological considerations are involved, especially where those concerned are committed members of a religious group which perceives itself as threatened by what may appear to it as unsympathetic research. Indeed, I am perhaps less concerned about the amateur status of my critics than by the intellectual and ideological assumptions which inform their undertaking and dictate the terms of their debate. Since these assumptions may not be familiar to most readers, it is, I feel, crucial that they be made clear before proceeding further.

Bahā'ism has inherited from Islam a tradition of apologetic centred around the notion of defending the faith from both internal and external attack. Bahā'ī sensitivity to misrepresentation owes much to the attitudes and values of Shi'ism, out of which it emerged, where the notion of the misunderstood and maligned minority has dominated the group self-image from the sect's inception. Defence of the faith was made a religious duty for all believers by Bahā'ism's founder, Mīrzā Husayn 'Alī Bahā' Allāh (1817–1892): 'It is incumbent upon all men . . . to refute the arguments of those that have attacked the Faith of God'.¹ It is a measure of the importance of this injunction in Bahā'ī life that it has been institutionalized in the modern period in the form of continental and national bodies for 'protection', the purpose of which is to refute internal dissent and external attack. This is, of course, an entirely legitimate exercise for members of a small and often genuinely misrepresented religious community, particularly where intellectual attacks on it (as in Iran) have tended to be gross, dishonest and vitriolic, and where calculated misrepresentation has led and still leads to physical violence. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that, in common with many modern Muslims, Bahā'īs tend to be unfamiliar with and resistant to the assumptions and methods of contemporary western scholarship, to the extent that independent academic studies which contradict established dogma are often lumped together with religiously- or politically-motivated polemic produced by non-academics.

This process goes back as far as the late nineteenth century, when the work of the British orientalist E. G. Browne provoked hostile comment from Bahā'ī writers disturbed by his accounts of Bābī and Bahā'ī history. These

writers attempted, among other things, to demonstrate that the text of an important early Bābī chronicle published by him was actually a forgery produced by a rival sect with his connivance. Browne's view that 'the more the Bahā'ī doctrine spreads, especially outside Persia, and most of all in Europe and America, the more the true history and nature of the original Bābī movement is obscured and distorted'² has been echoed in one form or another by several later writers (some of whom have, admittedly, used the notion for polemical purposes). The Bahā'īs, in their turn, have continued to reject Browne's interpretation of their methods of writing (or re-writing) history, and have refused to accept any substantial modifications to the version of Bābī and Bahā'ī events supplied in a series of officially-approved publications and by now sanctioned as more or less irrefutable in content and interpretation. Although certain favourable elements in Browne's work have continued to be used by Bahā'īs (and his role in bringing the subject to the attention of western scholars praised), none of his less favourable criticisms have ever been accepted, even partially, by the movement. It would be an insult to the memory of a brilliant scholar to suggest that he made no valid criticisms in a subject he knew inside out, and one must regret the tardiness of the Bahā'īs in coming to terms with his views on many matters that affect them quite vitally. The response that met Browne's work a century ago continues to greet that of any modern scholar attempting to re-write Bābī or Bahā'ī history on the basis of contemporary materials coupled with a non-hagiographic reading of events. The tendency is to describe alternative versions as 'distortions' or 'doubtful judgements' which have to be 'corrected' by reference to a body of 'facts' contained in the standard histories. *Mutatis mutandis*, I face today substantially the same problem E. G. Browne faced in his time, and often with respect to the same issues.

There is more to the matter than this. While not, in principle, opposed to intellectualism or scholarship, and while, in many ways, seeking to encourage the growth of studies on Bābī and Bahā'ī subjects, the Bahā'ī authorities are eager to promote only a limited type of scholarship that accepts for its basic premise the underlying validity of divine revelation as expressed in the Bahā'ī scriptures. This approach has much in common with that of some modern Muslim educational theory that seeks to re-articulate academic disciplines to render them consonant with Quranic principles (as interpreted by generally conservative *ulema*). Nor is it unlike certain Creationist and other Christian fundamentalist approaches, which attempt to align scientific, historical, or archaeological data with Biblical revelation.

This attitude is made clear in the following statement issued by the Research Department of the Bahā'ī World Centre in Haifa: 'The principle

of the harmony of science and religion means not only that religious teachings should be studied with the light of reason and evidence as well as of faith and inspiration, but also that everything in this creation, all aspects of human life and knowledge, should be studied in the light of revelation as well as in that of purely rational investigation'.³ Since revelation is, in the Bahā'ī system, infallible and unquestionable, it inevitably has the edge in any dispute with mere human reason. Later in the statement it is argued that 'In scientific investigation when searching after the facts of any matter a Bahā'ī must, of course, be entirely open-minded, but in his interpretation of the facts and his evaluation of evidence we do not see by what logic he can ignore the truth of the Bahā'ī Revelation which he has already accepted'.

This approach may seem relatively innocuous, but in practice it often results in a hardening of attitudes against academics whose work has not been illumined by the 'light of revelation', particularly, of course, where they are involved in research touching on Baha'ism itself. In a report from an Australian 'Institute on Bahā'ī Scholarship' held in 1982, a contrast was drawn between 'the Bahā'ī scholar, well-versed in the teachings, upholding the covenant, bound by its laws, guided by wisdom, and humbled by knowledge of his responsibilities' on the one hand, and 'the scholar of the 20th century, whose knowledge has fed his ambition, set him aloof from society, and allow [*sic*] him to do anything he could [*sic*] justify in the name of intellectualism' on the other.⁴

Within the Bahā'ī community itself, historical and doctrinal 'accuracy' is preserved by keeping a very tight rein on the published writings of members. All the major national Bahā'ī bodies operate some form of reviewing procedure (usually by means of a committee set up for that purpose), and arrangements also exist for selected materials to be vetted at the Bahā'ī World Centre in Haifa. It is obligatory for any Bahā'ī, academic or other, to submit his work to the proper authorities for approval prior to publication, whether it is intended to issue the material in question as an official Bahā'ī text or not. There are no exceptions to this rule, which also, of course, demands that authors incorporate into their work any alterations or 'corrections' that may be deemed necessary as conditions for publication. Failure to comply (either by non-submission or a refusal to make changes) may result in the imposition of sanctions and can, if an individual publishes in a spirit of non-compliance, lead to excommunication.

Those responsible for carrying out the review of publishable material are not normally trained academics, but are usually drawn from the ranks of 'knowledgeable' and experienced Bahā'īs deemed capable of ensuring that a given text conform to accepted standards in terms of both style and content. More than one Bahā'ī scholar has told me in private that they would prefer not to publish some of their work rather than submit it to a body which

they know will reject it or ask for radical alterations. By way of corollary, of course, one can have a high degree of confidence that anything published by Bahā'ī writers—including the present article by Afnān and Hatcher—will have been vetted and approved at some stage. Rather more worrying is the fact that even materials submitted by non-Bahā'ī writers to Bahā'ī publishing houses will still be subject to some form of official review, since the publishers themselves are bound by the rules laid down for this purpose.

More disturbing to the academic is the application of this reviewing process to original historical materials. In 1982, for example, Kalimat Press of Los Angeles published a translation of the memoirs of Ustād Muhammad 'Alī Salmānī, originally written in the last part of the 19th century. Following publication, the central Bahā'ī authorities in Haifa stated that, even though the text had been reviewed for publication in America, had they themselves checked the manuscript, they 'would not have given permission for its publication or translation'.⁵ Prior to this, however, an *ad hoc* committee had already taken action 'to eliminate the most harmful passages so that the publication of the book . . . could proceed'.⁶ Nevertheless, not all the required deletions had, in fact, been made, and the Haifa authorities concluded that they would have to review all such documents themselves in future.⁷ Such tampering with historical documents already seems to be common practice in Iran, where books sometimes contain statements to the effect that an editorial committee has introduced 'corrections', even though no details of these are provided in the text. I even possess a second edition of a Persian book which originally contained two early historical memoirs, from which the second document has been wholly removed without explanation.

