

# **MAKING THE CROOKED STRAIGHT**

## **A CONTRIBUTION TO BAHÁ'Í APOLOGETICS**

by

Udo Schaefer • Nicola Towfigh • Ulrich Gollmer

translated from the German by  
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*Quod curiositate cognoverunt, superbia  
amiserunt.*

St Augustine, *Sermones* 151

*Souls such as these cause the straight to  
become crooked.*

‘Abdu’l-Baha

*Will and Testament* 2:13

*Melius est, ut scandalum oriatur, quam  
ut veritas relinquatur.*

Pope Gregory the Great (Hom.  
VII in Ezekiel, quoted from *Migne  
Patrologiae Cursus Completus  
Series Latina*, vol. 76, p. 842)

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Contents, Preface, Introduction, Chapter 1, Conclusion, Bibliography, Index

(pages i-35 and 774-863)

## Foreword

*J. A. McLean*

The publication of this book—a rebuttal of a 450-page monograph on the Bahá'í Faith written by an embittered ex-Bahá'í named Francesco Ficicchia[1]—has wider implications for the study of the Bahá'í Faith than what otherwise might be viewed as a localized scholarly dispute in German-speaking Europe. There are three reasons for this. First, by way of apologia, the reader is led into an instructive exploration of the salient and distinctive features of the sacred teachings and history of the Bahá'í Faith, its organization and administration. Beyond its polemical value, *Making the Crooked Straight* is a serious and useful didactic tool, yielding solid information on the Bahá'í Faith.

Among this book's other merits is its offering of a critical analysis of much of the erroneous information disseminated mainly by Protestant missionary theologians in the West since the turn of the century. This material will be of interest to those who are not yet familiar with it. Ficicchia proved himself to be an eager collector of much of the previously disseminated misinformation on the Bahá'í Faith, which he put to good use in *Der Bahā'ismus*. Schaefer, Towfigh and Gollmer examine and clarify several issues regarding early key sources such as those used by the Azalís as well as more scholarly interpretations of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths by such writers of the time as the

1. entitled *Der Bahā'ismus—Weltreligion der Zukunft?*

well-known Cambridge orientalist Edward G. Browne (1816–1882) and Arthur Comte de Gobineau (1862–1926). A fresh approach is taken to a wide range of theological, community and governance issues (e.g. methodology, divine law, the political dimension of the Bahá'í Faith), as well as in-depth analysis of such questions as the infallibility of institutions and 'covenant breaking'. *Making the Crooked Straight* responds to the harsh critique of Shoghi Effendi and the Guardianship and addresses the question of the authenticity of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament.

The second reason is a moral one. The lessons to be drawn from Ficicchia's case are in effect bigger than the author himself. According to Schaefer, Gollmer and Towfigh a decidedly unsound methodology is employed throughout Ficicchia's entire book. The case of acrimonious and deliberate distortion represents a phenomenon, a *typos* of a style and pattern of which the author is not the unique representative. In fact, the method and stratagems that are rejected by Schaefer, Gollmer and Towfigh are, in some respects, typical of a larger pattern spun by those who choose to write defamatory representations of the Bahá'í Faith, however such presentations may be disguised as scholarship.

The third reason for this book's importance is that it may be a foreshadowing of things to come. For as we move ahead into the newly dawned third millennium, and as the Bahá'í Faith continues to steadily assume its rightful place as the youngest of the sister religions of the world, other officers of disinformation may come and go. In this sense, *Making the Crooked Straight* both provides a welcome rejoinder and serves notice that Bahá'í scholars are well qualified to respond either to open or covert attacks of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

\* \* \*

It is pertinent to this discussion to focus briefly on a key issue raised by the publication of this book—the nature and function

of critical apologetics in Bahá'í scholarship today, only *one of* it should be noted, several modes of learning pursued by Bahá'í scholars. Paul Bernabeo writes: 'Any religion, monotheistic or otherwise, might adopt an apologetic posture under circumstances in which it perceives the need to defend itself against misunderstanding, criticism, discrimination or oppression. ...'[2] This book clearly falls into such a category, particularly under the mention 'misunderstanding' and 'criticism'. But in this case these words are euphemisms. Schaefer, Towfigh and Gollmer contend that the author's numerous distortions are not simply misunderstandings of one who has failed to grasp some essential feature of the Bahá'í Faith; not merely poor scholarship. The authors argue that Ficicchia's presentation makes errors of both omission and commission, that is, misapprehension and systematic disinformation. These serious assertions are well-supported by their textual arguments.

While running against the temper of our times, historically, apologetics is usually at its peak during the formative age of a religion, an age in which the Bahá'í Faith currently finds itself. While certain scholars have sometimes deplored the apologetic tone of some Bahá'í scholarship, such a stance has been necessitated by the demands of the present historical situation and by works such as the one written by Francesco Ficicchia. Systematic theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965) and David Krieger, one of today's global theologians, remind us that it was the 'apologetic impulse'[3] that first drove formative

2. 'Apologetics', *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (editor-in-chief Mircea Eliade), vol. 1, p. 349.

3. David J. Krieger, *The New Universalism*, pp. 17–18: 'I will show first how pluralism resulted from an internal split, a break in the continuity of Western cultural identity. This entails showing how Christian theology arose from apologetic impulse and how, to this day, the pragmatics of theological thinking, indeed all Western thinking, remain determined by what may be called the apologetic method ...'.

Christian theology.[4] This statement has a certain validity if applied to the development of Bahá'í theology. In terms of being suited to the present historical juncture, apologetical approaches to Bahá'í scholarship are far from being *passé*.

While Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, counsels his followers 'not to view with too critical an eye the sayings and writings of men' but to approach them 'in a spirit of openmindedness and sympathy',[5] those who have assailed the 'tenets of the Cause of God, are to be treated differently'. For these individuals Bahá'u'lláh has directed that:

It is incumbent upon all men, each according to his ability, to refute the arguments of those that have attacked the Faith of God.[6]

While critical apologetics may differ from other forms of *Religionswissenschaft*, the distinction disappears at the level of performance. This volume demonstrates that critical apologetics is neither anachronistic, nor can it be relegated to a second-class, narrowly functional speciality employed only when the Bahá'í Faith is subjected to attack. Here I note in passing that when the Protestant theologian, Emil Brunner (1889–1966) wrote that apologetics was not '... a distinct discipline but rather a dimension of all theology',[7] he probably did not have the great world religions in mind, but his statement would appear to apply to them all.

In the Introduction to this book, Udo Schaefer cites comparative religionists N. Ross Reat and Edmund F. Perry who in

4. Tillich called the apologetic movement '... the birthplace of a developed Christian theology', in *A History of Christian Thought*, p. 24.

5. *Gleanings* 154:1.

6. *ibid*.

7. Brunner's position as stated by Avery Dulles in *A History of Apologetics*, p. 233. Like Karl Barth, and notwithstanding the difference between them over the possibility of natural theology, Brunner also maintained a uniquely salvific role for Christianity.

the pluralistic spirit of the times confidently assert that ‘dogmatic, sectarian polemic—whether religious or secular in origin—is well and truly anachronistic at this, the dawn of the second [*sic*] millennium of the common era.’[8] While all those who recognize the value of interfaith dialogue and the necessity of peaceful conflict resolution readily assent to such an affirmation, polemical works such as *Der Bahā’ismus* demand a more assertive kind of refutation. For, if theological truth, like all truth, is still to be discovered and told, those who seek it have the right to be availed of authentic and reliable sources.

Looking at the apologetic approach from a broader perspective, one that collapses the secular-sacred distinction, we sometimes lose sight of the fact that apology applies as much to the secular world as to the realm of the sacred. Apology characterizes any advocacy or activist viewpoint and is very much alive in many secular movements today. As such, secular apologists, whatever their cause, share certain common features with their religious counterparts. Both are committed and convinced of the viewpoint they represent. On this basis, one could argue that there is nothing intrinsically religious about *apologia*. It is a basic dynamic of human thought that aspires to seek and defend the truth.

Apologetics as advocacy has a long history. Historically, the earliest uses of apology in ancient Greece were forensic. In the fifth century BCE, the rhetorician Coax of Syracuse gave legal counsel to those living under the newly established democratic regime in Syracuse who had been dispossessed of their property by earlier autocratic rulers. The ‘Art of Coax’ consisted of a five-part rhetorical/legal argument on their behalf.[9] Socrates’ defence before the Athenian Law Court recorded in Plato’s *Apology* is perhaps the most influential classical pres-

8. From *A World Theology. The Central Spiritual Reality of Mankind*, p. 311.

9. ‘Rhetoric’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. XIX (1959).

entation of apology and has left traces on legal discourse, theology and certain notions of morality and, of course, rhetoric.

Socrates' defence points to both the legal and moral aspects of apology. Wrongful accusation (several pointed cases are to be found in *Der Bahā'ismus*) requires defence so that the truth may be told. Where truth is told, justice is more readily served. In this sense, *Making the Crooked Straight* takes the part of the *Parákletos* or advocate, one who pleads the cause of another. The three Bahá'í scholars who argue in this volume plead for truth-telling vis-à-vis the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, a case of apologetics in the interests of justice, that is, discursive reasoning for the purpose of righting the wrong.

Today apology prevails in forensics, politics, teaching and certainly in advocacy journalism. Apology is implicit in the praise and maintenance of any socio-political system and/or world view. Indeed, David J. Krieger writes that the situation of 'radical pluralism' today is an outcome of 'apologetic universalism' in which both Christian theology and secular humanism (ironically), and indeed all western thinking are based on the 'apologetic method'. [10] Faced with what he sees as the collapse of both, Krieger seeks 'presuppositions for a global theology', [11] which seems to be increasingly taking the form of a new apologetic for a global society in which pluralism is increasingly becoming the norm.

*Making the Crooked Straight* presents itself as a variation of 'answering theology'. In Paul Tillich's monumental three-volume work, *Systematic Theology*, [12] answering theology forms part of the method of 'correlation', a method that is basically apologetic. In *A History of Christian Thought* Tillich writes: 'This is the apologetic form of theology which I use in my own

10. Krieger, op. cit., pp. 17f.

11. *ibid.* pp. 37-44.

12. 3 vols. (vol. 1: 1951, vol. 2: 1958, vol. 3: 1963), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



systematic theology, that is, the correlation between question and answer.’[13] Tillich points out that ‘... an apologia means a reply or answer to a judge in a court ...’[14] In his *Systematic Theology* Tillich’s view of ‘answering theology’ (correlation) reflects an existential perspective of the predicament of the human condition in that ‘it answers the questions implied in the “situation” in the power of the eternal message and with the means provided by the situation whose question it answers’.[15] By contrast, in *Making the Crooked Straight* answering theology comes in the form of refutation. But the arguments of these scholars are nonetheless pre-dialogical; written in the hope that they may lead to open inquiry and to real dialogue whose pre-eminent goal is, as always, the search for truth

Critical apologetics is responsible apologetics, a function that can be traced to the etymological root of the word ‘responsible’ from the Latin verb *respondere*, meaning to answer. Answering theology is, moreover, covenantal since it sees itself as being charged with a duty or obligation. The covenantal origins of the notion of responsibility are to be found ultimately in a sense of divine vocation and by implication define the theologian’s role as that of a committed member of a believing community.

Robert Parry well articulated this answering function of Bahá’í theology some twenty years ago during the Second Ethics and Methodology Seminar in Cambridge, England in a statement that still strikes us as being timely. Parry made the following point that typifies the approach taken in the present volume:

13. pp. 26f. Tillich, however, was aware of the dangers of the apologetical approach. In historical Christianity, he deplored the continual narrowing down and exclusion that resulted from dogmatic definition.

14. *ibid.*

15. *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, p. 6. For a fuller view of ‘correlation’ see Tillich’s methodological introduction to vol. I.

Apologetics is not shouting, neither is it passive listening to the criteria of the ‘world’. It is responsible engagement. Responsible, because it strikes at clarity and is undergone in responsibility and honesty by responsible believers; engagement because it is not afraid. What is continuous with the Word—the Bahá’í Revelation, i.e. a world conditioned by the possibility of being addressed—cannot be a fearful prospect.[16]

Bahá’u’lláh, referring to both the Cause he proclaimed and the unconcealed manner of his own conduct, despite the prolonged hostility of his persecutors in Persia and the Ottoman Empire, wrote in the Sixth Ṭaráz of the Tablet of Ṭarázát (Ornaments): ‘Concealment hath no access unto this station, nor is there any occasion for fear or silence.’[17] His precept finds concrete expression in the pages that follow.

J. A. McLean  
Spring 2000

16. Robert Parry, ‘Phenomenology, Methodological Agnosticism and Apologetics’ in the *Proceedings of the Second Bahá’í Ethics and Methodology Seminar*, Cambridge, England, 15–16 September, 1979, p. 19.
17. *Tablets* 4:27.

## **Preface to the German edition (1995)**

The names of the authors of the various parts of the book appear at the top of every page. The sections written by the authors are as follows:

Udo Schaefer: Introduction, ch. 1–5, Conclusion, Appendix

Nicola Towfigh: ch. 8, 9.I. and 10.II–IV

Ulrich Gollmer: ch. 6, 7, 9.II, 10.I. and II.

