TRUTHFULNESS—THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIETY

EDITORIAL

MILLENNIALISM, THE MILLERITES, AND HISTORICISM

WILLIAM P. COLLINS

THE CONCEPT OF “THE END”: A PHILOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

YOUZI ARKADYEVICH IOANNESYAN

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ’S MEETINGS WITH TWO PROMINENT IRANIANS

TRANSLATED BY AHANG RABBANI
Truthfulness—
The Foundation of Society

A midst unprecedented economic prosperity, America, the world's leading superpower, is held captive by a debilitating crisis. While a bizarre political drama plays itself out on millions of television screens, a bewildered public tries to make sense of conflicting opinions with which it continues to be bombarded by the media. As the drama unfolds, few seem to realize that what they are watching is, in reality, an accelerating moral and spiritual crisis, at once much deeper and more threatening than those caught in its vortex imagine.

The crisis did not arrive suddenly or unexpectedly. Its main elements were visible half a century ago and were summed up at that time by Shoghi Effendi, then Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, in a single portentous and prophetic paragraph embodied in a message sent to the Bahá’ís in North America:

The steady and alarming deterioration in the standard of morality [in America] as exemplified by the appalling increase in crime, by political corruption in ever widening and ever higher circles, by the loosening of the sacred ties of marriage, by the inordinate craving for pleasure and diversion, and by the marked and progressive slackening of parental control, is no doubt the most arresting and distressing aspect of the decline that has set in, and can be clearly perceived, in the fortunes of the entire nation.

The rot that continues to spread through American society is not the product of any single cause. It is the result of many errors, or, to use unfashionable language, sins, repeated over the years. The modern separation of law from morality and the consequent reduction of the legal process to a contest over technicalities; the notion that guilt or innocence, established by juries, are legal fictions and that these terms have no inherent meaning or relevance; the idea that victory in a contest justifies any means used to achieve it; the blurring of the distinction between truth and falsehood, whether in court, in advertising, in reporting, or in political campaigns; the notion that truth is no more than a convention to be disregarded whenever it becomes an obstacle to the achievement of one's ends—these are but a few of the symptoms of a disease that is slowly but steadily eroding the body politic.
Yet truthfulness is the cornerstone not only of the entire public edifice but of personal life as well. Without truthfulness, all other qualities on which society depends for its proper functioning wither away.

Enumerating some of the qualities of the “divinely enlightened soul,” 'Abdu'l-Bahá lists knowledge, faith, steadfastness, uprightness, fidelity, and humility but accords primacy to truthfulness, which He calls “the foundation of all the virtues of the world of humanity” and even beyond. “Without truthfulness, progress and success in all the worlds of God are impossible for a soul,” He writes. “When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also become realized.”

A society that devalues truth and truthfulness is, by any measure, a society in decline.
The advent of the third millennium is creating considerable discussion in the media and among the general public. Whether the focus is the Y2K bug or the flocking of conservative Christians to Jerusalem to prepare for Christ's second coming, all discussions turn with expectation toward the future and the question of whether anything—technological, eschatological, social, or cultural—will mark the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The editorial in World Order's Spring 1998 issue discussed responses to the approaching millennium. We are pleased to make a further contribution to the dialogue in this issue. Youli Ioannesyan's "The Concept of 'The End': A Philological Perspective" considers the linguistic issues behind the claim of some Bible students that the Bible predicts the end of the world. Dr. Ioannesyan explores the worlds of the biblical Jews and the classical Greeks, notes the overlapping semantic fields of the words "age" and "world" to explain the frequent confusion over the meaning of the biblical texts, and examines the texts in their larger context to show that they clearly refer to the end of an age, not to the end of the physical world. As a result, he demonstrates that the meaning of the biblical text is closer to the Bahá'í scriptures than many Bahá'ís had heretofore thought.

William P. Collins' "Millennialism, the Millerites, and Historicism"—the first of a two-part examination of the Bahá'í interpretation of biblical time-prophecy—brings the millennial theme home to the Bahá'í community by recounting the history of the Millerites. Most Bahá'ís have heard of William Miller, the upstate New York farmer who studied the Bible (in the King James version) with great thoroughness in the 1830s and early 1840s and convinced himself—and subsequently tens of thousands of Americans—that Jesus Christ would descend on the clouds in 1843 or 1844. With great skill Mr. Collins traces the roots of Miller's beliefs back to ancient Jew and Greek authors—the same ones considered by Dr. Ioannesyan—and the evolution of the interpretation of biblical prophecy from the classical Mediterranean through the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment to the early nineteenth-century American frontier. In the process he underlines the importance of the Millerites, not only to the Bahá'ís but to the world. His second article (in the Winter 1998–99 issue) will trace Millerite ideas in the early American Bahá'í community and their relationship to passages in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, contemporary interpretations by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and statements by Iranian Bahá'í biblical interpreters.

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The third article in this issue—Ahang Rabbani's translation of the notes of two prominent Persians (not Bahá'ís) who met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911—reveals the power of courteous consultation over con-
tentious confrontation. In spite of the built-in skepticism of these two about the legitimacy of the Bahá’í Faith, they were unable to maintain, in the face of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unfailing courtesy and reasonableness, the distance between themselves and Him that they would have liked to keep. These notes are of both historical and psychological importance and offer a fascinating glimpse into the effect ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had on people who came into His presence.

To the Editor

SHOGHI EFFENDI ISSUE HITS MARK

I congratulate the editors of World Order for having devoted an entire issue (Fall 1997) to the life and work of Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (1897–1957), the former head and Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith. I have noted, as have others, that there are very large lacunae in the fabric of Bahá’í scholarship where Shoghi Effendi studies are concerned. I hope this particular issue will help draw attention to the ongoing need for more in-depth studies on the Guardian and the guardianship. Whatever speculation may account for this present situation, the fact remains that qualified Bahá’í scholars are now only beginning to take seriously an investigation of the life, work and writings of this extraordinarily gifted former leader of the Bahá’í Faith. The entire field is a potentially rich seed bed awaiting cultivation.

I would like to make special mention of Dr. Sandra Hutchison’s insightful article “Shoghi Effendi and the American Dream.” Dr. Hutchison has done an admirable job in juxtaposing and “correlating”—a word that Shoghi Effendi himself used in relation to the method that ought to inform Bahá’í scholarship—the mythos that first drew the pilgrim fathers to the shores of North America (the Promised Land) to Shoghi Effendi’s sociospiritual vision of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh for this same continent, whose “unfolding destiny” he viewed as being inextricably linked to the mission of the Bahá’ís of North America.

On a slightly different note, the creative insights that Dr. Hutchison brought to her task, I experienced as an uplifting and refreshing relief to the sometimes overly cognitive and analytical “masculine” forms of scholarship that are all too pronounced within the circle of Bahá’í studies. Vision, insight, and creativity are as much needed in Bahá’í studies as are fully dressed academic approaches.

There is an all too prevalent tendency to view the ongoing history of the Bahá’í Faith and the North American Bahá’í community as being separate and apart from American history and the sociopolitical forces at work in what Shoghi Effendi often referred to as the “Great Republic of the West” and also in the Dominion of Canada. Such a disjointed view is no doubt accentuated by the many deplorable aspects of American culture that are clearly at odds with the many beneficial “prescriptions for living” contained in the revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. Nonetheless, Shoghi Effendi made it clear, without fully embracing any one of the “chosen-people” theologies of old, that both reciprocal and synergistic relationships defined the interactions between the non-Bahá’í peoples and governments of North America and the Bahá’í community living within the confines of its shores.

With the advent of the Bahá’í Faith, and in particular where the mission and destiny of North America are concerned, purely secular happenings are never entirely lost to the sacred moments of history. Shoghi Effendi made it clear, particularly in the last few pages of The Advent of Divine Justice, that the highest ideals of “the American Dream” would live on in Bahá’u’lláh’s and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sacred vision for the peoples of North America.
Thus it would seem that, by fulfilling its divinely ordained mission, the Bahá'í community of North America will both rescue and preserve the best and noblest elements contained in the sacred dream of its past and present history, a dream the ideals of which still animate and foster hope for the countless disillusioned and disoriented souls who live in the New World.

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SCIENCE AND WOMEN:
BEACON OF HOPE
I loved the Summer 1998 issue containing an article on women in science [Rhea Howard Harmsen’s “Science in the Hands of Women: Present Barriers, Future Promise”]. After reading this issue from cover to cover, I loaned it to my friend and study-buddy who is a mom and going into genetics research on C.elegans. She is facing so many of the issues the article talks about and is rather discouraged after six months of academic hell. She has shared with me day after day the intense competition she saw in the laboratory where she interned here at UIC. For the last six months she fought to keep her grades high enough to ensure she would get into her graduate program of choice, while working every additional hour at the lab, feeling terrible for not spending time with her son, only to be exhausted when she was with him. She was fortunate to have parents-in-law who were able to take care of him for a week or so at a time during midterms and finals. I think the situation is worse for women working in medical and related fields, where the new developments are emerging so rapidly that to take a little time off can mean being left behind. My sense is that the competition is less intense in my field, restoration ecology.

One of the high points of the article was the coverage of my personal heroine, Barbara McClintock. Even though I’m not in the same field, I have long admired her as a model of independence and trust in her own way of seeing things. She represents to me the ability to trust one’s own perceptions, and not see only what one is “supposed” to see. In the peer-review system it is so easy to become an outcast for not going along with the dominant paradigm. The other biographies of women scientists energized me as I read them. It isn’t just the fact that they are women and scientists like me, it’s that it puts me into a historical context where I’m not the only one.

I was also inspired as I read the passage in the Harmsen article that spoke of the link between women scientists and women at the bottom of the socio-economic scale: peasants, farmers, third world women. It’s easy to feel guilty about having the luxury to get a degree when so many people are deprived of the basics of food and shelter. I have vivid memories of my teenage years in Guatemala, where I saw so many rural indigenous men, women, and children work from dawn to dusk with little hope of getting more than a month or two away from the edge of starvation. The combination of guilt and powerlessness that comes with those memories is giving way to a sense of fighting the good fight.

I hope that everyone who participated in producing the Women in Science article realizes it is not at all trivial to aspiring women scientists like me. My career path requires toughness, persistence, and determination: I like it like that. I don’t want to take an easier route because I enjoy thumbing my nose at anyone who believes I am inadequate to conquer the goals I have set for myself, and there are plenty of people like that. All these conditions make every occasional drop of encouragement so much more precious.