All of this is, of course, directed towards the end of establishing a single 'authentic' version of Bahā'ī history and belief. Such a version is not, of course, intended merely for internal consumption. In one of its letters referring to the Salmānī memoirs mentioned above, the Universal House of Justice states that 'the principal task of the Bahā'īs at the present time—and especially of Bahā'ī scholars—is to present a true picture of the Faith to the general public . . .'.⁸ It is, I think, in an attempt to carry out this task that Professors Afnān and Hatcher have set out, not only to 'correct' my interpretation of certain aspects of Bābī history, but to discredit my work as a whole and to represent it as a distortion of the 'truth'. This seems to fit into a wider pattern: some two years ago, the national body of the Bahā'īs of the U.K. made an attempt to prevent publication of my contribution on Baha'ism to the *Penguin Handbook of Living Religions*. They had not actually read my article, but objected in principle to my having written it and recommended that the editor substitute for it an article by a Bahā'ī author.

Such attitudes have, of course, very deep roots, and some understanding of these may place the foregoing in clearer perspective. Baha'ism, like Islam and, in particular, the Shi^cī sect out of which it emerged, is built around a doctrine of what Roy Wallis has called 'epistemological authoritarianism'.⁹ True, unimpaired knowledge is made available to men by God through infallible prophets or imams, whose word in all matters is final and absolute. In Bahā'ī terminology, this is expressed in the doctrine of 'the Most Great Infallibility' possessed by the prophet or 'Manifestation of God'.¹⁰ This receives clear expression in the following passage by Bahā' Allāh: 'Were He [the Manifestation] to pronounce water to be wine or heaven to be earth or light to be fire, He speaketh the truth and no doubt would there be about it; and unto no one is given the right to question His authority or to say why or wherefore'.¹ This claim to be in possession of infallible knowledge is coupled with a very strong anti-liberalism, as is clear from the following passage¹²:

We find some men desiring liberty, and priding themselves therein. Such men are in the depths of ignorance. Liberty must, in the end, lead to sedition, whose flames none can quench Regard men as a flock of sheep that need a shepherd for their protection We approve of liberty in certain circumstances, and refuse to sanction it in others. We, verily, are the All-Knowing. Say: True liberty consisteth in men's submission unto My commandments . . .

Although the 'Most Great Infallibility' was not deemed to have been transferred by Bahā' Allāh to his successors, 'Abd al-Bahā' (1844–1921) and Shoghi Effendi Rabbāni (1897–1957), each of the latter was regarded as infallible within his own sphere as interpreter of the sacred text and head of the faith. In popular estimation, this infallibility extended very far indeed. As Peter Smith, himself a Bahā'ī sociologist, has expressed it, 'the essential claims of its [the Bahā'ī faith] central figures were definitely authoritarian'.¹³ The Covenant system (again derived from a basic doctrine of Shi^cism), whereby all believers have to submit without reservation to the commands and interpretations of the appointed head of the faith, means that, even in the West, where a more liberal attitude prevails in many areas, the basic mood of the religion continues to be authoritarian. The following statements of 'Abd al-Bahā' convey this mood in very stark terms: 'Firmness in the Covenant means obedience, so that no one may say this is my opinion. Nay, rather, he must obey what which proceeds from the pen and tongue of the Covenant';¹⁴ 'Not one soul has the right to say one word in his own account, or to explain anything or to elucidate the text of the Book whether in public or in private'.¹⁵ Smith has pointed out, indeed, that 'the implicit tension between Bahā'ī liberalism and Bahā'ī authoritarianism . . . remains a fundamental part of modern Bahā'ī life'.¹⁶

This background is, I feel, absolutely essential to any intelligent reading of the article by Afnān and Hatcher and to any attempt at elucidating the motives underlying its composition. To the authors, truth is both manifest and simple, and any deviation from the conventional version of it must be seen as lamentable and in need of correction or suppression. That they feel it necessary to do this, not only over doctrinal matters, but also in respect to historical events reflects the central position of history in the Bahā'ī movement. From the beginning, Bahā'ī leaders, including Bahā' Allāh, 'Abd al-Bahā' and Shoghi Effendi, the movement's three 'central figures', have either written or given their sanction to histories of the religion and its antecedents. In the modern period, two works—both of them extensively used and quoted by Afnān and Hatcher in their article—have come to have the status of more or less infallible sources for Bahā'ī history: Shoghi Effendi's *God Passes By* (1944) and his edited translation of part of a history by Mullā Muhammad Nabil Zarandī, known as 'Nabil's Narrative' or by the title *The Dawn-Breakers* (1932). The significance of these works in modern Bahā'ī consciousness cannot be over-emphasized. They provide an absolute standard, as it were, by which all other versions of the same events are to be judged and remain for the mass of believers the unquestioned sources of authentic historical knowledge. Where Afnān and Hatcher have tried to 'correct' my version of Bābī history, it has usually been on the basis of one or other of these works.

Beginning with E. G. Browne, a number of scholars, not all of them inherently hostile to Baha'ism, have advanced or supported the thesis that Bahā'ī historical works reveal a strong tendency to bowdlerize and re-write the events of Bābī history in a manner conformable to later Bahā'ī attitudes and expectations.¹⁷ More recent original research using contemporary documentation has in large measure confirmed this by producing versions of Babism often seriously at variance with that available in the standard Bahā'ī accounts.¹⁸ Whether or not it is comfortable or convenient for those committed to an ideologically formulated historicist narrative, Bābī/Bahā'ī history is, by its very nature, controversial, and the mere assertion of doctrinal convictions will not, in the long run, cause it to be any less so. It is particularly important in the context of the present debate to make clear what Afnān and Hatcher have allowed to remain hidden, that my work on Babism and Baha'ism is not that of a maverick scholar pursuing his own pet theories to absurd conclusions but is, rather, the latest phase in a long tradition of scholarship on the subject that has its roots in the findings of Browne in the last century. I cannot escape the feeling that I am being criticized for doing what most academic historians of religion set out to do, namely to confront and subject to critical analysis the most controversial aspects of the field in which they are engaged. Historical research that

ignores controversy is likely to be stale and boring, and ultimately of very restricted usefulness.

Having already spent much time examining the intellectual and ideological background to their article, let me now look briefly at some of the points raised by Afnān and Hatcher concerning my work. Let me begin by saying that it is regrettable that the authors, possibly because of the timing of their rejoinder, did not refer to my subsequent article 'From Babism to Baha'ism: problems of militancy, quietism and conflation in the construction of a religion' [*Religion* (1983) 13: 219–255], which serves as a sequel to the article under discussion, and which provides a detailed discussion of the ways in which Baha'ism sought to come to terms with its Bābī origins (which in the Afnān/Hatcher article have become 'Bahā'ī origins'). Since I cannot reiterate here the bulk of the arguments set out in my article, I must instead urge readers to turn to it as, in itself, an amplified explanation of the religious considerations that have made a rebuttal such as that of Afnān and Hatcher necessary in the first place. Many of the points raised by them are, in fact, dealt with at length there and need not be gone over again.

Let me first deal with one or two general and rather gratuitous issues raised in the introduction to their article. At the very outset, the authors refer to an early article of mine entitled 'Oriental scholarship and the Bahā'ī Faith' [*World Order* 8:4 (1974), pp. 9–21], and on the next page state that 'the cogency of the perspective on Bahā'ī scholarship contained in MacEoin's 1974 article certainly raised expectations that his future work would be of comparable quality. Unhappily, such expectations have not been fulfilled by his recent publications'. Well, that is obviously an opinion to which they are entitled, but I would argue that it speaks volumes about the standards by which they wish to weigh academic writing. When that article appeared, I was aged about 25 and just completing my second undergraduate degree, in Persian and Arabic. I had carried out no original research into Bābī or Bahā'ī history or doctrine, my knowledge of even secondary materials on the subject was as yet extremely limited, and my familiarity with the methodology of religio-historical studies was, to say the least, rudimentary. I would today regard that article as an embarrassment, not because it is a piece of juvenilia (of which we must all be guilty at some stage), but because it is in no sense of the word a serious, researched work of academic scholarship. Why then should Afnān and Hatcher think so highly of it and so poorly of my more recent work? Could it possibly be because I was then a young and enthusiastic Bahā'ī, that I advanced in that article a whiter-than-white expression of the orthodox Bahā'ī position, and that I subsequently left the movement and developed a critique of it based on wholly external criteria?