The authors would like to take this opportunity to express their gratitude to all those who subjected the manuscript to thorough review and made valuable comments and constructive suggestions: Ian Semple and Christopher Sprung; and for specific manuscripts—Dr Kamran Ekbal, Dr Ihsan Halabi, Peter Mühlshlegel and Dr Friedo Zölzer. The critical dialogue that took place was an invaluable opportunity for us to reconsider certain points and include some details that might otherwise have been overlooked. We hope, therefore, that errors and one-sided views, which can easily arise in such a complex study, will be found to be few.

We are indebted to Stephen Lambden for his valuable information on Persian and Arabic sources. We are also sincerely grateful to Sigrun Schaefer. She spent countless hours of research in various libraries in connection with the first five chapters, and she also took on the laborious task of standardizing the manuscripts and preparing them for publication.

In quotations from the works of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá numbers cited refer to the section and paragraph numbers of the work, which appear in the margins of most recent publications. Some works of secondary literature from which quotations appear frequently are also cited under their abbreviated title. Arabic and Persian terms have been transcribed according to the transcription system generally used in the Bahá'í community (see *Bahá'í World*, vol. 18, Haifa, 1986, pp. 893ff.).

Longer Latin quotations have not been translated in cases where they serve to emphasize and illustrate the text; their meaning is evident from the context. The two quotations from St Augustine and Pope Gregory the Great, which precede the text and serve as epigraphs, can be translated as follows:

That which they found through their curiosity, they have lost through their arrogance.

It is better for scandal to arise than for the truth to be relinquished.

*The authors*

## **Preface to the English edition (2000)**

Hardly had the German edition of this work been published in 1995 when requests for an English edition began to be received. The prospects for that were, at the time, extremely dim. In view of the size of the volume and its far from simple language, it was clear that only a professional translator of the highest calibre would be in a position to translate the book into English. That this edition has, after all, been produced is due to two fortunate sets of circumstances:

Hearing what stood in the way of the publication of an English edition, Dr Faramarz Ettehadieh, living in Linz, Austria, spontaneously offered to defray the considerable translation costs. Both the authors and the publishers would like to thank him most sincerely for his generous financial sponsorship of this project.

The second fortunate circumstance was that in Dr Geraldine Schuckelt we found a translator with the ability to deal with the complexities of the text, who set about the task without delay and brought it to a successful conclusion. We are much obliged to her for this outstanding achievement.

Translation—referred to by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as ‘one of the most difficult arts’—demands, on the one hand, accuracy and faithfulness to the original text, as well as, on the other hand, vitality, expressiveness and elegance in the target language. The bridge between these two requirements can hardly be spanned by a single translator working in isolation. The linguistic quality of even the best translation can be improved through critical scrutiny by competent editorial reviewers. This time-consuming

task was conducted, alongside their professional duties, by Dr John Hatcher, Professor of English literature at the University of South Florida in Tampa; J. A. McLean, a scholar of religious studies and writer; and Dr Craig Volker, a linguist at the Gifu University in Japan. We should hereby like to express our sincere gratitude for their hard work and for their many helpful suggestions and comments.

On the translation of the German theological and legal terms in a Bahá'í context the reader is referred to the Appendix written for this English edition, where problems of terminology are discussed.

We are especially grateful also to our editor at George Ronald Publishers, Dr May Hofman, for her highly competent and prudent work. It was a pleasure to work with her.

Last but not least, we should like to thank Sigrun Schaefer, without whose constant work this book could not have been published. She painstakingly sought out all the quotations from the huge variety of sources in the sometimes obscure English editions of the works cited in the original; she also keyed in the various alterations to the text on the computer, composed the index, and finally, in order to keep publishing costs down, she prepared the entire manuscript for printing.

*The authors*

## Introduction

In 1981, the Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen (EZW)[1] published a monograph by Francesco Ficicchia entitled *Der Bahá'ismus. Weltreligion der Zukunft? Geschichte, Lehre und Organisation in kritischer Anfrage*[2] as part of a series of texts produced by the Quell-Verlag publishing company, with whom the EZW is closely associated. In his foreword, the editor Michael Mildenerger described the book as the 'first authentic and at the same time critical presentation' of the Bahá'í Faith, and as a work that would close a tangible gap, since a 'comprehensive critical presentation' had been lacking for decades. He attested to the quality of the book as 'a standard work in the field of religious studies' that could 'scarcely be surpassed'[3] for a long time to come and would long remain 'signal for anyone who wishes to study the Bahá'í Faith'.[4]

This book that was touted as a ground-breaking work is, in fact, a caricature. A Bahá'í reading this allegedly academic 'standard work' cannot escape the impression that his faith is being reflected through a distorting mirror. Almost everything is twisted and disfigured beyond recognition.

1. Central Office of the Protestant Church for Questions of Ideology, hereafter referred to as EZW.
2. 'Bahá'ism—Religion of the Future? History, Doctrine and Organization: A Critical Inquiry'.
3. p. 13.
4. Inside cover.

For a start, the book contains a large quantity of demonstrably false information, so-called ‘facts’ that, in themselves, convey to an uninformed reader a very negative, tendentious image of the Bahá’í Faith. Worse than this, however, and much more difficult to refute, are the multitude of misleading insinuations, unfounded interpretations, abstruse conclusions and malignant distortions, which the author uses to portray such a repulsive picture of this religion that the reader is bound to ask in surprise how such a faith could attract followers and spread throughout the world.

Ficicchia’s book, which was much advertised at the time of its publication, can now be found in virtually all libraries of German-speaking Europe. Because of the efficient propaganda of the Protestant Church, it is undoubtedly the most widespread book on the Bahá’í Faith in German-speaking countries, and consequently has played a significant role in shaping the public perception of the Bahá’í Faith.

Even at the time of its publication, it was evident that with this book the Bahá’ís were faced with a challenge of new dimensions. Whereas an earlier attack on the Bahá’í Faith from within a tiny circle of dissidents had disqualified itself in the eyes of the critical reader through its gushing emotionality, its foaming polemics and its awkward title,[5] Ficicchia’s book came in the guise of a work of serious academic scholarship, leading the reader to believe that the information presented was the fruit of an ‘in-depth study of the sources’ in which the author had ‘self-critically and strictly observed the standards of research in the field of religious studies’, as Mildenerger attested in his eulogy.[6]

5. Hermann Zimmer, *Eine Testamentsfälschung wertet die Bahá’í-Religion ab in den politischen Shoghismus*, Waiblingen-Stuttgart, 1971. English edition *A Fraudulent Testament Devalues the Bahai Religion into Political Shoghism*, Waiblingen, 1973.

6. Ficicchia, Bahá’ismus, Foreword, p. 12.



At first sight, the book does, indeed, give the impression of being a critical academic publication. It has a systematic structure, numerous notes, cross-references, quotations from academic literature and Bahá'í primary sources. It employs Hebrew and Ancient Greek terms, as well as basic Persian and Arabic terms, and provides a transliteration table for Arabic words and a list of references. All of this leads the unsuspecting reader to believe initially that the author is someone who is well acquainted with the research in religious studies, and who aims to present carefully analysed, balanced findings and, while retaining a critical distance from his subject, will try to provide an objective, well-founded study of the Bahá'í Faith. This appearance of competence explains why the work has received such positive assessment in the academic press.[7]

7. In the journal *Anthropos* (78 (1983), pp. 936ff.) Joseph Henninger wrote in detail about Ficicchia's hypotheses, uncritically adopting them and 'unreservedly' endorsing Mildenerger's assessment that the author had 'self-critically and strictly observed the standards of research in the field of religious studies'. Hans-Joachim Klimkeit (*Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. 36 (1984), pp. 93ff.) praised the 'thorough investigation' and shared Mildenerger's judgement that Ficicchia's book constituted 'a standard work in the field of religious studies' (p. 94). Olaf Schumann (*Islam*, vol. LXII, Issue 1, pp. 184ff.) went into detail about Ficicchia's research findings, on occasion adopting his biting criticism and concluding that the author had succeeded in 'painting a picture of Bahá'ism that does justice to the self-image of its followers [sic!] and that brings significant advances in the academic study of this religion' (p. 186). He is of the opinion that the author should be thanked for 'offering with this work a clear and sound portrayal of this "most recent of world religions"' (p. 185). The Bonn Catholic theologian Hans Waldenfels SJ, too, concurred with Ficicchia's criticism, unhesitatingly adopting a number of his accusations and asserting that the Bahá'ís would have difficulty refuting the book (*Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* (1982), p. 237). It was also Waldenfels, in his capacity as editor of the reference work *Lexikon der Religionen* published by Herder (Freiburg, 1987), who later commissioned Ficicchia, as a 'proven expert' (letter from the publisher Herder-Verlag dated 8 May 1991) to write the entry under the keyword '*Bahá'ism*' in the same manner as the monograph in question. Günter

Considering the book's grandiose appearance and its approval within the academic community, how was the German Bahá'í community to react? Attacks on an institutionalized religion nowadays create a very awkward situation, as the EZW is undoubtedly aware. For instance, the dispute surrounding Eugen Drewermann[8] has clearly shown this. The Bahá'ís were faced with an inescapable dilemma: if they took up the challenge of such attacks and tried to invalidate them, they would be confronted with the judgement, '*Qui s'excuse s'accuse!*'. [9] If, on the other hand, they remained silent in order to steer clear of fruitless controversy and renewed attacks and to avoid conflict, the judgement would be: '*Qui tacet, consentire videtur.*' [10] Not to dispute something amounts to concession, a legal principle that prevails throughout the whole of German civil law. There was a broad spectrum of opinion in the German Bahá'í community concerning the appropriate reaction to Ficicchia's book. In the end, it was decided not to react to this extremely injurious publication.

There were good reasons for this decision:

Lanczkowski called the book 'a comprehensive presentation that will gain lasting significance as a standard work' (*Theologische Rundschau*, vol. 48 (1983), p. 210). Christian Cannuyer assesses the book as 'un travail de niveau universitaire, d'une information riche et précise mais très critique' (*Les Bahá'ís—Peuple de la Triple Unité*, p. 165).

8. A Catholic theologian and psychoanalyst, well-known author of a number of books (see below, p. 19, note 19) in which he analyses and portrays church history and church doctrine by methods of depth psychology. His assertions were the subject of a public controversy, which resulted in the revocation of his *missio canonica* (Canonical authorization to teach theology).

9. '*Dum excusare credis, accusas*' (Saint Jerome, *Ep. quat. ad Virg.* c. 3).

10. '*... videtur, ubi loqui potuit et debuit*': He who is silent gives consent, where he could and ought to speak, *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, Decr., Liber sextus 5, 13, 43 (Boniface VIII). See also Detlef Liebs, *Lateinische Rechtsregeln und Rechtssprichwörter*, p. 176, no. 80 with reference to many regulations in the Civil Code and in the code of commercial law.

Undoubtedly the style of the book is hardly an invitation to objective dialogue. Attempts at a critical analysis of its contents, and particularly of Ficicchia's methodology, inevitably draw one into depths that deter one from embarking upon such a venture. An even greater deterrent, however, is the fact that the current *zeitgeist* of thorough-going secularism (and indifference to religious claims to unconditionality) is ill-disposed to religious apologetics. In the present world which has been strongly influenced by the spirit of the Enlightenment and in which religion is no longer the standard and focal point of life, it has been assumed for the past century that religion would gradually die out. If religion is no longer a topic of discussion, then religious controversies are of no interest either.[11] Although there is today a renewal of interest in spiritual experiences and values, and people are again seeking orientation and a religious sense of purpose, they are seeking them, not in institutionalized religion, or established Christianity with its binding creed, its monopoly on truth, its traditional rituals and symbols of authority, but instead in the new, non-binding 'offers of salvation'.[12] In today's climate of post-modernity where 'anything goes' as far as the metaphysical is concerned and in which universal claims to truth arouse suspicion,[13] in the current age 'patchwork religion', where a 'pluralization of the horizons of meaning'

11. Shortly after the Second World War, Hans-Joachim Schoeps, a Jewish scholar, commented on the 'new phenomenon of non-belief that 'abstains from conducting disputes—even of a polemical kind—with the religious scriptures and with the upholders of religious faith', an attitude that is 'no longer one of unbelief and doubt' but rather of 'non-belief and indifference' (*Jüdisch-christliches Religionsgespräch in neunzehn Jahrhunderten*, pp. 154ff.).

12. See 'Wende zum Mythos. Wieviel Mythos braucht der Mensch?', in *Herrenalber Protokolle* 48, Evangelische Akademie Baden (ed.), Karlsruhe, 1988; Schaefer, *Beyond the Clash of Religions*, pp. 32ff.

13. On this subject see Heiner Barz, *Postmoderne Religion* (Jugend and Religion 2), pp. 88ff., 115ff., 136ff., 247ff.

and an ‘individualization of definitions of purpose’[14] has taken place, interreligious disputes are perceived as being pointless and irritating.

People today are tired of religious controversies and polemic. The conflict between the religions and within the various denominations has led over the millennia to violence, war and untold suffering. If any real progress has been made, it is in the growing realization that humanity can only survive if world peace is secured, and that universal peace is impossible without peace among the religions. One of ‘the most important phenomena of the twentieth century’ is, according to Küng, the ‘slow awakening of a global ecumenical consciousness’, the ‘beginning of a serious religious dialogue’[15]—a dialogue that has already been given a tangible form in the ‘Declaration on Global Ethics’ issued by the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago on 4 September 1993.[16] Religious controversies are inappropriate in such a climate.[17] Moreover, a religious community dedicated to overcoming narrow-minded dogmatism, religious strife[18] and religious fanaticism,[19] and whose founder exhorts ‘the peoples of the world to observe tolerance’,[20] to ‘as-

14. Thomas Luckmann, *Die unsichtbare Religion*, pp. 133ff.

15. *Christianity and the World Religions*, p. xiv. It was Küng who coined the formula ‘No survival without a world ethic. No world peace without peace between the religions. No peace between the religions without dialogue between the religions’ (*Global Responsibility*, p. xv).

