

WESTERN ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP AND BAHÁ'Í ORIGINS

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INTRODUCTION

In 1974, Denis MacEoin published an article entitled 'Oriental Scholarship and the Bahá'í Faith'¹ in which he deplored the lack of attention given during the preceding decades to the Bahá'í Faith by Western scholars of Eastern religions. He pointed out, among other things, that the Bahá'í Faith, having originated at a critical period in the recent history of the Islamic world, and having since exhibited substantial expansion, growth, and development, would appear to be worthy of significant consideration by scholars. At the time of MacEoin's article, however, virtually the only worker in the area seemed to be the Bahá'í scholar H. M. Balyuzi, writing in English and using a number of yet unpublished and/or untranslated sources. Balyuzi's work, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*², published in 1970, ended an almost fifty-year hiatus in the tradition started by such Western writers as Gobineau, Nicolas, and most importantly Browne himself, the subject of Balyuzi's book.

This long period of scholarly neglect of the Bahá'í Faith was particularly unfortunate for several reasons. In the first place, a number of highly significant additions to the literature of the Bahá'í Faith took place during the period from 1920 to 1970. For example, in 1932, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, published his annotated translation of Nabíl's narrative of the early days of the Bábí Faith.³ Nabíl's history was important not only because he was himself an eyewitness to and a participant in so many of the events which he recounts, but also because he consulted scores of other witnesses to those events of which he had no first-hand knowledge. As his work unfolds, Nabíl gives the names of those persons on whose direct knowledge each particular incident is based. Other examples of additions to Bahá'í literature during this period are the remarkable English translations by Shoghi Effendi of a number of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

All of these publications increased vastly the quantity of primary material accessible to any serious student of the Bahá'í Faith, whether from the

historical or the philosophical point of view. Nevertheless, the image of the Bahá'í Faith in scholarly circles during the period 1920–1970 was superficial and was largely formed without study (or perhaps even awareness) of these rich additions to Bahá'í literature.

Another reason that the lengthy gap in scholarly consideration of the Bahá'í Faith within the Western academic milieu was particularly unfortunate is that E. G. Browne, the foremost Western student of the nascent Bahá'í movement, made, in the latter years of his life, a number of rather arbitrary and doubtful judgements concerning the Bahá'í Faith. As a careful consideration of Browne and his work is the very focus of the Balyuzi book cited above, there is no reason to enter into a detailed discussion here. Suffice it to say that the series of Bahá'í studies undertaken by Browne in his later years was based on materials of increasingly doubtful authenticity and value, leading finally to the inclusion of the personal philosophical musings of certain writers whose doctrines had not even the remotest connection with Bahá'í teachings. That a person of Browne's stature in the academic world published such material undoubtedly served to obscure the perception of the Bahá'í Faith by subsequent scholars.

Since the appearance of Balyuzi's study on Browne and the 1974 MacEoin article, a number of younger Western Islamic scholars have undertaken various critical studies of the Bahá'í Faith and its origins. In particular, MacEoin himself has gone on to obtain a doctorate in the field of Islamic studies, and has begun to publish articles in various academic journals in which he purports to deal in a scholarly and objective manner with a number of questions relating to the birth and development of the Bahá'í Faith. The cogency of the perspective on Bahá'í 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.

In the article on 'Abdu'l-Bahá appearing in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*⁴, MacEoin discusses the teachings presented by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the course of his travels to the West. Although 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly stated that the universal principles which he elaborated in his talks were all based on the writings and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, MacEoin implies that this is not completely so. MacEoin hints that at least some of them were new, possibly borrowed from or influenced by certain of the liberal and humanitarian movements of thought then current in the West. Such a contention has been thoroughly refuted in a recent issue of *Andalib*⁵ where each of the ideas and principles advanced by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is traced to specific books and tablets of Bahá'u'lláh. Thus, the unsubstantiated thesis of MacEoin's *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article reflects a rather surprising ignorance of important segments of the basic literature of the Bahá'í Faith.⁶

In another recent article, 'The Bábí Concept of Holy War'⁷ (henceforth referred to as *Concept*), and in a review⁸ of Moojan Momen's *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944. Some Contemporary Western Accounts*⁹ (henceforth referred to as *Review*), MacEoin again raises a number of basic issues concerning the history and doctrines of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths and makes judgements about these issues. In the eyes of the present writers, many of these judgements appear to be extremely doubtful, and a consideration of them is the main focus of this article. Our comments represent the collaboration between an Eastern scholar who is well familiar with the intricacies of the Persian and Arabic languages and of the relevant texts of the Bábí and Bahá'í scriptures, and a scientifically trained Western writer.¹⁰

Without detracting in any way from the academic achievements of Western scholars such as MacEoin who have learned the Persian and Arabic languages, it is our hope that this kind of collaboration may allow for a more balanced and also more acute analysis of some of the basic issues involved in this field of study.

A NEW KEY TO BAHÁ'Í HISTORY?

In his article *Concept*, MacEoin's central concern is to elucidate what he sees as misconceptions regarding a number of important events in the early history of the Bábí Faith. He is particularly concerned with the violent confrontations between Bábís and Muslims at Shaykh Ṭabarsí, Nayríz, and Zanján. He points out (*Concept*, p. 94) that enemies of the Bábí Faith, and certain exponents of the established authorities of the day, consistently characterized these events as Bábí insurrections, uprisings, or rebellions. Bahá'í writers, on the other hand, have stressed the defensive nature of the Bábís' actions in the face of extreme provocation and persecution. Representative of the Bahá'í viewpoint (although this particular passage is not quoted by MacEoin) is the following statement written by George Townshend:

On these three occasions [Shaykh Ṭabarsí, Nayríz, and Zanján] a number of Bábís, driven to desperation, withdrew in concert from their houses to a chosen retreat and, erecting defensive works about them, defied in arms further pursuit. To any impartial witness it was evident that the mullás' allegations of a political motive were untrue. The Bábís showed themselves always ready—on assurance that they would be no longer molested for their religious beliefs—to return peacefully to their civil occupations. Nabil emphasizes their care to refrain from aggression. They would fight for their lives with determined skill and strength; but they would not attack. Even in the midst of fierce conflict they would not drive home an advantage nor strike an unnecessary blow.¹¹

The main thesis of *Concept* is that previous writers on Bábí history have neglected the concept of *jihád* (holy war) which, MacEoin affirms, is the key to understanding the Bábí attitudes and actions and thereby the essential nature of the events in question:

Both these views—‘rebellion’ on the one hand and ‘self-defence’ and ‘persecution’ on the other—obscure the more fundamental issue of the nature, status, and function of *jihád* within the Bábí movement, as derived from Islam, from the writings of the Báb, and from the expressed attitudes of the Bábí leadership in those localities where trouble broke out.¹²

MacEoin gives as reasons for the importance of *jihád* that ‘it provides us with an important focus for the consideration of the Báb’s attitude and the attitudes of his followers to Islam and to the Qájár state’, that ‘it enables us to carry out a reappraisal of the political and ethical issues involved in the struggles of Shaykh Tabarsí, Nayríz and Zanján’ and finally that ‘it leads us directly to one of the most central questions around which the development of Baha’ism out of Babism revolves, and clarifies for us what is perhaps the most distinctive feature of early Bahá’í doctrine’.¹³

The remainder of *Concept* consists in the presentation of a certain doctrine of holy war, attributed to the Báb and based on selected quotations from the Báb’s writings, particularly his initial work, the *Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’*,¹⁴ (the commentary on the súrih of Joseph in the Qur’án), and an analysis of the above-mentioned historical incidents in the light of this doctrine.

