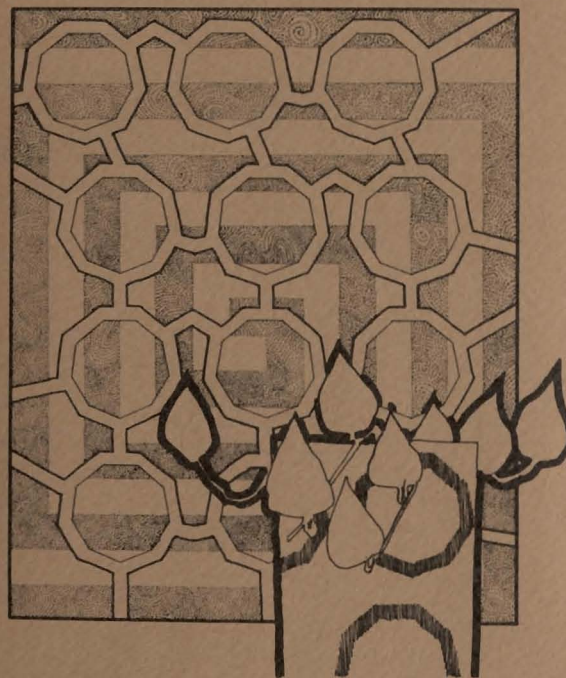


The Power of the Covenant

Part Three



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Part Three

The Face of Opposition

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The Power of the Covenant

There is a power in this Cause—a mysterious power—far, far, far away from the ken of men and angels; that invisible power is the cause of all these outward activities. It moves the hearts. It rends the mountains. It administers the complicated affairs of the Cause. It inspires the friends. It dashes into a thousand pieces all the forces of opposition. It creates new spiritual worlds. This is the mystery of the Kingdom of Abhá!

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 70

Know this for a certainty that today, the penetrative power in the arteries of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant. The body of the world will not be moved through any power except through the power of the Covenant. There is no other power like unto this. This Spirit of the Covenant is the real Centre of love and is reflecting its rays to all parts of the globe, which are resuscitating and regenerating man and illuminating the path to the Divine Kingdom.

ibid., p. 71

The first condition is firmness in the Covenant of God. For the power of the Covenant will protect the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh from the doubts of the people of error. It is the fortified fortress of the Cause of God and the firm pillar of the religion of God. Today no power can conserve the oneness of the Bahá'í world save the Covenant of God; otherwise differences like unto a most great tempest will encompass the Bahá'í world. It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else. ... Therefore, in the beginning one must make his steps firm in the Covenant—so that the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh may encircle from all sides, the cohorts of the Supreme Concourse may become the supporters and the helpers, and the exhortations and advices of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, like unto the pictures engraved on stone, may remain permanent and in-effaceable in the tablets of the hearts.

ibid., p. 77

Foreword

On the weekend of July 4 - 8, 1975, the members of all the senior institutions of the Bahá'í Faith in North America gathered at the House of Worship in Wilmette, to participate in a special conference called by the Universal House of Justice. The subject was the responsibility of the Bahá'í community for the protection of the Cause entrusted to us by Bahá'u'lláh. Three Hands of the Cause participated, as did all of the members of the Continental Board of Counsellors and the three National Spiritual Assemblies. All of the Auxiliary Board Members for North America likewise took part.

The conference had originated in an appeal from the Universal House of Justice dated November 26, 1974:

Five months before he passed away, the beloved Guardian ... drew our attention to the fact that from both without and within the Faith evidences of "increasing hostility" and "persistent machinations" were apparent, and that they foreshadowed the "dire contests" predicted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which were destined to "range the Army of light against the forces of darkness, both secular and religious".

The House of Justice went on to say:

The marvellous victories won in the name of Bahá'u'lláh since those words were written, and the triumphs increasingly being achieved by His dedicated and ardent lovers in every land, will no doubt serve to rouse the internal and external enemies of the Faith to fresh attempts to attack the Faith and dampen the enthusiasm of its supporters.

The House of Justice noted some recent evidences that this reaction has already begun in various parts of the world, and enclosed a compilation of excerpts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the beloved Guardian, which explain the principle that the progressive unfoldment of the Faith is bound, by its very nature, to raise up opposition which in turn will accelerate the expansion of the Cause. With this principle in mind, the House of Justice concluded:

We feel strongly that, whatever method is chosen

to inform the friends, the time has come for them to clearly grasp the inevitability of the critical contests that lie ahead, to give you (the National Spiritual Assemblies) their full support ... and aid and enable the Faith of God to scale loftier heights, win more signal triumphs, and traverse more vital stages in its predestined course to complete victory and worldwide ascendancy.

On receipt of this letter Canada's National Assembly began developing a series of publications and regional seminars for the education of the Canadian community in the subject of the protection of the Cause. At this point we received further advice from the House of Justice that they were calling a special conference on the subject for the institutions of the Faith in North America. It was this meeting which assembled at the House of Worship, the weekend of July 4 - 8, and which produced important advances in the unity of the institutions of the Faith on this continent.

During the course of the consultations at Wilmette, our National Assembly had an opportunity to present the outline of the program which we were developing. It consisted essentially of resource material for a series of four weekend institutes to be conducted by the National Assembly for groups of believers in various regions. It is this material, modified and expanded as a result of the invaluable discussions at Wilmette, that forms the content of this series of four booklets.

Each booklet introduces one of four different aspects of the subject of the protection of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and provides footnotes which will serve as an index to the Bahá'í texts from which the reference material has been drawn. The themes of the four presentations are:

- I Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant with Mankind.
- II The Problem of Covenant-breaking.
- III The Face of Opposition.
- IV Our Covenant with Bahá'u'lláh.

The booklets have been prepared as a stimulus and general

guide to group discussions. Clearly, the material is in no sense a comprehensive presentation of the subject matter concerned: the Cause of God is like an ocean and the truths it contains are limitless. Nor do the booklets represent authoritative statements of Bahá'í belief, apart from the various excerpts from the Scriptures of the Faith and from the commentaries of the Guardian and the guidance of the Universal House of Justice which are quoted.

Rather, the spirit of the discussion which the National Assembly hopes these thoughts will provide in the community is that described by the Universal House of Justice in a statement dealing with one of the central themes touched on in this series:

A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself from his study of its teachings. While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter, according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should by no means be suppressed. In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings. As Shoghi Effendi wrote: "To deepen in the Cause means to read the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form. ... There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the Writings, the more truths we can find in them, the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous". (*Well-spring of Guidance*, pp. 88-89)

Faithfully,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'IS OF CANADA

The Face of Opposition

INTRODUCTION

This third in the series of four studies on the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh examines the subject of attacks on the Bahá'í Faith. Clearly, the Bahá'í community itself can legitimately be the object of criticism in the technical meaning of that term. Neither as individuals, nor as communities, do Bahá'ís pretend to be perfect mirrors of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. That is the function of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant. Nor do Bahá'ís, whether as individuals or as communities, claim anything like an authoritative understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings. Only the Institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are assured of perfect guidance in this respect.

The followers of the Bahá'í Faith recognize, therefore, that they will always fall short, in varying degrees, of the standards which their Faith sets before men. Such shortcomings will inevitably attract a certain amount of critical probing from sincere inquirers who are attracted by the Teachings and concerned about the human condition. Bahá'ís have learned to value deeply this type of discussion.

The term “opposition” is used in the title of this study in the strict sense of the term. It refers not to those who are seeking a better understanding of the Bahá’í Cause, but rather to individuals who, for one reason or another, attempt to interfere with the work of the Faith, to damage its name, or to suppress it entirely. These people are not Covenant-breakers (see Part II of this series) as they have never regarded themselves as Bahá’ís, but their activities present a special type of challenge and opportunity to the members of the Faith. The aim of the present study is to bring together the relevant guidance in the Bahá’í Writings as an assistance to members of the Faith in responding.

I Opposition: Why Study It?

Most Bahá’ís are reluctant to become deeply involved in a discussion of attacks on their Faith. This is not because they fear such attacks. Quite the opposite. The history of the past one hundred and thirty-three years provides an unbroken record of triumphs over every kind of opposition, which must be unique in the annals of religion. Without exception, all those who arose to interpose themselves between the Message of Bahá’u’lláh and the masses of mankind—ruling dynasties, ecclesiastical systems, totalitarian regimes—all failed in their objective and, in most cases, vanished from the stage of history. Meantime, the Cause

of Bahá'u'lláh has steadily grown in strength, expanding the range of its operations throughout the globe, consolidating its institutions and demonstrating its relevance to the basic issues facing the human race. Indeed, persecution and success seem so closely interrelated in the Bahá'í history that no one who considers the record can long avoid the implications stressed by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Cause:

I am ... assured and sustained by the conviction, never dimmed in my mind, that whatsoever comes to pass in the Cause of God, however disquieting in its immediate effects, is fraught with infinite Wisdom and tends ultimately to promote its interests in the world. Indeed, our experiences of the distant past, as well as the recent events, are too numerous and varied to permit of any misgiving or doubt as to the truth of this basic principle—a principle which throughout the vicissitudes of our sacred mission in this world we must never disregard or forget.¹

Much of the reluctance of Bahá'ís to consider the question of opposition arises from the emphasis which the Bahá'í Teachings place on a positive and optimistic approach to the challenges of life. Evil, 'Abdu'l-Bahá insists, has no objective existence. It is the absence of good:

This evil is nothingness; so death is the absence of life. When man no longer receives life, he dies. Darkness is the absence of light: when there is no light, there is darkness. Light is an existing thing, but darkness is non-existent.²

So it is that the Bahá'í Teachings strongly censure conflict of any kind, regardless of the circumstances. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says on this subject:

O ye beloved of the Lord! In this sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God's grace. It is incumbent upon everyone to show the utmost love, rectitude of conduct, straightforwardness and sincere kindness unto all the peoples

and kindreds of the world, be they friends or strangers. So intense must be the spirit of love and loving kindness, that the stranger may find himself a friend, the enemy a true brother, no difference whatsoever existing between them. For universality is of God and all limitations earthly.³

'Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear that this principle applies to the treatment not only of persons whose views are different from one's own, but even of those who quite deliberately set out to cause harm:

Recognize your enemies as your friends and consider those who wish you evil as the wishers of good. You must not see evil as evil and then compromise with your opinion, for to treat in a smooth, kindly way one whom you consider evil or an enemy is hypocrisy, and this is not worthy nor allowable. No! You must consider your enemies as your friends, look upon your evil-wishers as your well-wishers and treat them accordingly. Act in such a way that your heart may be free from hatred.⁴

Another reason why Bahá'ís find it difficult to become deeply involved in a discussion of attacks on their Faith arises from the feelings produced by such discussion. Ultimately, faith in God is a love affair. Those who recognize the Messenger of God come to love Him; to obey His teachings because they are *His*; to cherish every least trace of His life. His companions, though long since passed on to the world of the spirit, become familiar friends to the millions who are touched and moved by the power of their example. In such an association, not only one's mind and spirit are involved, but one's heart.