It strikes me as unusually interesting that the authors should go on to

drag in a reference to my article on 'Abd al-Bahā' in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Since that article touches in no way at all on the present subject, I am at a loss to see what possible relevance it can have to the discussion, unless—as I suspect is the case—it has been mentioned (and dismissed rather imperiously as having been 'thoroughly refuted') merely in order to raise further doubts as to my competence. By saying, for example, that I show 'a rather surprising ignorance of important segments of the basic literature of the Bahā'ī Faith', the authors obviously seek to undermine my credibility in the eyes of the reader, even though the present discussion deals, not with Bahā'ī, but with Bābī literature. It is, in any case, a rather uncertain argument. The writer of the article in *Andalib* referred to by the authors may have proved to his own satisfaction and that of a Bahā'ī readership that the basic dogma involved has remained immune to my criticism, but I am not sure that others will be so easily convinced. No doubt it is possible to interpret certain selected passages from the works of Bahā' Allāh in such a way as to make them the 'sources' for many of 'Abd al-Bahā's later teachings, but to do so is a theological, not an empirical academic enterprise. The main point seems to be to convey a sense of my ignorance of basic material. That in itself does little more than reflect the amateur character of the authors' approach: if someone has failed to see what is evident to the eye of faith, then the only explanation must be ignorance. Since I am, in reality, very far from ignorant of Bahā' Allāh's original writings, both published and manuscript,¹⁹ I would argue that my interpretation of the situation is based on a neutral reading of the texts and that these themselves reveal a picture somewhat at variance from the established dogma. Since the argument to ignorance is realistically untenable (or at best very risky), I would recommend that those who wish to criticize my work on this score concentrate instead on different explanations for my conclusions: that I have, for instance, failed to understand the 'real' meaning of certain texts, or that I have deliberately avoided certain references.

Before leaving the introduction, let me look briefly at two other points raised by it. Referring to the period 1920–1970, the authors speak of the appearance of 'highly significant additions to the literature of the Bahā'ī Faith' and make special mention of Zarandī's narrative of 'the early days of the Bābī Faith [*sic*]',²⁰ which they deem to be important because it is based on numerous eye-witness accounts. Zarandī's narrative is a crucial text for Afnān and Hatcher, who refer to it as 'the basic source' and cite it at least eight times, sometimes at crucial points in their argument.

What they do not point out is that Zarandī's history occupies a central place in the development of Bahā'ī historiography precisely because 'parts of the manuscript were reviewed and approved, some by Baha'u'llāh, and

others by 'Abdu'l-Bahā',²¹ while the English edition was both edited and translated by Shoghi Effendi—an unparelled combination of infallible approval. In consequence, *The Dawn-Breakers* is accorded a status within the Bahā'ī community that renders it all but infallible itself and makes it an extremely difficult book to contradict within Bahā'ī circles. Shoghi Effendi described it as an 'unchallengeable textbook'²² and referred to 'its varied rich and authentic material',²³ while his widow, Ruhyyih Rabbāni, speaks of the book's 'historical interest and validity'.²⁴ Yet another Bahā'ī writer describes Zarandī's narrative as the 'authentic history of the early days of the Faith'.²⁵ But clearest of all, I think, is the following statement by George Townshend, a much-respected Irish Bahā'ī writer whom Afnān and Hatcher quote in their article: 'Amid the great and ever-growing library of works on the Bāb, the Chronicle of Nabīl's holds a most conspicuous place It has in the fullest degree the character of a Bābī Gospel. If we possessed an authorized and large scale account of the Acts of Jesus Christ written by one of the Twelve and preserved in the form in which it came from the author's pen, we would have a Christian Gospel as authentic in its sphere as this of Nabīl's is in its'.²⁶

The drift of the foregoing quotations is, I think, obvious. Zarandī's narrative is a 'basic source', 'unchallengeable', 'authentic',²⁷ possessed of 'validity', 'authorized', indeed a 'Gospel'—and it is as such that it has been treated by Bahā'īs ever since its publication in 1932. Now, *The Dawn-Breakers* is, indeed, an absorbing and useful work which, when utilized by a competent historian, will often yield valuable and dependable information. But it is, of course, no more an 'authentic' history of early Babism than any other work of the period. Whatever its merits—and they are many—it has, like any hagiographical narrative, numerous imperfections from the point of view of the independent historian. It is, first of all, a relatively late work, having been composed between 1888 and 1890, some 95 years after the earliest events described in it and 35 years after the latest. It is, of course, partisan, heavily hagiographic in style, and frequently in error about dates and other vital details. Zarandī, like many chroniclers of the traditional type, loves to point a moral or to put long speeches into the mouths of his characters, even in situations where they are unlikely to have been overheard, much less recorded, and many of these monologues are, in fact, little more than pious expressions of later doctrine—what people should have said rather than what they really did say. It is not, perhaps, insignificant that Afnān and Hatcher have cited a number of such utterances in support of some of their arguments.

To make matters much worse for the historian, the English text of Zarandī's narrative is not altogether dependable. The original Persian text has never been published, nor do I believe it is planned to do so. In what is

an exceedingly curious sequence of events, Shoghi Effendi's English version of the history was translated into Arabic (under the title *Matāli' al-anwār*) by 'Abd al-Jalīl Sa'd, from which it was later rendered into Persian by 'Abd al-Hamīd Ishrāq Khāvarī.²⁸ The absence of an edition or even a facsimile of the original is all the more disturbing to the historian when he encounters statements to the effect that Shoghi Effendi made sufficient alterations to the text as to render his translation virtually an original work.²⁹ Even Ruhiyyih Rabbāni refers without apparent awkwardness to 'the text, based on the original of Nabil, but transfigured through the mind and vocabulary of Shoghi Effendi'³⁰ and writes that 'although ostensibly a translation from the original Persian Shoghi Effendi may be said to have re-created it in English', comparing his version with Fitzgerald's rendering of Omar Khayyam.³¹ Since I am already well aware that Shoghi Effendi allowed himself considerable latitude in his translations of the writings of Bahā' Allāh, I find myself uneasy about placing undue weight on the text of Zarandī as it is presently available.

However excellent Shoghi Effendi's version of Zarandī may be for the inspirational purposes to which the book is often put among Bahā'īs, it is less than reassuring to the serious historian, especially when faced with 'refutations' of his research bolstered by quotations from the narrative. My own arguments often revolve around careful readings of original manuscript material, and I find it tiresome to have to counter allegations that I have misrepresented these when my critics have little more to fall back on than the self-confessedly bowdlerized text of a late partisan history.

To anyone who has read my article 'From Babism to Baha'ism', the introduction to Afnān and Hatcher will, in one particular respect, seem rather like a perfect example of a genre of Bahā'ī writing which I have identified there, namely that in which the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions, contrary to earlier practice, are conflated into a unitary phenomenon indifferently labelled 'the Bahā'ī Faith'. Leaving aside two passing references to the 'Bābī Faith', there are no fewer than 16 mentions of 'the Bahā'ī Faith' (and one 'Bahā'ī movement'), together with references to 'Bahā'ī literature', 'Bahā'ī studies', 'Bahā'ī teachings', 'and 'Bahā'ī scholarship'. As in the title, the authors speak of 'the Bahā'ī Faith and its origins' or 'the birth and development of the Bahā'ī Faith'. Since we are, in fact, dealing here with the Bābī religion in the period before Baha'ism existed even as a sect within it, such careless use of nomenclature must be regarded as highly revealing.

The inevitable context of such a perspective is, once again, dogmatic rather than empirical, in keeping with the following statement made on behalf of Shoghi Effendi: 'Shoghi Effendi feels that the Unity of the Bahā'ī revelation as one complete whole embracing the Faith of the Bāb should

be emphasized The Faith of the Bāb should not be divorced from that of Bahā'u'llāh.³² Here again, the authors have uncovered the underlying logic of their position, evaluating Babism (and, hence, my interpretation of it) retrospectively as part and parcel of the wider 'Bahā'ī revelation', the values and doctrines of which must be read back into the earlier movement, even where this involves logical inconsistency or historical improbability. From this perspective, it may well be true that my judgements about the unitary 'Bahā'ī Faith' are 'extremely doubtful', but that does not, of course, mean that my views on Babism, as a distinct phenomenon chronologically prior to its Bahā'ī offshoot, are distorted or unbalanced at all.