There are a number of reasons for feeling that MacEoin’s treatment of these events and issues is defective. He is highly selective in the material which he quotes from the Báb. Also, the Báb’s later works and their import are considerably neglected. Moreover, throughout his rather long paper, MacEoin states, without argument or support, a number of judgements and interpretations which are open to serious question. Finally, there are several important inconsistencies and contradictions in MacEoin’s presentation of his thesis. In our discussion below, we will deal with each of these questions.

Let us begin with consideration of a basic inconsistency which is fundamental to MacEoin’s presentation of his thesis. In his initial presentation (quoted above) of the thesis that the concept of holy war is the key to understanding the Bábí-Muslim confrontations, MacEoin clearly rejects both the notion that the Bábís were politically motivated (the ‘rebellion’ interpretation) and the notion that their actions were essentially defensive, as explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and other Bahá’í writers. Since MacEoin puts forth *jihád* as the proper answer, one would naturally expect him to present the Bábís as having engaged in an offensive military action justified by appropriate religious doctrines and motives. It is therefore surprising to read, in the conclusion to the paper, that in MacEoin’s own judgement this is not the case:

In conclusion, then, we may note that in no instance do the Bábís seem to have declared offensive *jihád* along the lines suggested in the *Qayyúm al-asmá'*, probably because it was regarded as wrong to declare a holy war unless there was a reasonable chance of success—a condition clearly lacking in the case of the Bábís.¹⁵

How indeed can the notion of holy war be the key to understanding the Bábí-Muslim confrontations if in no instance it was involved in precipitating the conflicts? How can *jihád* explain to us 'the Báb's attitudes and the attitude of his followers to Islam and to the Qájár state'¹⁶ if the only notion of *jihád* which MacEoin attributes to the Báb (that which MacEoin derives from his particular exegesis of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*) was, in no instance, the basis of the Bábí actions?

Moreover, the only reason suggested by MacEoin to explain the Bábís' refusal to declare *jihád* against their Muslim opponents was the lack of a reasonable chance of success. Now, as we will see from our discussion below, *jihád* was never conditioned on calculating its success. By its very nature, holy war is based strictly on an intrinsic, moral justification, not an extrinsic, power-seeking one. Indeed, in characterizing the Bábí attitudes at Zanján, MacEoin has said: 'We can see the role played here, as at Shaykh Ṭabarsí, by religious fanaticism and a characteristically Shí'í fascination with martyrdom'.¹⁷ Would people who are fanatically religious and fascinated with martyrdom be reluctant to declare a holy war because they calculate that there is no chance of success? Would they even make such a calculation?

Furthermore, no one disputes the fact that the Bábís did fight, and fight heroically, against incredible odds. Once it became evident to the Bábís that a fight was unavoidable and that their own deaths as martyrs were likely, what would they lose in declaring *jihád* if that was, as MacEoin contends, their basic attitude and motive?¹⁸

If we reject the *jihád* thesis as inconsistent with the known attitudes and actions of the Bábís as well as the teachings of the Báb, then how can we interpret what happened at Shaykh Ṭabarsí, Nayríz, and Zanján? MacEoin tells us that: 'Once battle was joined, religious motifs of martyrdom, defensive *jihád* and "perfecting the proof" (i.e. demonstrating the truth of the cause in the eyes of men) took precedence over social, economic, and other features.'¹⁹ This is beginning to sound extremely close to Townshend's description of a defensive action in response to religious persecution. What, after all, is a 'defensive *jihád*' but a defensive action undertaken for religious motives? A defensive action is one taken in response to prior aggression on the part of others.²⁰

Thus, in the end, MacEoin's analysis appears to support in its essentials the interpretation of these events given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, to render doubtful or at least highly suspect the *jihád* thesis, and to discredit

completely any view which ascribes political or power-seeking motives to the Bábís.

THE NATURE OF THE BÁB'S CLAIMS

An essential aspect of the *jihád* thesis as presented in *Concept* is the notion that the Báb progressively changed the basic character of his claims during the evolution of his six-year ministry (from 1844 to 1850). Here is MacEoin's statement of the matter:

In its earliest phase (to 1848), Babism grew rapidly . . . as an expression of extreme Islamic pietism animated by urgent expectation of the return of the Hidden Imam in his messianic persona as the Imam Mahdí, Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad being his agent or 'gate' (báb) on earth. In its brief second phase (1848-9), . . . the Báb . . . proclaimed himself the promised Mahdí in person. A third phase followed, initiated by the Báb's rapid assumption of the role of an independent prophet or divine 'manifestation' directly empowered by God to open a new religious dispensation after Islam, to reveal new scriptures and to ordain a new legal system.²¹

Neither the historical facts nor the Báb's writings justify this simplistic attempt to divide the Báb's ministry into strict, sequential periods, each period represented by a characteristic claim. For example, the Báb's claims both to be an independent Manifestation of God, the so-called third phase quoted above, as well as to be the promised Mahdí or Qá'im, are easily seen to be already expressed in his initial work, the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, written in 1844. In this work, the Báb refers to himself and to his rank using terms which were understood and accepted by his Islamic audience as applicable only to an independent Manifestation of God.²²

That the nature of the Báb's claims were perceived by those who read the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* is illustrated by an incident which shortly followed the Báb's initial declaration of his mission in May, 1844, and the composition of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*. In order to understand the full significance of this incident, it will be necessary to summarize briefly some of the basic facts and events connected with the birth of the Bábí Faith.

In late 18th century 'Iráq and Irán, there began a reform movement within Twelver Shí'ih Islám known as Shaykhism, after its founder Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Aḥsá'í.²³ At that late stage in its history, Islám and the Islamic world had sunk into a state of extreme depravity and corruption. The world of Shí'ism was effectively ruled by the 'ulamá, the religious leaders. The brilliance of Islamic thought of the medieval period was replaced by a rigid orthodoxy and extreme fundamentalism. Moral degeneracy, bribery, and venality were rampant.²⁴ It was amidst such a sad state of affairs that Shaykh Aḥmad arose in an attempt to lead his fellow believers to a more subtle and spiritual concept of religion. He gave symbolic rather than literal

interpretations to many of the traditional Islamic beliefs and taught that the 'resurrection' of believers was to be spiritual and not bodily. At his death in 1826 he was succeeded by Siyyid Kázim-i-Raṣḥtí. The latter continued the doctrines of Shaykh Aḥmad, but laid increasing emphasis on teaching the imminent advent of the Mahdí (Qá'im), the Promised One of Shí'ih Islám. So much was this so that, at his death in January, 1844, Shaykhism had been largely transformed into a movement of messianic adventism.