It is this legacy of love and nobility which is attacked by the enemies of the Faith. Shoghi Effendi's remarks on the subject suggest the feelings of pain and indignation which a contemplation of these attacks must arouse in every Bahá'í

who encounters them:

Many and powerful have been its enemies who, as soon as they discovered the evidences of the growing ascendancy of its declared supporters, have vied with one another in hurling at its face the vilest imputations and in pouring out upon the Object of its devotion the vials of their fiercest wrath. How often have these sneered at the scantiness of its resources and the seeming stagnation of its life! How bitterly they ridiculed its origins and, misconceiving its purpose, dismissed it as a useless appendage of an expiring creed! Have they not in their written attacks stigmatized the heroic person of the Forerunner of so holy a Revelation as a coward recanter, a perverted apostate, and denounced the entire range of His voluminous Writings as the idle chatter of a thoughtless man? Have they not chosen to ascribe to its divine Founder the basest motives which an unscrupulous plotter and usurper can conceive, and regarded the Centre of His Covenant as the embodiment of ruthless tyranny, a stirrer of mischief, and a notorious exponent of expediency and fraud? Its world-unifying principles these impotent enemies of a steadily-rising Faith have time and again denounced as fundamentally defective, have pronounced its all-embracing program as utterly fantastic, and regarded its vision of the future as chimerical and positively deceitful. The fundamental verities that constitute its doctrine its foolish ill-wishers have represented as a cloak of idle dogma, its administrative machinery they have refused to differentiate from the soul of the Faith itself, and the mysteries it reveres and upholds they have identified with sheer superstition. The principle of unification which it advocates and with which it stands identified they have misconceived as a shallow attempt at uniformity, its repeated assertions of the reality of super-

natural agencies they have condemned as a vain belief in magic, and the glory of its idealism they have rejected as mere utopia. Every process of purification whereby an inscrutable Wisdom chose from time to time to purge the body of His chosen followers of the defilement of the undesirable and the unworthy, these victims of an unrelenting jealousy have hailed as a symptom of the invading forces of schism which were soon to sap its strength, vitiate its vitality, and complete its ruin.⁵

In countless places in the Bahá'í Writings, however, Bahá'ís are urged to "meditate deeply" to "ponder and reflect" on the subject of opposition to the Message of God. Most recently, the Universal House of Justice has said that the time has come for Bahá'ís everywhere to grasp clearly what opposition to the Cause of God involves. Here, as in so many places in the Teachings, the Bahá'í is called upon to discipline his moral and emotional responses at the same time as he seeks to deepen his understanding. Forbearance and kindness which do not take into account the real pain of life and its challenges are of little benefit to anyone. So it is that Bahá'u'lláh assures us:

Should you acquaint yourself with the indignities heaped upon the Prophets of God, and apprehend the true causes of the objections voiced by their oppressors, you will surely appreciate the significance of their position. Moreover, the more closely you observe the denials of those who have opposed the Manifestations of the divine attributes, the firmer will be your faith in the Cause of God.⁶

For Bahá'ís, therefore, an honest consideration of the subject of attacks on the Cause of God requires both a willingness to face the facts of religious history and of present-day circumstances, and a determination to turn the energies which this examination arouses away from animosity and into the service of God and mankind.

It is in this spirit, therefore, and with this goal in view, that we take up the question of opposition to the Message of Bahá'u'lláh.

II The Source of Opposition in the Past

In a number of His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh draws attention to the opposition which arose early in the history of each great religious Revelation, from the people among whom it appeared. One of His most important books, the *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, reviews the history of the attacks which were made on such figures as Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Bahá'u'lláh urges His readers to

consider the hardships and the bitterness of the lives of those Revealers of the divine Beauty. Reflect, how single-handed and alone they faced the world and all its peoples, and promulgated the

Law of God! No matter how severe the persecutions inflicted upon those holy, those precious, and tender Souls, they still remained in the plenitude of their power, patient, and, despite their ascendancy, they suffered and endured.⁷

Two thousand years ago, Jesus Himself declared that the persons responsible for this persecution of the Messengers of God in every age have been the clergy of the dominant religion of the day. His judgment of them was severe:

Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men:
for ye neither go in yourselves neither suffer ye
them that are entering to go in ...

Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and
garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

And say, "If we had been in the days of our
fathers, we would not have been partakers with
them in the blood of the prophets."

Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves that ye
are the children of them which killed the prophets.

Fill up then the measure of your fathers.

Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye
escape the damnation of hell?⁸

No doubt the severity of this judgment helped prepare the early Christians for the abuse which they themselves were to experience at the hands of both Jewish and pagan clergy. For two centuries after Christ, the civilized world of the day was exposed to slanders against the Christian faith which were a mockery of the truth. In these stories, Jesus was presented as the illegitimate offspring of a transient mercenary soldier. As time passed, new details were added, in-

cluding a name for this entirely fictional parent. The disciples were pictured as a band of fanatical cut-throats who mixed political conspiracy with highway robbery and casual mayhem. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was portrayed as a lunatic scheme to seize political power. Innocent metaphors in the Gospels were wrenched out of context and used to hint at obscene and cruel practices carried on in the dead of night. "Documentary evidence" was deliberately fabricated to convince civil authority that the new faith was a threat to public security. Finally, it was charged that this wretched backwater conspiracy had been turned by clever men into a universal religion that would appeal to the educated "Westerners" of the day, the Greeks and Romans.

It is an indication of the effectiveness of this campaign of vilification that so respected and informed an authority as the Roman historian, Tacitus, spoke of the Christians as persons "who are hated for their abominations". Of their faith, Tacitus said:

Repressed for the moment (under Nero), this detestable superstition broke out anew, no longer simply in Judea, where the evil arose, but at Rome, into which there flows all that is horrible and shameful in the whole world, and many people support it.⁹

There is no doubt that the calumnies invented by an antagonistic priesthood were responsible not only for inciting the waves of physical violence against the early Christians, but also for the long and tragic delay that intervened before the message of Christ was able to influence decisively the course of world history. The suffering caused by this delay helps us considerably to understand the vehemence with which Christ and other Manifestations of God condemned those responsible.

In the same way, the Báb, referring to the failure of Christian nations to benefit from the Revelation of the Holy *Qur'an*, says:

The blame falleth upon their doctors, for if these had believed, they would have been followed by the mass of their countrymen. Behold, then, that which hath come to pass! The learned men of Christendom are held to be learned by virtue of their safeguarding the teaching of Christ, yet consider how they themselves have been the cause of men's failure to accept the Faith and attain unto salvation!¹⁰

Bahá'u'lláh draws our attention to the means by which the clergy exercised this malign influence. In many instances, they were regarded by the mass of the population as God's spokesmen on earth. When they turned aside from the divine Message, their congregations followed their example, and when they called for efforts to stamp out the new religion, mobs very often arose and did their bidding:

And the people also, utterly ignoring God and taking them for their masters, have placed themselves unreservedly under the authority of these pompous and hypocritical leaders, for they have no sight, no hearing, no heart of their own to distinguish truth from falsehood.¹¹

Beyond this influence on the general population, there are many examples in history of the success of religious leaders in manipulating or provoking civil authority to carry out persecutions. The relationship between the Pharisees of Jesus' time and Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, is one illustration of this process, which comes readily to mind. Bahá'u'lláh has said on the subject:

The source and origin of tyranny have been the divines. Through the sentences pronounced by these haughty and wayward souls, the rulers of the earth have wrought that which ye have heard ... God, verily, is clear of them, and We, too, are clear of them ...¹²

In urging students of religion to meditate carefully on the

opposition which religious leaders have launched against each new Revelation of God, Bahá'u'lláh focusses our attention on the motives behind this opposition:

Ponder for a moment, and reflect upon that which hath been the cause of such denial on the part of those who have searched with such earnestness and longing.¹³

What could have been the reason for such denial and avoidance on their part? What could have induced them to refuse to put off the garment of denial, and to adorn themselves with the robe of acceptance.¹⁴

And now, ponder upon these things. What could have caused such contention and conflict? Why is it that the advent of every true Manifestation of God hath been accompanied by such strife and tumult, by such tyranny and upheaval? ... Reflect, what could have been the motive for such deeds? What could have prompted such behaviour towards the Revealers of the beauty of the All-Glorious?¹⁵

In the *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, Bahá'u'lláh identifies some of these motives on the part of ecclesiastical opponents:

Some for the lust of leadership, others through want of knowledge and understanding, have been the cause of the deprivation of the people ... Content with a transitory dominion, they have deprived themselves of an everlasting sovereignty.¹⁶ and, later in that same Book:

Among these "veils of glory" are the divines and doctors living in the days of the Manifestation of God, who, because of their want of discernment and their love and eagerness for leadership, have failed to submit to the Cause of God, nay, have even refused to incline their ears unto the Divine Melody.¹⁷

In yet another Tablet, He adds:

The foolish divines have laid aside the Book of God, and are occupied with that which they themselves have fashioned. The Ocean of Knowledge is revealed ... yet they, even as earth-worms, are afflicted with the clay of their fancies and imaginings.¹⁸

The motivation for opposition to the Divine Revelation, therefore, is of two kinds: ambition, jealousy and pride, on the one hand, and, on the other, ignorance, error and prejudice. The pattern has repeated itself each time a Manifestation of God has appeared. All too many of the religious leaders of each age have experienced the new Message as a threat to the control they have exercised over the minds and the affairs of mankind and to the prestige that has accompanied this control. The new Message has also contradicted the meanings which these same clergy have attached to previous Scriptures and the closed systems of theology which they have erected on these human interpretations.