16. See Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel (eds.), *A Global Ethic. The Declaration of the Parliament of the World’s Religions*, London: SCM Press, 1993.

17. ‘Dogmatic, sectarian polemic—whether religious or secular in origin—is well and truly anachronistic at this, the dawn of a second millennium of the common era’ (Reat and Perry, *A World Theology*, p. 311).

18. ‘... the strife and dissension which religious differences provoke’ (Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets* 6:40).

19. ‘... a world-devouring fire’ and a ‘desolating affliction’ (Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 19 (p. 14)). *Tablets* 4:12.

sociate with joy and radiance'[21] and calls upon his followers to 'consort with all religions with amity and concord',[22] 'in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship',[23] is unlikely to be inclined to engage in polemical disputes with the representatives of other religions, especially in view of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's urgent admonition that the purpose of religion is to 'unite all hearts', to cause 'love and affection' and to overcome 'wars and disputes'.[24]

Thus, for a decade Ficicchia's foolhardy hypotheses went unrefuted. Willingly taken over and promulgated by church handbooks,[25] they occasionally succeeded in seeping through into academic literature.[26] It has even occurred that state authorities refer to these books for guidance[27] in connection with legal ap-

21. *ibid.* 3:5.

22. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 144.

23. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 4:10.

24. 'If religion becomes a cause of dislike, hatred and division, it were better to be without it, and to withdraw from such a religion would be a truly religious act. For it is clear that the purpose of a remedy is to cure; but if the remedy should only aggravate the complaint it had better be left alone' (*Paris Talks* 40:11).

25. See, for example, Horst Reller and Manfred Kießig, *Handbuch Religiöse Gemeinschaften*, pp. 628–641.

26. See Christian Jäggi, *Zum interreligiösen Dialog zwischen Christentum, Islam und Baha'itum*, Frankfurt am Main, 1987.

27. Concerned by the dangers that obviously emanate from certain groups within the broad spectrum of new offers of salvation, authorities are understandably reacting with increasing scepticism towards religious communities outside the traditional churches and seek information from 'critical' sources before making decisions concerning legal applications. A particularly striking case demonstrates the consequences when the source of information is Ficicchia's 'standard work' on the Bahá'í Faith. An application submitted by the Local Spiritual Assembly of Berlin-Steglitz dated 5 January 1988 (Ref. Tief II 6) for permission to set up an information stand in a public place was rejected by the Berlin-Steglitz District Office in a communication dated 25 January 1988, with the following justification: 'According to our information, young people can join your organization without prior knowledge of the faith. Furthermore, in recruiting new believers you frequently fail to point out the

plications submitted by Bahá'í assemblies and then try to prevent their activities, describing them as a religious community with allegedly 'radical political ideas' and 'fascist tendencies'. [28]

This is the point at which the bounds of acceptability are overstepped. If others followed suit, the German Bahá'í community would be intolerably hindered in the practice of its religion, and if such accusations were to become established in official rulings, it would be almost impossible to refute them with mere counter-arguments. For—and this is particularly so in the case of Ficicchia's 'standard work' and his encyclopaedia entries—'the simple fact of being put into writing' lends, as the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer points out, 'especially weighty authority' to an argument: 'The written word has the tangible quality of something that can be demonstrated and is like a proof. It needs a special critical effort to free oneself from the prejudice in favour of what is written down and to distinguish

long catalogue of norms and the other regulations, such as the fact that every member has the obligation of unconditional obedience and that public criticism and expression of opinion are forbidden upon pain of excommunication. In cases where all the members of a family are Bahá'ís, such excommunication can result in the rupture of all family ties, since even relatives are strictly prohibited from having contact with the "outcast". In addition to the fact that, in the above respects, contradictions to the free and democratic order of Germany are evident, there exists, in particular, the danger that young people who have gained insight into the workings of your organization are placed before the unreasonable alternative of either breaking off all family ties or remaining members of the Bahá'í against their own convictions. To promote the spread of your goals and recruitment for your organization by granting a permit for the erection of an information stand, as sought in your application, would be in contradiction to the general public interest ..., which is intended, among other things, to guarantee the protection of young people from damaging influences.' This incredible justification for the rejection—which was later reversed—whereby the Bahá'ís were bunched together with subversive organizations, is unmistakably based on Ficicchia's allegations. Needless to say, these allegations are untrue. They are dealt with in the relevant sections of this book.

28. Ficicchia, 'Der *Bahá'ismus*—ungewisse Zukunft der Zukunftsreligion', in *Materialdienst* 15/16, Issue 38 (1975), p. 238.

here also, as with all oral assertions, between opinion and truth.’[29] Hence, as long as the Bahá’ís are unable to refer to written evidence, to literature in which the distorted and defamatory attacks are individually analysed and subtly refuted, the public will conclude that a religious community whose members remain silent in the face of such criticism and do not defend themselves must have no conclusive and demonstrable counter-proofs. The established churches can afford to ignore attacks on them and to trust in the judgement of the critical reader,[30] but a religion whose history and teachings are still largely unresearched and which is largely unknown to the general reading public cannot afford to trust in the reader’s judgement.

The rebuttal published here is therefore a necessary act of self-defence. It is not our intention to throw down the gauntlet before the EZW which shares in the responsibility for publishing Ficicchia’s work. However, it cannot be expected that a relatively small religious community, whose position as a ‘cognitive minority’ in Germany is already awkward and uncertain, should, for the sake of peace, forever humbly maintain silence when faced with accusations that threaten its very existence, especially when those accusations are being wielded against it by a church authority whose principal concern is to maintain its own monopoly on truth.

To make an assertion is one thing; to refute it is quite another. It is easier and quicker to fling accusations than to invalidate them, especially if they are compounded by baseless value judgements. An encyclopaedic rebuttal of everything that Ficic-

29. *Truth and Method*, p. 241.

30. Even so, in early 1993 twenty-five church historians subjected the complete works of Karl-Heinz Deschner to critical analysis. Their contributions were published by Herder Verlag in an anthology, Hans Reinhard Seeliger (ed.), *Kriminalisierung des Christentums? Karl-Heinz Deschners Kirchengeschichte auf dem Prüfstand*, Freiburg, 1993.

chia portrays in a false or distorted manner is neither intended here, nor possible, nor necessary;[31] the detailed analysis of this incriminating book is in itself too great an honour for its author—not to speak of the danger of tiring the reader with the endless, but unavoidable corrections.[32] The present publication is not intended for the reader’s personal edification. It is a factual work in which the authors have made straight that which Ficicchia had made ‘crooked’ and which had been passed on ‘like an eternal, rank contagion’[33] for over ten years and was damaging the reputation of the Bahá’í Faith in German-speaking countries.

The major factual errors made by ‘today’s greatest expert on Bahá’ism’ alone disqualify him as a credible author. The emotionally charged nature of his work makes it also necessary to examine his academic qualifications, as well as his special interests and motives, because these have an impact bearing on his use of sources.

Finally, a word about the style of this book. A rebuttal is necessarily influenced by the material under scrutiny. The latter determines the logical structures of the critique. If in what purports to be an academic study, the most sacred elements of a religion—its founding figure, its teachings and its followers—are subjected to biting, frequently cynical criticism, and are disparaged and defamed, then the dictum ‘*suaviter in modo, for-*

31. The fact that a particular point is not discussed here should not lead one to the hasty conclusion that anything that is not expressly refuted is admitted to be true.

32. The reader will occasionally encounter overlaps. These are difficult to avoid when several authors are discussing a very complex phenomenon. The various issues are so portrayed as to be comprehensible within themselves, and it is not certain that the reader will recall particular facts and arguments presented earlier in a different context. Cross-referencing is used to increase the transparency of the various contributions.

33. Goethe, *Faust*, Part 1, The Study, Mephistopheles (p. 86).



*titer in re!*'[34] cannot be applied. Gentle hints using 'words as mild as milk'[35] are insufficient. A lie must be called a lie, a manipulation a manipulation. Clear and direct language has been employed here. Someone who publishes such a baneful work should not complain about polemics. No-one regrets more than the present authors of this rebuttal that the tone of Ficicchia's book forces all who critically examine it to lower themselves to the same seamy depths in order to refute his arguments.

Some may attempt to dismiss this rebuttal as merely 'polemical'[36] or an 'apologetic', in expectation, perhaps, that these terms are 'negatively loaded'[37] indeed even 'stigmatized.' In fact, apologetics—the establishment of the theology and content of one's own faith, comparison through argument with other positions, and defence against polemical attacks and clever misrepresentations—has been indispensable in the development of

34. 'Gentle in manner, resolute in matter' (Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615), general of the Jesuits).

35. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 11:31; 9:20.

36. This is generally regarded as distasteful, but occasionally, when a work strays too far off the path of reputability and a refutation is essential, it cannot be avoided—*difficile est satiram non scribere!*—, as is demonstrated by Gernot Rotter's book *Allahs Plagiator* (Heidelberg, 1992), in which the author (a professor of oriental studies) tears to pieces the works of radio and television journalist Gerhard Konzelmann (a prolific author of books on the Near East), who has been presented by his publisher as the 'expert most intimately acquainted with Arabia'. The dedication prefacing Rotter's book would have been equally applicable for this rebuttal of the work of the 'proven expert' and 'excellent scholar in the field of Bahá'ism' and his 'standard work in the field of religious studies' that could 'scarcely be surpassed' for a long time to come: 'To all self-professed experts, non-fiction authors and those who produce enemy images, for reflection.'

37. Hans-Jörg Hemminger, Foreword to 'Begegnung und Auseinandersetzung. Apologetik in der Arbeit der EZW' (*Impulse* 39, IX/1994). Recently a reappearance of apologetic theology has been described: Matthias Petzoldt, 'Apologetische Theologie heute', in EZW (ed.), *Beiträge zu einer christlichen Apologetik*, Berlin, 1999.

self-consciousness, identity and self-assertion in all religions. Christian theology grew out of the apologetic enterprise. In short, there is no reason why apologetics on the church's part should have been legitimate scholarship for two thousand years but should now be regarded as suspect or inappropriate when conducted by the Bahá'ís simply because it is not fashionable.[38]

Perhaps this rebuttal will give the EZW occasion for self-critical reflection. Perhaps that institution will consider whether the publication of Ficicchia's work served the cause of truth or not and whether or not continuing to publish such a work would be a responsible course of action.

38. The first eminent Bahá'í apologist was Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání, a brilliant scholar, before his conversion head of the theological college of Teheran. His most brilliant work *Kitáb al-Fará'id*, Cairo, 1315/1897–98, a defence of Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Íqán* against an attack by a prominent Shaykh, is still unpublished in western languages. About its contents see Christopher Buck's *Symbol and Secret*, pp. 252ff. and Kavian Sadeghzade Milani and Leila Rassekh Milani, 'The Proof based on Establishment (Dalíl-i-Taqrír) and The Proof based on Verses (Hujjiyyat-i-Ayát): An Introduction to Bahá'í-Muslim Apologetics', in *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, VII.4 (June—Sept. 1997) pp. 20ff. In this same article Abu'l-Faḍl's *Faṣṭul-Khiṭáb* (Dundas, Canada: Institute for Bahá'í Studies in Persian, 1995), is dealt with as well. Abu'l-Faḍl's treatise *Burhán-i-Lámi*, a response to a harsh criticism by a London preacher, was translated into English on instructions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and was published under the title *The Brilliant Proof*, Chicago, 1912. A new edition with a new foreword has been published by Kalimát, Los Angeles, 1997. On Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl see Taherzadeh, *Revelation*, vol. 3, pp. 93–107, 435–439.

# **Part I**

## **Methodology**

# Chapter 1

## Overview

### I. The limits of religious knowledge

The goal of all academic research is to find truth, yet religion is a subject that is only partially accessible to scientific analysis. The core of truth, the essential mystery of a religion, is beyond the reach of science. There are no scientific criteria for a religion's claim to truth; it can be neither proven nor disproven scientifically. Scholars working in the field of religious studies can investigate and describe only the historical, phenomenological, and sociological aspects of their subject. The academic discipline of religious studies is by nature descriptive, narrative and comparative. Where normative statements are nevertheless made and critical judgements are arrived at, these are necessarily based on certain preconditions,[1] on subjective standard values which cannot be questioned or even on dogmatic positions, and the study ceases to be scientific in the strict sense of the word. The extent to which the study of religion, in particular, is influenced by the researcher's own 'circular structure of understand-

1. 'Every statement has preconditions that are no longer stated. Only if one infers these preconditions can one really assess the truth of a statement' (Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Was ist Wahrheit?', in *Hermeneutik* II, p. 52). An English edition of vol. I of Gadamer's famous book (*Hermeneutik. Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, vol. I, Tübingen, 6th edn. 1990; vol. II, Tübingen, 2nd edn. 1993) has been published under the title *Truth and Method*, London: Sheed & Ward, 2nd edn. 1979. There is no English edition of vol. II (*Hermeneutik* II).

ing’,[2] his standpoint, his subjective attitude to the object of his research, his presuppositions (*vorverständnis*),[3] his assumptions proceeding from his basic religious views, his ‘dogmatic pre-convictions’,[4] and his subliminal, sub-conscious intentions and interests is something I have dealt with in detail elsewhere.[5] According to Gadamer, the idea of a truth in the humanities that is ‘detached from the standpoint of the observer’ is ‘a phantom’ that should be ‘annihilated’ in the name of science.[6]

The EZW publishes a wealth of highly interesting, well-researched material[7] on the *zeitgeist* and on religious life in the present day; however, it does so not in the service of academic study but on behalf of ecclesiastical preaching, with an apologetic stance. As Gottfried Küenzlen has fittingly remarked, it conducts ‘the business of church-appointed apologists’.[8] In its interpretations, analyses, and critical judgements it is clearly guided by vested interests. When it presents phenomena outside the church in a critical light, it is not pursuing academic, but rather apologetic and pastoral ends. After all, the material prepared by the EZW serves the purpose of enlightening and warning church-goers about rival claims to religious truth. That is a perfectly legitimate aim—but it cannot be called objective elucidation.

2. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 235.

3. Being caught up in pre-knowledge, a term developed from philosopher Martin Heidegger’s disclosure of the fore-structures of understanding (*Being and Time*, p. 153, frequently used by fellow philosopher Gadamer (*Truth and Method*, pp. 235ff., 261ff., 475)).

4. Hans Küng, *Christianity and the World Religions*, p. 29.

5. See *The Light Shines in Darkness*, pp. 146ff.; *Beyond the Clash*, pp. 96ff. ‘Wahrheit in den Geisteswissenschaften’, in *Hermeneutik II*, p. 40.

Gadamer cites as an example the study of history, in which the verdict passed on a single historical event by various researchers is very different depending on the national interests of each individual’s home country—‘not out of calculation as to effect, but out of an inner sense of belonging that dictates the standpoint to be taken’ (*ibid.* p. 42).

7. Hence, Ficicchia’s ‘standard work’ is all the more misplaced.

8. ‘Kirche und die geistigen Strömungen der Zeit’, p. 14.

tion. In any case, why should an ecclesiastical body concern itself with another religion simply for the sake of academic study and then present the public with a long treatise on the subject?

Surprisingly, the editor Michael Miltenberger has openly admitted that the church is ‘partisan’ in its assessment of rival claims to truth: ‘It would be unreasonable to demand of the churches the distance and objectivity claimed by science. The churches argue from their own standpoints. They are partisan and must remain so. Otherwise, they cannot remain faithful to the religious truth that they stand for, and can no longer fulfil their function of orientation.’[9]

When the EZW publishes a monograph on the Bahá’í Faith claiming to be a ‘critical inquiry’, it must be realized that the very fact of the ‘rivalry’ between two faiths means that caution is called for as regards the vested interests and ulterior motives behind its publication.[10] A state of tension exists, to say the least, between the strict scientific methodology, impartiality, objectivity that are demanded of an academic work, and the indisputable apologetic goals and the partisanship that has been conceded. The criteria for legitimate critical theological assessment of extra-ecclesiastical phenomena are, of course, based on dogmatic positions of orthodox church doctrine. In view of Cyprian’s doctrine that ‘*Extra ecclesiam salus non est*’[11]—which is still held valid today[12]—any post-biblical claim to divine revelation will inevitably be condemned as religious usurpation. Therefore, the religious phenomena described are bound to be interpreted differently than they are when regarded through the eyes of a believer.

9. ‘Die religiöse Szene. Kirchliche Apologetik als Sündenbock’, in *Evangelische Kommentare* (1982), Issue 4, p. 191.

10. A thought that, remarkably, did not occur to the reviewers.

11. ‘No salvation outside the Church!’

12. See *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, no. 846.

There is no valid reason why a presentation of a religion prefaced by the term ‘critical’ is constantly given preference over presentations written by the believers themselves. The one is no more ‘scientific’ than the other. Both must be judged as to whether or not they are scientific in their methods.

## II. ‘Critical literature’

A faith will, of course, always be presented differently from the outside than from the inside. An outsider necessarily sees things with different eyes than someone who knows of the mystery of a religion.[13] The portrayal of central figures in Christianity (Jesus, or Paul, for example) and of Christian doctrine by Jewish thinkers—such as Moses Mendelsohn,[14] Salomon Ludwig Steinheim,[15] Hans-Joachim Schoeps or contemporary Jewish writers such as Pinchas Lapide or Schalom Ben-Chorin—diverges widely from that conveyed by Christians. Are these interpretations more objective, more correct, just because they are ‘critical’ of official church doctrine and reach different conclusions about it? In that case, Goethe’s verdict on church history,[16] Karl-Heinz Deschner’s[17] condemnation of Christianity,[18] Eugen Dre-

13. Martin Buber formulates this as follows: ‘The other’s mystery is within himself and cannot be perceived from the outside. Nobody outside Israel understands the mystery of Israel. And nobody outside Christendom understands the mystery of Christendom. And in not understanding they can acknowledge one another in the mystery’ (*Die Stunde und die Erkenntnis*, p. 155).

14. 1729–1786.

15. 1789–1866.

16. He called it ‘a mish-mash of error and violence’ (Johann Wolfgang v. Goethe, ‘Zahme Xenien IX’, quoted from *Goethes Gedichte in zeitlicher Folge*, p. 1121).

17. In the judgement of the Viennese philosopher Wolfgang Stegmüller, this ex-Catholic is the ‘most significant critic of the church this century’.

18. *Abermals krähte der Hahn. Eine kritische Kirchengeschichte von den Anfängen bis zu Pius XII.*, Stuttgart, 1962; *Kriminalgeschichte des*

wermann's analysis of church history from the point of view of depth psychology,[19] and Uta Ranke-Heinemann's sweeping blows against the Bible and the church[20] would, simply by virtue of their 'critical' character, be *eo ipso* superior to all Christian self-presentations in their correctness and reliability. I am sure the EZW does not draw this conclusion.

'Critical' literature on the Bahá'í Faith produced in the past in the German-speaking (and also in the English-speaking[21]) countries originated exclusively from the pens of Christian theologians and was written in definite pursuance of self-interest, i.e. to resist Bahá'í missionary activities in the Western world, as these Christian writers themselves readily conceded. Hermann Römer, who—knowing neither Arabic nor Persian—was largely indebted for his information to the British orientalist Browne,[22] openly admitted the apologetic, missionary

*Christentums*, Reinbek, vol. I (1986), vol. II (1988), vol. III (1990), vol. IV (1994).

19. *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese*, Olten, 1984; idem, *Strukturen des Bösen*, Paderborn, 1988; idem, *Kleriker-Psychogramm eines Ideals*, Munich, 1991.

20. *Nein und Amen. Anleitung zum Glaubenszweifel*, Hamburg, 1992.

21. J. R. Richards (*The Religion of the Baha'is*, London, 1934) was an Anglican Church missionary in Syria and later a bishop in Wales. William McElwee Miller (*Bahā'ism*, New York, 1931; *The Bahá'í Faith: Its History and Teachings*, South Pasadena, Calif., 1974) was a missionary of the Presbyterian Church in Iran. A detailed analysis of Miller's works has been made by Douglas Martin, 'The Missionary as Historian', pp. 1–29.

22. *Die Bábī-Behā'ī* (Potsdam, 1911, doctoral thesis), Foreword. Considering that academic research in this field was then in its infancy, this theological thesis is a thorough, remarkably informative study. Nevertheless, Römer's findings, in particular his conclusions and verdicts, are heavily obscured not only by his confessed vested interests but especially by his strong and uncritical reliance on Browne. Great credit is undoubtedly due to Browne for his research on Bábism. The Bahá'ís are indebted to him, the only European of significance to have met Bahá'u'lláh, for the impressive report concerning his audience in 'Akká (*A Traveller's Narrative*, vol. II, pp. xxxix–xl). However, Browne's research was strongly influenced by his subjective conviction that not



purpose of his research: ‘My study sprang from the practical need to counter the propaganda of the Bahá’ís in Germany ... At the same time, the study is meant to serve Christian missionary work in the Mohammedan world.’[23] For his critique, Gerhard Rosenkranz—to whom goes the honour of recognizing and emphasizing the independent character of the Bahá’í Faith as a revealed religion, as a ‘prophetic religion’[24]—relies in turn greatly on Römer and states that one of the reasons why he, as a Christian theologian, produced his study was the opportunity ‘to reflect on the special nature of the Christian Message’.[25] In the concluding ‘theological verdict’, he again clearly stressed the ‘uniqueness of the Christian faith’ and critically contrasted it with the new message of salvation.[26] This type of literature serves the purposes of Christian apologetics, of promoting the Christian image, thereby reducing its academic value.

That the self-image of a religion must be the point of orientation for any portrayal of that religion by non-believers, that

Bahá’u’lláh but his rival Mírzá Yahyá (Subh-i-Azal) was the legitimate claimant to the position of successor to the Báb (see H. M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá’í Faith*, London, 1970, and Towfigh’s contribution here, below, pp. 529ff.). Römer adopted Browne’s errors and false judgements as his own. He stands alone, however, in his verdict that the Bahá’í Faith is ‘by character a dervish order, and thanks only to its association with the modern cultural movement does it appear in so much more modern guise as to render unrecognizable its blood relationship to its elder sisters’ (pp. 175f.). On Römer see Gollmer, below, pp. 546ff.

23. *ibid.* Foreword.

24. *Die Bahá’í*, p. 7. In his statement dated 3 October 1961, in connection with the persecution of Bahá’ís in Turkey at that time, Rosenkranz elucidated his earlier stated position once again: ‘In the recent history of religion, Bahá’ism stands as an example of how a movement can arise out of an existing world religion—in this case Islam—which not only raises the claim of itself being a world religion, but which in addition has all the religious-phenomenological characteristics of one’ (see Schaefer, ‘The Bahá’í Faith: Sect or Religion?’, p. 17).

25. *Die Bahá’í*, p. 7.

26. *ibid.* p. 59.

a religion must be able to recognize itself in a portrait,[27] is an accepted methodological standard today.[28] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a Canadian scholar in the field of comparative religious studies, has established the rule that no statement on another religion is valid ‘unless theoretically its validity can be verified both by the persons involved and by critical observers not involved’.[29] With reference to Smith and Raimondo Panikkar, Leonard Swidler has termed the ‘Golden Rule’ of interfaith dialogue that ‘the partners must be able to recognize themselves in that expression’,[30] and Karl Ernst Nipkow speaks of ‘the well-known hermeneutical rule that a foreign tradition should be presented in such a wise that its representatives can accept it as their own interpretation’.[31] Kurt Hutten initially tried, in his book on sects,[32] to present the Bahá’í Faith’s own view of its history and teachings, even though the section on the administrative order[33] contained factual errors, was tendentious, and in places failed to be objective in its criticism. The advantage of his presentation was that his decisive rejection of Bahá’í theology and doctrine was formulated under a separate heading,[34] and was thus in keeping with sound methodology. Unfortunately, however, he gave increasing scope, from one edition to the next, to the protests of a handful of dissidents against the trend towards a legal establishment of the Bahá’í community—which

27. See Hans Küng, *Christianity and the World Religions*, pp. xiv ff.

28. See Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Religionsgespräch*, p. 148.

29. *Towards a World Theology*, p. 60; *On Understanding Islam*, pp. 282ff.

30. ‘Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue: The Matrix for All Systematic Reflection Today’, p. 15.

31. ‘Oikumene’, in Johannes Lähnemann (ed.), *Das Wiedererwachen der Religionen*, p. 180.

32. *Seher, Grübler, Enthusiasten. Sekten und religiöse Sondergemeinschaften der Gegenwart*, Stuttgart, 1st edn. 1950, 12th edn. 1982.

33. See 10th edn., pp. 303ff.

34. ‘Christus—ein Vorläufer Bahá’u’lláhs?’, 10th edn., pp. 311ff.

he termed ‘confessionalism’ and ‘churchification’, [35]—and he eventually adopted the dissidents’ stance completely. In the posthumous twelfth edition, H. D. Reimer revised Hutten’s presentation and added critical comments, which were strongly influenced by the newly published ‘commendable work’ [36] by Ficicchia, who, as an ‘outstanding expert on Bahá’ism’ [37] was also invited to compose the final section.

This reveals clearly the methods that were now being adopted: the thrust of the attack was no longer the Christian theological verdict, whose relativity is obvious to any intelligent reader, it was no longer the standpoint of Christian superiority, which is today regarded by many as suspect, but rather the judgement of dissidents, no matter how small their number or how inconsequential their effective history (*wirkungsgeschich-*

35. It is surprising that a man of the church should use these terms with a negative and critical connotation. However, both terms are out of place. In the Bahá’í Faith there has never been a formulation of creeds (*confessiones*) such as accompanied the process of division in Western European Christendom. Fixed formulations, formula-like restrictive definitions of beliefs (*professiones fidei*), have never existed. The establishment of legal structures, which constitutes the development of the community as explicitly prescribed by the founder of the faith, is not ‘denominalization’. Neither is it ‘churchification’ because—apart from the questionability of using such Christian-centred terminology for a non-Christian faith community—the organized Bahá’í community is not a sacramental institution: sacraments, the objective conferring of grace by a priest who has objective access to such grace, an essential characteristic and constitutive element of all Christian churches, is absent in the Bahá’í Faith (see below, pp. 126ff.; my doctoral thesis *Grundlagen der ‘Verwaltungsordnung’ der Bahá’í*, pp. 82–85, my treatise ‘The Bahá’í Faith: Sect or Religion?’, p. 1; and Gollmer, *Gottesreich und Weltgestaltung. Grundlegung einer politischen Theologie im Bahá’ítum* (Diss., unpublished), ch. 11.1; 11.2.3). Hutten is evidently using the descriptive term found in recent sociological publications according to which the constitutive, specifically Christian contents of the word church are eliminated, and church is used to signify any institutionalized religion.