In January, 1844, Mullá Ḥusayn-i-Buṣhrú'í, one of the chief disciples of the late Siyyid Kázim, set out to find the Promised One who, Siyyid Kázim had insisted, was now living in their very midst. His search led him to the city of Shíráz in southern Írán where, on 23 May, 1844, Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad, the Báb, disclosed to Mullá Ḥusayn that he was the one foretold in unmistakable terms by Siyyid Kázim. Mullá Ḥusayn recognized in the Báb the various signs given by Siyyid Kázim and accepted the Báb as the Promised One. According to Mullá Ḥusayn's account, the Báb began the composition of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* in Mullá Ḥusayn's presence at their very first meeting. Following the Báb's explicit instructions, Mullá Ḥusayn refrained for the time being from teaching his new-found Faith.²⁵

Within a number of weeks following the Báb's declaration of his mission to Mullá Ḥusayn, sixteen other individuals also found their way to the Báb and accepted him as the Promised One. One other person, Táhírih, the only woman, also came to know of the Báb and accept him, but without meeting him. These eighteen disciples of the Báb were designated by him as 'Letters of the Living'. They were sent forth by the Báb throughout Persia and adjoining regions to teach his Faith. These events transpired during the Summer of 1844.²⁶

One of the Letters of the Living (the second, in fact) was Mullá 'Alíy-i-Bastámí. He, like Mullá Ḥusayn, had been a leading member of the Shaykhí community. He was given the specific task by the Báb of returning to the region of Karbilá, the heartland of Shaykhism, and of proclaiming there the new Faith. He was not, however, to divulge the identity of the Báb, but only to proclaim that he had, in fact, appeared.

Arising to fulfill this task given him by the Báb, Mullá 'Alí arrived in 'Iráq in early August, 1844.²⁷ He immediately embarked on the mission of proclaiming the advent of the Báb. As a proof of the validity of the new revelation, he produced and circulated copies of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*.²⁸

The impact which this work of the Báb had on the population of 'Iráq was immediate and dramatic. The implications of the claims and teachings it contained, coupled with the fearless and public pronouncements of Mullá 'Alíy-i-Bastámí, led to his arrest and eventual imprisonment in Baghdád. After some deliberations as to what should be done with him, the authorities, under the leadership of Najíb Páshá, convoked a conclave of Sunní and

Shí'ih ecclesiastics who tried Mullá 'Alí according to religious law. This trial took place in January, 1845.

The result of the trial was an edict or *fatwá*, which, among other things, condemned the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* as heretical and its unknown author as a heretic deserving of death. This edict was signed by every one of the mullás present at the trial. Mullá 'Alí was held to merit death and was remanded to prison. He disappeared from view and the exact conditions of his execution have remained unknown.²⁹

Of particular interest for the present study are the contents of the *fatwá* document itself. For here we have a surely authenticated document of the reaction of the leaders of thought of the Islamic world to the initial writings and claims of the Báb. The *fatwá* lays the following specific charges against the Báb:

- (1) That he wrote a book that resembled the Qur'án in its format, with chapters, verses, etc.
- (2) That he took liberties with the text of the Qur'án by adding, subtracting and interposing new material.
- (3) That he claimed divine revelation.
- (4) That he exaggerated concerning some of the Holy Family.
- (5) That he exaggerated the importance of his own writings and commandments while de-emphasizing the importance of Islám and of Islamic religious law.³⁰

Thus, based strictly on the text of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* (for they had nothing else, not even the knowledge of the Báb's identity), the panel of Sunní and Shí'ih 'ulamá unanimously declared that the Báb had claimed divine revelation. Let us mention a few of the passages of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* from which the panel perceived the Báb's claim to divine revelation. These are passages that have been cited in the *fatwá* document itself in explicit support of the charge that the Báb claimed divine revelation.

In chapter 61, verse 22 of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* we find: 'We have inspired you as We inspired Muḥammad and those messengers who were before him with clear signs in order that mankind may have no arguments against God. . . .'³¹ Here, the Báb clearly identifies himself as a Messenger of God after Muḥammad, and of the same rank and nature. Later on (verse 24) the Báb refers to himself as the 'Remembrance' of God, a term unequivocally understood in this context as implying the rank of a Manifestation or Prophet of God.³² In chapter 65, verse 2, the Báb speaks of the verses of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* as 'revealed' (*awhá*) by God.³³ In chapter 60, verse 14, the Báb speaks likewise of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* as 'sent down' (*anzala*) by God.³⁴ Both of these terms are immediately perceived as constituting an unequivocal claim to divine revelation.

In chapter 60, verse 12, the Báb refers to himself as the Proof (*al-Hujja*), one of the titles of the Imám Mahdí.³⁵

In chapter 62, verse 12, the Báb says: 'O people of the Earth! The Remembrance has come to you after a break in the succession of messengers in order that he may purge and purify you. . . .'³⁶ Not only does the Báb assume the title of Remembrance, but he specifically presents his revelation as following in the established succession of divine revelations.

The above is only a sampling, but should suffice to establish that, from the very beginning, the nature of the Báb's claims were quite clear and unequivocal.³⁷ If his claims were so clear to his enemies, and to the orthodox establishment of the day, they were certainly just as clear to his followers. What else indeed but the conviction that they were the believing witnesses to a divine epiphany could have motivated the early followers of the Báb (such as Mullá 'Alíy-i-Bastámí himself) to such deeds of self-sacrifice?

Thus, the *fatwá* document, written and proclaimed in early 1845 and based strictly on the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* (or whatever portion of it the Báb had completed before early August, 1844), the trial of Mullá 'Alíy-i-Bastámí which generated the *fatwá*, and the actions of both the early Bábís and their religious opponents all seem to contradict decisively MacEoin's description of the early Bábí Faith as 'an expression of extreme Islamic pietism animated by urgent expectation of the return of the Hidden Imam. . . .'³⁸

However, there is no doubt a considerable change in style, tone, and content between the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, written in 1844, and the Persian *Bayán*, written by the Báb in 1848. The former is more Qur'anic in style, and seeks to reaffirm the basic truths of Islám, much as Jesus said to the Jews that 'I have come not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it.' In particular, during the first few years of his ministry, the Báb did not institute laws different from those of Islám, and he explicitly enjoined his followers to continue observance of Islamic law.

On the other hand, the Persian *Bayán* represents a radical break with Islamic law, abrogating many traditional laws and instituting new ones. In one of his later writings, the *Seven Proofs*, the Báb refers to the evolutionary character of his revelation:

Consider the manifold favours vouchsafed by the Promised One, and the effusions of His bounty which have pervaded the concourse of the followers of Islám to enable them to attain unto salvation. Indeed observe how He Who representeth the origin of creation, He Who is the Exponent of the verse 'I, in very truth, am God', identified Himself as the Gate [Báb] for the advent of the promised Qá'im, a descendant of Muḥammad, and in His first Book enjoined the observance of the laws of the Qur'án, so that the people might not be seized with perturbation by reason of a new Book and a new Revelation and might regard His Faith as similar to their own, perchance they would not turn away from the Truth and ignore the thing for which they had been called into being.³⁹

A few words of explanation concerning the above passage are in order. After the death of Muḥammad (632 A.D.), there followed a succession of

Imáms or leaders, the first being 'Alí the son-in-law of Muḥammad, the husband of Muḥammad's daughter Fatima. The legitimacy and spiritual authority of the Imáms is recognized by Shí'ih Islám but not by Sunní Islám. Traditional Shí'ih belief holds that the twelfth and last Imám appeared in the tenth century and that he did not die but is only hidden and will, at the appropriate moment, return in eschatological consummation. This apocalyptic event is designated as the appearance of the Imám Mahdí, the Qá'im, the Promised One of Shí'ih Islám.