Juliet Carson-Martinez
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Earthquake

It isn't an ordinary quake
beginning with a soft rumble
in the mind
it finally explodes
in the valley of the heart

The floor doesn't move
the walls don't sway
it comes from within

There is a wild singing
sounding at the top of your head
you cannot think
you cannot feel

Until the sudden rush
of tumbling water
reaches your heart

Only then can you see
a white hand waving
from the dungeon room
in Akka

—Joan Imig Taylor

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**Millennialism, the Millerites, and Historicism**  
**BY WILLIAM P. COLLINS**

**Introduction**

Why has the creation of the kingdom of God on earth been a central vision of the Bahá’í Faith, and why has it resonated particularly with converts from Protestant Christianity? A number of motifs have been central to various stages in Bahá’í history, according to sociologist Peter Smith.¹ The first and foremost of these motifs, he posits, is millennialism (the urgent expectation of eschatological events and revolutionary changes that would transform society through the agency of God, His Emissary, or His people) and the expectation of a future time when that transformed society would minimize poverty and suffering. Thus it is not surprising that millennialism has primacy as a theme in the writings of the Báb! Faith and as a foundation for other motifs, such as martyrdom and social reform. This same millennial motif was a major impulse that encouraged early American Bahá’ís, living in a largely Protestant culture, to focus on the Bible and a particular form of interpretation of biblical time prophecy.

The interpretation of prophecy has fundamental value for large numbers of believers in any religion because it plays a crucial role in individual and group self-definition. “Prophecy belief,” according to Paul Boyer, a leading scholar of millennialism, “is a way of ordering experience. It gives a grand, overarching shape to history, and thus ultimate meaning to the lives of individuals caught up in history’s stream.”² At the end of the nineteenth century this process of self-definition consumed early American Bahá’ís, who sought proof from the Bible that Bahá’u’lláh, the founder of their Faith, was the return of Christ anticipated by the millennial elements within all religions. One strand of American Protestantism, Millerism, was particularly attractive to early American Bahá’ís largely because of its expectations for the fulfillment of biblical prophecy in 1844—the beginning of the Bahá’í era. This conjunction of the founding of the Bahá’í Faith with the Millerite prediction validated for Bahá’ís of Protestant background the exegetical method employed by the followers of Millerism.

An investigation of the intellectual genealogy of the Millerites and their exegetical method reveals how influential Protestant beliefs were in shaping a distinctly Bahá’í methodology in time-prophesy interpretation. The Millerite movement was the prime example of Christian expectation regarding 1844, and its principles of time-prophesy interpretation found favor as a pattern for prophetic interpretation by American Bahá’ís.

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Early American Baha'is were instrumental in fostering a consensus around this approach that has since become the norm among Baha'is, largely through the confirmation, correction, and creative synthesis of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'u'llah's eldest son, His appointed successor, and the interpreter of His writings. By applying one of several distinctly Protestant approaches to time-prophecy interpretation and drawing on a Baha'i perspective on key biblical passages, American Baha'is have emerged in the twentieth century as the primary bearers of a particular approach to time-prophecy interpretation.

**Seeds of Historicism**

Belief in prophecy, and particularly in the type of prophecy that specifies the dates of future events, has its roots in the human experience of time. Human beings have an innate need to measure and order things, relating human actions and events to each other in sequence. Hence they have set up elaborate schemes for measuring time.

Calendars and clocks demarcate human experience by dividing time into manageable portions to which meaning and value can be assigned.

Human beings also seek to escape time, to be freed from imprisonment in the here and now, to gain transcendent knowledge of the future or at least a sense of assurance in predicting its course in humanity's favor. In the base ten number system now universally in use, the multiples of ten, one hundred, and one thousand demarcate transitions in order of magnitude and are used as a convenient way to count in large amounts. The inherent operations of base-ten counting, with the appearance of one or more zeros at the end of a number, thus serves as a mental marker. In the past two centuries, as each century has begun, human discourse has been filled with expectation. The highest expectation, however, has been reserved for millennial markers, when three zeros ring up after the initial digit. There is ongoing discussion about whether the year 1000 was seen as anything special by those who lived through it. To any honest observer, however, it is clear that the year 2000 has sparked a mythic interest that combines the fear of apocalypse and the hope of progress.

The Bible has also given to the Christian world a demarcation in the form of the millennium, a Latin word meaning a period of one thousand years, which represents the Christian expectation that Jesus Christ will return bodily from heaven and reign over a recreated earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20). But millennialism is not confined to the Christian or religious worlds: It has come to have a historical and sociological meaning that transcends both Christianity and a specific period of time. One of the most widely used definitions calls millennialism a brand of salvationism that pictures salvation as collective, terrestrial, imminent, total, and miraculous or, succinctly, as the "urgent expectation of eschatological events that will utterly transform the world." In its most generic form, the millennium is
“a future time free from cares, imperfections, and suffering.”

In addition to the millennium, Jewish and Christian scriptures refer to other time periods that mark significant events in sacred history, perhaps contemporary with the authors, perhaps future: 1,260 days, 1,290 days, 1,335 days, 2,300 days. The myth and magic of such numbers inserted in a sacred text has spurred many to search for the keys to their decoding.

Both the biblical prophecies and the properties of calendrical systems have fostered a significant trend in religion: the interpretation of prophecy in terms of a timetable of sacred history. The interpreting of dates within sacred texts and traditions has been an important way of defending prophetic claims, establishing theological chronologies, and constructing scenarios of the consummation of history. Protestant Christianity in particular has fostered several schools of prophetic exegesis. One of these is of particular importance in understanding the development of the Bahá’í approach to time prophecy in the largely Protestant environment of North America.

The exegetical method used by many Protestant interpreters in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has been termed historicism. It was a method of continuous historical interpretation, including the coordination of all prophecy with specific historical events.

Historicists believed that Daniel’s prophecies were reiterated in the Book of Revelation and that many of the events described had already been fulfilled in history. Drawing on the historicist method, one could theoretically know which prophecies were yet to be fulfilled and calculate them based on the historical events and dates that historicists assigned to the already-completed prophecies. Protestant historicism exhibited four characteristics: a preoccupation with prophetic time periods, buttressed by the widely accepted theory that every prophetic day signified a literal year; a calibration of all prophecy with history; the identification of the papacy with the Antichrist; and a coherent system of interdependent synchronization among prophecies.

For those who believed in prophecy, and particularly in historicism, history had a direction, a goal. The randomness and uncertainty of history gave way to coherence, order, and certainty. Chronologies in which particular years were invested with millennialist significance were of necessity destined to elicit and evoke a millennialist response whenever a period of mythic import approached. Likewise, if one wishes to search for the meaning of prophecies in historical events, millennialist significance can be created around a date on
the basis of the perceived authority of the prophetic text and the apparent soundness of the methods used for deciphering prophecies. Such creative investment of an otherwise mundane year with mythic meaning can be seen in the results of the historicist methodology used by the Millerites. This method of interpretation, widespread and largely unquestioned in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American Protestantism, had its origins in a number of trends and movements in pre-Christian writings and within early Christianity.

The Greek poet Hesiod (eighth century B.C.E.) taught that history was a succession of worsening stages, descending from a golden age to silver, bronze, and iron. The final stage of history, he believed, would be marked by warfare and discord, completed by Zeus' destruction of humankind for its wickedness. This Greek vision reemerged in the book of Daniel in the form of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2:31–45).

Apocalyptic writing, which emerged from the earlier prophetic tradition of Amos, Hosea, and Micah that stressed ethical issues, reached its apogee in the eighth to the sixth centuries B.C.E. among Jewish authors who observed God's operation in human actions and who gave sacred significance to the sweep of history. The most significant of such apocalyptic writers were the authors of portions of the book of Ezekiel and the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, as well as the authors of several later noncanonical texts. The apocalyptic passages of Ezekiel were set down following a period when the Jews faced extinction as a nation, when the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar conquered the Holy Land and destroyed Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (sixth century B.C.E.). The author of the book of Daniel wrote around the time that the Seleucid monarch Antiochus Epiphanes attempted, between 175 and 164 B.C.E., a forced Hellenization of the Jewish people, who revolted under the leadership of the Maccabee family. The historical personages of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and other lesser prophetic figures had functioned primarily as preachers focusing on contemporary transgressions, foretelling divine favor or wrath, depending on the actions taken toward Israel by Israel's enemies and Israel's response to the divine call. The subsequent apocalyptic authors who wrote the biblical books that now bear the names of Ezekiel and Daniel introduced the notion that history would have an ending or consummation—an apocalypse. They were stylistically creating a literary genre that relied heavily on symbol and allegory to reveal the divine plan underlying the surface flow of events. Taking the entire sweep of history as their subject, they portrayed in metaphorical language the future of the Jews, the fate of Israel's enemies, and the ultimate destiny of humanity and the universe itself. The prophets viewed the struggle between good
and evil as an individual and corporate matter; the apocalypticists saw it in cosmic terms.  

The apocalyptic authors’ understanding of humanity’s fate, which was articulated when the books of Ezekiel and Daniel were written, opened the door for continued elaboration of humanity’s cosmic destiny. In the period of more than a century and a half between the Maccabean revolt and the appearance of Christianity, a number of apocalyptic works, some canonical, some extracanonical, appeared, including apocalyptic works in the Dead Sea scrolls.

The canonical apocalypses available to early Christians included important parts of Ezekiel and Daniel; the Little Apocalypse (also known as the Olivet Discourse or Synoptic Apocalypse, in Mark 13:14–27, Luke 21:25–28, Matt. 24:29–31), and the Revelation of St. John. All would become the basis of the kind of prophetic dating on which historicism flourished.

The eschatological hopes and millennial dreams that sustained the early Christians remained alive and took various forms over time. In 172 C.E. the Phrygian Christian prophet Montanus proclaimed that he was the Holy Spirit incarnate and that the last judgment was at hand. The great Christian theologian Irenaeus (c.130–c.200 C.E.), in his treatise Against Heresies, reviewed the biblical apocalypses and developed a prophetic timetable that demarcated millennial periods based on the six days of creation and the day of rest. History would last for six thousand years, ending with Christ’s return and the millennium. Victorinus, the late third century C.E. Bishop of Pettau, wrote the earliest surviving commentary on the Book of Revelation, in which he asserted the millennialist vision that Christ would reign for a thousand years at the end of history. The theologian Lactantius (early fourth century C.E.) introduced a strong apocalyptic strain in his Divine Institutes. However, Origen (c.185–c.254 C.E.), the premier theologian of the early Greek church, wrote against literal interpretation of prophecies. He taught, for example, that the Antichrist was only a symbol of evil and that the thousand-year reign of righteousness described was a spiritual state of the souls of individual believers. Christianity’s most celebrated doctrinal theologian, Saint Augustine (354–430 C.E.), also rejected a literal millennium, elaborating instead the metaphor of history as a struggle between two cities symbolically represented by Jerusalem (the city of God—that is, the Church) and Babylon (the city of man). The combat of the Book of Revelation did not await eschatological fulfillment because it was being enacted in the present.