36. Hutten, *ibid.* p. 800.

37. *ibid.* p. 827.

te).[38] The intention was clearly to discredit the Bahá'í Faith from the inside, so to speak. Internal antagonists (in the terms of canon law *heretics* and *schismatics*), were practically regarded as witnesses to the allegation that self-presentations of the Bahá'í Faith merely describe false façades, are hagiographical, and have no scholarly value. Someone who denies what he formerly professed, a renegade, was now being placed in the role of chief witness against the cause on which he had turned his back: he was hailed as the supreme expert whose knowledge surpassed that of anyone else. This method is advantageous for the purpose at hand, because the reader is generally inclined to attribute greater value to the critical judgements of former 'insiders' than to self-presentations or to Christian theological critiques. The publication of Ficicchia's book was a consistent step along this path.

The method may well be successful—but one cannot help asking whether it is born out of that 'spirit of reconciliation, humility and intercommunication', the spirit of 'love and justice'[39] to which church institutions have verbally pledged themselves again and again. In Geneva in 1977 and in Kingston, Ja-

38. A term coined by Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 267ff.

39. for which Kurt Hutten found such beautiful words in his Foreword to the 8th edition of his book: 'It is one of the characteristics of the Christian Truth that its proof depends on the love it succeeds in arousing. An essential component of love is justice in the assessment of other doctrines.' His judgement that anyone who responds to people of other faiths 'in an unobjective and inimical way' is 'not a witness to the Truth' but 'discredits' this truth, is deserving of whole-hearted applause (quotations from *Seher, Grübler, Enthusiasten*, Foreword to 12th edn. p. 15). However, his fine-sounding words contrast with the overt hostility shown in his publications over the last twenty years, in which he has consistently attacked and ridiculed the Bahá'í Faith. I gave a critical response to his arguments in a letter (published in *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 'Answer to a Theologian', pp. 55–109). The renegade Ficicchia must have seemed like a god-send to Hutten. He used him for his purposes and it was he who suggested that Ficicchia write a monograph about the Bahá'í Faith.

maica in 1979, the World Council of Churches produced ‘Guidelines’[40] for the dealings of the churches with people of other religions, in which the churches’ traditional attitude was abandoned and the churches were called upon not to be guided by ecclesiastical ‘triumphalism’, by ‘condescension towards our fellow human beings’,[41] by ‘an aggressive Christian militancy’,[42] nor by ‘prejudice’, or ‘stereotyping’.[43] Dialogue[44] with

40. *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*, Geneva, 1979.

41. Part I, B 14, p. 9.

42. Part II, C 18, p. 11.

43. Part III, 4, p. 18.

44. The *Lexikon der Religionen*, edited by Hans Waldenfels SJ and published by Herder-Verlag in 1987, also declares its intention of making a ‘first conscious contribution to the nascent dialogue between the religions’. Referring to the Global Day of Prayer for Peace on 27 October 1986, to which Pope John Paul II had invited representatives of the various religions (and at which Bahá’í representatives were also present), Hans Waldenfels writes: ‘Working for peace and understanding between the religions and thereby calling them anew to God’s message for the world, will be a decisive contribution to the welfare and future of all people on this earth’ (Foreword to the first edition, p. xi). It is therefore hardly fitting that among the large number of renowned specialists who have compiled the lexicon, the author of the entry on ‘Bahá’ism’ is someone without any evidence of education in the field of religious studies but whose sole qualification is his brief membership in the Bahá’í community and who, in just one and a half columns, manages to present almost everything incorrectly—with the exception of a few historical dates (pp. 46, 47). The tendentiousness of Ficicchia’s entry is demonstrated by his list of references alone: in addition to his own work, he lists exclusively ‘critical’ literature written by Christian theologians (Römer, Rosenkranz, Elder and Miller) and the *Handbuch Religiöse Gemeinschaften* mentioned in note 21 of the entry, which in turn is based on Ficicchia’s monograph. Either he did not know of the detailed entry on ‘Bahá’ism’ in the respected *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (TRE), or he intentionally ignored it. When more than half of an encyclopaedia entry consists of biting criticism and the author does not list a single authentic work from the large stock of primary literature published in German, nor a single work of secondary literature produced by the community itself, the editors ought, one would think, to have

qualms about the objectivity of the contribution. Having been informed about the background and shortcomings of the encyclopaedia entry and about the forthcoming critical analysis of Ficicchia's book, Herder-Verlag responded by saying that it found the criticism 'helpful' and passed it on to the editor 'with the request that he consider how consequences could be drawn for the next edition'. In the meantime the entry has been published unchanged in the third (1992) edition.

Ficicchia's denigration of the Bahá'í Faith is obviously appreciated by Herder-Verlag, as he was invited to compose the entries under the keyword 'Bahá'í' in Herder's *Lexikon der Sekten, Sondergruppen und Weltanschauungen* (3rd edn. 1991, 4th edn. 1994) and thus to disseminate further his disinformation about this religion. Here, too, the editor seems not to have been disturbed by the fact that the literature listed—with the exception of my doctoral thesis and two works by Shoghi Effendi—consists entirely of works by 'critical' authors, in particular his own monograph. The co-editor, Dr Friederike Valentin, at least knew what kind of scholar had been selected for this keyword. She had written an information booklet about the Bahá'ís (*Bahá'í: Geschichte-Lehre-Praxis. Dokumentation 1/81*) that was published by the Pastoral Office of the Arch-Diocese of Vienna, for which she had relied heavily on Ficicchia's monograph and incorporated long passages from that work in her own essay. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís in Austria responded by sending to the Archbishop responsible, Cardinal Dr Groer, a 30-page documentation (*Gerades krumm gemacht. Der Renegat als Forscher*) in which it corrected some of the most serious instances of false information and mentioned the situation of conflict which produced Ficicchia's monograph. In a letter written on Ash Wednesday 1989, the Cardinal expressed his gratitude for the documentation, stating that: 'I hasten to thank you for this assistance in improving my understanding. Unfortunately, we experience again and again in this world how even believers treat believers with injustice and how strong intolerance can be on the part of those who from God Himself experience nothing but mercy.' In a letter from the Pastoral Office dated 7 February 1989, Dr Valentin informed the National Assembly that: 'I confirm receipt of your letter dated 30.1. along with the brochure concerning the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran and the detailed rebuttal by Dr Udo Schaefer; in examining these materials I noted that the criticism consists in the use of the documents from the EZW which originate from Mr. Ficicchia and is therefore concerned only secondarily with the brochure. I also acknowledge the errors referred to and will take these into account in a possible future edition (although there are currently no plans for this).' Nevertheless, these statements did not prevent Dr Valentin from engaging the 'specialist' Ficicchia for the composition of the 'Bahá'í' entry. *Cui bono?*

members of other religions should be conducted, instead, in a spirit of humility, repentance and integrity: ‘Primary importance’ should be paid to the ‘self-understanding’ of the other faith community.[45] ‘One of the functions of dialogue is to allow participants to describe and witness to their faith in their own terms ... It is out of a reciprocal willingness to listen and learn that significant dialogue grows.’[46] In a dialogue ‘on the basis of a mutual trust and a respect for the integrity of each participant’s identity’,[47] we are told, ‘Christians actively respond to the commandment to “love God and your neighbour as yourself”’, that ‘Dialogue can be recognized as a welcome way of obedience to the commandment of the Decalogue: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour”’.[48] The Guidelines warn against the danger ‘of interpreting a living faith not in its own terms but in terms of another faith or ideology. This is illegitimate on the principles of both scholarship and dialogue’.[49]

The EZW deserves gratitude for its efforts in spreading these noble maxims through its ‘Arbeitstexte’, published in 1979,[50] and it has repeatedly professed its allegiance to these principles since then.[51] The reader may judge for himself whether

45. Part III, 4, p. 18.

46. *ibid.* pp. 17f.

47. Part II, C 17, p. 10.

48. Part II, C 17–18, pp. 10f.

49. Part I, E, 27, p. 15.

50. *Leitlinien zum Dialog mit Menschen verschiedener Religionen und Ideologien*.

51. e.g. Reinhart Hummel, who warns against ‘prejudice and false assumptions’ and admonishes Christians to ‘fairness’ and ‘understanding and respect towards people with different ideas and beliefs’ (‘Apologetische Modelle’, pp. 9–10), or Gottfried Küenzlen, who demands that interfaith dialogue be conducted on the basis of ‘correct factual information on the contents and claim to truth of the religion in question’, and calls for ‘inner understanding’ as well as warning against ‘overhasty condemnation’: ‘... “Trampling one’s own caricatures to death is ... a childish pursuit”’ (Julius Kaftan, quoted in *Religion in Geschichte und*

it was guided by them when, just two years later, it edited and published Ficicchia's 'standard work'. [52] It may well be that the EZW was taken in by its appointed 'expert' and, as far as the facts are concerned, was acting in good faith when Ficicchia bore 'false witness'. However, it cannot have failed to notice the obvious bias of Ficicchia's book, in which the Bahá'í Faith is simplistically distorted. The selection of a former 'insider', a renegade, [53] makes a mockery of the ethos proclaimed in the *Guidelines*. The unsuspecting reader is led to believe that the author is particularly well informed and has specialist knowledge in the subject because of his once having been a member of the community of Bahá'u'lláh and having known it from the inside. Yet since when has brief membership in a religious community made someone an expert, and since when has such membership been a substitute for relevant academic education and serious scholarship in the field? Is every church-goer *eo ipso* an expert on Christianity?

### III. The renegade as researcher

The scholarly knowledge of Ficicchia will become evident in detail below. Yet knowledge alone (presuming one has it), does not in itself make an academic specialist in the field of religious

*Gegenwart*, 3rd edn., vol. I, 490) ('*Kirche und die geistigen Strömungen der Zeit*', p. 20).

52. Michael Mildenerger, who is responsible for Ficicchia's book, has verbally professed allegiance to this new spirit in his call for 'respect for others even when they are "rivals"', and in his demand for an overall 'change in the inner attitude towards people with different religious beliefs and non-church or non-Christian groups' ('Die religiöse Szene. Kirchliche Apologetik als Sündenbock', in *Evangelische Kommentare*, Issue 4 (1982), p. 191). However, he must then accept the legitimacy of the question whether the instrumentalization of a renegade in the interests of church apologetics is in keeping with this demand.

53. N.B. Apostasy is not an offence in Bahá'í doctrine and law. A believer may leave the community at any time without any form of stigmatization (see also p. 236, note 477).



studies. More than in any other subject, the presentation of a religion depends not only on specialist knowledge but also on the subjective attitude of the author. Honourable intentions, absolute freedom from bias, unwavering objectivity towards the object of one's presentation are essential prerequisites. It is with regard to these requirements that the author is found especially wanting. What Ficicchia wrote first in the periodical *Materialdienst*[54] and then in his book is marked by profound resentment towards the community of which he was once a member and by a festering desire for revenge against it. His verbal pledge to absolute impartiality and objectivity[55] is belied on every page of his book.

The possibility that the EZW's editors failed to recognize the problematical nature of the situation can be discounted. After all, the church has had ample experience with renegades in the course of the centuries. Renegades are, as a rule, strongly influenced by the conflict in which they find themselves. If they take up the pen they are inclined to take revenge on the community to which they formerly belonged.[56] The worst anta-

54. 'Der Bahā'ismus—Ungewisse Zukunft der "Zukunftsreligion"', in *Materialdienst* 15/16, Issue 38 (1975).

55. *Bahā'ismus*, p. 30. Historical experience has shown that such rhetoric should indeed be treated with caution. The Roman historian Tacitus pledged to write '*sine ira et studio*' (*Annales* 1, 1, 5) and then embarked on a harsh tirade against conditions under the Emperor Domitian (81–96 CE), with whom he had fallen out of favour.

56. A remarkably similar case has arisen more recently. A married couple, originally inclined to socialist views, converted to Buddhism and worked closely with the Dalai Lama for some time. They later published an 800-page work on Tibetan Buddhism (*Der Schatten des Dalai Lama. Sexualität, Magie und Politik im tibetischen Buddhismus*, Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1999) under assumed names (Victor and Victoria Trimondi). The publishers described this work as 'a sound academic analysis, an enlightening and fascinating work of fundamental importance in the field of cultural history'. According to a review published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* under the heading 'Renegade literature', this work is one of 'revenge by two disappointed individuals' who

gonists and the sharpest critics of the church are theologians who have broken away from the church; the most malevolent invective has flowed from the pens of renegades.[57] The emotionally charged character of Ficicchia's writing, his superfluous and biting criticism, the zealous repetitions of certain accusations, the frequent use of italics for emphasis, his tendentious semantics—these cannot have been overlooked by the editors responsible for the book.[58] That despite these characteristics the 'inner involvement of the author'[59] was sought out for particular praise[60] and the author was credited with having 'self-critically and strictly observed the standards of research in the field of religious studies'[61] is enough to render one speechless. That the

interpret Buddhism as a world-wide conspiracy seeking to attain Buddhist hegemony and establish a global buddhocratic dictatorship of monks by manipulative and aggressive means. The authors raise very similar accusations to those raised by Ficicchia against the Bahá'í Faith (see my discussion pp. 90ff., 102–138). They presume to discern a fascistic, inhuman ideology that seeks to annihilate all those whose beliefs are different. Like Ficicchia, the authors make use of assumptions, speculation, and unproven hypotheses by making assertions that they fail to specify and for which they provide no evidence. The verdict of the reviewer was as follows: 'Unfortunately, this is often the wretched state of renegades: they lose all sense of proportion. But why did a reputed publishing house go and take such a work on board? Was there no editor able to recognize that this was an initial angry manuscript which might one day end up as a book?' These are questions that are bound to occur to the reader of Ficicchia's book, too.