Each Imám had designated his successor, and it is believed that the twelfth and last Imám designated an intermediary or 'Gate' (Báb) to succeed him. Three other succeeding Gates were designated by their predecessors, and then the succession ceased. The Gates were not held to be Imáms but only representatives of the last (hidden) Imám. All of the Imáms were descended from 'Alí and from Muḥammad via Fatima. Thus, when 'Alí-Muḥammad of Shíráz took the title of Báb, he could easily have been interpreted to mean that he was yet another (fifth) Gate to the twelfth Imám, i.e., a 'Gate for the advent of the Promised Qá'im, a descendant of Muḥammad. . . .'⁴⁰ But this interpretation is rendered ambiguous by the Báb's unequivocal claims to independent divine revelation as discussed above. The obvious conclusion, then, is that, in the early period of his ministry, the Báb deliberately employed this ambiguity in order to lessen the impact of his otherwise clear claims to divine revelation.

However, this conclusion, though logical, does not explain what 'Alí-Muḥammad of Shíráz did in fact mean by the title of 'Báb'. What else could he have meant if not that he was the fifth Gate to the Hidden Imám?

To answer this important question, and to gain an adequate understanding of the nature of the Báb's claims, and of the evolution of his ministry, one other important feature of the Persian *Bayán* needs our attention. Not only does the *Bayán* promulgate a radically new set of rather severe laws, it speaks continually of a further Manifestation of God whose appearance is soon expected. The title given to this future Manifestation is 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' and He is addressed or mentioned over three hundred times in the Persian *Bayán*. Indeed, He Whom God shall make manifest is the very focal point of the *Bayán* in that the stated purpose of the *Bayán* and its laws is to prepare the followers of the Báb for the acceptance of this imminent epiphany. For example, the Báb affirms: 'And know thou of a certainty that every letter revealed in the *Bayán* is solely intended to evoke submission unto Him Whom God shall make manifest. . . .'⁴¹

The Báb likewise affirms that all of the laws of the *Bayán* are to stand only if they are confirmed and accepted by Him Whom God shall make manifest. For example: 'At the time of the appearance of Him Whom God shall make manifest, wert thou to perform thy deeds for the sake of the Point of the

Bayán, they would be regarded as performed for one other than God, inasmuch as on that Day the Point of the Bayán is none other than Him Whom God shall make manifest. . . .⁴² and 'Thus, should the followers of the Bayán observe the precepts of Him Whom God shall make manifest at the time of His appearance. . . .'⁴³

The Báb further makes clear that the revelation of Him Whom God shall make manifest is greater than the Báb's own revelation: 'I swear by the most holy Essence of God—exalted and glorified be He—that in the Day of the appearance of Him Whom God shall make manifest a thousand perusals of the Bayán cannot equal the perusal of a single verse to be revealed by Him Who God shall make manifest.'⁴⁴

Thus, in the same book and at the same time that the Báb finally uses his full authority to establish the laws of his religious dispensation, he states that his system is to be short-lived and sharply focused. It is to prepare the way for the imminent advent of another, greater revelation.⁴⁵ Therefore, the true meaning of the title 'Báb' or 'gate' is that 'Alí-Muḥammad considered himself to be the gate or forerunner of a second Manifestation of God:

The Báb declared Himself at the beginning of His mission to be the 'Báb' by which He meant to be the gate or forerunner of 'Him Whom God will make manifest', that is to say Bahá'u'lláh, Whose advent the Shí'ahs expected in the person of 'the return of the Imám Ḥusayn'. The Sunnis also believe in a similar twofold manifestation, the first they call 'the Mihdí', the second 'the Return of Christ'. By the term Báb, the Báb meant to be the forerunner of the second manifestation rather than, as some have maintained, the gate of the Qá'im. When He declared Himself to be the Báb, the people understood by the term that He was an intermediary between the absent Qá'im and His followers, though He Himself never meant to be such a person. All He claimed to be was that He was the Qá'im Himself and in addition to this station, that of the Báb, namely the gate or forerunner of 'Him Whom God will make manifest'.⁴⁶

Let us sum up: from the beginning of his ministry, the Báb laid claim to the station of the bearer of an independent divine revelation, thus of one having the authority to inaugurate a new religious dispensation and to proclaim new laws and principles. However, in the early period of his ministry, he used the term 'Gate' (Báb) in a deliberately ambiguous way in order to diminish somewhat the impact of his otherwise unequivocal claim to divine revelation. He also refrained, in the beginning, from using the full powers with which he felt himself invested to avoid giving an unnecessary shock to the Islamic recipients of his message, and to reaffirm the essentials of Islám and its laws. He was explicit in stating this principle of his mission. After a four-year period fraught with numerous events,⁴⁷ the Báb then wrote both the Arabic *Bayán* and the Persian *Bayán* in which he reiterated his claims to divine revelation and put forth an entirely new set of laws, abrogating those of Islám. At the same time, he stated clearly that the entire

purpose of his system and his cause was to prepare his followers for the recognition and acceptance of a further, greater Manifestation of God soon to come, clarifying thereby the true meaning of the title 'Báb'.⁴⁸

JIHÁD AND THE WRITINGS OF THE BÁB

The preceding discussion has already drawn attention to the fact that the doctrine of *jihád* which MacEoin attributes to the Báb is derived from the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, the first work of the Báb. Furthermore, we have seen that for the first four years of his ministry (and in particular in the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*), the Báb strictly enjoined adherence to Qur'anic law. It is therefore clear that the doctrine of *jihád* in the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* is not the Báb's at all but is rather the Qur'anic doctrine which the Báb is simply reiterating in the same manner as he did with a number of Qur'anic laws in the course of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*. That this is so is implicitly recognized by MacEoin:

The regulations governing the conduct of *jihád* are set out in a number of places in the *Qayyúmu'l-asmá'*, principally in *súras* 96 to 101. For the most part these consist, like a great many passages of the book (notably those dealing with legislation), of verbatim or near-verbatim reproductions of existing Quranic passages or echoes of such passages, with only occasionally novel features introduced by the Báb himself. . . . we shall attempt to outline the main features of the Báb's directions concerning *jihád*, with brief references in the notes to what seem to be the Quranic original, where appropriate.⁴⁹

