

Baha' U'llah's son, ABDU'L BAHA (1844-1921), assumed leadership of the group after his father's death. It was during Abdu'l's reign that Bahá'í was brought to the United States in 1893, the year of the famed Chicago World's Fair. Abdu'l proved to be an outstanding interpreter of his father's teachings, and Bahá'í became solidified into an established movement under Abdu'l's tenure. A \$2.5 million temple was built by him in the Chicago suburb of Wilmette, Illinois, the U.S. headquarters for the movement.

After the death of Abdu'l Baha in 1921, SHOGHI EFFENDI (d. 1953), Abdu'l's grandson, became the new leader. Shoghi appointed the Hands of the Cause of God as an institution that advises and guides the movement.

The supreme governing body of Bahá'í is the Universal House of Justice, which acts as the legislative and executive governing body seeking to promote and apply the laws of Baha' U'llah.

Bahá'í utilizes a unique calendar revolving around the key dates in the lives of Mirza Ali Muhammad and Baha' U'llah. The year begins on March 21, which is considered to be a holy day. Other holy days include: April 21, 29, and May 2 — Baha' U'llah's calling and mission; May 23 — the call of Bab; November 12 — the birth of Baha' U'llah; October 20 — the birth of Bab; May 29 — the death of Baha' U'llah; and July 9 — the martyrdom of Bab. Bab established a calendar of nineteen months of nineteen days each, allowing for four intercalary days (five in leap years).

To become a member of Bahá'í, one must profess a belief in the teachings of Baha' U'llah.

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There are no SACRAMENTS or rituals and no professional clergy. Members are expected to pray daily; fast nineteen days per year; observe the holy days; make at least one pilgrimage during their lifetime to Haifa, Israel, the location of the world headquarters for the movement; and abstain from alcohol and refrain from all substance abuse.

The temple in Wilmette is constructed with the numeral nine as the central architectural motif. Nine is the Bahá'í symbol of unity and stands for the nine manifestations — Moses, BUDDHA, Zoroaster, CONFUCIUS, Jesus Christ, MUHAMMAD, HARE KRISHNA, Bab, and Baha' U'llah — whom God has raised up throughout the centuries. There are nine sides to the building, nine pillars, nine arches, nine gates and nine fountains.

Local groups, called spiritual assemblies, meet in major cities all over the world. These are governed by a National Spiritual Assembly comprised of nine members. There are presently close to 24,000 assemblies and 133 national assemblies in the United States. Members come from all walks of life and from every nationality and race. Currently, there are over five million members of the Bahá'í faith in over 205 countries worldwide. Bahá'í temples are situated in cities throughout the world. The writings of Baha' U'llah have been translated into hundreds of languages.

Teachings. "Ye are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one Branch." So stated Bahá'í's founder. In keeping with this basic tenet, Bahá'í teaches that all religions contain a degree of truth and that this should warrant the incentive to unite them into a world religion comprised of universal principles. "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens," is another oft-quoted slogan of the movement capturing the essence of its basic thrust toward universalism.

This ideal is contrary to traditional CHRISTIANITY and, ironically, to Bahá'í's parent, Islam. Christianity, for example, teaches that the sole means for unity and peace in the world lies in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In keeping with these words, the creeds of Christendom have always confessed that the one true Faith to the exclusion of all others is Christianity; "Whoever will be saved shall, above all else, hold the catholic faith" (Athanasian Creed, Appendix 1). It is this exclusivism that furnishes Christianity with its missionary motive. This is similarly true of Islam, the mother of Bahá'í ("There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet"). Muslims generally regard Bahá'í as being a heretical SECT chiefly because it has substituted a new prophet (Baha' U'llah) for Muhammad, much the same way that Christianity rejects Mormonism, for example, as a heretical movement because its founder and prophet, JOSEPH SMITH, claimed supernatural revelation in addition to the revealed Word of God in the BIBLE. Therefore, the noble goal of unity among the religions of the world fails at the outset. By definition, it is impossible. Christianity ceases to be Christianity when it accepts as legitimate any means of salvation outside of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Islam ceases to be Islam, etc. Bahá'í's chief tenet of unity among all faiths is an idealistic goal that can never be realized.

A second stark contrast to traditional Christianity is the Bahá'í belief that the great religious teachers in history are "manifestations" of God. For Christianity, Jesus is confessed as the INCARNATION of God. This "fleshing" of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth is rejected by the proponents of the Bahá'í faith, who claim that God simply cannot be identified in the flesh of Jesus or any other great religious leader.