57. Such as the former Jesuit A. Tondi, *Die geheime Macht der Jesuiten*, Leipzig-Jena, 1960; idem, *Die Jesuiten. Bekenntnisse und Erinnerungen*, Berlin, 1961; idem, *Vatikan und Neofaschismus*, Berlin, 5th edn. 1959; Joachim Kahl, *Das Elend des Christentums*, Reinbek, 1958.

58. It is astonishing that this was not noticed by any of the reviewers.

59. Inside cover-flap.

60. 'The author is doubly well equipped to produce such a work. For one thing, he was for a long time himself a member of the Bahá'í community, knows it like few other people [!] do and had an inner affinity with its aims' (*Bahá'ismus*, Editor's Foreword, p. 12). The 'long time' was three years.

61. *ibid.* Inside cover-flap.

editors even went so far as to describe Ficicchia's work as the 'first authentic' presentation[62] of the Bahá'í Faith, thus discrediting the whole of the Bahá'í tradition and historical research by Bahá'ís as 'inauthentic' in other words as false, unreliable and unconfirmed—is even more incredible.

#### IV. The origins of the conflict

Francesco Ficicchia, born in 1946, joined the Bahá'í community of Switzerland in 1971. At that time he worked as an accountant for a chemical concern in Basle. His application in 1972 to take up a position at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa was rejected on the grounds that he could not speak English. Following a brief period of attendance at the 'School for Social Work' in Basle, he entered employment as a social worker in Zurich from November 1973. After reading Hermann Zimmer's book[63] Ficicchia became increasingly alienated, and in August 1974 he gave sudden vent to his feelings, striking the Bahá'í community like a thunderbolt. In an 'Open Circular' distributed by Ficicchia himself, he vehemently attacked the institutions of the Faith. Following Zimmer's thesis whereby 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament (which together with Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* constitutes the charter of the administrative order of Bahá'u'lláh) is claimed to be a forgery and the institution of the 'Guardianship' appointed therein is rejected as a usurpation, Ficicchia pronounced harsh judgement upon the Bahá'í institutions of the community of Bahá'u'lláh. The main accusations that were to be disseminated shortly afterwards in his article for the EZW's *Materialdienst* and later in his book were already apparent in this circular. After correspondence with the Bahá'í World Centre

62. *ibid.* Foreword, p. 12. In making this enthusiastic judgement, the editor, Michael Mildenberger, found himself in good company. His predecessor, Kurt Hutten, had poured equally fervent praise on Ficicchia's concoction.

63. See p. 2, note 3. For details on Zimmer, see Gollmer, below, p. 724ff.

in Haifa, numerous discussions with appointed representatives of the Bahá'í institutions and a second circular of similar content, Ficcchia finally declared his withdrawal from the Bahá'í community at the end of November 1974. Owing to his continued subversive activities, he was excommunicated shortly afterwards by the relevant bodies, in accordance with established procedures.[64]

Early in 1975 he raised his accusations before the public at large by submitting a reader's letter to a Zurich daily newspaper.[65] As early as August 1975 he published his article 'Der Bahā'ismus – ungewisse Zukunft der "Zukunftsreligion"'[66] in the EZW's periodical *Materialdienst*. This lampoon, a presumptuous condemnation of the Bahá'í Faith, was a prelude to his opus of 1981.

Surprisingly, Ficcchia contacted the Bahá'í World Centre again at the beginning of 1977. In his letter, dated 10 February, he assures the Bahá'í community that he—'currently perhaps the greatest enemy of the Bahá'í administration'—was not moved by feelings of remorse, but that he still felt 'associated in spirit with the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh'. He professed that he had never doubted the essential contents of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and that his resistance was directed solely against 'the intransigence of the administrative bodies'. The motives for his actions, he went on to say, derive from 'deep concern about the integrity of Bahá'ism'. He calls this letter, in which he again mentions the alleged testament forgery[67] and the alleged suppression of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*,[68] an 'Appeal for Dialogue', an offer 'to discuss all the questions raised here in a spirit of mu-

64. See Schaefer, below, pp. 224ff., especially paragraph d, and pp. 237f.

65. *Der Zürcher Oberländer*, 11 February 1975.

66. 'Baha'ism—an uncertain future for the "religion of the future"'.

67. On this subject see Gollmer, below, pp. 674ff.

68. See my discussion of this allegation, below, pp. 322–329.

tual respect'. In further letters to the World Centre,[69] Ficicchia declared that he 'would like to return to the bosom of the community'. He affirmed that his associations with the 'covenant-breakers'[70] had cooled off and admitted that his 'harsh criticism of the system' may have been 'partially unjustified'. He announced that a 'fundamental transformation' had taken place within him, and he requested 'readmission to the community'. He assured[71] the National Spiritual Assembly of Switzerland of his inner transformation and of his realization that he had 'inflicted great harm' on the community and had 'acted overhastily'. He further requested that the Assembly intercede on his behalf at the Bahá'í World Centre.

Subsequent to a conversation between a representative of the World Centre and Ficicchia,[72] which he himself described as having been conducted 'openly and in a friendly atmosphere',[73] he informed the World Centre[74] that he had no difficulties concerning recognition of and obedience to the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith.[75] He was also prepared to respect the status of Shoghi Effendi, even though he lacked ultimate certitude regarding the question of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's testament. In a further conversation in November 1977, it became clear that Ficicchia's misgivings could not be completely resolved. This process of rapprochement came to an abrupt halt in an acrimonious letter in which Ficicchia declared war, so to speak, on the World Centre. He called the members of the Universal House of Justice 'seducers', 'the epitome of falseness', 'hypocritical and false potentates', and an 'oligarchic clique', and he revoked 'all

69. Dated 11 February, 29 March and 23 June 1977.

70. On this term see below, pp. 232ff., especially note 449.

71. In a letter dated 28 May 1977.

72. on 23 June 1977.

73. Letter dated 12 July 1977.

74. *ibid.*

75. i.e. the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.

previous expressions of loyalty'. The letter culminated in the following threat:

... I declare that you will from now on have me as an embittered enemy who will fight you with all possible means at every opportunity ... You have now brought upon yourselves my ultimate enmity ...[76]

This declaration of his status as an enemy towards the object of his presentation might lead one to expect a number of things, but objectivity would hardly be one of them. The driving force of his actions, his highly praised 'inner involvement', is nothing other than his unbridled hatred.

That someone who has dedicated himself, heart and soul, to a particular cause should later for one reason or another become alienated from it and ultimately turn his back on it is the way of the world. However, perhaps only psychoanalysis could explain why someone's original attraction should be transformed into irreconcilable hatred and why, driven by a 'road to Damascus experience' in reverse, he should relentlessly attack the community of which he was once a member and the faith he once professed, subjecting all that he formerly held sacred to malevolent, cynical vituperation and lashing out *comme le diable dans le bénitier*. In any case, with his so-called 'standard work' and his later encyclopaedia entries, he has indeed carried out his threat to fight the Bahá'ís 'with all possible means' at every opportunity.

No academic training,[77] and certainly no education in the fields of religious studies or theology, prepared Ficicchia for his role as a 'researcher on religions'.[78] The wealth of Arabic, Per-

76. Letter from Ficicchia to the Universal House of Justice dated 5 April 1978.

77. He does not even possess the 'Abitur', the school-leaving qualification.

78. as he refers to himself in *Bahā'ism*, p. 313. It is all the more astonishing that the EZW published in its periodical *Materialdienst* 3

sian, Hebrew, and Ancient Greek terms, along with the transcription table for the Arabic alphabet at the beginning of the book—all of which signal to the unsuspecting reader that this is the work of an expert orientalist[79]—must have been taken from secondary literature or provided by someone else, since Ficicchia knows none of these languages. Elsewhere, too, Ficicchia makes use of other writers' formulations without identifying them as such.[80] According to his own claim, Ficicchia under-

(1995), pp. 89ff. a book review of Manfred Hutter's *Die Bahá'í. Geschichte und Lehre einer nachislamischen Weltreligion* (Marburg, 1994) in which the social worker Ficicchia attests that the author, a professor of religious studies at the University of Graz, has succeeded in producing a concise but highly informative presentation of this modernistic religion that is both precise and fully in keeping with academic standards' [!]. 79. This purpose is undoubtedly served, too, by his constant references to 'Mufāwadāt' (*An-nūr al Abhá fī Mufāwadāt 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Leiden-London, 1901), although in the text he cites the German edition of *Some Answered Questions (Beantwortete Fragen)*, because he has no knowledge of Persian.

80. e.g. the formulation whereby religion is described as 'an ordering power that pervades and lays claim to all aspects of human existence' (p. 387) is taken verbatim from my essay *Bahá'í sein*, p. 11. The passage was published in English, in *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, p. 26. The whole ensemble of religious studies literature listed by Ficicchia on p. 446 is to be found in my doctoral thesis, including remote works that are barely known today, such as Adam, Hagen and Schoeps. On page 327 Ficicchia notes in note 36: 'The Catholic Church does not claim infallible authority for its book of laws (CIC). See A. Hagen, *Prinzipien des katholischen Kirchenrechts*, p. 161.' This has been 'cribbed' word for word from my thesis (p. 79, note 257), where the same formulation is used along with the same source reference. The section on the concept of law (p. 217) seemed very familiar to me as I read it—and no wonder, for with only minor alterations he had taken it from my 'Antwort an einen Theologen', p. 82, note 146 ('Answer to a Theologian', in *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, p. 97, note 308). It includes the same quotations, the same source references; he even cites (as I had done in 1970) the English edition of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's 'Mysterious Forces of Civilization', although the German edition, entitled *Das Geheimnis göttlicher Kultur*, Oberkalbach, 1973 (based on *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. Translated by Marzieh Gail in consultation with Ali Kuli Khan. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2nd edn. 1970), had become avail-

stands Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.[81] In any case, his knowledge of English, at least in the mid-1970s, was very limited,[82] a fact that did not prevent him from making a devastating appraisal of Shoghi Effendi's English style.[83] This, it is to be noted, was on the basis of the *German translation* which, it must be admitted, is unsatisfactory and frequently lacks clarity. As author, Ficicchia provided the name, the material, and, in many respects the caustic diction, but there can be no doubt that the theological editors of the *Zentralstelle* (EZW) have also exerted a strong influence, especially in view of Ficicchia's lack of a relevant academic background.

able in the meantime. Furthermore, the quotation from Hermann Cohen's *The Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, with an introduction by Simon Kaplan, and an introductory essay by Leo Strauss, New York: Frederick Ungar Publ. Co, 1972, that is to be found in this section, is cited by Ficicchia, as in my own work, not from the original but from *Jüdisch-christliches Religionsgespräch in neunzehn Jahrhunderten*, p. 50. Can these all be mere coincidences? My work, from which he has plagiarized so much, does not even appear in his list of sources, let alone being referred to in a note.

81. Letter dated 8 March 1972.

82. His correspondence with the World Centre was conducted in German, and owing to the participation of an English speaker the above-mentioned conversations had to be conducted through an interpreter.

83. *Bahā'ism*, pp. 306ff. He calls him 'long-winded', 'difficult to understand', 'arrogant' (p. 28) and speaks of 'down-to-earth tough talking', 'haziness' and 'unrealistic self-approbation' (p. 306).



This PDF, posted at

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is merely an excerpt from the full book:

Contents, Preface, Introduction, Chapter 1, Conclusion, Bibliography, Index

(pages i-35 and 774-863)

## Conclusion

This book was written in response to a state of affairs that had come to a head after developing over a number of years as a result of a pseudo-academic attack on the faith and on the community of Bahá'u'lláh. The accusations raised in that work reached a wide audience through church publications, and for over 15 years the views of its author largely shaped the public perception of the Bahá'í Faith in German-speaking Europe, damaging its reputation. This happened, moreover, at a time when the European public was becoming increasingly alarmed at the abundance of new, alternative offers of salvation, some with bizarre practices indeed. From the mid-1980s it was realized that certain groups had managed to build up huge business empires, avoiding taxation by concealing them behind a pseudo-religious facade. Deep conflicts resulting from the psychological manipulation and economic exploitation of the supporters of these groups were causes of serious public concern. In most European countries there was public debate on the subject of religious sects. In this emotional atmosphere, religious minorities were subjected to hostile criticism. They were indiscriminately lumped together under the label of 'sects' and denounced as a public threat.[1]

1. This debate led to the setting up of an Enquête-Commission by the German parliament in 1996 to investigate 'so-called sects and psychological groups'. The commission has so far produced two reports.