The first complete section of the paper by Afnān and Hatcher ('A new key to Bahā'ī [sic] history?') is taken up with a discussion of my use of the *jihād* concept as a means towards understanding Bābī attitudes and responses. In it, they uncover what they describe as 'a basic inconsistency which is fundamental to MacEoin's presentation of his thesis', arguing that, since I reject the notions of political motivation and defensive action in favour of an explanation centred around *jihād*, I might be expected 'to present the Bābīs as having engaged in an offensive military action justified by appropriate religious doctrines and motives', something which I do not do. They then ask 'how indeed can the notion of holy war be the key to understanding the Bābī-Muslim confrontations if in no instance it was involved in precipitating the conflicts?'

May I draw to the authors' attention a statement in the second paragraph of my article, in which I make it perfectly clear that its purpose was 'to clarify the background to the Bābī-state clashes in the form of a discussion of the theory of holy war as presented in early Bābī writings and to analyse these conflicts themselves within the context of that theory'. What happened, of course, is that, when I examined the actual fighting in which the Bābīs were involved from 1848, I found that it was not necessarily carried out according to the ideal prescriptions for *jihād* given in Bābī writing prior to that date, but that many of the attitudes expressed by those involved in the struggles owed much to the ideal theory and that some form of *jihād* provided the legal justification for the struggles. There is a difference between simple defensive action and defensive *jihād*, and there are very important links between *jihād* and the notion of self-sacrifice through martyrdom in conflict with the unbeliever. To investigate these links is, it would seem to me, a perfectly legitimate piece of historical research and one that does not involve any obvious contradictions. But Afnān and Hatcher take a most surprising view: since the actual struggles do not appear to reflect in practice the earlier ideal, it is somehow misleading to discuss that ideal or to use it as a context (even a negative context) within which to set

historical events.

Let me reiterate what seems to have happened in the first six years or so of Bābī history. The Bābīs, inspired by the Bāb's writings, wanted to fight a holy war against the unbelievers, initially to prepare the way for the coming of the imām, later to establish the Bābī theocracy envisaged in later works such as the Persian *Bayān*. They bought and manufactured arms to this purpose and, contrary to normal practice for clerics (who formed a large percentage of the sect's membership), carried such weapons on their persons, often in situations in which this would have been regarded as provocative. In the end, however, a variety of factors, most of them outside their control, prevented them from launching a full-scale holy war along the lines of the earlier Wahhabi *jihād* in Arabia or the later Mahdist uprising in Sudan.

The lack of a central organization, fewness of numbers, the imprisonment of the Bāb from an early date, the provincialized character of the second-rank Bābī leadership (as in Zanjān and Nayrīz), and the absence of politically-influential converts after the death of Manūchihr Khān, the governor of Isfahan, in early 1847, all restricted the scope for positive action on the part of the Bābīs. In September 1848, the ruling king, Muhammad Shāh, died, leaving the country in a politically-confused state and triggering off disturbances in a number of places, including Shirāz, Kermān, and Yazd.

The first of the Bābī-State struggles (that at Shaykh Tabarsī) followed almost immediately, and before thought could be taken to organize resistance on a national scale or go over to the offensive, the Bābīs found themselves embroiled in a series of essentially urban disturbances, in which they faced inevitable defeat from forces much larger than themselves. It is, however, naive to suggest that their existing attitudes towards *jihād*, their view of non-Bābīs as unbelievers, or their often open hostility towards the Qajar state played no part in precipitating the crises after 1848. One of the points I sought (obviously without complete success) to get across was that we are not dealing here with a band of pious, peace-loving mystics leading lives of quietist seclusion, engaged in prayer, meditation and study, and attacked out of the blue by unprovoked and fanatical mobs, but with men imbued from childhood with attitudes favourable to religious militancy and willing to kill as well as die for the sake of what they regarded as the true faith. This point should become clear if one cares to make a comparison between the Bābīs and the Ni^cmat Allāhī Sufis, persecuted in Iran earlier in the century.

To clarify one or two small points: I am unsure what the writers mean when they say I am 'highly selective' in the material I quote from the Bāb. Perhaps they would rather I had not referred at all to those passages which

deal with holy war or hostility towards unbelievers, perhaps they even know of sections of the Bāb's writings in which he speaks of unqualified universal love and brotherhood, in common with the later Bahā'ī writings. I selected from the Bāb's works precisely those passages dealing with *jihād* and related topics—presumably the most relevant ones for an article dealing with those subjects. Nor is it, I think, fair to say that, in my article, 'the Bāb's later works and their import are considerably neglected', since I do, in fact, devote about two and a half pages to this topic and give no fewer than 28 references to these writings.

To be honest, I cannot help but feel that many of Afnān and Hatcher's comments are themselves based either on considerable ignorance of the Bābī texts and what can and can not be found in them, or else on the assumption that most readers will have no access to these texts outside of the genuinely selective excerpts available in approved Bahā'ī publications. But in thus seeking to imply that my thesis somehow distorts the material, they themselves do serious damage to the textual evidence. Thus, for example, they state that most of my article 'consists in the presentation of a certain doctrine of holy war, attributed to the Bāb and based on selected quotations from the Bāb's writings, particularly his initial work, the *Qayyūmu'l-Asmā'*'. This implies that such a doctrine cannot really be found in the Bāb's writings, that I have somehow manipulated the texts in order to invent it. Perhaps, then, the authors will be surprised to find my basic argument about the role of *jihād* in the Bāb's earliest writings supported (and even much exaggerated) by a well-known Iranian Bahā'ī scholar, the late 'Abd al-Hamīd Ishrāq Khāvarī, who says: 'the decree of *jihād* with the unbelievers, and insistence on treating them harshly, was revealed repeatedly, time and again, by the pen of the Bāb in the *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, and there is hardly a *sūra* in this blessed book which does not contain this decree'.³³ The point is, of course, perfectly obvious to anyone who has actually read the book.

Here, as elsewhere, Afnān and Hatcher are trying to convey the impression that the picture I present of the Bābī teachings is idiosyncratic, whereas what they really mean is that it is in disagreement, as they themselves state, with the views of 'Abdu'l-Bahā, Shoghi Effendi, and other Bahā'ī writers'. It would, however, be more precise to say that my views are at odds with those of later Bahā'ī writing but are, in many respects, supported by earlier statements dating from the period before the Bābī and Bahā'ī movements were conflated. My article 'From Babism to Baha'ism' makes this point at length, but perhaps the following two quotations will suffice to get across the fact that I have not conjured up my image of Bābī doctrine out of thin air.

According to Sayyid Mahdī Gulpāygānī, writing around the beginning of

this century, 'the basis of the religion of the *Bayān* . . . is the effacement and destruction of all books not written on the Bābī faith, the demolition and ruination of all shrines, temples, holy places, and resting-places, the slaying of men, the legalization of shunning and unchastity, and, in fine, the wiping out of all who do not believe in the religion of the *Bayān*, and the obliteration of all traces of them'.³⁴ In similar vein, the Bahā'ī leader 'Abd al-Bahā' states quite clearly that 'the decree of the *Bayān* was the striking of necks, the burning of books and papers, the destruction of shrines, and the universal slaughter of all save those who believed and were faithful'.³⁵

The second part of the article by Afnān and Hatcher deals with 'the Nature of the Bāb's Claims' and seeks to criticize my breakdown of the Bāb's career into three main phases, in the course of which he claimed successively to be the *bāb* or gate preparing the way for the advent of the hidden imām, then the imām in person (as the promised Mahdī), and finally an independent prophet or 'divine manifestation' (*mazhar ilāhī*). According to Afnān and Hatcher, 'neither the historical facts nor the Bāb's writings justify this simplistic attempt to divide the Bāb's ministry into strict, sequential periods, each period represented by a characteristic claim'.

Once again, I feel obliged to make one or two general remarks before looking more closely at this criticism. My remarks about the progressive development of the Bāb's claims were made in passing in the course of my introductory paragraph, in which I summarized the main phases of Bābī history in a few sentences. They do not form part of my general thesis about the Bābī concept of holy war, nor do I seek to relate this development in any particular way to the questions around which the article as a whole revolves. It strikes me as remarkable, then, that Afnān and Hatcher should devote six out of the 18 pages of their own article—a full third—to the refutation of what is nothing more than a side issue of no consequence for the main questions under discussion. I cannot find a ready explanation for this other than that my remarks have somehow touched a sensitive nerve in Bahā'ī consciousness and that they have sought to make much of this point solely in order to defend what they regard as a central Bahā'ī dogma concerning the status of the Bāb and his relationship to Mirzā Husayn 'Alī Baha' Allāh. That we are involved here in the defence of dogma rather than in any attempt to carry out fresh research into the texts or the historical evidence is, I think, evident from the use of quotations from the writings of Shoghi Effendi (pp. 39, 47, n. 45) in support of this position. Shoghi Effendi's assertions of the 'true' nature of the Bāb's claims are not, of course, in themselves evidence of anything but are, rather, dogmatic statements that have, I imagine, themselves inspired the present authors to argue as they do.