III

Opposition to Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh helps us to see the attacks on His own Revelation and that of the Báb in the setting of this long history of opposition to the unfolding revelation of God's Will:

Men have, at all times, considered every World Reformer a fomentor of discord, and have referred unto Him in terms with which all are familiar. Each time the Day-Star of Divine Revelation shed its radiance from the horizon of God's Will a great number of men denied Him, others turned aside from Him, and still others calumniated Him, and thereby withheld the servants of God from the

river of the loving providence of Him Who is the King of creation. In like manner, they who, in this day, have neither met this Wronged One nor associated with Him, have said, and even now continue to say, the things thou has heard ...¹⁹

In a Tablet addressed to one of the Muslim ecclesiastics, who had taken the lead in inciting mob violence first against the Bábí martyrs and later against the followers of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, He says:

Judge thou fairly, I adjure thee by God. What proof did the Jewish doctors adduce wherewith to condemn Him Who was the Spirit of God (Jesus Christ), when He came unto them with truth? ... Indeed thou hast produced, in this day, the same proofs which the foolish divines have advanced in that age. ... Thou hast, truly, walked in their ways, nay, hast surpassed them in their cruelty, and hast deemed thyself to be helping the Faith and defending the Law of God ...²⁰

Shoghi Effendi thus describes the reception accorded to the Báb by those who were the civil and religious leaders of His day:

Sudden arrest and confinement in the very first year of His short and spectacular career; public affront deliberately inflicted in the presence of the ecclesiastical dignitaries of Shíráz; strict and prolonged incarceration in the bleak fastness of the mountains of Adhirbáyján; a contemptuous disregard and a cowardly jealousy evinced respectively by the Chief Magistrate of the realm and the foremost minister of his government; the carefully staged and farcical interrogatory sustained in the presence of the heir to the Throne and the distinguished divines of Tabríz; the shameful infliction of the bastinado in the prayer-house, and at the hands of the Shaykhu'l-Islám of that city; and finally suspension in the barrack-square of Tabríz

and the discharge of a volley of above seven hundred bullets at His youthful breast under the eyes of a callous multitude of about ten thousand people, culminating in the ignominious exposure of His mangled remains on the edge of the moat without the city gate—these were the progressive stages in the tumultuous and tragic ministry of One Whose age inaugurated the consummation of all ages, and Whose Revelation fulfilled the promise of all Revelations.²¹

In the case of Bahá'u'lláh, Shoghi Effendi recounts His confinement “in the company of the vilest criminals and freighted down with galling chains” in a “vermin-infested subterranean dungeon of Tíhrán”; the “savage violence” with which He was stoned by the mob; of His suffering the bastinado “by order, and in the presence, of the assembled siyyids and mujtahids into whose hands He had been delivered by the civil authorities”; the “outrages” and “abuse” heaped upon Him when He was conducted “on foot and in chains, with bared head and bare feet” from Náyávarán to the “Black Pit” of Tíhrán; the “avidity with which corrupt officials sacked His house and carried away all His possessions”; His banishment, without trial or conviction “in the depth of winter, despoiled and defamed,”²² from the Persian Empire to neighbouring 'Iráq; and finally, after a series of exiles, His imprisonment in the pestilential penal colony of 'Akká.

From the age of eight, 'Abdu'l-Bahá experienced similar mistreatment throughout most of His life. Some of His most important work, indeed, was carried out under imminent threat of death, a threat which was finally removed only when Palestine passed out of the hands of the Ottoman Turks in 1918.

Finally, many thousands of those who followed the new Revelation were subjected to massacre, pillage, torture, vilification, exile and imprisonment. The Guardian estimates

that those who perished in the persecution of the Bábí Faith numbered some 20,000 souls, including many of the finest minds and spirits of the age. The persecutions, like those of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, were the work of the governments and peoples of predominantly Muslim lands, and, as in earlier ages, the chief influence behind the attacks was that of the clergy of the dominant faith: "When We observed carefully," Bahá'u'lláh remarks, "We discovered that Our enemies are, for the most part, the divines."²³

The suppression of the Bahá'í Faith in a number of Muslim lands continues to our own day. While the large-scale massacres which appalled Western observers in the nineteenth century no longer take place, a residue of popular prejudice and ill-will continues to plague Bahá'ís. In several countries, Bahá'í institutions are proscribed and Bahá'í communities severely limited in the freedoms they enjoy. In others, mob violence continues to be an ever-present threat. No small part of the energies of the Bahá'í community is devoted to attempting to reassure civil authorities in these lands of Bahá'ís' loyalty to government, and to clear away the misunderstandings and prejudices so assiduously cultivated by an earlier generation of ecclesiastical enemies. Material fire, as Bahá'u'lláh has pointed out, "lasteth but for a time," but the effect of the "fire of the tongue ... endureth a century."²⁴ On occasion, when all efforts of this kind at the local and national level failed, it has proved necessary to appeal for the intervention first of the League of Nations and later of the United Nations.

In the face of such long-standing and bitter hostility on the part of opponents who seemed to enjoy all the advantages of arbitrary power, as well as the unquestioning support of the ignorant and violence-prone among the population, the emergence of the Bahá'í world community seems truly miraculous. For the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh did not merely survive, but triumphed beyond even the brightest hopes of its earliest followers and the wildest fears of its nineteenth century ecclesiastical enemies. None of the latter could have

conceived that a time would come when the movement which they had harried almost into extinction would have become a world-wide religious community, enjoying consultative status among the non-governmental members of the United Nations, established in over 350 countries and major territories, operating through many thousands of locally and nationally-elected institutions, embracing persons of every racial, social, cultural, and religious background on earth, and safely past the first critical century of its existence, with its unity firmly intact.

Nor, indeed, could these clergy have anticipated that this same time would find their own power slipping away, their institutions dissolving, their most solemn doctrines derided and themselves figures of mockery in a secular and irreverent society.

IV

Opposition from Totalitarian Regimes

In the West, for the most part, opposition to the Bahá'í Faith has taken a much less violent form. Physical persecution of Bahá'ís has been limited almost entirely to Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany. Shoghi Effendi summarized the developments in Russia during the 1920's and 30's as a "crisis" which

... resulted gradually in the imposition of restrictions limiting the freedom of these communities, in the interrogation and arrest of their elected representatives, in the dissolution of their local Assemblies and their respective committees ...

and in the suspension of all Bahá'í youth activities. It even led to the closing of Bahá'í schools, kindergartens, libraries and public reading-rooms, to the interception of all communication with foreign Bahá'í centres, to the confiscation of Bahá'í printing presses, books and documents, to the prohibition of all teaching activities, to the abrogation of the Bahá'í constitution, to the abolition of all national and local funds and to the ban placed on the attendance of non-believers at Bahá'í meetings.

... In 1938 the situation in both Turkistán and the Caucasus rapidly deteriorated, leading to the imprisonment of over five hundred believers—many of whom died—as well as (of) a number of women, and the confiscation of their property, followed by the exile of several prominent members of these communities to Siberia, the polar forests and other places in the vicinity of the Arctic Ocean, the subsequent deportation of most of the remnants of these communities to Persia, ... and lastly, the complete expropriation of the Temple itself and its conversion into an art gallery.²⁵

Similar opposition to the Faith quickly developed following the installation of the Nazi Party as the Government of Germany in 1933:

In Germany likewise, the rise and establishment of the Administrative Order of the Faith, to whose expansion and consolidation the German believers were distinctively and increasingly contributing, was soon followed by repressive measures, which, though less grievous than the afflictions suffered by the Bahá'ís of Turkistán and the Caucasus, amounted to the virtual cessation, in the years immediately preceding the present conflict, of all organized Bahá'í activity throughout the length and breadth of that land. The public teaching of

the Faith, with its unconcealed emphasis on peace and universality, and its repudiation of racialism, was officially forbidden; Bahá'í Assemblies and their committees were dissolved; the holding of Bahá'í conventions was interdicted; the Archives of the National Spiritual Assembly were seized; the summer school was abolished and the publication of all Bahá'í literature was suspended.²⁶

It is significant that, in both of these two cases, the State which persecuted the Faith was identified with an ideology that had assumed the place in human affairs normally occupied by religious systems. That is to say, the State itself sought not only to control men's actions, but also to dominate their minds and spirits. While both ideologies were atheistic, those who occupied positions of leadership in them, like the clergy before them, saw themselves as mouthpieces of universal truth, justified in using any means at their disposal to suppress contrary beliefs.

Elsewhere in the West, the Faith has so far experienced little problem from civil authorities. For the most part, State and Church are separated in Western nations. This fact, together with widespread public education, makes it more difficult for a sectarian group to use civil government for ecclesiastical ends.

In all situations, however, it is vital for Bahá'ís to avoid any trace of involvement in political concerns. On this subject, the Universal House of Justice has said:

The Army of the Cause, advancing at the bidding of the Lord, to conquer the hearts of men, can never be defeated, but its rate of advance can be slowed down by acts of unwisdom and ignorance on the part of its supporters. ...

One of these issues, and by far the most important, is a lack of appreciation of the implications of the Bahá'í principle of noninterference in political

affairs. We find that 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have given us clear and convincing reasons why we must uphold this principle. ...

The Bahá'í Community is a worldwide organization seeking to establish true and universal peace on earth. If a Bahá'í works for one political party to overcome another it is a negation of the very spirit of the Faith. Membership in any political party, therefore, necessarily entails repudiation of some or all of the principles of peace and unity proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated: "Our party is God's party; we do not belong to any party." ...

If the institutions of the Faith, God forbid, became involved in politics, the Bahá'ís would find themselves arousing antagonism instead of love. If they took one stand in one country, they would be bound to change the views of the people in another country about the aims and purposes of the Faith. By becoming involved in political disputes, the Bahá'ís instead of changing the world or helping it, would themselves be lost and destroyed. The world situation is so confused and moral issues which were once clear have become so mixed up with selfish and battling factions, that the best way Bahá'ís can serve the highest interests of their country and the cause of true salvation for the world, is to sacrifice their political pursuits and affiliations and wholeheartedly and fully support the divine system of Bahá'u'lláh.²⁷

V Opposition from Christian Clergy

Apart from the two or three totalitarian situations mentioned, attacks on the Bahá'í Faith in the West have consisted largely of hostile literature and verbal assaults. As in Muslim countries, the leaders in this campaign have been clergymen, mostly Protestant missionaries with a background in the Near East mission fields.²⁸ These attacks deserve consideration because they illustrate the motivations identified by Bahá'u'lláh in His Writings.

No area of Christian mission work has been so barren and so discouraging as the Islámic Near and Middle East. In the message of the *Qur'án*, major elements of Christian truth

were incorporated in the sophisticated and very universal doctrines of Islám. It is understandable therefore that Christian missions failed to convert significant numbers of people in Irán or the Arab countries, as they succeeded in doing in the Far East and in large areas of Africa. Moreover, it was in this very area of the world that the Christian Faith, originally the dominant religion of the Eastern end of the Mediterranean, had been displaced by Islám.