Thus, the passages of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* referring to *jihád* do not constitute a Bábí doctrine of *jihád* but simply a restatement in almost identical terms of the Qur'anic doctrine.⁵⁰ In fact, the Báb's treatment of *jihád* in the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* really amounts to a first step towards a restriction of the Islamic law of *jihád* as conceived at the time of the Báb, for the Báb clearly made the waging of *jihád* contingent on his orders, whereas Shí'ih tradition had developed a number of special cases which allowed for *jihád* to be waged in more general circumstances. By making *jihád* conditional on his approval, and by withholding that approval (as the Báb did), he effectively abrogated the waging of *jihád*, but without explicitly denying the Qur'anic doctrine of holy war.⁵¹

Yet another point should be stressed here. The Qur'anic doctrine made holy war legitimate only against unbelievers, i.e., non-Muslims. Since the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* strictly enjoins obedience to Qur'anic law, the references to *jihád* in the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* could not have been taken or understood by the Báb's followers as legitimizing a holy war against their fellow Muslims. But it is with these very Muslims that the Bábís eventually had their bloody encounters. This, again, suggests strongly that the *jihád* doctrine of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* cannot be an explanation for or a key to the understanding of these encounters.

If we turn, now, to a consideration of the Persian *Bayán*, the book which contains the new laws of the Bábí dispensation, we find that there is no *jihád* doctrine whatever. In fact, the word *jihád* appears only twice in the entire corpus of the Persian *Bayán*, both of them being incidental references.⁵² Of course, the *Bayán* does not specifically abolish the Qur'anic law of *jihád* either. It could therefore be legitimately presumed that the *jihád* of the Qur'an was still permissible to the Bábís (contingent, of course, on the Báb's explicit order). On the other hand, let us recall that the whole focus of the Persian *Bayán* was the imminent advent of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest', and that the Báb made all of his laws conditional on their acceptance by the second Manifestation. Since Bahá'u'lláh abrogated the law of *jihád*, we can again see in the Báb's handling of the question of holy war in the *Bayán* a step in the direction towards its abrogation.

In any case, the fact is that the Persian *Bayán* institutes a number of very severe laws, but the law of *jihád* is not one of them. The very most that the Báb's followers could have drawn from this was that the Báb tacitly approved the Qur'anic law already accepted, but with the condition that only the Báb could declare holy war.⁵³

SHAYKH TABARSÍ, NAYRÍZ, ZANJÁN

After the composition of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, the Báb proceeded, in the Fall of 1844, to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. There he openly proclaimed his Cause to the Sharíf of Mecca and to the assembled pilgrims.⁵⁴ At the same time, the teaching activities of his disciples in Persia served to spread knowledge of the new Faith to the whole country. Upon his return from pilgrimage in the Spring of 1845, the Báb was immediately arrested by the Governor of the Province of Fárs and maintained under house arrest in his native city of Shíráz. After the Báb and his followers suffered many indignities and persecutions at the hands of the Governor, the Báb moved to Isfáhán in September, 1846.

In the Spring of 1847, the Grand Vazír Hájí Mírzá Áqásí, an implacable enemy of the Báb, ordered his incarceration in the castle of Máh-Kú in the North of Írán. In April, 1848, the Báb was subsequently moved to yet another prison, at Chihríq, in the same general area as Máh-Kú. In July of the same year, he was brought to Tabríz for a religious trial before an assembly of Shí'ih ecclesiastics. There he boldly and publicly proclaimed himself as the awaited Qá'im in language which was unequivocally clear to all.

At this point, interest in the Báb and his Faith was at a fever pitch in Írán, and the hostility of certain fanatical elements of the clergy and of the government was thereby heightened as well. Shoghi Effendi describes the situation in Írán immediately following the Báb's trial and public declaration in Tabríz:

The formal assumption by the Báb of the authority of the promised Qá'im, in such dramatic circumstances and in so challenging a tone, before a distinguished gathering of eminent Shí'ah ecclesiastics, powerful, jealous, alarmed and hostile, was the explosive force that loosed a veritable avalanche of calamities which swept down upon the Faith and the people among whom it was born. It raised to fervid heat the zeal that glowed in the souls of the Báb's scattered disciples, who were already incensed by the cruel captivity of their Leader, and whose ardor was now further inflamed by the outpourings of His pen which reached them unceasingly from the place of His confinement. It provoked a heated and prolonged controversy throughout the length and breadth of the land, in bazaars, masjids, madrisih and other public places, deepening thereby the cleavage that had already sundered its people.⁵⁵

Only two months later, Muḥammad Sháh died, and seventeen-year-old Násiri'd-Dín Mírzá, who had been present at the Báb's trial in Tabríz, became Sháh of Persia. The new Sháh's chief minister, Mírzá Taqí-Khán, immediately instigated a systematic campaign against the Bábís:

Mírzá Taqí Khán . . . decreed that immediate and condign punishment be inflicted on the hapless Bábís. Governors, magistrates and civil servants, throughout the provinces, instigated by the monstrous campaign of vilification conducted by the clergy, and prompted by their lust for pecuniary rewards, vied in their respective spheres with each other in hounding and heaping indignities on the adherents of the outlawed Faith. For the first time in the Faith's history a systematic campaign in which the civil and ecclesiastical powers were banded together was being launched against it. . . .⁵⁶

This campaign of terror and repression culminated in the Báb's execution by government decree two years later in Tabríz on 9 July, 1850.

It was in such an atmosphere of terror and repression that there occurred, on three separate occasions, major confrontations between Bábís and Muslims. Let us sketch briefly the basic facts of each of these events.

In mid-July, 1848, a group of Bábís encamped on the outskirts of the village of Niyálá was suddenly attacked by some of the townspeople. The Bábís dispersed in different directions. Quddús, one of the Letters of the Living, was forcibly detained and held under house arrest in the home of Mírzá Muḥammad-Taqí, the leading ecclesiastic of the town of Sári in the province of Mázindarán. Tāhirih, the courageous female Letter of the Living, was also arrested and held in Tīhrán under the authority of the Mayor, Maḥmúd Khán. Many of the scattered Bábís regrouped near Mashhad under the leadership of Mullá Ḥusayn, the first Letter of the Living, who had received instructions from the Báb to come to the aid of Quddús.

In their march towards Sári, the group of Bábís, which numbered several hundred, camped near the town of Bārfurúsh. Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá, the leading divine of Bārfurúsh, preached vehemently against the Bábís and incited the

townspeople to attack them with an array of weapons including guns and ammunition. The Bábís, armed primarily with swords alone, defended themselves and succeeded in dispersing the attack.⁵⁷ As a result, the townspeople asked for a truce, but begged Mullá Ḥusayn to leave the area to avoid further unrest. One of the leaders offered an escort of horsemen to guide Mullá Ḥusayn and the Bábís through the forest of Mázindarán, giving a solemn oath on the Qur'án that they would not be molested.

However, Sa'idu'l-'Ulamá succeeded in corrupting the leader of the escort, Khusraw-i-Qádi-Kalá'í, by assuring him that he, Sa'idu'l-'Ulamá, would assume before God the moral responsibility for Khusraw's actions if the Bábís were all slain in the forest. The treacherous attack did take place, but again the Bábís were able to repulse the adversary, though not without loss of life on both sides.