But what are the facts of the case? Is there really no historical or textual evidence to back up my admittedly simplified (but not, I would argue, simplistic) periodization of the Bāb's claims, or could it be that Afnān and Hatcher are simply unaware of it? It might, in fact, have helped had they referred to two longer discussions of this point set out by me elsewhere,³⁶ in which I give my main reasons for dividing up the Bāb's career in this way. Since Afnān and Hatcher do not mention either of these discussions, I can only assume that they have not read them or that they would rather ignore the material quoted in them. In either case, it is an entirely un-scholarly way in which to proceed, and I can only recommend readers who may be interested in the arguments in favour of some form of periodization to examine the texts assembled in those places. For the present, a few apposite quotations, some of them not previously used by me, may serve to demonstrate that, whatever other faults my position may have, it is far from untenable on the basis of contemporary evidence.

In several passages of his *Kitāb-i panj sha'n*, the Bab himself states that he revealed himself (or that God revealed him) in the station of 'gatehood' (*bābiyya: fi'l-abwāb; bi-ismi abwābiyyatika [sic]*) for a period of four years, after which he appeared as the promised Qā'im (*bi-ismi qā'imiyatika; bi-ismi'l-maqsūdiyya al-maw'ūdiyya*).³⁷ An early Bahā'ī writer, Sayyid Mahdī Dahajī, basing himself rather loosely on a passage in the Bāb's *Dalā'il-i sab'a*, advanced the notion that, in the first year, Sayyid °Ali Muhammad referred to himself as 'the gate of God' (*bāb allāh*), in the second as 'the remembrance' (*dhikr*), in the third as 'the proof' (*hujja*), in the fourth as 'another name', and in the fifth as the Qā'im in person.³⁸ Dahajī is, in fact, incorrect in his specific attribution of these titles to the years in question, but his attempt to divide the Bāb's career in this manner does, at least, show that early Bahā'īs were not averse to the notion that some such division could be made.

What we are concerned with here is not what Shīrāzi may 'really' have meant by claiming to be the gate of the imām, but what he actually said and what his early followers thought he meant. Contemporary evidence for the latter exists in the following written statement made by Mīrzā Muhammad °Alī Zunūzī, who was executed alongside the Bāb in 1850:³⁹

At the beginning of the cause, he made himself known by the title *bāb* and "servant of the *baqiyyat allāh*" ("the remnant of God", a title of the twelfth imām), so that, as people say, he was regarded as having been sent by the hidden imām, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan This was the first station, (through which) he moved men from their immobility and stagnation, for the lowering of his own rank and the exaltation of the rank of the sacred law. After that he called himself "the Remembrance of God" (*dhikr allāh*) . . . , while the rank of "gatehood" (*bābiyyat*) was transferred to the first to believe, Mullā Husayn Bushruwiyya (Bushrū'ī). After a while, he revealed (the station of)

Qa'im, and the rank of "Remembrance" was overshadowed by it. In the same wise, he referred to (the station of) divinity (*rubūbiyyat*).

Works by other early Bābīs, such as Qurrat al-^cAyn, make similar statements, describing the Bāb as the 'gate of the imām' in language entirely innocent of later Bahā'ī interpretation.

The notion that the Bāb meant by his early claim that he was 'the gate or forerunner of "Him Whom God will make manifest"', that is to say Bahā'u'llāh' is purely retrospective exegesis. The Bāb himself states quite clearly and unambiguously that he is nothing more than the gate or remembrance of the twelfth imām.⁴⁰ In the *Sahīfa-yi 'adliyya* he writes: 'out of his bounty, the hidden imām, may God hasten his advent, has chosen one of his servants from among the peoples of Iran, and the descendants of the Prophet, in order to protect the Faith of God'.⁴¹ He even makes it abundantly clear in the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* that 'I am not different from the gates',⁴² namely the four *abwāb* who acted as intermediaries between the twelfth imām and the *shī'ca* during the 'lesser occultation'. Similarly, Qurrat al-^cAyn states that, in the present age, the imām singled out three perfect men, one after the other, as signs to mankind, these being Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsā'ī, Sayyid Kāzim Rashtī, and the Bāb, whom she describes as 'the third gate after the (previous) two'.⁴³

I am, of course, well aware that the matter is far from as simple as I have made it sound, and in my previous writing on this subject I have myself drawn attention to the many ambiguities and subtleties contained in the Bābī texts, both those of the Bāb himself and the apologetic literature produced by many of his early followers. The problem is that these ambiguities cannot sensibly be resolved by reference to later Bahā'ī doctrine, but have to be discussed within the context of Shī'ī theosophy and theophany, particularly the 'fourth support' doctrine developed within the Shaykhi school out of which Babism directly emerged. Unfortunately, I do not believe either Professor Afnān or Professor Hatcher is properly equipped to carry on a discussion within this area, much less contribute usefully to original research. They are, of course, entitled to take the question right out of the context of Shī'ism or early Babism in preference for an interpretation based on later Bahā'ī belief, but I have no wish to follow them in that direction, since we would still be talking at cross-purposes, just as they are arguing at cross-purposes in their article.

Before leaving the section on the Bāb's claims, let me note briefly that the accounts of Shaykhism and the circumstances surrounding the origins of the Bābī movement are based almost entirely on Zarandī's late history, as the authors themselves admit in note 23. Zarandī is a singularly bad source for Shaykhism, his chapters on the lives of al-Ahsā'ī and Rashtī being almost equally compounded of myth and fact and containing numerous

factual errors. Since a reasonable body of historical materials on early Shaykhism exists in Persian, Arabic, French and English,⁴⁴ I find it both remarkable and significant that Afnān and Hatcher make no reference whatever to any of these and rely instead on an extremely late non-Shaykhi source. The result is that their account of Shaykhism is very derivative and shows a serious lack of any first-hand acquaintance with the school or its teachings. To describe Shaykhism as 'a reform movement', to say that al-Ahsa'i 'taught that the "resurrection" of believers was to be spiritual and not bodily', or to maintain that, by 1844, 'Shaykhism had been largely transformed into a movement of messianic adventism' all reveal a lack of knowledge that I find most disturbing in a supposedly academic article. Since a detailed knowledge of Shaykhism is an indispensable prerequisite for the study of early Babism, I fear that, on this count alone, the authors have again shown themselves to be unqualified for the task they have set themselves to perform.

The account given of the inception of Babism, while correct in its broad outline, is again drawn exclusively from late Bahā'ī sources and shows no acquaintance with recent scholarship carried out on the basis of early manuscript materials.⁴⁵ The very language used serves as an indicator of the way in which the authors approach the events described, less as empirical historical occurrences subject to rational enquiry than as episodes in a sacred drama, the details of which have been set out in sanctified texts. Phrases like 'the Promised One', 'living in their very midst', 'the one foretold', 'sent forth', 'transpired', 'the new Faith', 'proclaiming the advent of the Bāb' all reflect a certain style of writing familiar to anyone well-acquainted with Bahā'ī literature in English. Perhaps I am finding significance where none is to be found, but this is not really the language of normal English historical discourse, whereas it is, as I am very well aware, unquestionably that of Bahā'ī historiography.⁴⁶

The next, brief section entitled '*Jihād* and the writings of the Bab' contains some of the most tendentious arguments in the paper. Referring to the fact that the Bāb commanded adherence to Quranic law during the first four years of his career, they quote a passage from my article indicating that the laws of *jihād* contained in the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* are basically Quranic in origin, after which they go on to draw the following remarkable conclusion: 'Thus, the passages of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* referring to *jihād* do not constitute a Bābī doctrine of *jihād* but simply a restatement in almost identical terms of the Qur'anic doctrine'.