Conclusion. Other principles of Bahá'í include the advocacy of egalitarianism between the sexes, a universal language, a world confederacy of nations, the establishment of world peace, and the complete and total freedom for study and independent investigation of the world.

Religious activities center around the calendar (see above), and the rising and setting of the sun begins and ends each day in the Bahá'í faith. The authoritative writings of Bahá'í are the sacred canons of Baha' U'Ilah and Shoghi Effendi.

2. Response by Dr. Robert Stockman

1994

[personal greetings not included]

Recently the Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions, and the Occult, edited by yourself and Mr. Larry A. Nichols, crossed my desk and I looked up your article on the Bahá'í Faith. By and large it is a fair article, rather impressive in its scope and treatment. There were a few minor factual errors, however, that I thought I would write to you about, in a spirit of collaboration and dialogue.

My comments are divided into two groups: general comments about the article, primarily about its use of words; and comments about specific statements.

First, about the word "Bahá'í": grammatically it is an adjective unless it refers to an adherent, in which case it is a noun. Thus it functions in sentences exactly the same way as the word "Christian." Consequently phrases like "Bahá'í utilizes a unique calendar" are ungrammatical in the same way the phrase "Christian uses a unique calendar" would be. The name of the religion is either "the Bahá'í Faith" or "the Bahá'í religion." It is unfortunate such a phrase is necessary, but "Baháism" is generally not used by English-speaking Bahá'ís (though the equivalent is used by French, German, and Russian-speaking Bahá'ís). Referring to the Bahá'í Faith as Bahá'í or as Baháism" is like referring to Islam as "Muhammadanism," something scholars did until Muslims complained about it.

Bahá'ís have a standardized system in the Roman alphabet for spelling Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and other major terms since 1923. These spellings are standard not only to English, but to Croatian, Icelandic, and all other languages using the same alphabet. Well over a thousand books have been printed using these spellings, as well as countless pamphlets, booklets, and periodicals. We are trying to spread the spelling standard among scholars and other writers as well, partly because it is confusing to have words spelled different ways, and partly because these are the names of our divine messengers. Presumably if scholars started transliterating Jesus Christ as Iesus Christos Christians would rightly complain.

Except for the capital "U" you spell "Bahá'u'lláh" according to the standard spelling. A capital "U" does crop up in a few non-Bahá'í publications, but could confuse pronunciation of the word. The use of accent marks is optional.

Turning now to specifics in the article:

Page 32, col. 2, line 2: "were referred to as Babists": The followers of the Báb in Persian were called Bábís. "Babist" was coined in the late nineteenth century, but was never as common as "Bábí" in English-speaking scholarly writing. It has never been used by the Bahá'ís and modern work on the Bábí movement by Islamic-trained scholars uses "Bábí." It is probably safe to

characterize the word "Babist" as archaic and nonstandard.

You might note that column 1 on the same page has an entry for "Babists." This also would be better changed to "Bábís."

Col. 2, ¶1, line 6: "Madhi" most likely should be "Mahdi."

Col. 2, ¶2, lines 2-3: "More than one hundred literary contributions of Bahá'u'lláh": Shoghi Effendi described Bahá'u'lláh literary output as consisting of "one hundred volumes," so this is not inaccurate. But Shoghi Effendi was writing in 1944 at a time no one had analyzed Bahá'u'lláh's literary output. The Research department at the Bahá'í World Center has now organized Bahá'u'lláh's writings and counts at least 15,000 "tablets," or separate writings. Most are a page or two in length; perhaps a dozen are of book length.

Col. 2, ¶2, lines 7-9 "Eventually the writings of Bahá'u'lláh were elevated to the level of inspired sacred text by Bahá'í devotees." Bahá'u'lláh made it clear in several of His writings - for example, his tablet to the Pope -- that he claimed to be the Return of Christ and a source of divine revelation. Consequently Bahá'ís have always treated Bahá'u'lláh's writings as the Word of God. There was never a time when Bahá'ís did not view Bahá'u'lláh's writings as "inspired sacred text."

Col. 2, ¶3, line 3: "It was during Abdu'l's reign": Grammatically one cannot separate "'Abdu'l" from "Bahá" because the first element means "Servant of" and the second element means "glory." The two constitute a single compound name. Thus it would be better to say "'Abdu'l-Bahá." Bahá'ís usually use the term "'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry" though it is reasonable for others to chose other terms.

Col. 2, ¶3, lines 9-10: "A \$2.5 million temple was built by him in the Chicago suburb of Wilmette." The Bahá'í temple in Wilmette was started in 1903 and finished in 1953; thus more than half of its construction was done during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi (1921-57), not that of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi encouraged and oversaw the construction plans, though the bulk of the fund raising and most of the actual planning and organization was carried out by the American Bahá'ís.