Despite the caution urged by Origen and Augustine, early Christianity was already strongly affected by the association of apocalyptic symbols with contemporary imperial powers and world events. These associations had arisen in the Maccabean period (second and first centuries B.C.E.), when Jewish existence was threatened, and when symbols in Daniel were already being applied to the contemporary Romans. It was a short stretch for New Testament authors and early church exegetes to interpret the book of Daniel by projecting some of its references into the future (for example, Matt. 24:15) while connecting prophecies to the international political realities of the day. From the time of the church fathers (the bishops and teachers

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14. The Olivet Discourse is the major source, from words attributed to Jesus Himself, of prophetic prediction about the end of the age. The discourse appears in slightly different forms in all three of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). For this reason it is often called the Synoptic Apocalypse. To distinguish it from the Book of Revelation, this sermon is also called the Little Apocalypse. See Boyer, When Time Shall Be No More 34–36.
of the early Christian church, circa 100–800 C.E.), the four kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in the book of Daniel (2:31-45) were identified as Babylon (the head of gold), Persia (the breast and arms of silver), Greece (the belly and thighs of bronze), and Rome (the legs of iron). If Rome was the kingdom of iron, its rule would be followed by disintegration into weak and strong nations (feet of iron mixed with clay) and the ultimate setting up of God’s kingdom. Believers could begin to ask themselves at what date this kingdom would arrive. However, historicism as a method of interpreting biblical time prophecy did not yet exist, for there was no harmonization of prophecies, and there was no papal Antichrist.

There existed in the early Church, however, a growing preoccupation with chronology, particularly with millennial dates. It is the confluence of calendrical millennia and the association of specific prophecies with past and contemporary events that catalyzed the historicist worldview. Judaism and Christianity both developed an overarching chronological measurement in the early centuries of the common era. The chronology was based on the supposed age of the world (anno Mundi, or A.M.). In the period from around 250 to 850 C.E. Christianity twice made major revisions in this dating system to avoid the threatened consummation of world history and the beginning of the millennium in the year six thousand A.M. It finally adopted the standard that reckons from the purported date of Christ’s birth (anno Domini, or A.D.), forestalling the threatened consummation, while creating fertile ground for future con-

summations as A.D. millennial years approached.

Near the end of the first millennium of Christianity, some Jewish commentators started to calculate prophetic time by counting a biblical prophetic day as a year (Hebrew יומ לַשָּׁנָה yom la-shana). Joachim of Fiore (1130–1202) was perhaps the first Christian to employ the year-day method. He applied it to the 1,260 days of the Book of Revelation, teaching that a new age was to begin in 1260 C.E. This age was to be the third spiritual dispensation of human history, the first having been that of the Father as recorded in the Jewish scriptures and the second, that of the Son as recorded in the New Testament. The third age would be the age of the Holy Spirit. Joachim can be credited with another exegetical convention on which historicists later seized. Joachim believed that the Antichrist would usurp the Holy See (the authority and power of the Pope, the bishop of Rome). By the time of the Reformation this view was common among the majority of those who became Protestants.

One thinker brought all the disparate elements of historicism together in a historicist world view. Joseph Mede (1586–1638) a master of Christ’s College, Cambridge, is credited with revolutionizing the interpretation of prophecy. His major work, *Clavis Apocalyptica, or The Keys to the Apocalypse*, was still in print in the nineteenth century. Mede’s main contribution was the synchronization of prophetic symbols. He coordinated the key prophecies of Daniel with those of Revelation, thereby radically altering any future explanations of Daniel. Mede’s most influential conclusion was equating seven time prophecies that contained time spans of 3½ times (Dan. 7:25, 12:7 and Rev. 12:14), 42 months (Rev. 11:2, 13:5), and 1,260 days (Rev. 11:3, 12:6) and defining a prophetic year as 360 days and a prophetic month as 30 days, thus dissociating prophetic years from exact solar and lunar years.


Mede also went beyond the boundaries of Daniel and Revelation. Writing to the famed Archbishop of Armagh, James Ussher (1581–1656), Mede revived the early Church concept that the second advent and millennium were to inaugurate a great Sabbath that was to begin six thousand years after the creation of the world. Mede matched the end of the six thousand years with his terminus for the 1,260 days/years of papal Antichrist in the year 1736 C.E.

Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) applied Mede’s rationalist method to prophecy through the use of mathematics, which Newton had already used so successfully to explain natural phenomena. Newton’s main contribution was to define historicist exegesis as scientific. Newton considered the book of Daniel to be the key to all other prophecy. Although Newton avoided becoming absolutely specific about the dates from which a terminal point of history could be calculated, he adumbrated a detailed mathematical foundation for calculating prophetic time. Newton, like Mede, equated the biblical 3½ times, 42 months, and 1,260 days and defined a prophetic year as 360 days and a prophetic month as 30 days. His model became widely accepted in the 1700s. Newton also introduced a starting point for time-prophetic calculations by measuring the 70 weeks (490 prophetic years) of Dan. 9:25 from Artaxerxes’ decree to rebuild the temple (Ezra 7), which Newton stated was issued in 457 B.C.E. Newton thus cast over prophetic exegesis the mantle of mathematical science. Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, this framework of so-called scientific interpretation of the symbols of the apocalyptic books was still in use, and Newton’s reputation was a powerful force in its legitimization.

In nineteenth-century American literature, the most-mentioned eighteenth-century interpreter of prophecies was Bishop Thomas Newton (1704–82), dean of St. Paul’s in London and Anglican Bishop of Bristol. Bishop Newton’s *Dissertations on the Prophecies* was extremely popular and widely read. The bishop’s central idea was that the entire Bible represented a harmonious chain of prophecy on the first and second advents of Christ. The two apocalyptic books, Daniel and Revelation, were the keys for unlocking the mysteries of other parts of the Bible. The prophecies, Bishop Newton believed, were a “summary of the history of the world” when explained scientifically. Newton’s addition to prophetic chronology was his equation of terminal points for six thousand anno Mundi, the completion of the 1,260 days/years and the 2,300 days/years. Emphasis on the completion of six thousand years and the coming of the millennial Day of God changed the priorities of Bible study. All genealogies and chronologies in the Bible became time prophecies with as much importance as the specifically apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Thus Bishop Newton, despite eschewing any specific date for the Parousia, or Second Coming, wrote in a manner that encouraged chronological speculation and left to his readers the working out of eschatological timetables.

Further influence on nineteenth-century religious thinking was the prevalence of historicism as the exegetical methodology of most published Protestant commentaries of the time. As already noted, historicism was a method of continuous historical interpretation of sacred text, coordinating all proph-
hecy with specific historical events, including the specific anticipated dates of future events. Along with the appearance of William Miller in America, there was in Britain a contemporaneous premillennial awakening led by interpreters of prophecy such as William Cuninghame (d. 1849), Edward Bickersteth (1786–1850), Thomas Rawson Birks (1810–83), and Edward Irving (1792–1834).21 The Christian Observer (London), which was published from 1802, predicted the second advent for some time between 1843 and 1847.

The Emergence of the Millerites

At no time was the process of constructing eschatological scenarios from historicist time prophecy more intense than during the nineteenth century. Millennial elements within all religions were convinced that the time of the end and the return of their promised one as encoded in their respective writings had arrived. In the landscape of American Protestant Christianity, no group was more influential than the Millerites in constructing an historicist interpretation of biblical time prophecy that argued for the imminent return of Christ in 1843 or 1844. Millerism is the premier example of the radical millennialism prevalent in parts of the United States in the early nineteenth century, and it remains the best-known case of the development of a millennialist movement that apparently failed in its time-prophetic predictions.22

William Miller (1782–1849) has been called “the most famous millenarian in history.”23 Born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, he later moved with his family to Low Hampton, New York. He was largely self-educated. In 1816 he returned fervently to the Baptist roots that had nurtured his intense interest in the Bible. It was questions of biblical interpretation that led Miller to study and calculate historical events. From his own reading and interpretation of the Bible, Miller developed ideas closely resembling those of British premillennialists of his time, but it appears that his ideas were an independent invention.24 The congruence between Miller’s interpretation and older readings of millennialist symbols shows that Miller breathed the common millennialist atmosphere of American Protestantism in the early nineteenth century.25

Miller was neither a charismatic individual nor one possessed of training in preaching.26 For several years he read the Bible with the help of a concordance until he became convinced that the Second Advent was imminent. Although he felt compelled to preach, he began his mission as a preacher reluctantly. He suppressed his urge to proclaim
the near Second Advent until some of his writing on the subject appeared in a Vermont newspaper in 1831, leading to requests from neighboring Baptist churches that he visit them. Miller abandoned farming to engage full time in the diffusion of his exegetical principles and their conclusions. Publication of Miller’s lectures in 1836 raised the visibility of the adventist cause. Having his lectures in print made it possible for Miller to reach beyond the immediate neighborhood. The appearance of Miller’s *Evidence from Scripture and History* resulted in the *Boston Times*’ printing excerpts from the book in 1838 and announcing that Christ would return in five years.27

Miller became the authorized interpreter of a particular ideology of historicist premillennialism. His message was a simple one, largely in accord with the given tenets of his Protestant culture. His preaching and focus was on the Bible, which, supplemented with a concordance, was his one constant companion. Parallel to Miller’s focus on the Bible was his method of handling history, which he believed would unfold in accordance with Biblical prophecy. Along with his evangelical contemporaries, Miller preached Jesus as the solution to the problems of the world and of the individual soul. But the distinguishing characteristic of the Millerite message was the setting of the date for the premillennial Second Coming of Jesus, which Miller said would be some time in 1843.28 That year was a date commonly put forward by historicist premillennialists in Britain and America. Miller was not originally dogmatic about 1843, and he even accepted in the movement some associates who did not agree that 1843 should have special significance. In 1843 he modified the predicted fulfillment to the period between 21 March 1843 and 21 March 1844.