I scarcely know what to say about this. The authors clearly seem to want to have several cakes and eat them. They have already implied that there is no doctrine of *jihād* in the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* at all, now they suggest that the passages referring to *jihād* exist but do not constitute 'a Bābī doctrine of

jihād. If I state that the Bāb made limited claims at the outset of his career and that his movement in that period was ‘an expression of extreme Islamic pietism’, they rap my knuckles for failing to see that the Bāb really was an independent ‘Manifestation of God’ right from the beginning. But if, on the other hand, it seems inconvenient to admit that the earliest writings of this independent Manifestation present his personal doctrine in any form, they prefer to fall back on the argument that the teachings contained in them are really Islamic and not Bābī at all. The point is, of course, that, once we accept that Babism in some shape or form began in 1844 (as Afnān and Hatcher have themselves stated), we are obliged to treat all material after that date as representative of Bābī teaching, whether it is simply reiteration of Islamic norms or modifications of them or outright innovation.

As for the later statement that ‘by making *jihād* conditional on his approval (as the Bāb did), he effectively abrogated the waging of *jihād*, but without explicitly denying the Qur’anic doctrine of holy war’—I find myself almost speechless. This is fatuous to an extreme degree, particularly to anyone with the slightest knowledge of Twelver Shī‘ī history. With very few exceptions, the waging of *jihād* has been suspended by the Shī‘a in the absence of the twelfth imām, whose approval is necessary for it to be waged (see ‘Concept’ p. 98). Does this mean that *jihād* was regarded as ‘abrogated’ by Shī‘ī Muslims? Since offensive *jihād* cannot, in any case, be declared without a reasonable chance of success (and element of Islamic law of which Afnān and Hatcher appear to be ignorant—see their article, p. 33), the fact that it was not launched during the early Bābī period is of no real significance. The whole thing becomes quite absurd, in fact, if we take at its face value their own later statement (p. 39) to the effect that ‘Bahā’u’llāh abrogated the law of *jihād*’ (which is historically perfectly correct—see my article ‘From Babism’). Might one ask why, if the Bāb had already done so, Bahā’ Allāh should have found it necessary to abrogate *jihād* (and in doing so make the point that he was the first prophet to take that step)?

After this, the authors state that, since *jihād* is only legitimate against non-Muslims, the references in the *Qayyūm al-asma’* ‘could not have been taken or understood by the Bāb’s followers as legitimizing a holy war against their fellow Muslims’. The authors really are getting themselves into knots here, for, after having gone to so much trouble to demonstrate that Babism was a ‘new Faith’ and the Bāb an independent prophet, they now speak of non-Bābīs as ‘fellow Muslims’. Actually, this argument has even deeper problems. The statement ignores the introductory section of my article in which I set out the basic features of *jihād* in general and Shī‘ī *jihād* in particular. Among my remarks there (p. 100) is the following: ‘. . . Shī‘ī doctrine applied the term [dissenters] to all those who opposed the

twelve imams—in other words, to all non-Twelve Muslims. The duty to fight against these dissenters was not dependent on any specific threatening circumstances, but remained a constant element of doctrine'. This point is further examined with respect to the Bābī position in later sections of my article. On page 104, I devote a long paragraph to a discussion of the important question 'against whom did the Bāb envisage waging holy war?' and conclude that he 'by no means restricted the terms *kāfir* and *mushrik* to atheists or polytheists, but applied them to Muslims, whether Sūnnī or Shī'ī, who held what he regarded as heretical doctrines or, more particularly, who refused to recognize him'. A few pages later (p. 108), I discuss the same question with respect to later Bābī law and conclude that '*Jihād* . . . could be waged against any group who did not believe in the *Bayān*; the questions of unbelief, Islam, faith, dissidence, and so forth no longer apply here since the entire non-Bābī world is now the "realm of unbelief"', while on page 109 I note in particular that 'the Shī'ī population of Iran was now regarded as subject to the decree of holy war'.

Finally, to argue that 'since Bahā'u'llāh abrogated the law of *jihād*, we can again see in the Bāb's handling of the question of holy war in the *Bayān* a step in the direction towards its abrogation' is to take us deep into the realm of apologetics. To make later events the effective cause of earlier ones may be acceptable theology, but it is very bad history and makes the serious study of historical texts impossible. In any case, the Persian *Bayān* constantly assumes holy war in its references to conquest, booty, the treatment of non-believers and their property, and the elimination of unbelief. If even the Bahā'ī leader 'Abd al-Bahā' accepted, as we have seen, that 'the decree of the *Bayān* was . . . the universal slaughter of all save those who believed and were faithful', I think Afnān and Hatcher would do well to read the *Bayān*, not to mention their own scriptures, more carefully.

I do not propose to look in any detail at the next section, which deals with the uprisings at Shaykh Tabarsi, Nayrīz, and Zanjān. It will suffice to point out that the sources used by the authors are all later Bahā'ī ones, namely Zarandī, Siyoghi Effendi and Balyuzi. Merely asserting the platitudes of contemporary Bahā'ī doctrine is no way to proceed in a complex historical argument. If the authors wish to disprove what they call my 'charges' against the Bābīs,⁴⁷ will they please deal in detail with the specific instances I cite, providing, if they can, textual evidence from the same period which will prove that my interpretations (and my sources) are false? Sweeping generalizations based on late tendentious materials are no substitute for original research. That the Bābīs were militant, that they had political aspirations (and did not distinguish these from their religious aims any more than Muslims or modern Bahā'īs do), and that they believed that the Qajar state had delegitimized itself by its treatment of the Bāb are all

verifiable assertions based on clear textual evidence, presented in my article and elsewhere, and it would be futile to carry the discussion further until my critics prove at least willing to examine and treat seriously the material in question. What might also help would be a very large dose of empathy for the Bābīs themselves, whose ideals and aspirations have been lost sight of beneath a haze of modern Bahā'ī pious rhetoric and historical reconstruction.

Before I finish, let me reply briefly to one or two points made by the authors in their notes. In number 48, they refer to my 'gratuitous assertion that the future Manifestation was expected "at a distant date", contrary to the clear indications in the Bāb's writings that the advent of this Manifestation was imminent'. It has to be made clear that it is Bahā'ī interpretation of the Bāb's writings that makes the date of the appearance of 'him whom God shall manifest' 'imminent', and not necessarily the texts themselves. Anyone with a knowledge of late Babism knows that this has been a much debated question, carried on basically between the Bahā'īs on the one hand and everyone else on the other. I discuss the issue at some length in a forthcoming article entitled 'Charismatic authority in middle Babism'. Here, the main point I wish to get across is that my statement is not 'gratuitous', but based on a widely-accepted reading of well-known texts mixed with a little common sense.

I feel I cannot let go unremarked the comment in note 53 to the effect that 'MacEoin quotes from book V, chapter 5 of the *Bayān* which states, among other things, that the kings and leaders of the earth should not wait for people to enter the Faith of the Bab spontaneously, but should actively teach the Faith to others and lead them to belief in it'. This, they say, 'is not just a "very different" form of *jihād*; it is not *jihād* at all', and they argue that I here betray how difficult the defence of my central thesis has become.

Unfortunately, I did not write what they seem to imply I did, namely that Bābī kings were to 'teach the Faith' (which is, in any case, a purely Bahā'ī phrase). I quoted the *Bayān* to the effect that 'the possessors of power [i.e. kings] must not wait for something to descend from heaven in order to bring all that are on earth into the faith of God, but it should be as all entered the faith in Islam . . .'. Perhaps it would have helped had I also quoted an earlier passage from the same section of the *Bayān* (5:5, p. 157), which reads: 'If, for example, at the beginning of Islam a country was conquered by force and violence, (its people) would enter Islam and attain to the fruit of faith'. In case the authors have not read it in full, the chapter from which these two quotations are taken deals with 'the decree concerning the seizure of the property of those who do not believe in the *Bayān*'. Should the point still be unclear, perhaps they would care to read

the opening words of the next chapter of the book (5:5, p. 159): 'If God, the Knowing, should grant the believers the favour of conquering a land which has not accepted the faith (*islām*), anything (in it) which is unique shall belong to the Point of the *Bayān* [i.e. the Bāb]'. I remain to be persuaded that any of this means the polite 'teaching of the Faith' suggested by Afnān and Hatcher.

