

The Baha'i Faith—Part Two

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The four principal individuals of Baha'i history are: 1) Mirza Ali Muhammad ("the Bab," 1819-1850, author of *The Bayan*); 2) Mirza Husayn Ali ("Baha'u'llah," 1817-1892, author of the *Al-Kitab-Al-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), and the *Kitab-I-Iqan* (The Book of Certitude); 3) 'Abdu'l-Baha (1844-1921, son of Baha'u'llah); 4) Shoghi Effendi, grandson of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Guardian of the Faith, who died in 1957.

The history of the Baha'is begins in 1844. This was the year that Mirza Ali Muhammad, otherwise known as "the Bab," proclaimed to the world that he was the greatest Manifestation of God to date and the fulfillment of prophecies in all world Scriptures. Baha'is believe that of the nine or more historic manifestations of God (for example, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus—the exact number has changed historically), the Bab was the greatest revealer of truth up to his time.

However, the Bab also told of another Manifestation, even greater, who would follow him. The Baha'is interpret this (erroneously in all likelihood) as Mirza Husayn Ali, otherwise known as Baha'u'llah. Baha'u'llah (meaning "the Glory of God") is as close as one can come to a Baha'i equivalent of Jesus Christ. Baha'is today view the Bab as his forerunner and give Baha'u'llah preeminence. Hence the teachings and writings of the Bab are of less import, as they are superseded by those of Baha'u'llah, who brought greater revelation to light.

Critique of Baha'i History

No discussion of Baha'i history is complete without noting Dr. William Miller's detailed research in *The Baha'i Faith: Its History and Teachings* (1974, 464 pages). This critical text is more than a headache to faithful Baha'is. In essence, Miller documents why he believes that the Bab did, in fact, teach that the *next* Manifestation of God would not appear for another 1511 to 2001 years, well into the fourth millennium A.D. ¹³ If true, Baha'u'llah was an impostor and the foundation of the Baha'i World Faith crumbles because Baha'i religion is based squarely on the divine authority of Baha'u'llah.

"Was Baha'u'llah actually the next Manifestation?" is a question that is crucial for Baha'is. If not, the Bab is still the true (current) Manifestation and the one he prophesied about has not yet appeared. If the Bab is still the true Manifestation, then Baha'is have abandoned the true prophet and largely discarded his writings for a false prophet, Baha'u'llah. Put simply, the Baha'is have chosen to trust Baha'u'llah's own claim that he was indeed the prophesied one. ¹⁴

Although Baha'i writer Douglas Martin ¹⁵ has raised a few minor technical issues in response to Miller's work, a discussion of which goes beyond the purpose of this critique, we believe that Miller is correct in his analysis: Baha'u'llah was not the next Manifestation. Significantly, not all of the Bab's followers accepted Baha'u'llah as the next true Prophet. ¹⁶

It should also be pointed out the Martin analysis does not have all its facts straight. For example, another problem for Baha'is is their inaccurate translation of their own *Al-Kitab-Al-Aqdas*, or "Most Holy Book," written by Baha'u'llah. Thus, Martin calls the Elder-Miller translation of *The Most Holy Book* (found in an Appendix to Miller's *The Baha'i Faith*) "often mislead-

ingly inaccurate.”¹⁷ This is in spite of the fact that Elder is an Arabic scholar, and that the translation was checked by scholars familiar with both Arabic and Baha’iism. It was published by the eminent Royal Asiatic Society in London, hardly known to publish inaccurate translations. Thus, the accuracy of the Elder-Miller translation places Baha’i authorities in a dilemma. Why did they reject this translation and forbid their members to read it, unless they disapproved of its contents? But if it is translated accurately, how could its contents be rejected by them, since it is Baha’i’s “Most Holy Book” and considered divine scripture?