Following the incident, and some subsequent attacks on the Bábí camp by other villagers, Mullá Ḥusayn led his group to the Shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsí in the forest of Mázindarán. There they built fortifications and stored food. Though this was a purely defensive position far from any village or urban centre, nevertheless, the government and clergy sent wave after wave of heavily armed troops to reduce the Bábís, who fought with swords and a few muskets against heavy artillery. The siege of Shaykh Ṭabarsí lasted seven months, from October, 1848, to May, 1849. It was ended only by trickery in which the leader of the government forces swore a signed oath on the Qur'án that the Bábís would not be molested if they ceased resistance. Though suspecting the insincerity of the pledge, the Bábís complied to show their good faith and their lack of any motive other than pure self-defence. Upon acceding to this request, they were nevertheless immediately set upon by the soldiers who had been unable to defeat them. Most were brutally killed, but a few escaped and survived to tell the details of what had transpired.⁵⁸ Such, in its briefest outline, are the well established facts of the Shaykh Ṭabarsí upheaval.

The incident at Nayríz took place during the months of May and June, 1850. The key figure is Vaḥíd, who had been sent by Muḥammad Sháh in 1845 to ascertain the validity of the Báb's claims on behalf of the Sháh. The result of Vaḥíd's encounter with the Báb was that Vaḥíd became himself a Bábí. In May, 1850, Vaḥíd returned to the town of Nayríz in his native province of Fárs where he was enthusiastically greeted by his friends and relatives. The Governor of Nayríz immediately set out to arrest Vaḥíd, hiring a thousand trained soldiers who were to accomplish this task. Vaḥíd escaped with about seventy of his friends and took refuge in an abandoned fort on the outskirts of the town. As at Shaykh Ṭabarsí, the vastly superior government force was unable to defeat the small band, armed primarily with swords. After a month, the leader of the government forces offered a truce to induce Vaḥíd to

leave the fort and meet with him. This was followed a few days later by the treacherous slaughter of Vaḥíd and his companions. This was the Nayríz incident.

Finally, at Zanján, in the North of Persia, a considerable segment of the population had become followers of the Báb, primarily through the remarkable teaching efforts of one Ḥujjat. In May, 1850, the Governor of Zanján decreed that the town be separated into two distinct quarters, Bábís on the one hand and non-Bábís on the other. Every single member of the city had to decide to which group he belonged. After the separation took place, there were about three thousand inhabitants, men, women and children, in the Bábí sector under the leadership of Ḥujjat. The Bábís took refuge in a nearby fort. A nine-month siege then followed in which again vastly superior forces were unable to reduce the Bábís. As in the other two incidents, a pledge of peace and safe conduct was made on a copy of the Qur'án. Ḥujjat responded by sending a small delegation of old men and young children. This delegation was cruelly mistreated, making the true intentions of the government forces clear to all. There followed yet another month of siege in which the Bábí force was finally reduced to less than two hundred able-bodied men. At that point, the Bábís had no other choice than to capitulate, after which most of those who remained were slaughtered.

There were, however, survivors both from Nayríz and Zanján who were able to verify the details of what transpired during these incidents.

These are the three main incidents which *Concept* seeks to explain on the basis of *jihád*. Of course, we have already seen that, in the concluding portion of his article, Denis MacEoin is constrained to admit that the Bábís never declared holy war on their adversaries. He characterizes each of the conflicts as a 'defensive *jihád*', i.e., a defense undertaken for primarily religious rather than political or social motives. However, MacEoin does level against the Bábís the charge of militant provocation, thus laying upon them the indirect blame for initiating these bloody confrontations:

... their refusal to recognize existing ecclesiastical and secular authority, their carrying of arms in situations of considerable political instability, and their generally aggressive manner resulted in clashes between them and the civilian population which quickly escalated into full-scale struggles.⁵⁹

This passage summarizes the various charges against the Bábís which MacEoin makes throughout his article. Let us examine each of them briefly.

The Báb never taught the destruction of any political regime, nor did he seek in any way to subvert the secular or political authority of the existing state. His followers likewise proclaimed in word and deed their acceptance of and respect for established legal authority. In none of the above three confrontations were the Bábís initially charged by their persecutors with

violation of local or state laws or of otherwise attempting to subvert government authority.⁶⁰ It is difficult, therefore, to see how any supposed Bábí rebelliousness towards secular authority could be construed as the cause of these incidents.

As to their attitude towards religious authority, it is clear that the Bábís regarded the 'ulamá as corrupt, and that the Bábís openly taught their Faith to others and sought converts among the Muslim population. It was clearly their notable success in converting considerable numbers of the populace in various corners of the land that angered the clergy and incited them to rise up against the Bábís. However, the Bábís never sought to restrict the right of convinced Muslims to practice their own religious laws in their own way. They sought only to have, for themselves, the same right, and it was this right that was denied them by their persecutors.

Regarding the 'carrying of arms in situations of considerable political instability': the 'political instability' referred to here is just a euphemism for the reign of terror that was directed against the Bábís. That they bore arms in their own defense can hardly be conceived as the *cause* of the *pre-existing* 'political instability', i.e. of the terror being directed towards them.

Finally, regarding their 'generally aggressive manner': It is true that the Bábís were, in many instances, quite fearless in teaching their Faith and quite fiery in supporting, through arguments, prophecies, and traditions, its truth. One can quite imagine, for example, the discomfiture felt by arrogant and self-righteous mullás who were unable to defeat in argument such a one as Táhírih, a woman. But what is clear beyond any doubt is the Bábís' consistent refusal to declare holy war or engage in aggressive acts.⁶¹ For example, Quddús, who was delivered from his confinement in Sári, who participated in the siege of Shaykh Ṭabarsí, and who was among the survivors martyred after the surrender, made this point very clear in the following statement:

Never since our occupation of this fort . . . have we under any circumstances attempted to direct any offensive against our opponents. Not until they unchained their attack upon us did we arise to defend our lives. Had we cherished the ambition of waging holy war against them, had we harboured the least intention of achieving ascendancy through the power of our arms over the unbelievers, we should not, until this day, have remained besieged within these walls.⁶²

Moreover, let us observe how far we have now come from the *jihád* thesis of *Concept* which holds that 'Bábí *jihád*' is the key to understanding the conflicts of Shaykh Ṭabarsí, Nayríz, and Zanján. Having concluded, with MacEoin, that the Bábís never declared *jihád*, we are now considering whether or not the Bábís' forthright teaching of their Faith to their fellow countrymen (what MacEoin calls their 'generally aggressive manner') is the

genesis of the persecutions which rained down upon them, a different question entirely.

