

Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths

Edited by
Moshe Sharon



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MOSHE SHARON



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The sun also arises, and the sun goeth down . . .

*The thing that hath been, is that which shall be;
and that which is done is that which shall be done:
and there is no new thing under the sun.*

Ecclesiastes 1:5,9

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The summaries of the majority of the articles included in this book were presented at the International Conference on Modern Religions and Religious Movements in Judaism, Christianity and Islam and the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths, convened at the campus of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in December 2000. The selection is dominated by studies on the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths, mainly because the scholars representing this field of research offered the largest number of studies to be considered for inclusion in this volume. This disproportion in the representation of other modern religions and religious movements may be somewhat justified if one takes into consideration that the Bābī-Bahā'ī venture was one of the major developments in the field of religion in modern times, especially because it was born out of the heart of Shī'ite Islam in the East, and succeeded in crossing the ocean, treading new paths into the heart of western civilization and the bosom of Christianity. As such, it is unique among other modern religious movements.

None of the other modern religions and religious movements succeeded in crossing the lines in such a way, and attracting at the same time believers across the board of civilization. The Hasidut movement was born in Judaism and remained there. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormons) departed from institutionalized Christianity but remained within the borders of Western Christian civilization. The same can be said about the Ahmadiyyah that remained within Islam, and all the Christian Adventist movements that did not break away from their Christian roots.

Mysticism, millennialism and messianic ideas are present in all the modern religions and religious movements, and they are predominant subjects in these studies. Because of the great importance attached in mystical thought in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bābī-Bahā'ī faiths to the power of the letters of the alphabet and their numerical values, a special contribution deals with the study of Gematry—the “science” of the letters, and their mystical significance.

In editing the material I tried to interfere as little as possible with the original form of the articles, but made an effort to give the whole book a certain degree of uniformity. In spite of that, there is a slight

diversity between the bibliographical lists at the end of each contribution, since some of the authors insisted on using internet publications extensively, and others, on quoting unpublished works (including conference papers). One author expressed the particular wish to accompany his contribution with endnotes.

The method of transliteration from Arabic and Persian, which has been standardized in Bahā'ī writing, uses accents over the vowels *á*, *í*, and *ú*, instead of an elongating line (*ā*, *ī*, *ū*). Wherever possible the Arabic and Persian were transliterated according to the latter method, preferring the elongating lines to the accents.

In my contribution to the volume, which I wrote in place of a formal introduction, I attempted to show the common thread, which goes through all the chapters of the book. I identified it as a common monotheistic or Biblical tradition, which is present in all the religions and religious movements either in a direct way or via a mediating scripture or agent. I deliberately did not indulge in either historical or sociological discussions, which I felt would confuse the main thrust of my remarks.

It is my delightful duty to acknowledge the contribution of the following institutions and individuals to this publication. Firstly I would like to thank the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and its Authority for Research and Development that supported the conference and put at its disposal, its administrative and maintenance resources.

Particular thanks are due to Mrs. Linda Egger, the coordinator of the conference, whose contribution to its success, and to the preparation of this book for print was immeasurable, and to Mrs. Sivan Lerer and Mr. Shahin Izadi who contributed their time and talents in fitting the various articles into the unified pattern of this volume. This proved to be a particularly intricate task because of having to deal with so many different styles. Such a task could not be achieved, however, without the good will and cooperation of each one of the authors.

With deep gratitude I acknowledge the assistance of my wife Judy, and my students Iris Ronen-Forer, Netanel Toobian, Naghmeh Sobhani, and Sarah Clarke during the weeklong conference.

May they all be blessed!

M. Sharon
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
December 2003

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(Prepared by Sivan Lerer)

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