As the predicted date drew near, Millerism grew rapidly. There were a number of dates during 1843 and 1844 on which Miller or his followers expected the descent of Jesus Christ on the clouds. Originally the expectation was limited to what he termed the “Jewish year” of 21 March 1843 through 21 March 1844. When the awaited Parousia did not take place on 21 March 1844, Joshua Himes wrote: “If we are mistaken in the time, and the world still goes on after 1843, we shall have the satisfaction of having done our duty.” This softness on the time tended to be held by the central leaders and cushioned the disappointment of spring 1844.29 But a new movement—called the “seventh-month movement”—began that the established leaders of the initial movement could not control. Its followers believed that Christ’s return would be on the day of atonement according to the Karaite calendar (the tenth day of the seventh month) or 22 October 1844. On 22 October 1844—the last of the definite dates given by the Millerites for the Parousia—the person of Jesus Christ did not descend in the expected manner. Millerism, by this failed prediction, discredited premillennialism in America for many years and undermined historicism as the preferred method of interpreting time prophecy.30 In concentrating on a specific date, Miller introduced an element in which failure would bring the movement to an end. The movement’s exegesis and claim to truth rested on a set date that could be disconfirmed if the expected event did not materialize. However, it was not necessarily the setting of dates, in itself, that was the cause of objections by non-Millerites:

It was not date setting that caused the showdown crisis. After all, John Wesley

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28. Miller believed Jesus’s statement “of that day and hour knoweth no man” (Matt. 24:36), but Miller believed that the year was absolutely clear from proper biblical exegesis.
had once set a date for the end in 1836. And several Baptists had set dates between 1830 and 1847. Rather, it was the assertiveness, popular success, and closeness of the time, as preached by the Millerites, that made it difficult for many people to ignore Millerism, especially in light of the increasing burden of the Adventists to warn the world. Millerism and its culture were on a collision course that could only intensify with time.31 [emphasis added]

Indeed, one scholar has estimated that the fifty thousand Millerites influenced a million or more American Christians to become anxiously but cautiously expectant of the advent.32 Within the American Baha’i community the Millerites’ exegetical methods, too, emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century as the primary methodology for Bahá’ís in “proving” that Christian anticipation about the return of Christ, and particularly the Millerites’ expectations of 1844, had been fulfilled in the twin Manifestations of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh.

31. Knight, Millennial Fever 142.
33. English dictionaries permit a number of words to describe Shiism. Shia, Shiah, Shi’i, and Shiite may all be used to describe the followers of Shi’ism. If one seeks technical correctness, Shi’at ‘Ali (party of ‘Ali) is the proper reference to the community that follows Muhammad’s son-in-law and his descendants as legitimate successors. The believers are called Shiites.
35. A.H. is the abbreviation for anno Hegirae, the dating of the lunar Islamic calendar. The calendar is measured from the time of the hijra (hegira), Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina, which took place in 622 C.E.
36. Momen, Introduction to Shi’i Islam 162–64.
the twelve Imams was the Imam Qa'im in his own time. The Twelfth Imam, as the last Imam, was considered by Shiites as the Imam Qa'im who was expected to reappear in the physical world at a future time. Mahdi is a term common to both Sunni and Shia branches as the future messianic figure. While Sunnis have prophecies that the Mahdi will come with certain characteristics (such as membership in the family of the Prophet Muhammad), Shiites are more specific, saying the Mahdi will, in fact, be the Twelfth Imam who had “disappeared” or gone into “occultation.” For Shiites, Qa'im and Mahdi are one and the same eschatological personage. 37

Shaykhism. Among the movements that flourished among Muslims during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the Shaykhis, followers of Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahss’i (1753–1826) and his successor Sayyid Kázim-i-Rashtí (1793–1843), who taught primarily in Iraq. 38 Ahss’i developed a number of metaphorical interpretations of the literalist expectations of the Shia masses, particularly with regard to the notions of resurrection, heaven and hell, and the return of the Imam. When Rashti died in 1843, he did not appoint a successor but called on his students to search for the promised one.

Beginnings of the Babi Faith. In early 1844 one of Rashti’s pupils—Mullá Ḥusayn-i-Bushrū’i—undertook a forty-day fast and began his quest for the mysterious promised one. He found that promised one in the person of Sayyid ‘Ali-Muhammad of Shiraz (1819–50), a twenty-four-year-old man known in Shaykhí circles, who took the title of the Báb (gate, or the door to divine knowledge, Arabic ﷼). 39 The title could mean that He was a new gate to the as-yet-unrevealed Hidden Imam or that He was—as reported by Mullá Ḥusayn—the gate of God Himself. In the Qāyūmu’l-Asmā’ He hinted at claims to a station as lofty as those of Muhammad, Jesus, and Moses. 40 The Báb’s messianic and millennialist role was particularly attractive to an expectant and significant minority of Persians because of His elastic interpretation of His station. Their expectations could be accommodated within the wide spiritual authority claimed by the prophet from Shiraz. As early as 1847 the Báb had laid explicit claim to Qā’im-hood and Mahdi-hood, the
The Babi Faith as Religious and Social Revolution. Unlike traditional claimants to Mahdihood, the Bab openly proclaimed the abrogation of the Islamic shari'a (path, way; custom, law) and its replacement by the laws of the Bayân (exposition or revelation). Bayân was the term designating the entire body of works revealed by the Bab, as well as two specific works: the Bayân-i-Farsi (Persian Bayân) and the Bayân al-'Arabi (Arabic Bayân).

A Babí break from Islam, implicit from the beginning of the movement in 1844, became explicit at a meeting in the village of Badasht in 1848, where leading exponents of the movement accepted the inevitable break from Islamic law, symbolically enacted by Táhirih's removal of her veil in the presence of the male believers. This abrogation of the Islamic legal code was fundamental to the Babí Faith's ultimate transformation into the Baha'i religion, for it had effectively abandoned any claim to be a sectarian or specifically Shia development and had begun to assume the character of an independent world religion.

The Babís, whose claims made them appear revolutionary and antisocial in the eyes of the Shia majority, found themselves forced into a series of conflicts with state and religious authorities in what have been termed the Mazindarin, Nayriz, and Zanjin upheavals. The Bab challenged the world to accept Him as a source of divine revelation and to make itself ready to recognize the next Messenger, Whose appearance was imminent.

Shia Expectation and Dating and Babí Expansion. The Babi Faith emerged at a time when the imaginative power of the Islamic date A.H. 1260 (1844 C.E.) could be fully exercised. Its inception coincided with the one thousand year anniversary of the disappearance of the Twelfth Imam. The year itself arrived, providing opportunity for the expression of all the millennialist expectations fixed on that date. The mythic date came also in the context of severe crisis and social disruption. Persian economic, political, and social infrastructure had sunk into apathy and decay and failed to articulate a restructuring. The Qajar dynasty was incapable of bringing long-term improvement and proved unable to control the tensions and conflicts in the society. Due to corruption and mismanagement, central administration steadily deteriorated. Into this vacuum stepped the Russians and British, who struggled for influence and control over Iran throughout much of the nineteenth century. Above the disturbed social, political, and economic circumstances of Iran, the prophetic power and promise of fulfillment contained in the date of A.H. 1260 (1844 C.E.) provided significant explanation and grounding for the millennialist fervor that gave rise to the Babí Faith. Those who were ready to focus on the strained Iranian sociopolitical environment found ample evidence of the fulfillment about to occur in the magical year of expectation, just as those who fervently awaited the year could use its mythic potency to find and explain the stresses in contemporary Iranian affairs.

It is, nevertheless, essential to understand that the Bab's stated intent, as expressed in His own writings, was spiritual renewal rather than political insurrection. The Bab defined the Day of Resurrection as the time when a
new Manifestation of God appears, when those who believe in previous dispensations must determine their response to His claim. He included recurring renewal in the body of His religious doctrine in the form of the concept of progressive revelation—the concept that God periodically renews religion according to the exigencies of the time by sending a new Messenger. While Persians hoped for a spiritual and cultural change, the Báb’s teachings provided a spiritually based solution to the moribund condition of all the world’s long-established religious and social formulae.

The Bábí religion was not, therefore, a short-lived catastrophic millennialist movement. Though the Báb claimed to be the Qá’im and Mahdí, it was the spiritual authority He conveyed as an independent prophet holding the same rank as Muhammad and Jesus and His promise of the imminent appearance of the messianic “He Whom God shall manifest” that made possible the long-term survival of His spiritual message.

The Emergence of the Bahá’í Faith. The Báb was executed in 1850 by the Persian authorities. His followers were persecuted with a ferocity and vigor largely unmatched in the annals of Persian imperial rule. Without the staying power of millennialist ideas, the Bábí Faith might have ceased to exist. Its transformation into a world religion, at once orthodox and cosmopolitan, was effected by the charisma and claims of divine authority of Mírzá Husayn-‘Alí Núrí (1817–92), Who took the title Bahá‘u’lláh (the Glory of God, Arabic بہاءالله).

Early in the Báb’s ministry, Bahá‘u’lláh instantaneously converted to the Bábí Faith and became one of its most articulate exponents. Following the execution of the Báb and the subsequent persecutions of His followers, Bahá‘u’lláh was imprisoned in the Siyáh-Chál (Black Pit) of Tehran, a loathsome place of incarceration for the Shah’s prisoners. In an effort to reduce Bahá‘u’lláh’s influence on the Báb’s followers, Iranian authorities exiled Him to Ottoman Iraq in 1853. In Baghdad He established Himself as the preeminent leader and spiritual guide to the scattered and dispirited Bábí community. In 1863, under pressure from Iran, the Ottoman government condemned Bahá‘u’lláh to a further exile to Constantinople (Istanbul), then to Edirne, and finally in 1868 to the prison-citadel in Acre, a town in Ottoman Palestine. Before His departure from Baghdad, Bahá‘u’lláh, already the de facto head of the Bábí community, announced that He was the man yúzhrubáláh (He Whom God shall manifest, Arabic من يظهره الله).

Significantly, Bahá‘u’lláh’s claim was more inclusive than simply that of being the fulfillment of the Báb’s teachings. Not only was He the fuller of the Báb’s promise, but He was also the latter-day messiah promised by all religions. His millennial kingdom, as He proclaimed it, came into existence spiritually at the public assumption of His mission and was to be established by His follow-

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46. Bahá‘ís traditionally commemorate this announcement as the twelve-day Ridván festival, which they regard as the most sacred of the religion’s holy days.
ers in the visible world over a period of at least a thousand years.\(^{47}\) The Bahá’í shari’a focused on the establishment of institutions, of social structures, and of spiritual life that would become the basis for world civilization and the unification of contending nations in one global federation. The Bahá’í religion’s foundation was, therefore, a progressive millennialism, enunciated in a set of theological and social principles that would generally be considered progressive and inclusive.\(^{48}\)

Bahá’u’lláh provided His followers with a clear succession and an administrative structure, which they regard as divine in origin. He appointed His son, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), to be the head of the religion, the authorized interpreter of its sacred texts, and the exemplar of Bahá’í life. Likewise, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá appointed His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), to be the first Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith and the authorized interpreter of its scriptures. Bahá’u’lláh outlined the institutions and processes, later elaborated on by His appointed successors, for creating an international administrative structure, based on local, national, and international houses of justice. The present head of the faith is the Universal House of Justice, charged with legislating on questions not already revealed in scripture or authoritative interpretation, elucidating questions that are obscure, and making final decisions on all appeals through the Bahá’í administrative system.\(^{49}\) Obedience and loyalty to the successive heads of the religion is a sacred responsibility embodied in the notion of the Covenant. This Covenant creates a sacred bond of loyalty between the believer and the head of the religion.