Finally, I must respond to note 61, where I am quoted as stating that the Bābīs showed 'great brutality not only to the hostile soldiers but to civilians in the region as well'. The authors go on to say that 'this undocumented and unsupported accusation by MacEoin is particularly gratuitous and unscholarly. There are in fact a number of such summary, unsupported judgements throughout the paper'. May I reply that their criticism is at this point both unfair and inaccurate. Bābī brutality, particularly at Shaykh Tabarsī, is well documented, as the following selected instances taken from Bābī sources will demonstrate.

The *Nuqat al-kaf* admits that, when *en route* to Bārfurūsh, the Bābīs in the company of Mullā Husayn Bushrū'ī killed a dervish and his small child for having misdirected them.⁴⁸ In the course of an early attack on the besieging army at Shaykh Tabarsī, a group of Bābīs killed 130 soldiers and villagers, destroyed the village near which the military had erected its defences, and seized two years' worth of provisions from the inhabitants.⁴⁹ In a later attack on the army camp at Vāskas, two princes took refuge in an upper room, whereupon the Bābī attackers set fire to the house, burning them to death, after which a group of Māzandarāni Bābīs looted the village.⁵⁰ On a later occasion, the Bābī defenders of the fort were instructed by Bārfurūshī to sever the heads of their enemies from their bodies and to erect the grisly relics on poles around the walls.⁵¹ Describing one of the Bābī attacks on the village of Vāskas, Lutf^c Alī Mīrzā Shīrāzī (himself one of the defenders of the fort), speaks of the extreme hard-heartedness of his co-religionists, who killed anyone they came across, including a man and a woman in a village before Vāskas, by mistake.⁵² Zarandī speaks of a similar mistake.⁵³ During the Zanjān upheaval, a Bābī renegade named Farrukh Khān was killed (along with 22 other prisoners) by being skinned alive and then roasted.⁵⁴

There is no need to labour the point. Rather than accuse me of gratuitousness and unscholarly methods, Afnān and Hatcher would do very well to read the available sources and ask themselves whether this is not really a case of the pot calling the kettle black. Having carried out no original research of their own, they seek to undermine my work for reasons that seem to be entirely partisan and polemical. They are, of course, welcome to make such criticisms, but they must realize that the proper place for them is in the pages of the sectarian journals published and vetted by their own

organization, not in academic publications designed to foster open and balanced discussion of religious history according to the standards of scholarly debate as normally understood.

More than once in the past century, scholars have had occasion to speak of the intellectual dishonesty of the Bahā'īs in dealing with matters of historical fact. Unhappily, it has fallen to my lot to reiterate the sentiments of my predecessors and to deplore, as they deplored, the high-handed and tendentious manner in which texts are manipulated, facts swept aside or transformed, and common sense outraged by the exponents of a religion that prides itself—justly in many other respects—on its respect for human reason and its freedom from prejudice. May I, therefore, plead that this present clash of opinions, acrimonious as it has by its nature been, may at least serve to alert those among the Bahā'ī community who have the sense and the intelligence to recognize the problems generated by the hitherto dominant fundamentalist element in their ranks to the dangers of leaving such debates in their hands. I would ask such individuals, whether or not they be academics themselves, to encourage future Bahā'ī scholars to treat seriously and with due respect for academic standards any further work carried out on aspects of their history by myself or others. The alternative will be to dissuade anyone with sense from engaging in Bābī or Bahā'ī studies, to the permanent detriment of a rich and important field of religious and historical research.

Most of all, perhaps, those of a fundamentalist persuasion among the Bahā'ī ranks, would do well to ask themselves whether they are not unwittingly doing more harm than good to the cause they seek to represent. There are in existence, in Britain and the United States, a number of Bahā'ī scholars, sociologists and historians among them, whose work is of a very high standard and on whose efforts any possibility of a meaningful dialogue with non-Bahā'ī academics will largely rest. It cannot be anything but an embarrassment for such individuals to have their less qualified co-religionists complicating an already difficult area of study by seeking to keep arguments at an apologetic level. Bahā'ī scholars have problems, not the least of which is the onerous obligation to submit their work for review, but they are making sincere and often very successful attempts to transform the image of Bahā'ī scholarship to one consonant with rigorous standards and academically tested methodology. I hope that those who are not prepared to follow them in adopting such a course will at least have the grace to recognize that the introduction of apologetics into scholarly debate is at best a distraction and at worst a means of wrecking the foundations on which future studies involving both Bahā'īs and non-Bahā'īs may be based.

NOTES

- 1 Mīrzā Husayn 'Alī Bahā' Allāh, 'Lawh-i Salmān', in *Majmū'a-yi alwāh-i mubāraka* (Cairo, 1338/1920), p. 153; trans. Shoghi Effendi, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh* (London, 1949), p. 328.
- 2 E. G. Browne (ed.) *Kitāb-i Nuqtatu'l-Kāf* by Hājī Mīrzā Jānī Kāshānī (London and Leiden, 1910), p. XXXV.
- 3 'The Bahā'ī Studies Seminar on Ethics and Methodology held in Cambridge on 30 September and 1 October 1978', comments by the Research Department at the World Centre, enclosed with letter from the Department of the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice, Haifa, 3 January 1979. This seems to me to represent an excellent example of the sectarian attitude summarized by Roy Wallis as follows: 'World-rejecting movements regard themselves as possessed of a revealed truth entirely at variance with the wider society (and with other world-rejecting movements). They construe themselves as alone possessed of a truth relevant to every aspect of human existence, embracing the individual totally and the whole of society. Since there exists certainty as to their truth, there can be no compromising or temporizing with other ideas. Members are expected to turn completely from alternative sources of belief, to embrace the truth unreservedly and to recognize that truth lies solely within the community of believers. It must therefore be defended against error and converts must display a high level of commitment and loyalty before complete acceptance, and work assiduously to spread such an important message to the world or assist in its being brought to fruition.' (*The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life*, London, 1984, p. 126). See also the comments of Werner Stark on sects as 'contracultures', particularly in respect to knowledge and learning, in *The Sociology of Religion*, vol. 2 (London, 1967), pp. 128–133.
- 4 'Extract from a report on a Bahā'ī weekend Institute on "Bahā'ī Scholarship" held in Yerrinbool during 9–12 April 1982: from the *Australian Bahā'ī Bulletin* of June 1982 (p. 16)', in *Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin* 1:2 (September 1982), p. 60.
- 5 Letter of the Universal House of Justice to Mr Juan Ricardo Cole, 2 December 1982, in *Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin* 1:4 (March, 1983), p. 89. The book in question was published under the title *My Memories of Bahā'u'llāh*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Los Angeles, 1982).
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Letter of the Universal House of Justice to Kalimat Press, 2 December 1982, in *ibid.*, p. 88.
- 8 Letter of the Universal House of Justice to Cole, in *ibid.*, p. 89.
- 9 Wallis, *Elementary Forms*, p. 123: 'What constitutes truth and heresy is determined not by individual choice and personal preference, but by authoritative definition'. This notion is, I think, closely connected to that of 'epistemological pessimism', described by Karl Popper as rooted in 'disbelief in the power of human reason, in man's power to discern the truth' [*Conjectures and Refutations*, 4th. Ed (London, 1972), p. 6]. Popper's further comments on epistemological traditionalism and the theory that truth is manifest are also extremely relevant to the present argument (see *ibid.*, pp. 6–9). On concepts of knowledge in Islam (including Shi'ism) see F. Rozenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant* (Leiden, 1970).
- 10 See Mīrzā Husayn 'Alī Bahā' Allāh, 'Lawh-i Ishrāqāt', in *Alwāh-i mubāraka-yi hadrat-i Bahā' Allāh . . . shāmīl-i Ishrāqāt wa chand lawh digar* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 54–56, 58–59; trans. H. Taherzadeh in *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh revealed after the*