It is not surprising that in this atmosphere—which was already unpleasant enough for the German Bahá'í community—Ficicchia's systematic disinformation fell on fertile ground. His picture of the Bahá'í Faith was one of an authoritarian, cadre-dominated movement with totalitarian, fascist goals and hegemonic strivings. In the new federal states of Germany, those of the formerly communist East Germany, the generally anti-religious climate meant that the Bahá'ís were especially liable to being categorized among the destructive cults. In particular, the 'Information Centres on Sects' run by the churches were responsible for disseminating Ficicchia's materials, both orally and in print.

More than four years have now elapsed since the German-language publication of this rebuttal. The publication of this English-language edition provides us with an opportunity to take stock of the book's effect so far.

Short-term expectations should not, of course, be raised too high. A monograph that has been described as a 'standard work', promulgated by the Church, and highly praised by theological reviewers, that is to be found in most major libraries and is frequently referred to in academic works, will undoubtedly remain influential for a long time to come, especially as no systematic presentation of the Bahá'í Faith has yet been published that satisfies academic criteria. Even more damaging than his original monograph were Ficicchia's two entries in the encyclopaedias[2] published by Herder-Verlag, which functioned very effectively as vehicles for his disinformation. Even in the editions published after 1995, he continued to present his preposterous theories, retouching them only slightly. Despite having access to the rebuttal, the editors—Catholic theologians—

2. *Lexikon der Sekten, Sondergemeinschaften und Weltanschauungen. Fakten, Hintergründe, Klärungen*, ed. Hans Gasper, Joachim Miller and Friederike Valentin, Freiburg, 3rd edn. 1991; 4th edn. 1994; *Lexikon der Religionen. Phänomene—Geschichte—Ideen*, ed. Hans Waldenfels SJ, Freiburg-Basel-Vienna, 1987, 3rd edn. 1996.

evidently found it difficult to dispense with Ficicchia as an author. However, in 1999 the editors of the *Lexikon der Sekten* replaced Ficicchia's article on the Bahá'í Faith with one by a competent author.

Nevertheless, effects are already discernible. The publication of *Desinformation als Methode* has palpably altered the formerly very unpleasant situation facing the Bahá'ís. Hans-Georg Gadamer's insight—cited in the Introduction of this book—that 'the simple fact of being put into writing' lends 'especially weighty authority to an argument'[3] has been fully confirmed.

Instead of having to admit that they are uninformed of the contents of Ficicchia's book or are unable to give a spontaneous response to a particular point when confronted with Ficicchia's assertions, the Bahá'ís can now at least refer to the fact that the arguments have now been scientifically analysed and refuted. Especially with regard to the debate on sects mentioned above, the fact that this work could be referred to in response to unjustified allegations has repeatedly been of inestimable value.

Within the community, the book has also helped to reduce the level of anxiety when confronted with defamatory presentations of the Bahá'í Faith, as well as helping Bahá'ís to realize that the high virtue of trust in God (*tawakkul*) does not mean avoiding every controversy and, like the *Mutawakkilún*,[4] leaving the defence of the faith to God and adopting a stance of silent humility in the face of attack. Dialogue is only possible

3. *Truth and Method*, p. 241.

4. Lit.: 'those who trust in God', a group of Muslim ascetics who grotesquely exaggerate the ancient religious virtue of trust in God, refusing to take any action in pursuit of their own needs, and leaving everything to God. They apparently ignored the piece of practical advice recorded in Tirmidhi's collection of traditions whereby a believer who asked the Prophet Muḥammad whether he should tie up his camel or pray that it would not run away was told: *I'qilhá wa tawakkal*—Tie up (your camel) and trust (in God).

between equals. Interfaith dialogue presupposes mutual respect. Someone who unprotestingly allows himself to be treated without such respect will not find acceptance as a satisfactory partner in dialogue.

Furthermore, the book has brought about a greater readiness among the Bahá'ís to take a rational approach to the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and to reflect critically on their own beliefs.

The Protestant Central Office for Questions of Ideology (EZW), which originally initiated and published Ficicchia's slanderous work, has published a review of *Desinformation als Methode* in its monthly journal *Materialdienst*.<sup>[5]</sup> This review was basically an attempt to justify the EZW's actions, since it had, after all, been responsible for the publication of an academically worthless book that had caused considerable damage. In this review, Ficicchia was not altogether discarded but the EZW was clearly trying to distance itself from him. The reviewer, Dr theol. habil. Ulrich Dehn, criticized the 'eloquent polemics' that run throughout the book, as well as what he called the 'missionary apologetic language', but he conceded that the authors 'had spared no pains with regard to the care and thoroughness of their research'. He speaks of 'meticulously prepared comprehensive patterns of argumentation and refutation' and describes my discussion of religious hermeneutics as revealing 'a wealth of knowledge' and 'remarkable erudition'. He welcomes the fact that the opportunity was taken to present fundamental principles, as for instance in Gollmer's contribution on the prospects for peace and Towfigh's informative analysis of the sources. According to Dr Dehn, the contributions made in the book on specific aspects of the Bahá'í Faith make the work 'interesting and recommendable even for a readership that had not especially been awaiting a rebuttal of Francesco Ficicchia'. His overall judgement is that 'Ficicchia has indeed

5. 17 (1996), pp. 309ff.

not been ignored or ... hushed up, but has been taken seriously at a high level'.[6]

In a later article,[7] Dr Dehn again took up the subject of the EZW's attitude towards the Bahá'ís. In this contribution, he distances himself even more from Ficicchia than in his earlier review, in which he had doubtless felt obliged to be considerate towards his colleague Michael Mildenerger, who had edited Ficicchia's work. In this article, the reader is not only informed about Ficicchia's letter to the Bahá'í World Centre in which he referred to himself as an 'embittered enemy' of the Bahá'ís and declared his intention of attacking them 'with all possible means', but he also learns of the recently initiated process of dialogue between the EZW and the Bahá'ís. The Bahá'í Faith is referred to in the article as a 'post-Islamic world religion'. Finally, in January 1996, I accepted an invitation from the reviewer to visit him in his office in Berlin, where talks were held lasting several hours in a remarkably objective, even friendly, atmosphere. Since this meeting, Dr Dehn has participated several times in Bahá'í events in various Berlin communities.

This renunciation of the spirit of confrontation and the striving for objectivity is evident from other experiences, too. Quite a number of the 'Information Centres on Sects' who were given copies of *Desinformation als Methode* reacted in a very positive way and emphasized that it was their intention to provide an objective presentation of the Bahá'í Faith. The extent to which the attitude of the churches towards the Bahá'ís has improved—irrespective of all the dogmatic differences—is revealed by the following developments.

In the summer of 1998, the renowned Protestant journal *Evangelische Kommentare*[8] published a report on the multi-

6. *ibid.* p. 311.

7. *Materialdienst* 1 (1997).

8. *Monatsschrift zum Zeitgeschehen in Kirche und Gesellschaft* 9 (1998), pp. 514ff.

religious society of Germany, in which representatives of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism wrote about their experiences. The issue also contained a report by a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany, Christopher Sprung, concerning the experiences of the Bahá'ís with the Christian majority,[9] including discussion of the precarious situation brought about through Ficicchia's publications. In his introduction, the editor-in-chief remarked that: 'Now that the Bahá'ís have succeeded in correcting the erroneous images of them that had been circulating, they have recently gained appreciation from the churches as religious partners.' Since then, Sprung has been appointed a member of the 'Inter-faith working group in the Intercultural Council of Germany' as a representative of the German Bahá'í community. This working group unites representatives of the Catholic and Protestant Churches, the Central Council of Jews, the Central Council of Muslims and the Chairman of the Buddhist Union of Germany. A member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís in Germany, Dr Nicola Towfigh, has been included in the forum 'Mainzer Gespräche' (Mainz Talks), in which representatives of the major religions cooperate at national level. A clear indication that the German Bahá'í community is gradually being divested of its image as a 'sect', is the fact that Bahá'ís are increasingly being invited to speak at religious congresses.[10]

Change is also evident in the field of comparative religious studies. Three academic reviews have so far been published: by Prof. Dr Manfred Hutter of the University of Graz in Austria,[11] by Prof. Dr Christian Cannuyer of the Catholic Uni-

9. *ibid.*

10. See above p. 132ff.

11. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol. 12.3 (October 1967).

versity of Louvain in Belgium,[12] and by Prof. Dr Heshmat Moayyad of the University of Chicago.[13] The reviewers have confirmed beyond doubt the book's rank as an academic work. The verdict on the Bahá'í Faith pronounced in his review by the Catholic orientalist Cannuyer is impressive:

Sécrté par l'islam shí'ite, considéré par les áyatu-lláhs de l'Iran actuel comme une hérésie nuisible, relégué par d'autres au rang de secte, le bahá'isme est en réalité aujourd'hui une religion de dimension universelle qui n'appartient plus à la mouvance musulmane. C'est un 'monothéisme abrahamique' à part entière: par ses doctrines originales, il mérite l'intérêt. Par son message d'amour, sa tolérance et son action humanitaire, il suscite la sympathie. Par ses nombreux martyrs, en Iran et ailleurs, il a droit au respect.

He closes his review with the remark that:

C'est ce respect que revendique le livre de Schaefer, Towfigh et Gollmer. La revendication est honorable et la plaidoirie fait mouche.[14]

Further reviews are due to appear in relevant German specialist journals.

The reaction of a reputed German scholar in the field of religious studies is particularly interesting. Having originally followed Ficicchia's line, he decided, after reading this book, to acquire a number of the primary works of Bahá'í literature for his Institute, and he later made the Bahá'í Faith the subject of a senior seminar, as part of which he visited the local Bahá'í Centre along with about 70 students. During their visit, which lasted several hours, I had the opportunity of responding to

12. *Mélanges de Science Religieuse*, Université Catholique de Lille, Janvier-Mars 1997, pp. 116ff. An English translation of this review has been published in *Bahá'í Studies Review* 8 (1998), pp. 69–72.

13. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8 (November 1998), pp. 451ff.

14. *Mélanges de Science Religieuse*, p. 118.



questions on theology, history and the Bahá'í community. Later, the Professor and his students paid a visit to the House of Worship in Langenhain, where they engaged in dialogue with Ulrich Gollmer, again over several hours. Interestingly, the Professor proposed that the Bahá'í Faith should be made the subject of doctoral dissertations, since it offers a broad and interesting field of research in religious studies. The themes that relate to the political and social dimensions of the Faith, which are usually dealt with by the Bahá'ís when presenting the religion of Bahá'u'lláh to others (such as peace, world unity, international order, global governance, gender equality etc.), have not hitherto made the faith appear particularly interesting to scholars in the field of religious studies. The deep theological, mystical dimension, that is at the heart of every revealed religion, has evidently yet to be discovered.

Thus, it is already apparent that, in the long term, the experience of dealing with Ficicchia's disinformation confirms the dialectic whereby the 'Letters of Negation'[15] involuntarily

cause the Word of God to be exalted, and spread His signs and tokens far and wide: Were it not for this opposition by the disdainful ... —how could news of the advent of the Primal Point and the bright dawning of the Day-Star of Bahá ever have reached to east and west?[16]

Goethe also has this dialectic in mind when his character Faust asks Mephistopheles who he is, and the latter replies:

A portion of that egohood,  
Which always evil wills  
and always works the good 17

15. Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* 184:3.

16. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 195:2.

17. Part One, Study.

## Appendix On terminology

Some of the terms used in this book, in particular those which originate from ecclesiastical law, have caused a certain amount of irritation and confusion amongst English-speaking readers,[1] a problem that reflects the difficulty of translating such terms. The borrowing of technical terms is without doubt problematical, and concern for doctrinal purity is indeed justified.

Like previous revelatory scripture, especially the Bible and the Qur'án, the scripture of Bahá'u'lláh has its own terminological system which, 'though drawn from existing Arabic or Persian vocabulary'[2], and rooted for the most part in the language of the Qur'án,[3] nevertheless includes some new coinages.[4] These 'mother words'[5] are fundamental concepts and are

1. They have been criticized as misleading and hampering the discussion not merely stylistically but also doctrinally. The view has been expressed that they might tend to vitiate the clear and precise language of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian.

2. Christopher Buck, *Symbol and Secret*, p. xxviii.

3. This applies to numerous legal terms such as *ziná* (premarital and extramarital sexual intercourse, including adultery, see *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 19, 49; 'Questions and Answers', no. 49; see also *ibid.* note 75), *liwáth* (sexual relations between men), *al-qatl* (murder, homicide, see *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 19, 62), *diyyah* (indemnity, see *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 4; 56, 188), '*ahd*, *mitháq* (covenant), *naqd al-'ahd wa'l mitháq* (covenant-breaking). On this subject see Kamram Ekbal, 'Islamische Grundlagen des Kitáb-i-Aqdas', in Bürgel, *Der Iran im 19. Jahrhundert*, pp. 53–89.