The millennialist strand in Bahá’í thinking retained its importance, in large measure, because of the missionary activities of the religion and the need in the West to present proofs that Christianity had been fulfilled in the Bahá’í Faith. For the millennialist motif of the Bahá’í community to be a successful conversion tool in North America, it, therefore, had to undergo modifications to fit a specifically Protestant culture that believed in rationalist, biblical, common-sense proofs.

Bahá’u’lláh’s Hermeneutic. Bahá’u’lláh’s approach to the Bible and to Christian beliefs was different from that of American Protestants, among whom the Bahá’í Faith was soon to be introduced. Bahá’u’lláh taught that all religions have eternal doctrines. Like the Báb, He also emphasized progressive revelation—the idea that God reveals Himself gradually, according to the human capacity and social exigencies of the time. God is, in Himself, complete and unchanging; but God’s creatures undergo a process of growth and development that requires divine revelation itself to be relative. All religions thus contain truth, but each is especially suited to its time and place. This concept of progressive revelation is to some degree in conflict

\(^{47}\) In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, regarded by Bahá’ís as their most holy book, Bahá’u’lláh states that “Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God, ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying impostor” (The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, ps ed. [Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1993] §37).

\(^{48}\) Theological principles include humanity’s inability to know God fully and the revealing of God’s will and attributes through a series of divine Manifestations; social principles include emphasis on world unification, the oneness of humanity, the equality of the sexes, and the establishment of mechanisms to ensure permanent and lasting peace. These principles have been stated in diverse forms since the time when ‘Abdu'l-Bahá made them the centerpieces of many of His public talks in Europe and America in 1911, 1912, and 1913. For a useful summary of the principles, see Moojan Momen, The Báb and Bahá’í Religions, 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981) xxiv–xxv.

with the evangelical Protestant belief in unchanging divine truth.

Bahá’u’lláh’s principles of universal education, the duty of individuals to investigate the truth independently of tradition, and the abolition of clergy all tend to imply that Bahá’u’lláh considered truth accessible to all. Bahá’u’lláh interpreted the Bible in the context of progressive revelation. This principle implies that divine truth, while progressively evolving, is not self-contradictory. Hence Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation cannot be seen as contradicting biblical revelation. Previous scriptures, such as the Bible, point toward and promise the Bahá’í scriptures, and the latter fulfill the former. Bahá’u’lláh demonstrated these notions by claiming to fulfill biblical prophecy and by interpreting the Bible symbolically from the perspective of progressive revelation. The manifestations of God, He writes, speak a twofold language. One language, the outward language, is devoid of allusions, is unconcealed and unveiled. . . . The other language is veiled and concealed, so that whatever lieth hidden in the heart of the malevolent may be made manifest. . . . In such utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended.

The hermeneutical methodology on which Bahá’u’lláh based His approach to the Bible included reliance on post-biblical sacred texts to interpret the Bible (especially the Koran and hadith); a focus on the symbolic, allegorical, and metaphorical meanings of the images; and the view of all sacred scripture as having many meanings. An example is Bahá’u’lláh’s interpretation of the Olivet Discourse or Synoptic Apocalypse (Mark 13:14–27; Luke 21:25–28; Matthew 24:29–31). Bahá’u’lláh devoted more than fifty pages to the exegesis of this passage, explaining various words such as “oppression,” “sun,” “moon,” and “stars.” This hermeneutic was to be the pattern of later interpretations by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Bahá’u’lláh apparently did not calculate and decipher time prophecies of the Bible or Koran, although He used Islamic hadith and statements by the Bab to demonstrate the date of His own revelation. Rather, the hermeneutic Bahá’u’lláh used created a rationale for scriptural symbolism within which to show correspondences between texts in various religions and thus to extract the eschatological meaning of the metaphorical imagery.

Persian Exegetes. A few Persian-language treatises on Bible prophecy were written before the American Bahá’í community was established in 1894. The greatest scholar of the first Bahá’í century was Mirzá Abú’l-Faḍl Gulpáygání (1844–1914). He had studied the Bible thoroughly, and it is clear from his writings that he was capable of an exegesis.

51. Hadith are extra-Koranic traditions or sayings attributed to Muhammad and the imams.
53. It is striking to compare Bahá’u’lláh’s exegesis of the symbolism in the Synoptic Apocalypse with William Miller’s explanation in A Familiar Exposition of the Twenty-Fourth Chapter of Matthew and the Fifth and Sixth Chapters of Hosea (Boston, 1842), especially pp. 24–26. There are parallel understandings regarding the “heavens” representing the clergy and divines who become corrupted from the truth.
55. Mirzá Abú’l-Faḍl Gulpáygání became master of a prestigious Islamic seminary in Tehran at a young age. But his greatest challenge was the astute reasoning of a Bahá’í blacksmith who put him on the road to conversion. Gulpáygání studied and wrote copiously on the Bahá’í Faith, developing its philosophy and theology to a highly rational level. He lived his last years in Egypt, the intellectual hub of Islam at the turn of the century, where he taught a large number of students at al-Azhar University (the preeminent Islamic university located in Cairo), many of whom became Bahá’ís.
of symbol and of time prophecy. He wrote two treatises in 1888 C.E. that are particularly relevant: *Sharh-i A'īd-i Muwarraхīh* and *Risāliy-i Ayyūbiyyih*. The former was a study of fulfillment of Islamic, Judaic, Christian, and Zoroastrian prophecies. The author showed that each scripture promised two latter-day messengers. Gulpáygáni addressed time prophecies in Daniel, referring specifically to the accepted Jewish and Christian use of the principle that a day in time prophecy is equal to a year of history. He asserted that Christian leaders also followed this interpretation, especially in regard to Dan. 9:24 where it is stated that “Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city...” Christians calculated seventy weeks to be the equivalent of 490 days, or according to the “day for a year” computation, 490 years, which they assert to be a prophecy for the advent of Jesus.

Gulpáygáni stopped short of carrying the prophecy to the logical and specific conclusion that Miller and American Bahá'í exegetes did. In the *Ayyūbiyyih*, Gulpáygáni wrote of the 2,300 days/years of Dan. 8:14 that “it is evident that over 2,300 years have elapsed from the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar [586 B.C.E.] and the present time” [1888 C.E.]. Gulpáygáni did not articulate the corollary that the 490-year prediction of Christ’s first advent was calculated from 456 or 457 B.C.E. and that the 2,300 year prophecy could also have the same initial point. Likewise, Gulpáygáni treated the reference in Dan. 12:11 to 1,290 days as being fulfilled in the time of Bahá’u’lláh. In his interpretations of Revelation 11 and 12, however, Gulpáygáni clearly anticipated later interpretations by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *Some Answered Questions*, published in 1908. Gulpáygáni named the two witnesses of Rev. 11:3 as Muhammad and ‘Ali (first Imam of the Shia); clearly identified the 3½ times/1,260 days as a reference to A.H. 1260 (A.D. 1844), the year in which the Báb announced His mission; and interpreted the dragon of Revelation 12 as the Umayyad dynasty, which in the Shia view was the evil agency responsible for the martyrdoms of the early Imams. Gulpáygáni was cautious to interpret most time prophecies as being fulfilled within a time period rather than during a given year. It was only in the case of the 1,260 years (1,260 days = 3½ times = 42 months) that the association of A.H. 1260 with the beginning of the Bahá’í era was unquestioned and absolutely specific.

Hájí Mirzá Ḥydar-‘Ali (d. 1920), an early follower of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, echoes and expands on many of Gulpáygáni’s interpretations while also advancing new “proof” of Bahá’u’lláh’s fulfillment of biblical expectation. In his *Dalá'il-’Irfán*, published in
1896, Ḥaydar-ʿAlī devoted a few pages to the interpretation of prophecies in Daniel and Revelation. He quoted the twelfth chapter of Daniel in its entirety and then explained that in time prophecy a “day” meant a “year,” according to Num. 14:34. He stated that Daniel 12 prophesied the greatness, glory, and wonder of Bahá’u’lláh and all the signs associated with His appearance. According to Ḥaydar-ʿAlī, after the appearance of Muhammad, the second Caliph ['Umar] conquered the Holy Land and forbade the sacrifice that is among the important laws of the Jewish faith; the children of Israel were exiled and scattered from that region. After the passage of 1,290 years, Bahá’u’lláh, together with His companions, arrived in the city of Acre. When Bahá’u’lláh was permitted out of prison, He visited Mount Carmel as prophesied in the Old Testament (presumably as stated in the book of Isa. 35:2). Ḥaydar-ʿAlī also quoted Revelation 11 and 12, explaining that the two witnesses were Muhammad and ‘Alī, who ruled for 1,260 days (42 months) or 1,260 years.62 His analysis appeared to have been informed by the writings of Gulpáygání and again anticipated ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s exegesis in Some Answered Questions.

Chronologically, Gulpáygání’s and Ḥaydar-ʿAlī’s analyses appeared before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s authoritative interpretation. The similarities in interpretation may lead readers to assume that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá received His ideas from these authors. All three were, however, recipients of considerable instruction directly from Bahá’u’lláh Himself. Gulpáygání and Ḥaydar-ʿAlī were frequent visitors to Bahá’-u’lláh, received communications from Him, and became long-term residents in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s household, where they were also able to absorb ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explanations on many topics, including biblical and koranic prophecies. Lua Getsinger, who became a Bahá’í in 1897 and was intimately associated with the household of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for almost two decades, wrote in a letter dated 19 October 1900 that Mírzá Abúl-Faḍl’s “teachings and explanations of the Bible are authorized by our Lord [‘Abdu’l-Bahá], so we know they are correct!”63 There was at least a developing understanding in the American Bahá’í community of the meaning of such prophecies, based on Bahá’u’lláh’s hermeneutic and a decades-long discourse between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and various Bahá’ís who researched the scriptures for biblical proofs. Getsinger reported in 1901 that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “gives lessons every morning from the Bible.”64 The fruition was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s normative exegesis, with a relatively detailed understanding of the meaning of certain passages in Daniel, Isaiah, and Revelation, just as Bahá’u’lláh’s exegesis of the Synoptic Apocalypses in The Kitáb-i-Íqán informed and set the groundwork for all Bahá’í understanding of that text.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s authority as Center of the Bahá’í Faith and authorized interpreter bridged three worlds: the Shia Islamic world of most Iranian believers, the Protestant Christian world of the emerging North American Bahá’í community, and the Bahá’í worldview that had to make coherent sense of Islam and Christianity as chapters in the evolution of a single divine faith of which Bahá’u’lláh was the latest Revealer. Bahá’ís in Persia and North America were setting their minds to the task of creating traditional proofs based on koranic and biblical prophecy. Such proofs were, therefore, a significant and expected element of the interpretive scope exercised by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Conclusion to Part I. Millennialism arose
from the apocalyptic writings of Jewish authors who used coded symbolic language to encourage their people in the face of persecution and threatened extinction. Apocalyptic authors transmuted the contemporary meaning into assurance of a final cosmic triumph of good over evil and the destruction of Israel's enemies. History, calendars, and symbolism were later combined into an exegetical method called historicism, where dates from the past, present, and future could be decoded. Fulfillment became fixed in the text and could be deciphered if one had the key. Protestant Christianity set itself the task of finding that key. Historicism culminated in American millennialism's most dramatic movement—Millerism—with its prediction of Jesus' literal return in 1843–1844. The apparent failure of Miller's prediction discredited historicism. The historicist exegesis of biblical time prophecy used by Millerites, nevertheless, provided a tool for Bahá'ís to attract Protestant Americans to a new millennial vision. The final part of this exploration will survey the use of historicism by North American Bahá'ís in the first decade of the twentieth century, the corrective and authoritative exegesis by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Some Answered Questions (1908), and the continuing contributions to this theme made by others in the middle and late twentieth century.