Altering Their History

According to Miller, the Baha’is have had to alter their own history to escape embarrassment caused by their own scriptures and prophets. While this is not uncommon in the history of religion, to suppress and then seriously tamper with one’s own “Most Holy Book” and the commands of one’s own divine prophets is hypocrisy and, one would think, egregious folly. One may check these facts by reading Dr. Miller’s text (the unabridged version) where he has documented the additions, deliberate changes and omissions in the official Baha’i translation.¹⁸ In a brief personal letter to us, despite the recent death of his wife, he very graciously responded to Martin’s charges: “I stand by what I wrote in *The Baha’i Faith*.... I believe my documentation is an adequate reply for anyone who is able and willing to read the references in the Arabic texts. It makes no matter who supplies the material; if it is true, one should accept it....”¹⁹ It seems that Baha’is, like Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Scientists and other sects with suppressed and altered histories, or biased translations of “divine” books, should exercise some “independent investigation” here. Baha’is might do well to remember the statement of Baha’i writer Gloria Faizi:

“The claim which Baha’u’llah has advanced is no ordinary claim, and He does not ask anyone to accept it without serious investigation. Indeed, one of His most important Teachings is on the subject of independent investigation of the truth.” (*The Baha’i Faith—An Introduction*)

The value of Dr. Miller’s text is that no well-documented, extensive objective-critical history of the Baha’i movement had been available previously. Nearly all Baha’i histories were written by Baha’is. Dr. Miller provided the impetus for examining Baha’iism in a different, if less favorable, light. Based on his research alone, Baha’i claims to the divine origin and guidance of the movement are dramatically called into question. Indeed, they no longer ought to be believed by those who pride themselves on rationality and impartial inquiry, as Baha’is do. Douglas Martin correctly noted, in a critical review of Miller’s book, that the picture painted by Dr. Miller is that the Baha’i faith “is a product of a century-long conspiracy conceived by persons of the basest character and motive. Its present-day followers... are entirely deceived as to their Faith’s real nature,” although he admits Dr. Miller is much more gracious in tone than the above assessment.²⁰

Nevertheless, since Dr. Miller’s analysis is heavily documented (over 800 footnotes of largely primary sources), it is up to Baha’i historians to refute its arguments objectively and not merely present a self-serving use of the facts to support *modern* Baha’i interpretations, beliefs and practices. If, as Dr. Miller claims, Baha’i leaders are guilty of altering or suppressing the commands of their own divine prophets, and of severely altering and pasteurizing their history, the Baha’i laity is in deep trouble if such prophets were indeed “Manifestations” of God. Baha’is at this point cannot appeal to the “infallible” pronouncements of their leaders because the Baha’i claim of an *infallible* leader or governing body (Shoghi

Effendi, the House of Justice, etc.) has been disproved by false prophecies, changes in earlier divine pronouncements and simple errors.^{20a} For example, Charles Mason Remey, once President of the International Baha'i Council and a committed seventy-year Baha'i, was expelled by the governing body (the Universal House of Justice or UHJ) after he charged them (correctly) with abandoning fidelity to the laws of God—to the earlier divine pronouncements of Shoghi Effendi and the then held doctrine of the perpetuity of the Guardian's role.

During Shoghi Effendi's lifetime, Baha'is agreed that there would always be "in perpetuity" a "Guardian of the Cause" (cf., *World Order*, April, 1937). However, when Shoghi Effendi died without appointing the new Guardian successor, a nine-member "House of Justice" was set up, supposedly having the infallibility that Baha'u'llah said belonged only to the Manifestations. Dr. Miller responds, "The indispensability of the Guardianship has been forgotten by most of the Baha'is, and their literature has been rewritten to suit the new situation. It is as though the Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church should suddenly decide that the Church no longer needs a Pope, and all the Catholics should silently acquiesce."²¹ In essence, the UHJ usurped the allegedly divinely instituted role of the Guardian and then covered their tracks by altering Baha'i history and scripture.

Remey himself wrote in 1968, "One of the greatest sins that a believer can commit is to change the Holy Baha'i Texts. I am now finding how confused [even] the most sincere believers are becoming by these alterations and changes and additions to the Holy Teachings."²²

Altered histories, teachings and doctrinal confusion explain why there are several different Baha'i sects today. Thus, despite the Baha'i claim to be without schism, the "unorthodox" Baha'i sects include: "The Free Baha'is," who denounce Shoghi Effendi as the "orthodox" successor to 'Abdu'l-Baha and "The Orthodox Baha'i Faith," which also originated with disputes over leadership, in this case after Shoghi Effendi's death. Organized by excommunicated member Mason Remey, it denies that the UHJ was the true successor of Shoghi Effendi. Another of their sects is "Baha'is Under the Provision of the Covenant" (BUPC), headed by chiropractor Leland Jensen.