4. Such as the broad-ranging term *latáfah* (refinement, see *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 45, 74, 151; see also *ibid.* note 74 and 104) or *mubayyin* (the expounder, lit.: 'the one who explains', see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament* 1:16). Such terms are invested with new specific meaning.

the starting point of any Bahá'í theology and jurisprudence. For this reason, they must be preserved in their pure form, free of the dust of terms coined in previous eras. Bahá'u'lláh therefore admonishes his followers: 'Corrupt not the holy, the all-embracing, and primal Word of God.'[6]

The uncritical adoption of established terms originating from earlier periods in the development of religion undoubtedly facilitates discourse with a different cultural and religious environment, but inherent in such adoption lies the danger of unwittingly assimilating certain elements into the Faith's own doctrinal system. The extent to which the undiscerning adoption of terms and patterns of expression and thinking can affect the content of a new revelation is demonstrated by the hellenization of early Christianity, in which reflection on the original teachings and the formulation of Christian dogma (in particular, the creed concerning the trinity, the *Symbolum Nicaenum*[7]) made use of Greek terminology and even Greek ideological thought patterns, borrowing these from Platonism, Neo-Platonism and Neo-Pythagorism.[8] Islam was much more reticent in adopting concepts from Greek philosophy or other belief systems. Hence, for instance, the term 'theology' has never been used. Instead, the term *kalâm* (discourse on the divine) was coined because the term 'theology' was identified with the doctrine of the holy trinity.

The Bahá'ís have, from the outset, retained a critical distance from traditional theological terms. This can be illustrated by the example of the term 'mission'. Although Bahá'u'lláh has, in numerous verses, 'prescribed unto everyone the duty of

5. See Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 74.

6. *ibid.* 153:4.

7. 325 CE.

8. For a detailed discussion of this subject see *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. V, column 213–222.

teaching His Cause’,[9] the Bahá’ís refrain from using the words ‘mission’ or ‘missionary’,[10] because these terms are historically burdened and the methods for disseminating Bahá’u’lláh’s message are essentially different from Christian mission. However, one should be aware of the fact that the word ‘mission’ originally coined by Christian theology[11] has meanwhile been taken out of the Christian context and is used today as a technical term in religious studies for any proclamation and propaganda conducted by a religious group. Given that this is the case, it does not make sense to avoid this term in academic publications,[12] and it should certainly not be asserted that the Bahá’ís do not conduct missionary work.[13]

9. *Gleanings* 158; see also *ibid.* 128:10; 144:1; 157:1; *Tablets* 2:12; 2:23; 5:17; 10:11; 13:4; *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 38, 53; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Will and Testament* III:10.

10. The Arabic texts use neither the word *tabshir* (the equivalent for ‘mission’) nor the Islamic *da’wa* (which means ‘invitatory proclamation’). The term used in the sacred texts *tabligh* (‘transmission of the message’) was translated by Shoghi Effendi as ‘teaching’ (see Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 144:1; 128:6, 10; 157:1; 158; *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 150, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Will and Testament* 1:14; 3:11).

11. from Latin: *mittere*: to send out.

12. This does not apply, of course, to the term ‘missionary’, which would be inappropriate for those Bahá’ís ‘that have forsaken their country for the purpose of teaching Our Cause’ (*Gleanings* 157:1) although it must be admitted that it has occasionally been used by Bahá’í institutions in requests for residence permits to government offices in countries which recognize ‘missionaries’ as a category of voluntary workers. Even a purely technical use of the term ‘church’ for any legally constituted religious community, as has become customary in the sociology of religion (in which it is not uncommon to find references to an Islamic or Buddhist ‘church’), cannot be accepted with regard to the Bahá’í Faith, as I have discussed at length in my thesis (see *Grundlagen*, pp. 73ff.). On grounds of both terminology and content, the legally constituted Bahá’í community cannot by any means be designated the ‘Bahá’í Church’ (see above, pp. 160ff., and below, pp. 792f.).

13. The often voiced and strongly emphasized assertion that the Bahá’í Faith knows no ‘mission’ nor ‘missionary work’ simply because Bahá’ís do not use this term has encouraged and fostered the grave misunder-

While concern for the purity of the language and contents of the revelation is undoubtedly justified, it must be realized that no-one involved in academic discourse in this field can avoid using generally accepted academic terms. It would be impossible to present Bahá'í doctrine in an academic sphere while completely abstaining from the use of these terms and restricting oneself to the vocabulary of the holy texts. Whereas meditation on the scripture is not dependent on any set of academic terms, reflection on its philosophical, theological and

standing that they refrain totally from any attempt to spread the teachings of their faith. Scholars, journalists and sympathizers have often reacted with astonishment. How can such a community find followers, and how can it survive? Faced then with Bahá'í 'teaching activities' and even plans for a global proclamation of the message of Bahá'u'lláh, people feel embarrassed and may be under the impression that Bahá'ís are dishonestly dissimulating their aims and methods—an accusation that has been made by Ficichia. There are quite a number of other examples that demonstrate how ignorance and the wrong use of the proper theological terminology results in the spreading of erroneous distinctions such as: the Bahá'í Faith is a religion without rites (an assertion which is evidently wrong: the *qibla*, the prescriptions for the *hajj*, the fasts, the obligatory prayers, the communal prayer for the deceased, the *dhikr*, see *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 18, are without any doubt 'rites'); a religion without dogmas (from Greek, *dogma*: that which one thinks true, a religious doctrine, a tenet that is taken for true; *apropos* 'tenet' see *World Order*, p. 166), without theology and without theologians (it is true that we have no clergy, no caste of clerical functionaries, no priesthood; however, *al-'ulamá' fi'l Bahá'* (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 183) cannot but be regarded as theologians, i.e. those who reflect on the scripture, on issues of theology and of the revealed law); a religion without interpretation (on this subject see above, pp. 194ff.); a religion without tradition (of course, there exist many reported utterances of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, of anecdotes and historical accounts handed down, but they have no authority beside the authentic holy texts. As to the *sola scriptura* principle in the Bahá'í Faith see *Grundlagen*, pp. 66-74); a religion without the concept of sin (as maintained by a Bahá'í in an interview with a correspondent of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Jerusalem in May 1992). Thus, the Faith appears to critical observers to be like a *Lichtenberg-knife*, a knife that has neither handle nor blade. The eradication of these deeply-rooted, wide-spread errors has proved to be extremely difficult.

juridical contents cannot do without such terms. This is even more the case when these contents are to be presented in an academic context and as part of interfaith dialogue with scholars from other religions. Indeed, anyone engaging in interfaith dialogue ought to be familiar with the terminology of religious studies and theology, and be able to present the contents of the Faith in a way acceptable to the ‘scientific community’.

If the use of academic terminology were to be regarded as taboo in an effort to preserve semantic purity, the Bahá’ís would run the risk of isolating themselves and subjecting the revelation of Bahá’u’lláh to a semantic ‘Babylonian Captivity’, thus hindering its development and growth.

This is particularly true with regard to the legal structures of the Bahá’í community. Its institutions (including certain aspects of their functioning, such as the principle of consultation[14]) are part of the revelation and therefore constitute divine law (*ius divinum positivum*).[15] To present these structures and their implementation in specific community structures to an academic readership necessitates the use of a legal parlance that cannot be developed without reference to existing legal terms.

My doctoral thesis was an initial attempt to investigate the order of the community of Bahá’u’lláh in accordance with the established standards of scholarship in the field of religious studies. Since there was, at that time, no academic literature to which I could have referred, it seemed logical to adopt the method of comparing that order with ecclesiastical law. I was

14. See Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 30; *Tablets* 8:55; 9:4; 11:16; 17:44; *Gleanings* 120:1.

15. Certain structures, such as the current electoral system, are based on explanations set down by Shoghi Effendi and are subject to amendment in future legislation by the Universal House of Justice: ‘When this Supreme Body will have been properly established, it will have to consider afresh the whole situation, and lay down the principle which shall direct, so long as it deems advisable, the affairs of the Cause’ (Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 41).

therefore dependent on the nomenclature used in that discipline.[16] This was especially the case when I undertook to compare the Guardianship with the Papacy. I had no qualms about this, since the terms adopted had long since been removed from their purely Christian context and were in common use as technical terms in the field of comparative religious studies. Moreover, the terms I borrowed were always intended merely as suggestions and are open to discussion.[17] Nothing could be further from my intention than that the order of Bahá'u'lláh should be forced into the Procrustean bed of a terminology that is foreign to it, or to propound the adoption of canonical legal terms into Bahá'í jurisprudence. The purpose of the numerous references in this book to my doctoral thesis, which was written over forty years ago, is by no means to draw belated attention to it.[18] Rather, since Ficicchia has taken it to pieces and used it for his own purposes, quoting from it repeatedly, it was important for this rebuttal to examine his often bizarre interpretations and to discuss the terms used in the thesis, as these are frequently taken up by Ficicchia.

It is always difficult to translate legal terms into another language, especially one that is associated with a different legal

16. My academic advisor, Prof. Dr. Reicke, taught ecclesiastical law and German legal history at the University of Heidelberg.

17. No academic analysis of my doctoral thesis has yet been undertaken.

18. It bore late fruit when, some years ago, the German National Spiritual Assembly appealed to the German Federal Constitutional Court against decisions of a State Court and a High State Court, according to which the legal structure of the Bahá'í community was held to be in contradiction with the German civil code and not liable to being incorporated. This appeal could not have been appropriately formulated, the legal structures of our community could not have been analysed in terms of law other than by using the specific legal and theological vocabulary which I had introduced in my thesis. Such an appeal (or any thesis on the Bahá'í Faith) cannot be written in a purely internal language that does not bring the scientific criteria to the attention of the non-Bahá'í reader.

culture.[19] The translation of German legal terms into English has therefore been very difficult. Anyone who is not at home in this sphere can hardly be expected to find equivalent concepts. Since there are no German-English specialist dictionaries for the field of theology and religious studies, it was necessary to seek out the relevant terms in academic literature written in English. The most important of these terms were the following:

*Jurisdiktionsgewalt*: the ‘power of jurisdiction’. This power comprises the three classical powers described in political science: legislation, jurisdiction and execution (administration). In the Bahá’í communal order the ‘power of jurisdiction’ has been conferred on the elected bodies, the Houses of Justice (*Buyútu’l ‘adl*) on the local, national and international level.

*Lehrgewalt*: can be translated as ‘teaching power’ or ‘power of interpretation’. The term refers to the monopolization of the authority to interpret and infallibly determine the revealed doctrine in an authentic and binding way by a specific office, such as the Papacy[20] or the Guardianship.[21] This authority can indeed be interpreted in legal terms as a ‘power’.

In the Bahá’í community, the power of jurisdiction and the power of interpretation are thus separated and rest on the two distinct pillars of the community. Hence, the Bahá’í communal order is characterized by the principle of the separation of powers,[22] whereas in the Catholic Church, which upholds the principle of the concentration of powers,[23] the power of inter-

19. There are major differences between Anglo-American legal terminology and that of continental Europe.

20. As defined at the First Vatican Council, 1870.

21. Explicitly appointed and invested with infallible authority in *Will and Testament* 1:16–17: ‘He is the expounder of the Words of God’ and ‘under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One ... Whoso opposeth him hath opposed God’.

22. See the discussion above, pp. 158, 247, 702ff.

23. *ibid.* see Can 331; see also the text above, p. 156.



pretation is part of the *potestas regiminis*[24] (formerly called the *potestas iurisdictionis*) borne by the Pope.

*Lehramt*: in Canon law *magisterium ecclesiasticum*. In English-language Catholic literature this term has been translated in various ways. The official term would seem to be ‘teaching office’.[25] However, the term ‘teaching authority’ is also in use.[26] The official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*[27] defines the ‘teaching office’ as ‘the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God’.[28]

This task has, according to Catholic doctrine, been ‘entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome’.[29] Although the Catholic system is fundamentally different from the Bahá’í one in its legitimation as well as in the way it functions, the authority and task which has been conferred on the Guardian as ‘the expounder of the Word of God’[30] is quite comparable: to give the authentic, infallible interpretation of the revealed word. The term ‘teaching office’ denotes the office, which has been invested with the interpretative authority (*auctoritas interpretativa*). I see no reason why the Guardian’s authority and task should not be considered as an ‘office’ for the authentic and authoritative interpretation, as ‘teaching authority’ or ‘interpretative authority’.

*Heilsanstalt*: the Church regards itself as an ‘organ of grace’ or ‘steward of grace’ because, according to Christian doctrine, it conveys divine grace upon the believers through the

24. *Can 331 CIC*.

25. *See Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 85, 888ff.*

26. *See the English edition of Karl Adam, Das Wesen des Katholizismus (The Spirit of Catholicism, London: Sheed & Ward, 6th edn. 1934), where only this term occurs.*

27. *Nos. 888–892.*

28. *No. 85.*

29. *ibid.*

30. *Will and Testament 1:16.*

administration of the sacraments. As I have shown in detail in my doctoral thesis, the organized Bahá'í community is not a 'church' because there is no conveyance of divine grace through appointed functionaries. In the Bahá'í community divine grace is not administered by human functionaries; this sphere is exclusively reserved to the direct relationship between God and the individual.[31]

31. On this subject see above, p. 155, note 76.

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## Abbreviations

BSB	<i>Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin</i>
EI1	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i>
EI2	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i>
EIR	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>
ER	<i>Encyclopaedia of Religions</i>
HRG	<i>Handbuch Religiöse Gemeinschaften</i>
HWPph	<i>Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie</i>
LThK	<i>Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
RGG	<i>Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i>
SBB	<i>Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History</i> From vol. 5 (1988) called <i>Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions</i>
SEI	<i>Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam</i>
THE	<i>Theologische Realencyclopädie</i>
TRT	<i>Taschenlexikon Religion und Theologie</i>

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