By the late nineteenth century, Anglican and Presbyterian missionaries in this area witnessed, on the one hand, the hopelessness of their own task and, on the other, the steady expansion of the Bahá'í Faith. Edward Granville Browne, (a Cambridge orientalist whose research has made him an authority on certain aspects of the history and teachings of the Bábí Faith,) refers to the distress expressed by Christian missionaries "at the extraordinary success of Bábí missionaries, as contrasted to the almost complete failure of their own."²⁹ Professor Browne offered as reasons for this contrast the more comprehensive teachings of the Bahá'í Faith which, like Islám, incorporated earlier religious messages; and the fact that "Western Christianity, save in the rarest cases, is more Western than Christian, more racial than religious, and ... grows steadily more, rather than less material." Professor Browne saw Christianity in the Near East as inextricably associated with the imperialistic and commercial aims of European nations. He pointed out, on the other hand, that the Bahá'í Faith owed allegiance only to its own universal objectives, and he paid tribute to the "complete sincerity", the "fearless disregard of death and torture", the "certain conviction" and the "generally admirable conduct towards mankind" of the exponents of the Message of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

Missionary antagonism was exacerbated when the Bahá'í Faith began to make progress in the West itself. Protestant clergymen who had seen it as merely a new offshoot of Islám and resented its successes amongst Muslims, now found it attracting a growing number of adherents in both Europe

and America. At the same time the clergy and the churches were already showing evidence of the rapid decline which has since rendered them virtually irrelevant to the course of Western civilization. The reaction of a number of these missionaries to the new threat to their role of leadership was to join their Muslim counterparts in attacking the Faith. A religion which had been the object of barbarous persecutions in the East, now found itself, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá had warned, gratuitously slandered and denounced in the West:

We cannot believe that as the Movement grows in strength, in authority and in influence, the perplexities and the sufferings it has had to contend with in the past will correspondingly decrease and vanish. Nay, as it grows from strength to strength, the fanatical defendants of the strongholds of orthodoxy, whatever be their denomination, realizing the penetrating influence of this growing Faith, will arise and strain every nerve to extinguish its light and discredit its name. For has not our beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent forth His glowing prophecy from behind the prison walls of the citadel of 'Akká—words so significant in their forecast of the coming world turmoil, yet so rich in their promise of eventual victory ...³⁰

Shoghi Effendi warned that what Bahá'u'lláh called "lust of leadership" is still a very powerful force operating within the major ecclesiastical systems of the West:

For let every earnest upholder of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh realize that ... so soon as the full measure of the stupendous claim of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh comes to be recognized by those time-honoured and powerful strongholds of orthodoxy, whose deliberate aim is to maintain their stranglehold over the thoughts and consciences of men, this infant Faith will have to contend with enemies more powerful and more insidious than the cruellest torture-mongers and the most fanatical clerics who have afflicted it in the past.³¹

VI Tares and Wheat

Bahá'u'lláh Himself, however, was the first to point out that jealousy over spiritual leadership was not the only factor at work in producing opposition to His religion. A large part of the problem He attributed to ignorance on the part of many clergymen of the real nature of the new Faith. This in turn arose out of a very superficial acquaintance with its beliefs, coupled with an attachment to church dogmas. In a number of major areas of belief, the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh represent a sharp departure from attitudes towards religion which grew out of Christian theology. Christian theologians, like those in most other religions, have been extremely reluc-

tant to consider seriously any teachings which contradict familiar assumptions and interpretations. Three examples suggest the magnitude of the gap.

The first concerns the subject of man's relationship to God. All three of the great "Semitic" religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islám, are based on belief in divine Revelation, that is to say, the direct intervention of God into human history. In the case of Christianity, the Revelation was focussed in the person of Jesus Christ. Very early in Christian history, however, a second source of divine inspiration opened up in Christian theology, coming eventually to be personified in the figure of a "Holy Spirit", the third person of a triune God. Having no objective reality in either Christian Scripture or Christian history,³² the doctrine opened wide the door to sectarian tendencies which had made their appearance early in the history of Christianity. If one church could claim that the Holy Spirit had inspired its interpretations and given it authority, every other church could make the same claim. Indeed, every individual could make this claim.

The result was to create in the minds of most Christians a vague assumption that, when the individual prays directly to God, he receives guidance through his private conscience. Many times, the promptings of conscience contradict the apparent meaning of Christian Scriptures (as in the case of St. Paul's statements on celibacy) or the explicit teachings of a particular church (as with race relationships). Increasingly, however, it is conscience which is regarded as the reliable guide, a guide which has no objective check upon it. Little now remains of the conviction that the only reliable channel between His followers and God was the historic revelation given through Jesus Christ. Even Jesus' statement on the subject: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh to the Father but by Me", is taken not as an expression of the limitations of the human soul, but only as a kind of defiance of the claim of the other great religions.

Bahá'ís, on the other hand, do not believe that man can communicate directly with God, Who is utterly unknowable.³³ God, rather, communicates with man through His Messengers Who come as living Persons, performing great acts, giving teachings which guide mankind in all areas of life, providing moral example, and revealing prayers and teachings through which men can immerse their minds in the Mind and Will of God. "God passes by", and at all times He does so in the full glare of history, not as an invisible or disembodied presence. Behind Him, Bahá'u'lláh teaches, He leaves all that men will need to renew civilization and to develop their highest faculties. It is as men relate themselves to this inheritance, that they come into communion with the Spirit of God which informs it. Bahá'u'lláh states on the subject:

The Holy Spirit Itself hath been generated through the agency of a single letter revealed by this Most Great Spirit, if ye be of them that comprehend ...³⁴

Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, (God), through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation. ...

These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. ... It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory.

And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation ... He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdom of earth and heaven ...³⁵

Through the Teachings of this Day Star of Truth every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed.³⁶

There is a second concept which also demands substantial adjustment in the religious thinking of a person of Christian background who approaches the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. This is the social and institutional character of the Faith which Bahá'u'lláh founded. In traditional Christianity, the individual was saved alone. Essentially, he was an independent being whose chief purpose in life was the salvation of his soul, either through good works and sacramental rituals (as in Catholicism) or through personal faith (as in Protestantism) or both. The society in which the individual lived might be improved in various ways and in various ages, but essentially it was irredeemable. Christian hope for social transformation centred in the eventual Return of Christ and the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of God.³⁷

This system of belief has had many admirable results in the individual spiritual life. Its unrestrained influence on social history, however, reveals many limitations. It permitted the growth of the conviction not only that personal conscience is the ultimate authority in life, but also that personal freedom is the highest good. The rise of a democratic political philosophy and democratic processes in the West gave the final blessing to this doctrine of individualism. "Christianity" and "Democracy" in time blended in the public mind as one vaguely defined, but immensely influential popular cult of individualism, embracing people of all religious denominations. Such a cult differs in several important ways from the

Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh's central claim is that He is the long-awaited universal Messenger of God, Whose mission is no less than the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. He has revealed not only teachings that relate to the life of the individual, but also those that are designed to mould the social life of mankind, teachings which deal with economics, world peace, race relationship, the equality of the sexes, universal education, to name only a few of the subjects discussed in the Bahá'í Writings.

Bahá'u'lláh sums up the demand which the advent of the Kingdom makes on those of Christian background who recognize Him:

Verily (Jesus) said: "Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." In this day, however, We say: "Come ye after Me, that We may make you to become the quickeners of mankind."³⁷

The Guardian explains the relation between the transformation of society and the eternal life of the soul:

The object of life to a Bahá'í is to promote the oneness of mankind. The whole object of our lives is bound up with the lives of all human beings; not a personal salvation we are seeking, but a universal one ... our aim is to produce a world civilization which will in turn react on the character of the individual.³⁹

Further, Bahá'u'lláh established institutions for the administration of the affairs of His community, institutions which rest squarely on His own written statements. These institutions are democratic with respect to the processes by which they come into existence and are renewed, but they also have other, equally important dimensions. Bahá'u'lláh asserts that, in time, this Order will embrace the great majority of the peoples of the world:

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes hath never witnessed.⁴⁰

Beseech ye the One True God to grant that all men may be graciously assisted to fulfil that which is acceptable in Our sight. Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead. Verily, thy Lord speaketh the truth, and is the Knower of things unseen.⁴¹

Yet a third area in which the message of Bahá'u'lláh challenges traditional Christian views is the nature and operation of the Divine Revelation itself. Christianity was presented as “the faith delivered once, for all, to the saints.” A handful of its early followers, supremely confident that they had fully understood the essential concepts taught by Christ, and indeed that His return was imminent, froze Christian views of the nature of God and man in the cultural concepts and attitudes common to the first century Mediterranean world in which they lived. Letters outlining the opinions of St. Paul and unknown others came to be regarded as divinely inspired, and were incorporated into the canon of Scripture, eventually becoming confused with the Word of God itself.

As Christ's return continued to be delayed, and as the Christian community grew, wide differences of opinion developed concerning the meaning of this original deposit. A great many efforts were made artificially to impose an interpretative authority on the churches, but at no time was the Christian community, as a whole, willing to accept any single authority, whether of popes, theologians, church councils, or Christian emperors. The inevitable changes which followed, therefore, were not a *development* in any sense of the word, but rather a series of spasmodic convulsions, each of which produced a new sect or denomination. This

point is very important. Christian history is not, and has not been seen even by most Christians as an evolutionary process in which the teachings of Jesus have slowly unfolded as an ever-developing civilization required. To Christians, spiritual truth has been essentially a static phenomenon. Theoretically, a 20th century Christian should see the essentials of his faith in much the same way as the believers in the first century church did. Each church has simply insisted that its own version was the truest, or even *the* true expression of the early believers' faith, a version dictated by the Holy Spirit. It was this attitude which permitted the churches to reduce the Gospel to creeds and dogmas which, because they seemed to state so explicitly the elements of belief, tended to become even more important than the original Message of Jesus in critical areas of Christian life and thought.⁴²

This long history has left certain unexamined assumptions in the minds of Christian believers (and, for that matter, in the minds of many agnostics and atheists whose emotional attitudes were formed by it). These assumptions include the belief that a religious system which is not static must have departed from the intention of the Founder.

One of the distinguishing features of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is that it is not at all static. It can only be described as evolutionary. Indeed, even to understand it, we have to employ a vocabulary which has come into existence only since Bahá'u'lláh's birth. Shoghi Effendi refers to the present-day Bahá'í administration as “an embryonic World Order”, and both his writings and those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are studded with the language of biological analogy: “efflorescence”, “evolution”, “germ”, “seed”, “organic development”, “nucleus”, “generating influence”, “assimilation”. Speaking of the Bahá'í Faith as a “living organism”, Shoghi Effendi emphasized that it has passed through a series of stages and will pass through still others before it attains maturity. What makes this evolutionary process possible is Bahá'u'lláh's creation of the institutional authority to interpret His Teachings and guide His community, an authority clearly stated

and accepted by all His followers. As in the case of the foetus in the womb, or the growing child, therefore, there is a long orderly schedule by which the various organs and faculties of the Bahá'í Cause develop. Shoghi Effendi points out, however, that, as with all life, the institutions and laws of the Faith "lie embedded in the Teachings themselves, unadulterated and unobscured by unwarranted inferences or unauthorized interpretations of His Word."⁴³

In these three important ways and many others, therefore, the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh do not fit the traditional categories of Christian theology. They deal with man in society, rather than as an isolated soul; they envisage an orderly process of evolution by which the laws, concepts and institutions implanted by the Founder gradually unfold in the mind and life of His community; above all they insist that the explicit Revelation given through the lips of the Manifestation of God is the sole source of Divine guidance for man and society.

At least part of the reason why these new dimensions are difficult for any of us who come from a Christian background to grasp is that the West has been deprived of the bridge which the message of Muhammad would have provided. Christians have long insisted that the Jews have been seriously deprived as a result of their rejection of Christ. Muslims could, no doubt, make a similar assertion with respect to the obvious disabilities under which Christian societies have laboured for many centuries, and which were dramatically apparent in the moral, intellectual, and cultural superiority that Islám enjoyed prior to the emergence of the modern secular world.⁴⁴ From a Bahá'í point of view, it is clear that had Europe accepted Islám, Westerners would have been spiritually prepared to consider dimensions in the Divine Will beyond those contained in church theologies. The succession of the Prophets would have prepared the Western world for the idea of progressive revelation; the role of Muhammad as the Founder of an Islámic State would have made more comprehensible the connection between spiritual life and social order; the *Qur'án* itself would have developed

in Westerners an appetite for divine Revelation which consists solely in the authentic work of God, spoken through the lips of His Messenger.⁴⁵

Bahá'ís should, therefore, be prepared to recognize that not all of the opposition which their Faith encounters from Christian ecclesiastics represents the influence of malice and jealousy. The intellectual demands which the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh make are as great as the spiritual ones. Professional training in theology is no greater help in leaping the gap of understanding today than it was at the time of the advent of any of the earlier Messengers of God. Rather, it seems to constitute a major obstacle, since it focusses the minds of its recruits on creeds and "explanations" which arose out of primitive and superficial schools of semi-pagan thought.