* * *

Let There Be Light

With the scholarly prerogative of Sadducees and Pharisees, the TV panel of religion experts interpreted the Genesis story with authority. In the beginning was the word and the Word was silent, and the word was passed between them eye to eye: heads we win, souls you lose.

One Phd., early-Christian history, professed, “God felt short-changed with His creation.” This illumination of her hip-pocket god bought her credit, quick as swiping a 16-digit card past a ray of light. The next theologian agreed, “I can testify to the distance I felt when my child came into being.”

In his own image he made Him man. His pocket-flask god was of spirits, and he swigged a hit. Then, a Talmudic scholar’s affirmation: “Of course God created evil so that man would have the power of free will.” To exorcise spirits, he rubbed the rabbit’s foot of his pants-pocket god.

And all was without form, and void, of darkness, confusion and watery chaos.

The host warned of the end of time and the panelists concluded their revelation of creation, until the last proclaiming intimate knowledge of the Author so universally known and unknowable.

—Cynthia Sheperd Jaskwhich

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The Concept of “The End”: A Philological Perspective

BY YOU LI AR KADYE VIC H IO ANNESYAN

The notion of the inevitable end of the existing order of things is an essential part of the teachings of many religions. This notion forms the basis of the concept of “the end,” “the end of all things,” or “the last things,” which is known as eschatology. Eschatology is derived from the Greek ἐσχάτος eskhatos ‘last’ ‘final’ and λόγος logos ‘teaching’. The most common perception of “the end” (outside the Bahá’í Faith) is contained in the phrase “the end” as in “the end of the world,” which implies a global catastrophe that will befal humanity and the earth, instantly sweeping away civilization and eliminating the earth at least in its present form. Such an interpretation contrasts with the perception of “the end” as “the end of a certain span of time, the consummation of an epoch or age,” superseded by another age. The latter concept is an important part of the Bahá’í teachings, following directly from the notions of progressive revelation and “an ever-advancing civilization.”

Understanding “the end” as referring to “the world” leads to contradictions that become apparent when one examines, even briefly, the current Christian views on this and other issues involved. Christendom, in one way or another, accepts the idea that there will come a happy time on earth when the Kingdom of God will be established. In many Christian denominations in the West this glorious time is identified with the millennial Kingdom. The most colorful and vivid description of this age of harmony is found in Isa. 11:6: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, . . . and a little child shall lead them.” The establishment of the Kingdom is related to the second coming (or return) of Jesus Christ. Yet Christianity holds fast to the doctrine of “the end of the world,” according to which the world will at some time come to an end.

There is an obvious contradiction between the anticipation of the golden age on earth and the expectation of the elimination of the world, the place where the expected Kingdom is supposed to be established. Moreover, the consequences of such a concept of “the end” go far beyond this logical contradiction, assuming a moral dimension, as they lead to certain moral choices—withdrawal from “the world” or a passive attitude toward life resulting from the world seen as evil and condemned. Such an approach to life, however, can hardly escape another logical contradiction: the “Kingdom of God” will be established, but individuals are discouraged from becoming involved in bringing it about, for it is to come instantly without their participation. Consequently, the surest way to accelerate the process is extreme passivity in the
matters of “the world,” which implies that the best cooperation with God is avoiding any purposeful effort to cooperate. This conclusion is inconsistent with the belief (shared by many Christians) that God uses human beings as instruments to do His will (“whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven” [Matt. 18:18, NASB]), let alone the negative moral implications of the individual’s passivity.

An examination of the philological aspects of the concept of the end is illuminating. The text of the Bible itself provides an understanding of how the notion of “the end of the world” could have originated.

A careful and systematic analysis of European translations of the Bible reveals confusion in the translations of terms referring to “age” and to the “world.” The most striking examples of this confusion are provided by the verses in which both words are used interchangeably as synonyms in the same phrase or verse or in similar places. The fact that the terms alternate leaves no room for doubt that their meaning in the context of the given phrase or verse is exactly the same. For example, consider verses in the first and third chapters of 1 Corinthians:

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age [αἰῶνι αἰόνι]? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world [κόσμου κόσμου]? (1 Cor: 1:20, NKJV; cf. NIV, NASB)

Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you seems to be wise in this age [αἰῶνι αἰόνι], let him become a fool, that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world [κόσμου κόσμου] is foolishness with God. (1 Cor. 3:18–19, NKJV; cf. NIV, NASB)

Tracing such cases back to the Greek original, one also finds that the principle of rendering the words αἰῶν αἰόν as ‘age’ and κόσμος κόσμος as “world” is not consistent. Indeed, in many instances where the Greek has αἰῶν αἰόν ‘age’, one finds “world” in European translations. This is most typical of the King James version of the Bible. Rom. 12:2 (KJV) reads, “And be not conformed to this world,” although what is, in fact, implied is “age,” for it corresponds to αἰῶν αἰόν in the Greek. In Eph. 2:1–2 (NKJV; cf. NASB) one finds in the Greek both terms used in the same sentence, making a single expression that English versions render inadequately: “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins; in which you once walked according to the course of this world.” The Greek is αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τοῦ αἰόνα τοῦ κόσμου τοῦτο—literally, ‘according to the age of this world’ (cf. RV). Such examples lead to a number of conclusions.

The terms “age” and “world” are often used in the same senses as is attested by the fact that they are used to translate similar concepts in the same verse or phrase or even in the complex expression composed of two synonymous words. European translators of the Bible had difficulty trying to understand and convey adequately the meaning of these terms, resulting in their using one word in one case and another word in a seemingly similar case. Hence, is there any objective reality or ground behind this confusion, or is the confusion due to the translators’ lack of skill?

It appears that an objective ground does exist. It has already been shown that the confusion goes as far back as the Greek original where the words αἰῶν αἰόν and κόσμος
The concept of "The End"

kósmos are also confused. Of course, Greek was not the original language of Jesus nor of most of the people whose utterances are recorded in the New Testament. This definitely is true of the apostle Paul, the author of the epistles, which make up the bulk of the New Testament (apart from the Gospels). The quoted passages are from his epistles, which present one of the many obvious examples of the New Testament text’s having been deeply influenced by the Semitic (Aramaic, Hebrew)-speaking or Semitic-thinking milieu. This implies that many terms, expressions, and metaphors in the New Testament cannot be adequately understood apart from the Aramaic or Hebrew context.4

In Hebrew the word corresponding to the Greek κόσμος kósmos is ḥlām. Its cognates exist in other Semitic languages such as Aramaic ‘alma and Arabic ‘alām. The Hebrew concept of “the world” was basically different from the Greek. As Russian semitologist I. R. Tantlevski (with a reference to S. S. Averintsev) writes, the Hebrew “world,” in its original sense, means “age” or, more precisely, “the course of time,” “the flow of time,” which carries along all existing things—the world understood as history. Consequently, ḥlām is “the world time,” time not as an eternity, because, first, it constantly moves on and, second, it can come to an end and be replaced or succeeded by another ḥlām—in other words, by another state or order of things. The Talmud speaks of ḥlām hab-ha in the eschatological sense, which can be literally translated as “the future age” and “the future world” or as “life in the future age,” whereas the κόσμος kósmos ‘world’ of the Greeks was viewed as “space,” “the three-dimensional sphere,” “the universe.” Within the κόσμος kósmos of the Greeks, even time exists in the context of space. The notion of the inevitable return of cycles that is explicit or implicit in the Greek concepts of being, both mythological and philosophic, deprives time of the quality of irreversibility, replacing it with the notion of symmetricity, conceivable only in space, while within the ḥlām, the Jewish “world,” even space exists in the context of the course of time—time as the container of irreversible events. The Greek god Zeus dwells on Olympus. Consequently, he is assigned a definite place in space, while the Jewish God Yahveh, the Creator of the heaven and earth, is the Lord of history, the Lord of time. Hence, according to the Greek concept, the “world” rests in space, whereas the “world” of the Bible moves in time. In the former case it is static, in the latter it is dynamic.5 These are quite opposite notions. It is not surprising, therefore, that their coming into close contact at the beginning of the Christian era produced confusion. The Greek language, if not the ancient Greek mentality, proved inadequate for expressing the biblical concept of the “world” perceived as “time” or “age” rather than “space.” Seen in this context, the use of the terms “age” and “world” in the same sentence or verse as synonyms, as in the cases considered earlier, may be regarded as an attempt to overcome this difficulty. The very fact of this double use is highly significant, for it indicates that these passages in the New Testament, which definitely bear traces of Hebrew (or Aramaic) influence should be perceived in the light of the Jewish notion of “the world,” which is “the world” as “age.” This leads one to reflect upon the broader issue—the eschatological concept of the Jews as it is revealed in the Old Testament.