Had the Bábís not been so successful in converting large numbers of their countrymen to the Báb's Faith, the conflicts of Shaykh Ṭabarsí, Nayríz, and Zanján could never have taken place, because there would have been essentially no one for the fanatical elements of the 'ulamá and the government to persecute. But this cannot obscure the fact that the instigators and aggressors in each of these upheavals were those who arose to persecute the Bábís, and not the Bábís themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

We have now examined a number of reasons why the *jihád* thesis of *Concept* is defective. In particular, we have seen that MacEoin's exegesis of the Báb's writings neglects the claims to divine revelation contained in the *Qayyumu'l-Asmá'*, characterizes as a Bábí doctrine what is clearly the Qur'anic one, attributes to the Persian *Bayán* a doctrine of *jihád* which that book in no wise contains, and systematically omits the central focus of the *Bayán*, namely 'Him Whom God shall make manifest'. Moreover, his interpretations of events neglect the repeated statements and actions of leading Bábís which clearly indicate their refusal to declare holy war against their Muslim opponents. Though forced to conclude that the Bábís never did, in fact, declare *jihád*, MacEoin nevertheless seeks to blame the Bábís for the persecutions they endured by attributing such persecution to a more general kind of militancy on their part.

In our refutation of these points, the present authors do not mean to imply that no excesses or faults were ever committed by Bábís. Indeed, Nabíl's narrative mentions several instances of such reprehensible actions on the part of Bábís. Moreover, in 1852, two Bábís, deranged with grief over the martyrdom of the Báb, attempted to kill Násiri'd-Dín Sháh with a pistol loaded with birdshot. This attempt on the Sháh's life is recounted in detail in all histories of the Bábí Faith, and it is clearly regarded as a vengeful act and therefore morally unjustified. However, it is again interesting to observe the reaction of the state authorities to this crime.

Rather than punish only the assailants (who were immediately captured), the government used the incident as a pretext for a nation-wide campaign of indiscriminate slaughter of Bábís even in the remotest corner of the land. In the government's own account of its actions we find, among other things:

Amongst the Bábís who have fallen into the hands of justice, there are six whose culpability not having been well established have been condemned to the galleys for life.⁶³

In other words, those who had not the remotest connection with the crime

even in the eyes of the authorities were nonetheless condemned to life in prison. Two Western observers of these events, both non-Bahá'ís, have commented on the government account from which the above statement was drawn:

The account, coming from an enemy of the Bábís, tries to show them at their worst, but its naïve admissions only serve to bring out the high ideals and heroism of the Bábí martyrs, and the cold cruelty and bigotry of their persecutors. The article convicts its authors.⁶⁴

As we are, even in our times, reliving in Írán some of the same horror, the same self-convicting 'cold cruelty and bigotry', we can see that the need for accurate, fair-minded and balanced scholarship of the history of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths continues to make itself acutely felt.

NOTES

- 1 Denis MacEoin, 'Oriental Scholarship and the Bahá'í Faith, *World Order*, 8: 4 (1974), pp. 9–21.
- 2 H. M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*, George Ronald, Oxford 1970.
- 3 Nabíl-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois 1932 trans. Shoghi Effendi.
- 4 *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, 1: 1, pp. 103–104.
- 5 Haghghatpejoo, 'An Answer to the Misunderstandings and Misrepresentations in the Article in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* on the Teachings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá', *Andalib*, 2: 5 (1983), pp. 27–41.
- 6 Since MacEoin knows both Persian and Arabic, his ignorance of these works of Bahá'u'lláh cannot be related to the fact that some of them have not yet been translated into Western languages. Indeed, even though the works of Bahá'u'lláh currently published in English comprise about two thousand pages, there are at least forty thousand manuscript pages of his writings which have not yet been translated or published in any Western language.
- 7 Denis MacEoin, 'The Bábí Concept of Holy War', *Religion*, 12 (1982), pp. 93–129.
- 8 Denis MacEoin, *Religion*, 12 (1982), pp. 405–408.
- 9 Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844–1944. Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, George Ronald, Oxford 1981. Henceforth referred to as Momen 1981.
- 10 It is interesting to note that this collaboration would certainly not have taken place were it not for the most unfortunate recent outbreak of extreme persecution of the Bahá'í Faith in Írán which has led to the exodus of a number of intellectuals to the West. Perhaps, then, the tragic events in Írán will lead ultimately to a number of fruitful scholarly endeavours in Bahá'í studies. It is the hope and prayer of the present writers that our effort will contribute in some small measure to such a consummation.
- 11 Introduction to *The Dawn-Breakers*, op. cit., p. xxxiv.
- 12 *Concept*, p. 94

- 13 *Ibid.* It is curious that MacEoin, writing for a general audience, never states here or elsewhere in the article just what this 'most distinctive feature of early Bahá'í doctrine' is. Presumably he is alluding to Bahá'u'lláh's clear and unequivocal teachings that his followers not become involved in political movements and power struggles, as well as his firm injunction that 'it is better to be killed than to kill'. (Cf. *The Dawn-Breakers*, op. cit., p. xxxv.)
- 14 The *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* was written by the Báb in 1844. (Cf. *ibid.*, p. 61.)
- 15 *Concept*, p. 121.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 120.
- 18 That such was not their attitude is attested by numerous eyewitness accounts. For example. Vahíd, the leader of the Bábís at Nayriz, said to his fellow Bábís regarding their Muslim opponents: 'This very sword that lies before me . . . was given me by the Qá'im Himself. God knows, had I been authorised by Him to wage holy warfare against this people, I would, alone and unaided, have annihilated their forces. I am, however, commended to refrain from such an act.' (Cf. *The Dawn-Breakers*, op. cit., p. 469.)
- 19 *Concept*, p. 121.
- 20 In our discussion below, we will attempt to see how the references to *jihád* in the writings of the Báb can be interpreted in a way which is consistent with the attitudes and actions of his followers.
- 21 *Concept* p. 93.
- 22 Some of these terms are: Remembrance, Remembrance of God, Greatest Remembrance, the Gate of God, the Word, the Mighty Word, Qá'im of the (year) One Thousand, Cupbearer at God's Bidding, the Blessed Tree in Sinai, the Greatest Hour, the Resurrection, the Promised One, the Awaited Qá'im, the Greatest Announcement, the Greatest Sign, One Who Warns, etc. It is perhaps unnecessary to engage a detailed discussion of the background of each of these names and titles, but a few of them are treated in more detail in our discussion below.
- 23 Our main source for this is Nabíl-i-A'zam, op. cit.. Momen 1981 is also a useful reference, as well as Moojan Momen, "The Trial of Mullá 'Alí Bastámí: A Combined Sunnī-Shí'í Fatwá against the Báb", *Journal of Persian Studies*, 20 (1982), pp. 112–132. Henceforth, the latter will be referred to as Momen 1982.
- 24 Concerning the conditions of the Muslim world of the period see Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, 2 vols., Longmans, Green and Co., London 1892. Cf. also A.-L.-M. Nicholas, *Seyyèd Ali Mohammed dit le Báb*, Dujarric & Cie., Paris 1905.
- 25 Nabíl-i-A'zam, op. cit., pp. 52–65.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 66–69, 80–96. Also, Momen 1982 and H. Balyuzi, *The Báb*, George Ronald, Oxford 1973.
- 27 Momen 1982, p. 116.
- 28 According to Muslim theology and belief, the most tangible proof of divine revelation is the capacity of the Revelator to produce 'revealed verses' or 'revealed writing'. The main characteristics of revealed writing are held to be: the profundity and depth of the writing, the literary style and poetic quality of the writing, the manner of writing (spontaneous and uninterrupted), and the capacity to reveal writing under all conditions and circumstances.
- 29 Balyuzi, *The Báb*, op. cit. and Momen 1982.
- 30 Momen 1982, p. 119.