One thinks of Christ's parable of the tares:

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:
But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.
But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.
So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, "Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?"
He said unto them, "An enemy hath done this."
The servants said unto him, "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?"
But he said, "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.
Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."⁴⁶

And of the concluding words of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to

Pope Pius IX:

Verily, the day of ingathering is come, and all things have been separated from each other. He had stored away that which He chose in the vessels of justice, and cast into the fire that which befitteth it.⁴⁷

No doubt it was out of respect for the magnitude of the spiritual and intellectual tests involved that Bahá'u'lláh said of those clergymen who recognize the Manifestation of God at His advent:

Great is the blessedness of that divine that hath not allowed knowledge to become a veil between him and the One Who is the Object of all knowledge, and who, when the Self-Subsisting appeared, hath turned with a beaming face towards Him. He, in truth, is numbered with the learned.⁴⁸

VII

Ends and Means

The purpose of the present study is not to examine in detail the various attacks which Christian ecclesiastics have launched against the Bahá'í Faith over the years. It will be enough if we consider some of the basic features of these attacks which reveal both the motives behind them and the inherent weaknesses they contain. More detailed critiques are available elsewhere.⁴⁹

In a number of His Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh urges the ecclesiastics whom He addresses to set aside dogmas and interpretations of past scriptures, and to examine the universal

Revelation of God with open minds:

O concourse of divines! ... Lay aside that which ye possess, and hold your peace, and give ear, then, unto that which the Tongue of Grandeur and Majesty speaketh.⁵⁰

O concourse of divines! Fling away idle fancies and imaginings, and turn then towards the Horizon of Certitude. I swear by God! All that ye possess will profit you not, neither all the treasures of the earth, nor the leadership ye have usurped. Fear God, and be not of the lost ones.

Say: O concourse of divines! Lay aside all your veils and coverings. Give ear unto that whereunto calleth you the most Sublime Pen ... The world is laden with dust, by reason of your vain imaginings. ...⁵¹

It behooveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind on the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission, the tokens of His glory.⁵²

The most conspicuous feature of the attacks which ecclesiastics have made on the Bahá'í Faith is their neglect of this advice to set dogma aside. There is almost nothing that has been written about the Faith by Christian ecclesiastics in which various themes from Christian theology are not irrelevantly introduced and vigorously argued. Christian dogmas such as the Trinity, Atonement, etc. are made the touchstone of spiritual truth, and a measuring rod for the Revelation of God, quite as the Pharisees used similar dogmas in the time of Jesus. Fortunately, there is now a large body of Bahá'í literature which extricates the teachings of Jesus Christ from the dogmas that grew up in later years, and which demonstrates the harmony between these teachings and the truths revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.⁵³

A related problem, however, is the effect which unconscious theological assumptions in the minds of the missionaries who have written books attacking the Faith produce on their work. We noted above, for example, that the traditional view, whether admittedly so or not, is that religion is essentially *static*. It has been almost impossible for ecclesiastical writers, whose minds were formed by such attitudes about the nature of religion, to focus on a subject like the *Aqdas*. Speaking of the history of the unfoldment of the Cause, the beloved Guardian says that its various periods:

are to be regarded not only as the component, the inseparable parts of one stupendous whole, but as progressive stages in a single evolutionary process, vast, steady and irresistible. For as we survey the entire range which the operation of a century-old Faith has unfolded before us, we cannot escape the conclusion that from whatever angle we view this colossal scene, the events associated with these periods present to us unmistakable evidences of a slowly maturing process. ...⁵⁴

Shoghi Effendi adds, with respect to the laws and Teachings of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*:

We perceive a no less apparent evolution in the scope of its teachings, at first designedly rigid, complex and severe, subsequently recast, expanded, and liberalized under the succeeding Dispensation, later expounded, reaffirmed and amplified by an appointed Interpreter, and lastly systematized and universally applied to both individuals and institutions (i.e. by the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice).⁵⁵

The promulgation of a law such as the marriage law, therefore, presents the fascinating picture of an immense truth about human happiness and human purpose slowly emerging through the Will of Bahá'u'lláh, as the instruments through which it can be expressed come into existence, and as those who are to receive it gradually become able to bear

its implications. Slowly, lovingly, and patiently,—as with children—, the Manifestation of God leads men out of old, faulty habits into a realization of the Will of God and a capacity to respond to that Will.

Such an approach to moral teaching is simply beyond the ken of minds confined by traditional church theology. If a universal ordinance such as the Bahá'í law of marriage is gradually explained and applied in stages, first by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, then by the Guardian, and finally by the Universal House of Justice, Christian opponents interpret this to mean that the Bahá'í Faith has somehow "changed" its "real" Teachings, presumably in order to appease different audiences. They apply this same "reasoning" to the way in which the text of the *Aqdas* is being patiently codified, arguing that it should instead be simply translated and published as if it were a kind of catechism or handbook. The world of Bahá'u'lláh is as incomprehensible to such minds as the universe revealed by modern science is beyond the grasp of mediaeval learning. Bahá'u'lláh suggests the magnitude of the challenge which the *Aqdas* represents when He spoke of it as "a heaven which We have adorned with the stars of Our commandments and prohibitions," and when He counselled:

Consider the sun. How feeble its rays the moment it appeareth above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approacheth its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light. ... Were it all of a sudden to manifest the energies latent within it, it would no doubt cause injury to all created things ... In like manner, if the Sun of Truth were suddenly to reveal, at the earliest stages of its manifestation, the full measure of the potencies which the providence of the Almighty hath bestowed upon it, the earth of human understanding would waste away and be consumed; for men's hearts would neither sustain the intensity of its Revelation, nor be able to mirror forth the radiance of its light.⁵⁶

A glaring omission from virtually all of the books written on the Bahá'í Faith by Christian clergymen is any honest admission of the moral achievement represented by the Bahá'í community itself. Yet it is this aspect of the Bahá'í Faith, next to the lives and work of the Founders Themselves, which has attracted the most widespread admiration and praise from independent observers ever since the days of Professor Browne. Clearly, it is the success of the Bahá'í community in providing a living example of the truths that Bahá'u'lláh taught which accounts, in large measure, for the respect and the formal recognition that the Faith has won from civil governments, prominent figures, and various international agencies. The implications of Bahá'u'lláh's statements on the role of moral example become clearer with every passing year:

O people of God! Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men. This can best be achieved through pure and holy deeds, a virtuous life and a goodly behaviour. Valiant acts will ensure the triumph of this Cause, and a saintly character will reinforce its power. Cleave unto righteousness, O people of Bahá! This, verily, is the commandment which this wronged One hath given unto you, and the first choice of His unrestrained Will for every one of you.⁵⁷

However uncomfortable an honest examination of this aspect of Bahá'í history and of the present-day Bahá'í community may be for its opponents, it cannot be ignored. For a writer to do so is to convict himself at the outset of prejudice. To attempt to write a book on the subject of the Bahá'í Faith, without an adequate treatment of a subject considered by independent observers to be one of the Faith's most striking features, indicates that the writer fears the effect on his readers which such a discussion would have.

A fourth characteristic of all of the attacks on the Bahá'í

Faith by Christian ecclesiastics has been the abuse of historical sources. From a purely Bahá'í point of view, infallible guidance is available not only in the meaning of Scripture, but also in the field of history. One of the functions of the Guardianship is to provide precise and authoritative guidance on the major issues of Bábí and Bahá'í history, and Shoghi Effendi therefore wrote his monumental *God Passes By*, to serve as the standard in this respect. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament states of Shoghi Effendi's interpretative role:

Whoso disputeth with him hath disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself and turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned aside from God.⁵⁸

Christian ecclesiastics are not, of course, expected to begin by accepting the interpretative authority of the Guardian. Lacking such authority, however, it is all the more important that they scrupulously present all of the historical evidence available, and consider carefully the best opinion of qualified independent observers. That is to say, they should observe the accepted standards of scholarship. In this age of universal justice, the law of the independent investigation of truth is binding upon the whole of mankind, whether they have recognized the Manifestation of God or not:

O Son of Spirit! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thin eyes.⁵⁹

There has never been a Revelation in all of human history

which has offered to the independent student even a fraction of the wealth of historical evidence which the mission of Bahá'u'lláh provides. One of the most serious handicaps to a scientific study of the phenomenon of Revelation is that the originating impulse in each of the earlier religions has receded so far into history as to be accessible to mankind in only a very limited and unsatisfactory degree. The real nature of the original teachings of the Buddha, the events of Jesus' life, the era in which Zoroaster lived, and even the historical existence of Krishna—all of these present insoluble problems to the student of the history of religions. The life and person of Muḥammad are more accessible, as in the *Qur'án*, but even here, disagreements so serious as to produce many conflicting schools of thought testify to the magnitude of the problem which the sources present.

Far otherwise with the work of Bahá'u'lláh. The details of His life and that of the Báb are massively documented, as are the contributions of those whom They inspired and led. Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual and social Teachings are available in the original text, under His own seal, often in His own hand. The same may be said for the provisions he made for the organization of His Cause. The sequence of events by which these concepts, laws and institutions moulded the development of the Bahá'í community also lie open to scrutiny, unobscured by time, by myth, or by the glosses of conflicting schools of interpretation.

It is therefore a fatal flaw in the work of all those Christian ecclesiastics who have attacked the Cause that their books have ignored evidence which, in any other field of research, would be regarded as priceless discoveries. Most attacks on the Bahá'í Faith, for example, are written as if Nabíl's narrative, the *Dawnbreakers*, did not exist. Yet in it we have the only comprehensive history of the Bábí period written by a person who was both a first-hand observer and a competent historical writer. The Guardian understandably hailed it as the "unchallengeable textbook"⁶⁰ in the early history of the Cause. For those events which he did not personally

witness, Nabíl provides in exhaustive detail the identity of the observers from whom he received accounts and very often the circumstances surrounding the transmittal. To understand the significance of such a work, one would have to imagine the importance to Christian history of a similar, meticulously annotated record kept by one of the immediate companions of Jesus Christ, and covering all the significant events of the latter's ministry.

In the place of such sources, ecclesiastical opponents have relied upon obscure writings whose authenticity they have not been able to establish after decades of attempts to do so, and on the works of avowed enemies of the Faith, who are often represented as "independent" scholars and observers. Further, lacking professional training in historiography or oriental studies, the same missionaries have dealt with the work of responsible scholars like Professor Browne in a fashion that would not be acceptable in any serious academic study.