The Messianic expectation of the ancient Jews—the establishment of God's Kingdom—was related to what the Scripture defines as 'aḥārīt haza'am 'latter [time] of the indigation' (Dan. 8:19),6 'aḥārīt hayāmīm 'latter days' (Dan. 10:14; cf. 2:28; Is. 2:2; Mic. 4:1), yamīm nabhīm/yamīm 'many days [in the future]/remote days' (Dan. 8:26, 10:14), māʾēd qēs 'end of the appointed time' (Dan. 8:19), qēs 'time of the end' (Dan. 8:17), qēs hayāmīm 'end of the days' (Dan. 12:13).7 These examples show that the Old Testament concept of the “end” is expressed in terms of time, rather than space or anything denoting the world. If one compares this with the eschatological traditions of Zoroastrians or Muslims, one will see the same notion expressed in the context of time too. In Zoroastrianism rōz-i pāšēn and in the Qur’ān yaum al-ākhir (Qur. 2:7[8], 59[62]; 4:42[38]–43[39], and so on) are entirely analogous in meaning and form to the “latter day(s)” of the Jews.8 Like the Hebrew yōm ‘day’, rōz, literally meaning ‘day’, may refer to a year or era, as in the expression Nawrōz, ‘New Year’. The same applies to the Arabic term yaum al-ākhir. The events of “the last days” are described in two major Zoroastrian eschatological writings—Zand-i-Vahuman Yasn and Zamasp Namak and in the “apocalyptic” section of the Bundahišn. The latter is a fundamental Zoroastrian theological book. These sources contain a prophecy of “the final battle,” which will end with the great victory of the Prince of the Last Days, the King of Pataš-vārgar (Mázindarán)—Kay Vahrām (Sháh Bahrám).9 According to the prophecy, “the time of the wolves will pass away, and the time of the sheep will enter in. Uxš-yat-art, the son of Zartušt, will appear to reveal the Faith, and evil will be at an end, joy and gladness and happiness will have come.”10 One can hardly overlook the fact that this great event is presented as a succession of ages: “the time of the wolves” (gurg ŭšām) will be replaced with “the time of the sheep” (meš ŭšām). Similarly, in the moderate Shiite-Sufi tradition the time of Mahdi or Qā’im (the names to designate Messianic figures) were referred to as ākhir al-zamān—‘the end of time’.11

6. ‘aḥārīt is derived from ‘aḥār, a preposition and adverb that means ‘another’, ‘other’, ‘following’, and so on, which implies the ‘later’ but not the ‘last’ as final. It does not convey any sense of finality. It is ‘latter’ or even ‘another in succession’.


convulsions of this transitional and most turbulent period in the annals of humanity are the essential prerequisites, and herald the inevitable approach, of that Age of Ages, “the time of the end,” in which the folly and tumult of strife that has, since the dawn of history, blackened the annals of mankind, will have been finally transmuted into the wisdom and the tranquility of an undisturbed, a universal, and lasting peace, in which the discord and separation of the children of men will have given way to the worldwide reconciliation, and the complete unification of the diverse elements that constitute human society.  

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Meetings with Two Prominent Iranians

INTRODUCED AND TRANSLATED BY AHANG RABBANI

Two important figures in the literary and political life of modern Iran, Muhammad Qazvini and Siyyid Hasan Taqizadih, whose paths often crossed that of the Bahá’ís, have left poignant descriptions of their meetings with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in October 1911.

Muhammad Qazvini was one of the foremost scholars of Persian literature, history, and culture. He edited and published numerous manuscripts and historical documents, including Lubábu’l-Albáb, the oldest biography of Persian poets, compiled by Muhammad ‘Awfi around 1221 C.E.; Marzubán-námih, a book of fables by Sa’du’d-Dín Waráwini; Al-Mu’jam fi Ma’áyi’ri Ashá’ári’l-Ajam, a treatise on Persian prosody and poetic art written by Shamsu’d-Dín Muhammad ibn Qays ar-Rázi between 1220 and 1232 C.E.; Chahár Maqála (The Four Discourses), by Nizamí al-Aruşí of Samarkand; Kitáb-i-Nuqátatu’l-Káf, a purported early history of the Bábís; and Tarikh-i-Jabán-gushá, written by ‘Alá’ú’d-Dín ‘Aṭá Malik-i-Juwayní in 1260 C.E. Qazvini undertook many of these efforts in collaboration with the British Orientalist Edward G. Browne; most were published in the E.J.W. Gibb Memorial series.

In addition to editing and publishing literary and historical manuscripts, Qazvini wrote extensively about the life, works, and accomplishments of the men of letters of Iran and the Middle East, including a series of historical notes entitled Váfiyyát-i-Mu’áshiryn (The Passing of the Contemporaries), which appeared in 1949 in the celebrated Yádgar journal edited by Dr. ‘Abbas Iqbal Ašṭiyyání. The ninth section of these notes lists biographical information on contemporary figures whose names began with the letter ‘áyn, the first being ‘Abdu’l-Bahá under the entry “‘Abbás Efendi,” which appeared in two consecutive issues, nos. 6–7 of Bahman and Esfand 1327 Sh. [Islamic solar year] (January and February 1949). In this note Qazvini gives a brief history of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s life and his recollection of meeting Him in Paris. He also asked his old and close friend, Siyyid Hasan Taqizádíh, a well-known figure in the political, diplomatic, and literary circles of Iran, to describe his own meetings...
with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the same time. Taqizádih’s recollections are appended to Qazvini’s note.³

The significance of the accounts of the meetings with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lies in the fact that two prominent Iranians who, because of their Bábí-Azalí connections had been active opponents of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, in later life wrote sincerely about their meetings with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who received them with His customary love, affection, and sin-covering eye—never mentioning their past deeds—and immersing them in the ocean of His compassion.⁴ From their descriptions it is evident that their meetings with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left a deep impression that was still with them when they wrote these passages nearly four decades later, risking their reputations and standing in Iranian society by publishing them in an environment filled with hatred toward anything associated with the Bahá’í Faith.

Another point that makes Muḥammad Qazvini’s note on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá important to students of history is that he openly admits to having written the Persian introduction to Kitáb-i-Nuqtatu’ll-Káf, having edited its text, and having been generally the force behind its publication—a fact suspected for some time and now clearly documented in Qazvini’s own words. It should be noted that the printing of Kitáb-i-Nuqtatu’ll-Káf, allegedly an early history of the Bábís, caused ‘Abdu’l-Bahá much distress. He instructed Mirzá Abu’l-Faḍl, the foremost Bahá’í scholar of his generation, to write a detailed account refuting its content and also instructed several prominent Bahá’ís in Tehran to aid him in his research—a task eventually completed after Mirzá Abu’l-Faḍl’s death by Siyyid Mihdí of Gulpáygán.

A translation of Qazvini’s entry for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá follows. Parenthetical comments are by the authors; comments in square brackets are by the translator, who has also contributed the footnotes, unless otherwise noted.

* * *

‘ABBÁS EFFENDI (A.H. 1260–1340 [1844–1921 C.E.]): Known as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, he is the eldest son of Mirzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí Núrí, known as Bahá’u’lláh. The birth of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took place on the night of the fifth of Jamádíyu’l-Avval of the year A.H. 1260, corresponding to 1844 C.E., in the Arab

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³ [For details about the activities of this political reformist during the constitutional movement, see Edward G. Browne, The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909 (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1910). Trans.]

neighborhood of Tehran in the personal residence of Bahá'u'lláh. His mother was the first wife of Bahá'u'lláh, known as Navvábih and titled Ummu'l-Ká'inat; 'Abbas Effendi himself was styled the Most Great Branch.

From his first wife, namely, Navvábih, another son was also born to Bahá'u'lláh, named Mirzá Míhdi and designated the Purest Branch. He passed away in Acre during the lifetime of his Father, Bahá'u'lláh, in A.H. 1286 [1870 C.E.] at the age of nineteen.6

The second wife of Bahá'u'lláh, who was known or titled Mahd-'Ulyá, bore Bahá'u'lláh three sons: first, Mirzá Muḥammad-'Alí, titled the Greater Branch; second, Mirzá Bádí'u'lláh; and third, Mirzá Díyá'u'lláh.7 After the passing of their father, a fierce disagreement took place among these three brothers and their fourth brother, 'Abbas Effendi, over the matter of successorship. The followers of 'Abbas Effendi were called Thábitin [the steadfast] and the partisans of the other three brothers Náqidín [the Covenant-breakers].

The third wife of Bahá'u'lláh, known as Gawhar Khánum, was commonly referred to as the Haram-i-Káshi [the Káshi wife]. She bore Bahá'u'lláh a daughter named Farúghíyyih.

In mid-1908, when a revolt took place in the Ottoman Empire and Sultan 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd was dismissed from the throne, all prisoners and exiles other than common-law criminals were freed, including 'Abbás Effendi, who during Ramadán A.H. 1328 (1910 C.E.) left the city of Acre and began traveling to various parts [of the world]. He first went to Egypt, from there to Switzerland, and thence to London and Paris, returning to Egypt. From there, at the beginning of the year 1912 C.E., he journeyed to North America, arriving in New York in the middle of the year. After traveling and speaking in many North American cities, he returned at the end of that same year to Europe, arriving on 14 December in Liverpool. From there, in 1913, he traveled to many other European countries, including Germany, Austria, and Hungary, and by the middle of the year returned to Egypt and from there went to Haifa. From that date forward he selected Haifa as opposed to Acre as his headquarters. In sum, the travels of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which began at Ramadán A.H. 1329 [1911 C.E.] when he first went from Palestine to Egypt and then to Europe and America, until Muḥarram A.H. 1332 [December 1913 C.E.] when he returned to Palestine took a total of two years, three months, and some days.

5. [For details about the location of Bahá'u'lláh's residence in Tehran, see H. M. Balyuzi, Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980) 17. Trans.]
6. [Mirzá Míhdi died on 23 June 1870 at the age of twenty-two. Bahá'u'lláh and Navvábih also had a daughter, Fátımih, entitled Bahá'íyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf. Four other children died in childhood. Trans.]
7. [Bahá'u'lláh and His second wife also had a daughter named Šámadíyyih; two other children died in childhood. Trans.]
The passing of 'Abbás Effendi took place in Haifa on 27 Rabi‘u’l-Avval A.H. 1340, corresponding to 28 November 1921 C.E., at the age of seventy-eight according to solar reckoning and eighty based on lunar years. He was interred next to the resting place of the Báb on Mount Carmel overlooking the city of Haifa.8

After the passing of 'Abbás Effendi—as both his sons had passed away in childhood, and he was not survived by a male descendant—his successor in leading the Bahá’ís in accordance with his own Will and Testament was a grandson, Shoghi Effendi, a son of Diây’íyyih Khánum, daughter of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the wife of Aqá Mirzá Hádí, son of Aqá Siyyid Husayn, the son of Háji Mirzá ‘Abu’l-Qásim (who was a brother-in-law of the Báb). Shoghi Effendi was a graduate of Oxford University in England.9 He was born in A.H. 1314 [1897 C.E.]. At the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing he was still at Oxford. His family urgently requested him to return at once to Haifa, but due to distance he arrived a month after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing. Therefore, if we have correctly recorded the date of his birth, at present—that is, Esfand of 1327 Sh. [Islamic solar year; March 1949], he must be fifty-four years old [fifty-two solar years].

ACCOUNT OF MY MEETING WITH 'ABBÁS EFFENDI
‘ABDU’L-BÁHÁ IN PARIS

I, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdu’l-Vahháb-i-Qazvini, arrived in Paris from Clarens, Switzerland, on 6 October 1911 and immediately contracted such a severe cold that for a week I stayed home. During this period I did not leave my dwelling and remained thoroughly unaware of news of the world. One day Aqá Siyyid Muḥammad Sháykh-i-Islám of Gilán, who was the brother-in-law of the late Mirzá Karím Khánum-i-Rashti, and his brother, the late Sardar Muḥiy [the Mu‘issu’s-Saltanih], was visiting me at my house. In the course of conversation he asked: “Do you know that ‘Abbás Effendi, the leader of Bahá’ís, is now in Paris?” With astonishment I replied that I was unaware. “Yes, he has been in Paris for about twelve days,” he continued; “his house is near Quai de Passy among the well-known neighborhoods of Paris.”