Apparently, once those in power discovered that the proclaimed infallible "Guardian" of the faith (Shoghi Effendi) was quite fallible and had made serious errors, there was little desire for a repeat performance; that is, that a future "infallible" Guardian would again prove embarrassing. Hence a supposedly more "democratic" form of government, The Universal House of Justice, was selected to be the governing body of the Baha'i faith.

Like most Mormons, most Baha'is have little or no idea of the serious distortions that have transpired in their history, because they uncritically accept the pronouncements of the governing body. But the UHJ was not breaking new Baha'i ground with its chicanery. Just as the nine historic Baha'i Manifestations have contradicted one another on basic points, even the four cornerstone Baha'i prophets have contradicted one another and altered one another's teachings through infallible (mis)interpretation or outright subversion. For example, Miller points out that Baha'u'llah's son, 'Abdu'l-Baha (who, incidentally, left little of the Bab's teachings intact) violated his father's legal will by appointing his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as successor rather than Baha'u'llah's brother, who had been stipulated in Baha'u'llah's will. This leaves the Baha'is in the embarrassing position of accepting that a non-Manifestation of God can overrule the legally declared wishes of a Manifestation of God. The Baha'i website agrees that "'Abdu'l-Baha was *not* a Manifestation of God" and yet declares his decisions are considered binding. "Although He is not considered to be a

Manifestation of God like the Bab and Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha's decisions are believed to have been divinely guided and His writings (along with the Bab's and Baha'u'llah's) are considered a part of the Baha'i sacred scripture."

If such extensive corruption of the Baha'i faith has occurred, it is at least consistent with their belief that *all* religions become corrupted in time. As 'Abdu'l-Baha argued, "In the passage of time religions become entirely changed and altered."²³ "The essential realities... have now well nigh vanished."²⁴ If so, one wonders how Baha'is can logically argue that all other religions need to have their "original truths" restored to pristine Baha'i purity when it is their own religion that remains so corrupted? How can Baha'is pride themselves on the uniqueness and incorruptibility of their religion?

Other questions can be raised here as well. Baha'u'llah himself said that the biblical and Koranic texts had *not* been corrupted textually but hermeneutically:

That the meaning of the Word of God hath been perverted, not that the actual words have been effaced. To the truth of this testify they that are sound of mind.... We have also heard a number of the foolish of the earth assert that the genuine text of the heavenly Gospel doth not exist amongst the Christians.... How grievously they have erred!... How could God... cause His holy Book, His most great testimony amongst His creatures, to disappear also? What would be left to that People?... What law could be their stay and guide?²⁵

In light of this, the claim of some modern Baha'is, who appeal to a *textual* corruption of the Gospels in order to support their denials of biblical teaching, would seem to number them among "the foolish of the earth."

Notes:

13. William McLwee Miller, *The Baha'i Faith: Its History and Teachings* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1974), p. 54.
14. See Douglas Martin, *World Order*, Spring 1976, p. 46. Much depends here on the words of Shoghi Effendi and the clarity with which the Bab expressed his teachings about the next Manifestation. Obviously if his statements were unclear or contradictory, anyone could claim to be the next Prophet and, if luck were with him, succeed. Clear or unclear, the Baha'is have problems.
15. Ibid.
16. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah Adrianople 1863-68* (Oxford: George Ronald), pp. 120, 146, ch. 7; *Abington Dictionary of Living Religions*, p. 987.
17. Martin, p. 61.
18. Miller, *The Baha'i Faith: Its History and Teaching*, pp. 323, 327, 343-346.
19. Letter dated February 10, 1981.
20. *World Order*, Spring 1976, pp. 43-44.
- 20a. Miller, *The Baha'i Faith*, ch. 12-14, for example, pp. 310-322. On Baha'i authoritarianism, see the *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion*, June 1998.
21. Miller, "What Is the Baha'i World Faith?" (pamphlet), p. 13.
22. Miller, *The Baha'i Faith*, p. 321.
23. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Christ's Promise Fulfilled* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1978), p. 72
24. *Baha'i World Faith*, p. 225; 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Christ's Promise Fulfilled*, pp. 66-67.
25. Baha'u'llah, *The Kitab'Ilqan The Book of Certitude* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 87, 89, see also p. 86.

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