Col. 2, ¶4, line 2: Shoghi Effendi died in 1957, not 1953. He was born in 1897.

Col. 2, ¶4, line 3: "Shoghi appointed the hands of the Cause as an institution that advises and guides the movement": Referring to Shoghi Effendi Rabbani as "Shoghi" is like referring to President Reagan as

"Ronald." "Effendi is a title and Bahá'ís always use it when speaking of Shoghi Effendi. Though Bahá'ís rarely use Shoghi Effendi's last name, it would be legitimate to refer to him as "Rabbani."

The hands of the Cause of God as an institution are almost extinct, because the Universal House of Justice is unable to appoint hands; only Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi were empowered to so designate individuals. When Shoghi Effendi died there were 27 hands; today there are only 3 left, and all are in their 80s. To carry forward their functions (though not to continue their rank) the Universal House of Justice has appointed "Counselors."

Col. 2, ¶5, line 7: "call of the Báb":

Will Christians know what "call" means here? It is a phrase with which I am not familiar. Bahá'ís usually refer to May 23rd as the "declaration" of the Bab instead.

Page 33, Col. 1, ¶1, lines 3-6: "Nine is the symbol of unity and stands for the nine Manifestations - Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Confucius, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, Hare Krishna, Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh":

The nine sides of the Bahá'í House of Worship do not represent any particular nine Manifestations of God, though nine, as you note, is seen as a symbol of unity. The Bahá'í scriptures mention about fourteen individuals as Manifestations of God: Adam, Noah, Salih, Hud, the founder of the Sabaean Faith, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Zoroaster, Krishna, Buddha, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'í pamphlets rarely mention the first five because of their obscurity; the scriptures also make it clear that the names of other Manifestations have been lost. Your list did not include Abraham and referred to Krishna as "Hare Krishna," I suppose because there is an entry elsewhere in the dictionary under "H"; Bahá'ís, however, do not use the "Hare." Because of mistranslation of an oral statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (subsequently corrected) there has been some confusion about the status of Confucius. The Bahá'í Faith does NOT regard him as a manifestation of God.

Col. 2, ¶1, lines 8-9: "There are nine sides to the building, nine pillars, nine arches, nine gates, and nine fountains": where are the nine gates? I can recall only one gate at the House of Worship. Nine arches, pillars, and fountains may be found, but are not architectural requirements of a temple.

Col. 1, ¶2, line 5: Because of redistricting, primarily in India, the number of local spiritual assemblies has dropped to 20,000. The number of National Spiritual Assemblies has increased to 174, mostly because of the opening of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to the Bahá'í Faith.

Col. 1, ¶2, lines 10-11: "Bahá'í temples are situated in cities throughout the world": There are 7

Bahá'í houses of worship worldwide: Wilmette, USA; Sydney, Australia; Frankfurt, Germany; Panama City, Panama; Kampala, Uganda; New Delhi, India; and Apia, Western Samoa. There is no temple in Israel. The first Bahá'í House of Worship, in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, was damaged by an earthquake and razed in 1963 by the Soviet authorities.

Col. 1 ¶2, lines 11-12: "The writings of Bahá'u'lláh have been translated into hundreds of languages": over 800, at the latest count.

Col. 2, ¶1, line 18: Islam generally does not regard the Bahá'í Faith as a heretical "sect" if by "sect" you mean a branch of Islam. The word "sect" is ambiguous, as it usually is used to refer to a group that is a branch of a much bigger religious group. Muslims regard the Bahá'í Faith as heresy, but will add that it is non-Muslim.

Col. 2, ¶1, lines 19-24: The analogy between Bahá'u'lláh and Joseph Smith is imperfect because Mormonism, from a sociological point of view, is a Christian sect, while the Bahá'í Faith is not a Muslim sect. Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be a Mouthpiece of God and divine revealer; in contrast Smith only claimed divine inspiration to translate an alleged sacred record of Christ's work in the Americas.

Col. 2, ¶4, lines 4-5: "the authoritative writings of [the] Bahá'í [Faith] are the sacred canons of Bahá'u'lláh and Shoghi Effendi": What happened to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings? "Canon" could suggest a collection of writings, in which case the sentence could be understood to mean the Bahá'í Faith has two separate sacred scriptures. It would be more exact to say the Bahá'í authoritative texts includes the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. "Authoritative" is a good word to use because these different writings are viewed as having different statuses: the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are not the word of God but are sacred interpretation; the writings of Shoghi Effendi are interpretation and are authoritative but probably are not considered sacred....

[salutations not included]

Robert Stockman

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