- 31 Ibid., p. 120.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid., p. 124.
- 34 Ibid., p. 121.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid., p. 122.
- 37 The reader interested in pursuing the subject can consult Momen 1982 where numerous further examples and passages from the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* are given, all contained in the *fatwá* document.
- 38 *Concept*, p. 93, see note 21.
- 39 *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, compiled by the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa 1976, p. 119.
- 40 The Báb was a blood descendant of Muḥammad.
- 41 The *Bayán* is divided into books ('units') and chapters. The present passage is from book V, chapter 8. The present translation is that of *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, op. cit., p. 104.
- 42 Persian *Bayán*, VII, 2. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, op. cit., p. 95.
- 43 Ibid., VIII, 1. Ibid., p. 97.
- 44 Ibid., V, 8. Ibid., p. 104.
- 45 Part of the preparation for Him Whom God shall make manifest was the severity of the laws of the Báb, making a strong break with Shi'ih Islám. Shoghi Effendi has commented on this in the following terms: '... The severe laws and injunctions revealed by the Báb can be properly appreciated and understood only when interpreted in the light of His own statement regarding the nature, purpose and character of His own Dispensation. As these statements clearly reveal, the Bábí Dispensation was essentially in the nature of a religious and indeed social revolution, and its duration had therefore to be short, but full of tragic events, of sweeping and drastic reforms. These drastic measures enforced by the Báb and His followers were taken with the view of undermining the very foundations of Shia'h [sic] orthodoxy, and thus paving the way for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. To assert the independence of the new Dispensation, and to prepare also the ground for the approaching Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh the Báb had therefore to reveal very severe laws, even though most of them were never enforced. But the mere fact that He revealed them was in itself proof of the independent character of His Dispensation and was sufficient to create such widespread agitation, and excite such opposition on the part of the clergy that led them to cause His eventual martyrdom.' (Shoghi Effendi's secretary on his behalf, *Dawn of a New Day*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, New Delhi 1970, pp. 77-8.) Thus, the Báb's ministry had the two-fold function of establishing an independent religious system (but of short duration) and of serving as a preparation for a further, greater Manifestation of God. Bahá'í literature often refers to this 'dual' or 'two-fold' station of the Báb.
- 46 Shoghi Effendi's secretary on his behalf, in *Unfolding Destiny. The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of the British Isles*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, London 1981, p. 426.
- 47 Detailed consideration of these events is outside the scope of this paper. The interested reader can consult the basic source of Nabíl, op. cit.
- 48 In *Concept*, MacEoin has systematically avoided consideration of the central role played in the Persian *Bayán* by Him Whom God shall make manifest. He makes only one casual, passing reference to a '... messianic figure whose advent at a

distant date the Báb alluded to' (*Concept*, p. 108). Such systematic omission of the very focal point and central concern of the *Bayán* constitutes a gross distortion and misrepresentation of the Báb's teachings. Moreover, even this one reference contains the gratuitous assertion that the future Manifestation was expected 'at a distant date', contrary to the clear indications in the Báb's writings that the advent of this Manifestation was imminent.

49 *Concept*, p. 103.

50 In this connection, it is interesting to note that the *fatwá* document, which condemns the author of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* as a heretic, and which does not hesitate to mention every deviation from orthodox Islám, however slight, that the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* contains, makes no reference whatever to *jihád*. Thus, the *jihád* doctrine of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* was tacitly recognized by the Sunní and Shí'ih ecclesiastics as thoroughly Qur'anic.

51 We have already seen in the previous section why the Báb had decided, in the early stages of his ministry, not to promulgate explicitly any new laws. Thus, any restrictions or modifications of Islamic law had to remain implicit for the time being.

52 For example, in chapter VII, book 6, the Báb says: 'It is forbidden to carry arms of any sort except in case of an emergency or if a *jihád* has been declared.' Here again we can see that the law of the Báb tends toward a restriction of currently-accepted practice, rather than any incitement to wage war. Although *jihád* is mentioned as a possible exception to the prohibition against bearing arms, there is clearly no implication whatever that a *jihád* will be declared or must be declared, *jihád* being contingent on the command of the Báb alone.

53 In *Concept* MacEoin is at pains to extract somehow a *jihád* doctrine from the Persian *Bayán*. He begins by admitting that there is no explicit injunction to wage *jihád* in the Persian *Bayán*. He then continues: 'Nevertheless, several passages exist which rest on the assumption that *jihád* may be waged, while others command it in a form very different to that of the Quranic injunctions.' (*Concept*, p. 107.) What this 'very different' form of *jihád* turns out to be is simply the injunction to teach the Bábí Faith to others. For example, MacEoin quotes (*Concept*, p. 108) from book V, chapter 5 of the *Bayán* which states, among other things, that the kings and leaders of the earth should not wait for people to enter the Faith of the Báb spontaneously, but should actively teach the Faith to others and lead them to belief in it. This is not just a 'very different' form of *jihád*; it is not *jihád* at all. In attempting to interpret such injunctions to teach the Faith to others as incitements to *jihád*, MacEoin betrays here just how difficult the defense of the central thesis of his paper has become.

54 H. Balyuzi, *The Báb*, pp. 69–75.

55 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois 1957, pp. 35–36.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

57 It was during this encounter that Mullá Ḥusayn accomplished the often-told and thoroughly-authenticated feat of dispatching an adversary in one blow of his sword, cutting in two the man, his musket, and the tree behind which he had retreated. The feat was confirmed by enemies as well as Bábís. When the Grand Vazir chastized the Prince Mihdí-Quli Mírzá for his inability to defeat the Bábís at Shaykh Tabarsí, the Prince sent him pieces of the musket-barrel smashed by the sword of Mullá Ḥusayn, saying: 'Such is the contemptible strength of the

adversary who, with a single stroke of his sword, has shattered into six pieces the tree, the musket, and its holder.' (Cf., Nabíl., op. cit., p. 332.)

- 58 Nabíl, op. cit., contains the names of some of the survivors and even a photograph of one of them.
- 59 *Concept*, p. 121.
- 60 Once the sieges were under way, the authorities, in their desperate attempt to justify their actions, did misrepresent the Bábí defensive actions as rebellious and subversive in nature. But even then they were not able to make a case based on specific charges of documented violations of legally constituted authority.
- 61 On page 117 of *Concept*, speaking of the defenders of Shaykh Ṭabarsí, MacEoin accuses the Bábís of '... showing great brutality not only to the hostile soldiery but to civilians in the region as well.' 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.
- 62 Nabíl, op. cit., p. 396.
- 63 From the official government gazette, the *Rúz-námíy-i-Vaqáyi'-i-Ittifáqiyyih*, quoted in Momen 1981, p. 141.
- 64 Quoted in Momen 1981, p. 139.

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