Finally, it must be said that books written by Christian clergymen to attack the Bahá'í Faith are shot through with gross distortions of the facts. Typically, these are of two kinds. Where even prejudiced sources are lacking, several writers have simply manufactured history by writing about events as they themselves believe they should or must have happened, introducing their statements with such phrases as "no doubt", "probably", "it seems likely", "it is said". In case after case, responsible sources exist which provide evidence flatly contradicting these assertions. The second way in which facts are distorted is by the selective editing of material which the writer finds unacceptable in its original form. Sentences and paragraphs from original documents are quoted out of context and incompletely—so as to suggest that the original writer shared the views of the missionary who thus made use of his work. Since the original documents and scholarly commentaries are often very difficult or impossible for the average layman to acquire, the abuse goes unchallenged except where a Bahá'í writer takes the trouble

to expose it.

To read books put together in such a fashion is to wonder whether the writers regard themselves as in some way above normal moral considerations, whether Christian, scholarly, or otherwise. They seem to regard the Bahá'í Faith as evil or dangerous or both, and to believe that an attack on it is in itself a meritorious deed. The history of opposition to Bahá'u'lláh is a classical illustration of reliance on the philosophy that the end justifies the means. In fact, neither means nor ends are acceptable in the eyes of God.

Nor is it only history that is misused in this manner. Initially, with the "first generation" of missionaries who attacked the Faith at the turn of the century, there was a belligerent and confident atmosphere of defending "true religion" against what was regarded as error. As Western civilization has become progressively de-Christianized, however, and particularly as the clergy have become objects of suspicion, mockery and even resentment in many circles, this approach has lost much of its force. No doubt these altered circumstances account for a change that has occurred in the way in which some attacks on the Bahá'í Faith are being undertaken. Instead of representing themselves primarily as clergymen and defenders of the church, such present-day opponents of the Bahá'í Cause often write in the guise of detached "scholars" who purport to be merely sharing the results of "independent research" in the field of modern oriental studies. Their books do not nowadays appear under such titles as *Baháism and Its Claims*⁶¹ but rather as textbooks on "the teachings and history" of the Bahá'í Faith. The unwary reader is encouraged to view such a book not as part of a century-old vendetta carried on by partisan sectarians, but as a neutral and reliable source of information.

It is in the light of this sorry record that we can understand something of the anger of the Manifestations of God against those who have assumed a role of leadership in

religion:

O ye that are foolish, yet have a name to be wise!
Wherefore do ye wear the guise of the shepherd,
when inwardly ye have become wolves, intent
upon My flock? Ye are even as the star, which rises
ere the dawn, and which, though it seems radiant
and luminous, leadeth the wayfarers of My city
astray into the paths of perdition. ... Ye are like
clear but bitter water, which to outward seeming is
but crystal pure but of which when tested by the
Divine Assayer, not a drop is accepted.⁶²

VIII

Opposition to the Administrative Order

In addition to the meaning of Scripture and the interpretation of history, there is another subject on which the Bahá'í Faith can anticipate a good deal of criticism from its opponents among the Christian clergy. This is the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and the principles upon which it is based. The Guardian warns, for example:

That the forces of irreligion, of a purely materialistic philosophy, of unconcealed paganism have been unloosed, are now spreading, and, by consolidating themselves, are beginning to invade some of the most powerful Christian institutions of the western

world, no unbiased observer can fail to admit. That these institutions are becoming increasingly restive, that a few among them are already dimly aware of the pervasive influence of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, that they will, as their inherent strength deteriorates and their discipline relaxes, regard with deepening dismay the rise of His New World Order, and will gradually determine to assail it, that such an opposition will in turn accelerate their decline, few, if any, among those who are attentively watching the progress of His Faith would be inclined to question.⁶³

Moreover, the Guardian warns that ecclesiastical opponents of the Faith will do their utmost to transmit their own hostility to the public and even to the institutions of civil authority:

We can discover a no less distinct gradation in the character of the opposition it has had to encounter ... an opposition which, now, through the rise of a divinely appointed Order in the Christian West, and its initial impact on civil and ecclesiastical institutions, bids fair to include among its supporters established governments and systems associated with the most ancient, the most deeply entrenched sacerdotal hierarchies in Christendom.⁶⁴

Peoples, nations, adherents of divers faiths, will jointly and successively arise to shatter its unity, to sap its force, and to degrade its holy name. They will assail not only the spirit which it inculcates, but the administration which is the channel, the instrument, the embodiment of that spirit. For as the authority which Bahá'u'lláh has invested the future Bahá'í Commonwealth becomes more and more apparent, the fiercer shall be the challenge which from every quarter will be thrown at the verities it enshrines.⁶⁵

There is probably relatively little that Bahá'ís can do directly to counteract the suspicion and resentment which the rise of the Administrative Order will inevitably arouse both within ecclesiastical circles and in other parts of society. To say that the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh which gives this Order its authority is the distinguishing feature of the Bahá'í Faith is to emphasize how difficult it is for our generation to properly understand it. Bahá'u'lláh calls it “this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.”⁶⁶ Through it, a new element has entered man's religious life, and it will be generations or perhaps even centuries before the generality of mankind will have accepted it.

At a very early stage in the social evolution of mankind on this planet, religion was primarily a matter of magic. Only through the work of the great historical religions, Judaism, Hinduism, and such universal missionary faiths as Buddhism, Christianity and Islám, did men gradually accept that religion should be the authority in questions of morality. Only in these relatively recent great religious cultures did men come to understand that questions of “right and wrong” relate primarily to ethical life, and that the guide in this area of human experience is the Revelation of God:

He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?⁶⁷

So today, through the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, yet another entirely new element has entered man's religious experience, an element which non-Bahá'í society regards as being unconnected with matters spiritual. This new element is social order. Present-day society, in virtually any part of the world, does not accept that a Revelation from God can or should determine the way in which the social, economic, and administrative life of our world should be conducted. The Bahá'í community is called upon to *pioneer* this staggering truth. We can expect that this effort will attract widespread

attention and eventually the most intense interest from every element of society. There are many persons who, disillusioned with the repeated failures of the alternatives developed by human effort, will be attracted to the Faith primarily because of this very feature. There are, unfortunately, a great many others who, misunderstanding entirely its purposes and its nature, will regard it with suspicion.

The Heroic Age of the Faith, born in anguish, nursed in adversity, and terminating in trials as woeful as those that greeted its birth, has been succeeded by that Formative Period which is to witness the gradual crystallization of those creative energies which the Faith has released, and the consequent emergence of that World Order for which those forces were made to operate.

Fierce and relentless will be the opposition which this crystallization and emergence must provoke. The alarm it must and will awaken, the envy it will certainly arouse, the misrepresentations to which it will remorselessly be subjected, the setbacks it must, sooner or later, sustain, the commotions to which it must eventually give rise, the fruits it must in the end garner, the blessings it must inevitably bestow and the glorious, the Golden Age, it must irresistibly usher in, are just beginning to be faintly perceived, and will, as the old order crumbles beneath the weight of so stupendous a Revelation, become increasingly apparent and arresting.⁶⁸

With these considerations, among others, in mind we should reflect on the reference of the Guardian to "a high sense of moral rectitude in (Bahá'í) social and administrative activities" as the first of the "spiritual prerequisites" for the success of the Cause. Writing to the North American believers in 1938, Shoghi Effendi spoke of the spirit and the standards which must govern the operation of Bahá'í administrative institutions particularly:

This rectitude of conduct, with its implications of justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness, must distinguish every phase of the life of the Bahá'í community. "The companions of God", Bahá'u'lláh Himself has declared, "are, in this day, the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world. They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character that all mankind may profit by their example." ... Such a rectitude of conduct must manifest itself, with ever-increasing potency, in every verdict which the elected representatives of the Bahá'í community, in whatever capacity they may find themselves, may be called upon to pronounce ... It must be made the hall-mark of that numerically small, yet intensely dynamic and highly responsible body of the elected national representatives of every Bahá'í community, which constitutes the sustaining pillar, and the sole instrument for the election, in every community, of that Universal House whose very name and title, as ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, symbolizes that rectitude of conduct which is its highest mission to safeguard and enforce.⁶⁹

IX

The Effects of Opposition

What has been the effect of over 130 years of opposition to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh? Obviously, the opposition has not succeeded in its objective of stopping the rise of the Faith, of breaking the unity of its followers, or of slowing more than temporarily its progress in any part of the world. Viewed superficially, opposition to the Bahá'í Faith, whether ecclesiastical, governmental, or more general, might seem simply irrelevant to its history.

Any examination in greater depth of the events of Bahá'í history, however, shows clearly that this is not the case.

Extraordinarily, the net result of such attacks has been decidedly beneficial. While this fact in no way excuses the behaviour of those who were responsible, it does help Bahá'ís to regard these persons with a much more detached eye, and to deal more intelligently and confidently with those attacks which are yet to come. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said on this subject:

Therefore, O ye beloved of God, be not grieved when people stand against you, persecute you, afflict and trouble you and say all manner of evil against you. The darkness will pass away and the light of the manifest signs will appear, the veil will be withdrawn and the Light of Reality will shine forth from the unseen (Kingdom) of El-Abhá. This we inform you before it occurs, so that when the hosts of people arise against you for my love, be not disturbed or troubled; nay rather, be firm as a mountain, for this persecution and reviling of the people upon you is a pre-ordained matter. Blessed is the soul who is firm in the path!⁷⁰

In what ways has opposition been of benefit to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh? Four beneficial results particularly stand out, two of which relate to the outward expansion of the Cause, and two to its internal development.

One of the first effects which attacks on the Faith have is to attract interest. This has been true of the growth of religion since time began, and is particularly apparent in the history of the Bábí movement. The appalling persecutions which the Báb and His followers experienced in the middle of the nineteenth century generated a record of heroism which has no parallel in mankind's religious history. It is almost impossible, at this late date, to understand the impact which the incandescent lives of the Báb, Quddús, Táhirih, Mullá Husayn and their companions had on the consciousness of sensitive Europeans a hundred years ago. It was these lives which attracted the attention of the Comte de Gobineau, and produced his influential study of the early movement. Similarly, it was this extraordinary history which

not only attracted, but captivated Edward Granville Browne, and was responsible for the decades of work which he devoted to the study and publicizing of the Bábí Faith. Persons as different as Leo Tolstoy, Earnest Renan, Lord Curzon and Sarah Bernhardt were touched profoundly.