- Kitab-i-Aqdas* (Haifa, 1978), pp. 105, 106, 108–109.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 58; trans. *Tablets*, p. 108.
- 12 Idem, *Al-kitāb al-aqdas*, text in ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Hasanī, *Al-Bābīyūn wa ‘l-Bahā’īyūn fī hādīrihim wa mādihim*, 2nd. ed. (Sidon, 1381/1962), p. 123; trans. Shoghi Effendi, *Gleanings*, pp. 334–335; cf. Earl E. Elder and William McE. Miller (trans. and ed.) *Al-Kitāb al-Aqdas or The Most Holy Book* (London, 1961), pp. 56–57.
- 13 P. Smith, ‘The American Bahā’ī community, 1894–1917: a preliminary Survey’, in M. Momen (ed.) *Studies in Bābī and Bahā’ī History* (Los Angeles, 1982), p. 179.
- 14 ‘Abd al-Bahā’, quoted *Star of the West* magazine, 8:17 (19 January 1918), p. 227.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- 16 Smith, ‘American Bahā’ī community’, p. 179.
- 17 See E. G. Browne (ed. and trans.) *The New History of Mīrẓā ‘Alī Muhammad the Bāb* by Mīrẓā Huseyn of Hamadān (Cambridge, 1893), pp. xiv ff.; idem (ed. and trans.) *A Traveller’s Narrative written to illustrate the History of the Bāb*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1891), vol. 2, pp. xlv–xlvi; idem, *Nuqtatu’l-Kāf*, pp. xxxiv–xlvi; A. L. M. Nicolas (trans.) *Le Beyan Persan*, 4 vols (Paris, 1911–1914), vol. 1, p. xv ff.; V. E. Johnson, ‘An Historical Analysis of Critical Transformations in the Evolution of the Baha’i World Faith’, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Baylor University, 1974 (University Microfilms 75–20, 564), pp. 49–113; J. R. Richards *The Religion of the Bahā’īs* (London, 1932), pp. 12–14, 69–72; Sayyid Muhammad Bāqir Najafī *Bahā’īyān* (Tehran, 1399/1979), pp. 359–415.
- 18 See, in particular, A. Amanat, ‘The Early Years of the Babi Movement: Background and Development’, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1981; D. MacEoin, ‘From Shaykhism to Babism: a study in charismatic renewal in Shi‘ī Islam’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1979 (University Microfilms 81–70, 043).
- 19 A glance at the footnotes to my article ‘From Babism to Baha’ism’ will, I think, make it reasonably clear that I do possess a reasonable knowledge of these texts. What is, of course, less obvious is that I have read most of the major works of Bahā’ Allāh at least a dozen times.
- 20 I am not quite sure what is meant by this. The sub-title of the book in English is ‘Nabīl’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahā’ī Revelation’. In Bahā’ī thinking, the Bābī dispensation was terminated by the appearance of Bahā’ Allāh in 1853, the date at which Zarandī’s chronicle concludes. Am I right in detecting some confusion here, or are the authors seeking to imply that Shoghi Effendi’s original categorization of Zarandī’s narrative was incorrect?
- 21 Shoghi Effendi (ed. and trans.) *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahā’ī Revelation* (Wilmette, 1932), introduction, p. xxxvii.
- 22 Idem, cable in *Bahā’ī News*, July 1932.
- 23 Idem, cable cited in Ruhīyyih Rabbāni, *The Priceless Pearl* (London, 1969), p. 217.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Anon., *The Centenary of a World Faith* (London, 1944), p. 46.
- 26 George Townshend, *The Mission of Bahā’u’llāh and Other Literary Pieces* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 40–41.
- 27 The terms ‘authentic’ and ‘authenticated’ are widely used in Bahā’ī circles, particularly with respect to scriptural and historical writing. They are frequently

- employed in conjunction with a range of related terms such as 'authoritative', 'binding', 'official recognition', 'sanction' or 'approved', as well as their antonyms, such as 'unauthorized', 'unauthenticated' or 'erroneous' [see, for the above terms, Eunice Braun, *Know Your Bahā'ī Literature* (Wilmette, 1968), pp. 9–13]. It seems fair to say that, in these contexts, 'authentic' actually means something very like 'orthodox' or 'doctrinally sound'.
- 28 °Abd al-Hamid Ishrāq Khāvarī (trans.) *Matālī' al-anwār* (Tehran, 129 badi'/1973).
- 29 See statement of Dr (°Alī Murād) Dā'ūdī, quoted Najafī *Bahā'īyan*, p. 412, f.n. 107.
- 30 Rabbāni, *Priceless Pearl*, p. 217.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 215.
- 32 Shoghī Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahā'ī Community: the Messages from the Guardian of the Bahā'ī Faith to the Bahā'īs of the British Isles* (London, 1981), p. 426.
- 33 °Abd al-Hamid Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Ganjīna-yi hudūd wa ahkām* 3rd. Edn. (Tehran, 128 badi'/1972–73), p. 272.
- 34 Mirzā Abu 'l-Fadl Gulpāygāni and Sayyid Mahdī Gulpāygāni, *Kashf al-ghitā' 'an hiyal al-a-dā'* (Ashkhabad, n.d.), p. 166.
- 35 °Abd al-Bahā, *Makātib-i °Abd al-Bahā'*, vol. 2 (Cairo, 1330/1912), p. 266.
- 36 D. M. MacEoin, 'Early Shaykhi reactions to the Bāb and his claims', in M. Momen (ed.), *Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History* (Los Angeles, 1982), pp. 1–47; *idem*, 'From Shaykhism to Babism', pp. 167–175.
- 37 Sayyid °Alī Muhammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb, *Kitāb-i panj sha'n* [n.p. (Tehran), n.d.], pp. 11, 184, 256, 280. See also *idem*, *Dalā'il-i sab'a* [n.p. (Tehran), n.d.], p. 29.
- 38 Sayyid Mahdī Dahajī, *Risāla-yi Sayyid Mahdī Dahajī*, MS F.57, E. G. Browne Or. MSS, Cambridge University Library, p. 38.
- 39 Muhammad °Alī Zunūzī, *risāla* quoted Mirzā Asad Allāh Fādīl Māzandarānī, *Kitāb-i zuhūr al-haqq*, vol. 3 (n.p., n.d.), pp. 31–33. Zunuzi does, in fact, go on to interpret these 'stations' retrospectively with respect to 'him whom God shall manifest', but the point here is that he indicates that the Bāb's external claims did progress in the manner I have suggested. Nor, of course, is there any hint that 'he whom God shall manifest' is to appear soon, much less that he is to be identified with Bahā' Allāh.
- 40 Sayyid °Alī Muhammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb, *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, MS F.11, E. G. Browne Or. MSS, Cambridge University Library, p. 1; *idem* *Sahīfa-yi makhzūna*, MS 5006.C, National Baha'i Archives, Tehran, p. 284.
- 41 *Idem*, *Sahīfa-yi °adliyya* [n.p. (Tehran), n.d.], p. 13; cf. p. 7.
- 42 *Idem*, *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, f. 50b.
- 43 Qurrat al-°Ayn, *risāla* printed as appendix to Gulpaygani and Gulpaygani, *Kashf al-ghita'*, p. 2.
- 44 See D. M. MacEoin, 'Shaykhism', in L. P. Elwell-Sutton (ed.) *Bibliographical Guide to Iran: The Middle East Library Committee Guide* (Sussex and New Jersey, 1984).
- 45 See particularly, Amanat, 'Early Years', and MacEoin, 'From Shaykhism to Babism'.
- 46 Thus, in the corresponding sections of Zarandī's history, we find the following: 'the Promised One', pp. 24, 57, and *passim*, 'His presence in their very midst' (p. 25), 'sent forth' (p. 92), 'this new Faith' (p. 92).

- 47 I find it most revealing that Afnān and Hatcher speak of 'charges'. I am not 'charging' the Bābīs with anything or accusing them of having committed any 'crimes' or immoral acts. Would I be levelling 'charges' against Muslims if I wrote an account of early Islamic *jihād*? Since the Bābīs acted entirely within the context of their own system and according to the lights of their own consciences, I cannot see that there is anything to be gained by 'charging' them for not having behaved as I (or the Bahā'īs) would want to behave. I do, however, accept that I charge the Bahā'īs with having distorted and misrepresented the Bābīs, their history and their beliefs.
- 48 *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, p. 157.
- 49 *Ibid.*, pp. 161–162.
- 50 *Ibid.*, pp. 167–168.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 177.
- 52 Lutf 'Alī Mīrzā Shīrāzī, untitled history, MS F.28, item 3, Browne Or. MSS, Cambridge University Library, p. 92 ff.
- 53 Zarandī, *Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 346–347.
- 54 Hamadani, *The New History*, p. 155 and f.n.1.

DENIS MACEOIN was awarded his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge in 1979 and is currently Lecturer in Islamic Studies in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He has published many articles on aspects of modern Shi'ism, Shaykhism, Babism and Baha'ism.

Department of Religious Studies, The University, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 7RU, U.K.