Attacks on the Bahá'í community will have the same result. Undeterred by the relative smallness of their numbers and the limited resources at their disposal, the Bahá'ís of the world today are engaged in an epic struggle against the age-old enemies of human happiness: prejudice, alienation, selfishness, injustice, ignorance, pride, and fear. Moreover, they are doing so without criticizing or interfering with the interests of any other group. The struggle truly deserves the adjective heroic. Attacks on such a community, particularly when initiated by representatives of a discredited and moribund ecclesiastical order can only succeed in attracting attention to the struggle and in arousing interest in the source of its inspiration:

Behold how in this Dispensation the worthless and foolish have fondly imagined that by such instruments as massacre, plunder and banishment they can extinguish the Lamp which the Hand of Divine power hath lit, or eclipse the Day Star of everlasting splendour. How utterly unaware they seem to be of the truth that such adversity is the oil that feedeth the flame of this Lamp! Such is God's transforming power. He changeth whatsoever He willeth; He verily hath power over all things. ...⁷¹

The second effect of opposition is to make possible a clear distinction in the public mind between the moral condition of the Bahá'í community and that of its enemies. Such contrast helps clarify the issues, and throws into relief those spiritual aspects of the Faith with which the sincere, in all walks of life, can much more easily identify. On this subject, the Guardian has said:

Let not, however, the invincible army of Bahá'u'-

lláh, who in the West, and at one of its potential storm-centres is to fight, in His name and for His sake, one of its fiercest and most glorious battles, be afraid of any criticism that might be directed against it. Let it not be deterred by any condemnation with which the tongue of the slanderer may seek to debase its motives. Let it not recoil before the threatening advance of the forces of fanaticism, of orthodoxy, of corruption, and of prejudice that may be leagued against it. The voice of criticism is a voice that indirectly reinforces the proclamation of its Cause. Unpopularity but serves to throw into greater relief the contrast between it and its adversaries; while ostracism is itself the magnetic power that must eventually win over to its camp the most vociferous and inveterate amongst its foes.⁷²

Within the Bahá'í community, too, opposition has very important benefits. One of these is the purification of the life of the Cause. The world is the milieu in which the Revelation of God is unfolding, and in which the Kingdom of God must ultimately be erected. Inevitably, during this process, elements which are unworthy become incorporated into the fabric of the Bahá'í community. These include attitudes, patterns of behaviour, ideas and unconscious prejudices which, though at variance with the standards of Bahá'u'lláh, are difficult to recognize when they are so pervasive and characteristic of the society around us. Attacks on the Cause have the effect of emphasizing those things that are alien and of forcing the believers to turn more fully to the truths revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. Indeed, as the history of the Cause has shown, these periods of stress also separate from the life of the Cause those individuals who are unwilling to rise to the challenge its standards represent or who, in rare cases, would attempt consciously to pervert its course:

Viewed in the light of past experience, the inevitable result of such futile attempts, however persistent and malicious they may be, is to contribute to a wider and deeper recognition by believers and

unbelievers alike of the distinguishing features of the Faith proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. These challenging criticisms, whether or not dictated by malice, cannot but serve to galvanize the souls of its ardent supporters, and to consolidate the ranks of its faithful promoters. They will purge the Faith from those pernicious elements whose continued association with the believers tends to discredit the fair name of the Cause, and to tarnish the purity of its spirit. We should welcome, therefore, not only the open attacks which its avowed enemies persistently launch against it, but should also view as a blessing in disguise every storm of mischief with which they who apostatize their faith or claim to be its faithful exponents assail it from time to time. Instead of undermining the Faith, such assaults, both from within and from without, reinforce its foundations, and excite the intensity of its flame. Designed to becloud its radiance, they proclaim to all the world the exalted character of its precepts, the completeness of its unity, the uniqueness of its position, and the pervasiveness of its influence.⁷³

Finally, opposition has an invigorating effect on the unity of the friends. Our identity as Bahá'ís, our sense of working together for a common goal of supreme importance, our respect for one another's capacities, and our appreciation of the protecting power of the Covenant become the primary considerations of our spiritual lives. Differences of personality, of opinion, and of culture are suddenly reduced to proper proportions:

The resistless march of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh ... propelled by the stimulating influences which the un wisdom of its enemies and the force latent within itself, both engender, resolves itself into a series of rhythmic pulsations, precipitated, on the one hand, through the explosive outbursts of its foes, and the vibrations of Divine Power, on the

other, which speed it, with ever-increasing momentum, along that predestined course traced for it by the Hand of the Almighty.⁷⁴

The tribulations attending the progressive unfoldment of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh have indeed been such as to exceed in gravity those from which the religions of the past have suffered. Unlike those religions, however, these tribulations have failed utterly to impair its unity, or to create, even temporarily, a breach in the ranks of its adherents. It has not only survived these ordeals, but has emerged, purified and inviolate, endowed with greater capacity to face and surmount any crisis which its resistless march may engender in the future.⁷⁵

X

Responding to Opposition

The time will come when the insistent campaign of misrepresentation to which the Faith has been subjected ever since its birth, will begin to affect many peoples' attitudes. 'Abdu'l-Bahá warns that in Western countries:

...a large multitude of people will arise against you, showing oppression, expressing contumely and derision, shunning your society, and heaping upon you ridicule.⁷⁶

Clearly, therefore, the persecution of the Faith will eventually begin to impinge upon the personal lives of believers

everywhere. At the beginning of this study, a passage was quoted in which the Guardian outlined some of the Bahá'í themes which will increasingly become the target of abuse and ridicule.⁷⁷ The attacks already made by missionaries have begun to focus on these topics. There was a time when it would have been difficult to imagine any set of circumstances in most Western nations in which such a campaign could develop to the point where Bahá'ís would actually become the objects of ostracism on the part of their neighbours and fellow citizens. The rapid breakdown of society, however, and the bizarre and unexpected developments which have taken place in many areas of man's social life, have radically changed the situation. It is no longer possible to predict, with any degree of accuracy, what circumstances may arise as social discipline steadily fails, anxiety becomes the normal state of mind, and public vulnerability to prejudices and delusions rapidly increases. The Guardian said on this subject:

How can the beginnings of a world upheaval, unleashing forces that are so gravely deranging the social, the religious, the political, and the economic equilibrium of organized society, throwing into chaos and confusion political systems, racial doctrines, social conceptions, cultural standards, religious associations, and trade relationships—how can such agitations, on a scale so vast, so unprecedented, fail to produce any repercussions on the institutions of a Faith of such tender age whose teachings have a direct and vital bearing on each of these spheres of human life and conduct?

Little wonder, therefore, if they who are holding aloft the banner of so pervasive a Faith, so challenging a Cause, find themselves affected by the impact of these world-shaking forces. Little wonder if they find that in the midst of this whirlpool of contending passions their freedom has been curtailed, their tenets condemned, their institutions assaulted, their motives maligned, their

authority jeopardized, their claim rejected.⁷⁸

How should Bahá'ís react to opposition? 'Abdu'l-Bahá provides us with the basic guidance on the subject:

How great, how very great is the Cause! How very fierce the onslaught of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. ... One and all, they shall arise with all their power to resist His Cause. Then shall the knights of the Lord, assisted by His grace from on high, strengthened by faith, aided by the power of understanding, and reinforced by the legions of the Covenant, arise and make manifest the truth of the verse: "Behold the confusion that hath befallen the tribes of the defeated!"⁷⁹

Clearly, firmness in the Covenant, a strict adherence to the standards of the Cause, integrity in our personal lives and in the operation of our institutions, and a clear understanding of the processes at work, all of these are essential to the development of a mature set of responses. In addition, however, 'Abdu'l-Bahá provides another, very critical piece of advice:

You must make firm the feet at the time when these trials transpire, and demonstrate forbearance and patience. You must withstand them with the utmost love and kindness; *consider their oppression and persecution as the caprice of children, and do not give any importance to whatever they do.*⁸⁰ [italics added]

What does 'Abdu'l-Bahá mean by "the caprice of children", and how does an adult respond to such caprice? Children are often wilful, and when they are denied the necessary moral and spiritual training, this wilfulness tends to increase. Bahá'ís do not believe that human beings, left in a state of nature, will somehow "spontaneously" develop their human capacities:

We also observe in infants the signs of aggression and lawlessness, and that if a child is deprived of a

teacher's instruction his undesirable qualities increase from one moment to the next.⁸¹

This is precisely the present-day condition of the human race. Denied divine education by the leaders of thought who, Bahá'u'lláh says, have "interposed themselves" between mankind and the Divine Physician, the masses of mankind are experiencing a rapid increase of wilful, aggressive, and irrational behaviour. It is these conditions which have prompted attacks on the Messengers of God and on those who struggle to put Their Teachings into effect.

Almost every adult human being has experienced the irrational assault of an angry, wilful child. Perhaps our shins have been kicked, we have been poked with whatever object happened to be at hand, or have had a bowl of cereal dumped in our laps. Perhaps we have occasionally witnessed childish acts of cruelty to other children. Such experiences are unpleasant, sometimes painful, and occasionally can have very harmful and expensive consequences. But because we are adults and the child is a child, we do our best to control our anger and impatience, and try to determine whether a real problem or merely infantile frustration has produced this behaviour. If the problem is the child's own ill temper and folly, we do not assume responsibility for it. We do not take his actions personally, feel guilty and defensive, and withdraw into ourselves. As adults, we do what we can to help the child to understand his situation and correct his behaviour. If he refuses to respond, he will have to learn through experiencing the consequences of bad temper, obstinacy and carelessness. Our success in facing such minor crises varies widely from one adult to another and from day to day, but all of us learn to some degree to cope.

This is how 'Abdu'l-Bahá advises us to deal with opposition. Opposition to the Cause is painful to Bahá'ís in many ways, and particularly so when it generates slander, ridicule and ostracism. It is also, however, irrational and ultimately self-defeating. If Bahá'ís were to take seriously the efforts

of enemies of the Cause to undermine it or become defensive and hurt, we would waste our time and energies.

The community as a body can correct misrepresentations of the Faith. The Guardian explains:

The matter of refuting attacks and criticisms directed against the Cause through the press is ... one which devolves on the National Spiritual Assembly to consider. This body, whether directly or through the agency of its committees, should decide as to the advisability of answering such attacks, and also should carefully examine and pass upon any statements which the friends wish to send to the press to this effect. Only through such supervision and control of all Bahá'í press activities can the friends hope to avoid confusion and misunderstandings ...⁸²

Bahá'ís as individuals can point out these corrections to sincere seekers who raise questions in the course of their search. Beyond that, however, opposition to the Cause of God is an expression of immature souls desperately attached to power, position and prejudices in a world which has long since died and is bearing them down with it.

Say: O people of God! Beware lest the powers of the earth alarm you, or the might of the nations weaken you, or the tumult of the people of discord deter you, or the exponents of earthly glory sadden you. Be ye as a mountain in the Cause of your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Glorious, the Unconstrained.⁸³

When the victory arriveth, every man shall profess himself as a believer and shall hasten to the shelter of God's Faith. Happy are they who in the days of world-encompassing trials have stood fast in the Cause and refused to swerve from its truth.⁸⁴

When we began this study we were concerned as to how

we could bring together in our consciousness two different commands of our Faith. On the one hand we are urged to "meditate deeply" on the persecutions inflicted by enemies of the Cause; on the other, we are asked to "recognize your enemies as your friends". Clearly, these two teachings are different aspects of one single challenge. Covenant-breaking aside, if the external enemies of the Cause realized what they were attacking they would cease their attacks. Bahá'u'lláh says that if they understood what they were doing they "would hold their breath out of fear of God". They give way to their impulses because they are ignorant of the circumstances and of the consequences for their own immortal souls.

When a Bahá'í realizes this, and considers carefully the way in which attacks on the Cause have contributed to its purification and growth, then he sees the enemies of the Faith through different eyes. No doubt it was through such eyes that Shoghi Effendi viewed one of the many crises he was called on to meet, when he wrote:

Indeed this fresh ordeal that has, in pursuance of the mysterious dispensations of Providence, afflicted the Faith, at this unexpected hour, far from dealing a fatal blow to its institutions or existence, should be regarded as a blessing in disguise, not a "calamity" but a "providence" of God, not a devastating flood but a "gentle rain" on a "green pasture", a "wick" and "oil" unto the "lamp" of His Faith, a "nurture" for His Cause, "water for that which has been planted in the hearts of men", a "crown set on the head" of His Messenger for this Day.⁸⁵

The spiritual issues at the heart of opposition to the Cause of God—the issues of spiritual life or death—are nowhere more clearly spelled out than in the immortal Tablet on the subject which Bahá'u'lláh addressed to His persecuted followers a century ago:

O thou who hast set thy face towards the splen-

dours of My Countenance! Vague fancies have encompassed the dwellers of the earth and debarred them from turning towards the Horizon of Certitude, and its brightness, and its manifestations and its lights. Vain imaginings have withheld them from Him Who is the Self-Subsisting. They speak as prompted by their own caprices, and understand not.

Among them are those who have said: "Have the verses been sent down?" Say: "Yea, by Him Who is the Lord of the heavens!" "Hath the Hour come?" "Nay, more; it hath passed, by Him Who is the Revealer of clear tokens! Verily, the Inevitable is come, and He, the True One, hath appeared with proof and testimony. The Plain is disclosed, and mankind is sore vexed and fearful. Earthquakes have broken loose, and the tribes have lamented, for fear of God, the Lord of Strength, the All-Compelling." Say: "The stunning trumpet-blast hath been loudly raised, and the Day is God's, the One, the Unconstrained." "Hath the Catastrophe come to pass?" Say: "Yea, by the Lord of Lords!" "Is the Resurrection come?" "Nay, more; He Who is the Self-Subsisting hath appeared with the Kingdom of His signs." "Seest thou men laid low?" "Yea, by my Lord, the Exalted, the Most High!" "Have the tree-stumps been uprooted?" "Yea, more; the mountains have been scattered in dust; by Him the Lord of attributes!"

They say: "Where is Paradise, and where is Hell?" Say: "The one is reunion with Me; the other thine own self, O thou who dost associate a partner with God and doubttest." They say: "We see not the Balance." Say: "Surely, by my Lord, the God of Mercy! None can see it except such as are endued with insight." "Have the stars fallen?" Say: "Yea,

when He Who is the Self-Subsisting dwelt in the Land of Mystery (Adrianople). Take heed, ye who are endued with discernment!"

All the signs appeared when We drew forth the Hand of Power from the bosom of majesty and might. Verily, the Crier hath cried out, when the promised time came, and they that have recognized the splendours of Sinai have swooned away in the wilderness of hesitation, before the awful majesty of thy Lord, the Lord of creation.

The trumpet asketh: "Hath the Bugle been sounded?" Say: "Yea, by the King of Revelation! when He mounted the throne of His Name, the All-Merciful." Darkness hath been chased away by the dawning-light of the mercy of thy Lord, the Source of all light. The breeze of the All-Merciful hath wafted, and the souls have been quickened in the tombs of their bodies. Thus hath the decree been fulfilled by God, the Mighty, the Beneficent.

They that have gone astray have said: "When were the heavens cleft asunder?" Say: "While ye lay in the graves of waywardness and error." Among the heedless is he who rubbeth his eyes, and looketh to the right and to the left. Say: "Blinded art thou. No refuge hast thou to flee to." And among them is he who saith: "Have men been gathered together?" Say: "Yea, by My Lord! whilst thou didst lie in the cradle of idle fancies." And among them is he who saith: "Hath the Book been sent down through the power of the true Faith?" Say: "The true Faith itself is astounded. Fear ye, O ye men of understanding heart!" And among them is he who saith: "Have I been assembled with others, blind?" Say: "Yea, by Him that rideth upon the clouds!"

Paradise is decked with mystic roses, and hell hath

been made to blaze with the fire of the impious. Say: "The light hath shone forth from the horizon of Revelation, and the whole earth hath been illumined at the coming of Him Who is the Lord of the Day of the Covenant!" The doubters have perished, whilst he that turned, guided by the light of assurance, unto the Dayspring of Certitude hath prospered.

Blessed art thou, who hast fixed thy gaze upon Me, for this Tablet which hath been sent down for thee—a Tablet which causeth the souls of men to soar. Commit it to memory, and recite it. By My life! It is a door to the mercy of thy Lord. Well is it with him that reciteth it at even tide and at dawn.

We, verily, hear thy praise of this Cause, through which the mountain of knowledge was crushed, and men's feet have slipped. My glory be upon thee and upon whosoever hath turned unto the Almighty, the All-Bounteous. The Tablet is ended, but the theme is unexhausted. Be patient, for thy Lord is patient.⁸⁶

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2. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 302
3. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*, p. 13
4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in *Portals to Freedom*, p. 169
5. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 72–73
6. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 6

The Source of Opposition in the Past

7. Bahá'u'lláh, *ibid*, p. 45
8. Jesus Christ, *Gospel of Matthew*, XXIII, 13–33
9. Tacitus, *Annales*, XV, 44
10. The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 123
11. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Promised Day is Come*, p. 81
12. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *ibid*, p. 82–83
13. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, pp. 4–5
14. Bahá'u'lláh, *ibid*, p. 8
15. Bahá'u'lláh, *ibid*, pp. 12–13
16. Bahá'u'lláh, *ibid*, p. 15
17. Bahá'u'lláh, *ibid*, p. 164
18. Bahá'u'lláh, cited *ibid*, p. 83

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19. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 64–65
20. Bahá'u'lláh, *ibid*, p. 81
21. Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day is Come*, p. 6
22. Shoghi Effendi, *ibid*, pp. 8–10
23. Bahá'u'lláh, cited *ibid*, pp. 85–86
24. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 265

Opposition from Totalitarian Regimes

25. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 361
26. Shoghi Effendi, *ibid*, pp. 361–362
27. Universal House of Justice, *Messages, 1968-1973*, pp. 45–47

Opposition from Christian Clergy

28. See for example S. G. Wilson, *Baháism and Its Claims*, (N.Y., 1915); J. R. Richards, *The Religion of the Baháís*, (London 1932); W. M. Miller, *Baháism*, (N.Y., 1931), and *The Bahá'í Faith: Its History and Teachings*, (S. Pasadena, Cal., 1974) R. P. Richardson: a number of articles in *Open Court*, including “The Persian Rival to Jesus...” (August, 1915) and “The Precursor, The Prophet and The Pope” (October, 1915).
29. Browne, Edward G., Introduction to Myron Phelps, ‘Abbás Effendi. All the references in the paragraph are taken from this source.
30. Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 123
31. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 17

Tares and Wheat

32. The concept of the Holy Spirit, as a “person” seems to have originated with an attempt by church fathers to explain Jesus’ promise of a “Comforter”, who would come to lead men “into all truth”. (John XIV, 15–17). The context of the promise seems clearly to indicate that the promise refers to another historical event like Jesus’ own mission. The church fathers, however, early adopted the view that what was being promised was an invisible spiritual power operating through their own deliberations. References in the New Testament to other spiritual phenomena were arbitrarily attached to this interpretation (the appearance of the dove at Jesus’ baptism; the disciples’ experience of illumination and brotherhood at Pentecost). These decisions were purely theological since the Scriptures themselves imply no relationship among these various events and themes. Later copyists added specific references to a trinity of “Father, Son and Holy Ghost”, which are now being removed from modern versions of the New Testament that reflect the findings of biblical scholarship. The results of the doctrine have not been encouraging. Far from leading Christians into greater unity on questions of spiritual truth, the effect of this and other doctrines has been to produce ever greater disagreement and to harden sectarianism.
33. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 45–46
34. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 109
35. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 65–66
36. Bahá'u'lláh, *ibid*, p. 68
37. Efforts at the beginning of the twentieth century to create a “Social Gospel” out of Christ’s words as recorded in the New Testament failed totally, and underlined the individual orientation of Christianity’s moral teaching. The movement’s energies and many of its leaders including former clergymen were eventually absorbed into socialist political parties in Western countries. For a history of the movement see Charles W. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism* (New Haven, 1940).
38. Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *Promised Day is Come*, p. 110
39. Shoghi Effendi, cited by Rúhíyyih Khánum, *U.S. Bahá'í News*, No. 231, p. 6

40. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 136
41. Bahá'u'lláh, *ibid*, p. 7
42. For a summary of Bahá'í teachings on the subject of Christian doctrines, see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 95—162
43. Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 88
44. The Catholic historian, Christopher Dawson, says, for example: "For more than four centuries the intellectual leadership of the world passed unquestionably to the Islámic peoples ...". *The Making of Europe*, (N.Y., 1932), p. 139
45. See note 10 above.
46. Jesus Christ, *Gospel of Matthew*, XIII, 22—30
47. Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 63
48. Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *Promised Day is Come*, p. 115

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49. For a more detailed examination of the subject, see Douglas Martin's "The Missionary as Historian", *Proceedings of the 1976 Annual Meeting*, The Canadian Association for Studies on the Bahá'í Faith. Part of the paper was reprinted in *World Order*, spring 1976 issue, pp. 43—63.
50. Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *Promised Day is Come*, p. 91
51. Bahá'u'lláh, cited *ibid*, p. 86
52. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 11
53. See note 42 above.
54. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Foreward, p.p. xv-xvi
55. Shoghi Effendi, *ibid*, p. xvii
56. Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 5
57. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 93—94
58. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*, p. 11
59. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 2
60. Shoghi Effendi, (Cable, June 21, 1932), cited in *Nabil's Narrative (Abridged)*, (new Delhi, 1974), "Introduction".
61. Author, Rev. Samuel Graham Wilson (N.Y., 1915)

62. Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *Promised Day is Come*, p. 90

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63. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 180—181
64. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Foreword, p. xvii
65. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 18
66. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 136
67. *Old Testament*, Micah, VI, 8
68. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, p. 52
69. Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 19—22

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70. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, Vol. I, pp. 12-14
71. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 72
72. Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 35
73. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 15—16
74. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, p. 51
75. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 410

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76. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. I, No. 10, pp. 1—2
77. See reference to Note 5 above.
78. Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 2
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80. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, *op. cit.*, *idem*
81. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 97

82. Shoghi Effendi, August 30, 1939, cited in compilation from Universal House of Justice, November 26, 1974
83. Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 69
84. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 319
85. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 139
86. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 131–134