I immediately wrote to Dr. Muḥammad Khánum-i-Mahalláti, one of my old friends in Paris and notorious for being devoted to this path [the Bahá’í

8. [During His lifetime, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had expressed the desire to be buried halfway between the Shrines of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. However, as no such place was available or specifically designated at the time of His passing, His sister, Bahiyyih Khánum, instructed that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá be temporarily buried in a Shrine dedicated to the Báb, in a room next to the one where the Báb was interred. Trans.]

9. [Shoghi Effendi attended Balliol College, Oxford University, for a little over a year in 1920 and 1921 before 'Abdu'l-Bahá passed away. Trans.]
Faith] and asked him to arrange, if possible, for me to visit 'Abbas Effendi. I inquired whether it was necessary to request permission for me to come, thinking that, much like Acre, here, too, one should appeal to an intermediary to contact the chief, and a meeting would be possible only after receiving the proper permission.

At noon time the following day, Saturday, 14 October 1911 C.E., Muhammad Khan came to our house and told me that an intermediary, requests, and permissions were not needed:

All wishing to come forth, may,
and those who desire to leave, may;

Pride, coquetry, chamberlain, and doorkeeper,
have no place at this threshold.

We agreed that he would return the next morning at 9 A.M. so that together we could go to 'Abdu'l-Baha's place of residence.

The next morning (Sunday, 15 October 1911 C.E., or 21 Shavval A.H. 1329), Dr. Muhammad Khan came to my house, and by the underground rail (metro), we went to 'Abdu'l-Baha's house at 4, rue de Camoëns. His residence was at an exquisite building, newly constructed, and furnished with all the latest means of comfort, such as an elevator, electricity, carpeting in the stairway, telephone, and so on. It was a large apartment with six or seven rooms, and perhaps even more, two formal sitting rooms, and superb furnishings. Once we entered the hallway of the apartment, I noted that separate groups of twos or threes were conversing with one another and were not concerned with the traffic of the visitors. I quickly thought that it was similar to the Rawzih-khâni [soothsaying] gatherings in Iran where no one pays attention to others, and such formalities as invitation, calling ahead of time, presenting one's personal card, or requesting permission to enter, and so on were not required.

My friend became engaged in conversation with one of the groups standing in the hallway and was nearly out of my sight. For about six minutes I stood there not knowing what to do. Then I suddenly spotted one of my acquaintances from the previous year's visit to Paris, titled Tamaddunul-Mulk, who was a young man from Shiraz and a devout Bahá'í, and went toward him. He saw me and came forward, and we shook hands. When I inquired about attaining 'Abdu'l-Baha's presence, he said, "He is in the next formal room; if you please, let us go there." With this he picked up a chair and went to the drawing room and after about half a minute returned and invited me to go with him.

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10. [The Bahá'ís purchased the building in 1996. Trans.]
11. [He traveled with 'Abdu'l-Baha as His translator but because of his immense ego eventually left the Bahá'í Faith. Trans.]
When I entered the room, my eyes fell on 'Abdu'l-Bahá, whom I imme­
mediately recognized as I had seen his picture many times in various journals,
newspapers, and certain books, and my eye was well acquainted with his
countenance. He wore a small headdress, which simply was a white piece of
cloth wrapped around a small white fez, and a large brownish labbādīh with
wide sleeves. His beard and eye brows were white as cotton, and he possessed
brilliant, piercing eyes with strong manly features that, from the profile,
resembled those of Tolstoy. He was sitting on a velvet-covered chair (fauteuil)
at the head of the room with his back to the window. All around the room—
there were actually two connecting rooms, a larger one where he was at that
time and a smaller one—were sitting absolutely silent and motionless some
thirty-five people, mostly women, from Iran, Egypt, America, England, France,
and so on. Not one noise could be heard or felt from anyone, particularly the
Persians who were wearing their customary hats and who, with arms folded
on the breast, remained still and upright like statues. Each sat with downcast
eyes; truly one could mistake them for statues, as they were all extremely quiet,
immobile, and reverently still.

Quietly, I entered the room, offered my greetings, and wanted to sit
by the entrance. But 'Abbás Effendi rose from his seat and greeted me
warmly, bidding me to move up by saying, "Higher please, higher please." I
went a bit further in the room and was about to sit when again he said,
"Higher please. Come sit here." He pointed to a chair on his own right­
hand side. Since I did not wish him to remain standing, I quickly took
my seat next to him on the chair that he had designated. For the next two
or three minutes he continued to greet me and inquired about my well­
being, though, unfortunately, I do not recall his exact words. He added,
"I have asked of you and was told that you were not in
Paris." I was a
bit bewildered about how it was that he knew me and what had prompted
him to inquire about me. The thought then came to my mind that perhaps
this was a ploy to add me to the rank of his well-wishers. My reasoning
was that I knew Mr. Dreyfus was fully aware of the circumstances of my
publishing the [Kitdb-i] Nuqtatu'l-Káf, having edited its Persian
text, and
having prepared an introduction based on the English introduction of the
late Edward Browne and some other of his writings. 12 Therefore, I thought

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12. Hippolyte Dreyfus was a French Jew who converted to the Bahá'í Faith. Because he was a
lawyer and an outstanding orator, he was the general representative of the Paris Bahá'ís. I suspect
that he is no longer alive and must have passed away a few years ago. Qazvíní. [Mr. Dreyfus-
Barney died in December 1928; for Shoghi Effendi's eulogy, see "Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney: An
Appreciation by Shoghi Effendi," The Bahá'í World (Formerly: Bahá'í Year Book): A Biennial
International Record, Volume III, 1928-1930, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of
the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930) 3:210, 214. Trans.]
that, as soon as I had requested an audience, he must have told 'Abdu'l-Bahá: “This person who is now seeking an audience is the same publisher of the infamous Nuqatu'l-Káf, and to attract his heart, when he comes, do not mention any of this business.” It seems that Dreyfus did not wish to be present in the room when I entered and must have momentarily exited from another door but came in after my entrance and with his eyes greeted me, pretending to have just come into the room.

'Abdu'l-Bahá quickly turned to him [Dreyfus], and it was evident that he was engaged in presenting a talk—that is, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Persian would give his speech consisting of exhortations and teachings, and the others were listening most attentively; Dreyfus would translate from Persian into French. However, Dreyfus said, “I am hesitant to translate further in the presence of our old and much learned friend, Mirzá Muhammad.” 'Abdu'l-Bahá turned to me and said, “We were discussing a subject with the friends; after our talk we shall visit with you extensively. If you wish, translate for them that ‘The children of Israel had sunk into the depth of darkness...’” I replied that, since I had just arrived and was uninformed of the details, it was best if Mr. Dreyfus continued translating.

‘Abbás Effendi continued his talk and would speak each sentence in eloquent Persian. Dreyfus would translate its essence into French. In most instances, the translation was far from the original, and it required much imagination to relate the translation to the sentence originally spoken by ‘Abbás Effendi.

At any rate, from the point that I entered the gathering, the gist of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk was that the children of Israel had sunk into the abyss of darkness, were constantly at war and battling with one another, and worshiped a multitude of gods. Hence God sent Moses to guide them, and He was able to lead them from waywardness to the path of faith. After the passage of many centuries, because of the material attachment of the divines of Israel, the religion of Moses decayed and was corrupted and became the source of profits for the rabbis. Therefore, God sent forth Jesus, the Spirit of God, Who gave His life for this mission... and similarly, the Prophet Muhammad, and then, in his view, Siyyid ‘Alí-Muhammad-i-Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and now Him, and so on.13

In short, after concluding his talk, 'Abdu'l-Bahá took my hand and led me to the smaller room next to the larger one, where we conversed on a variety of topics not related to religion. I asked him several questions about the Ismá'ílís (as during that time I was in the process of publishing the third

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13. ['Abdu'l-Bahá holds a unique position as one of the three Central Figures of the Bahá’í Faith—Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. But He is not, as Qazvini's text implies, a Manifestation of God, a station reserved for Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. See Shoghi Effendi, "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh," in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters, new ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991) 131–34. Trans.]
It was toward the end of 1911 when I arrived in Paris from Istanbul, where I had been staying since the beginning of February of that year. I made this
journey at the request of Hájí 'Ali-Qulí Kháñ-i-Sardár As'ad-i-Bakhtiyári and stayed only a short while (perhaps about two or three weeks). During this time I traveled to London for a few days, returning to Paris from where I subsequently returned to Istanbul. This period coincided with the famous ultimatum issued by the Russian government against the Iranian government for the dismissal of the American Mr. Shuster, which resulted in the horrible massacre of Tabriz and the hanging of the Thiqatu'l-Islám on 'Ashurá A.H. 1330 [10 Muḥarram] corresponding to 31 December 1911 C.E., that I heard about upon my arrival in Istanbul.  

During my stay in Paris, one day in accordance with a previous arrangement, I went to see 'Abbas Effendi 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the leader of the Bahá'í community. I do not recall the exact date, but it was at the same time that the Russians were issuing ultimatums to Iran. One morning I was received by him ['Abdu'l-Bahá] at his residence, an exquisite building (which, it was said, he rented for 4,000 francs a month—that is, 160 British gold pounds).  

From the hallway I was led into a large sitting room that apparently served as his formal receiving room and where he delivered his talks. From there I went further to a smaller room that served as his bedroom, where he graciously received me. We spoke until about noon.  

Meanwhile, a crowd had gathered in the larger room in anticipation of an audience with him. As it was getting late, Mr. Dreyfus, a Jewish Frenchman and a close companion of his, came into the room and, standing with hands upon his breast, said, “People are waiting.” 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not pay much attention to him and only replied “Fine” and continued to converse with me.  

From what I recall of the conversation, one topic about which I asked Him was this: “From what I have heard, you desire the establishment of freedom in Iran. Hence, is it not proper that your followers, in accordance with your command and when necessary, aid and assist those (non-Bahá’í) elements promoting political freedom, such as in the elections, and so on?”

16. [W. Morgan Shuster, an American financial expert with experience in Cuba and the Philippines, where he had served after the Spanish-American war, was employed by the Iranian government with extraordinary powers to reform the country’s shattered finances. His activity antagonized the reactionary elements of Iranian society and their patrons, the Russians, who demanded that he be fired. When the Iranian government ignored the Russian ultimatum, Russian troops invaded northern Iran. Bowing to military force, the Iranian government dismissed Shuster. On returning to the United States, Shuster wrote a book, The Strangling of Persia, that has become a classic. Editor] [Taqizádih heard about the execution of a prominent Shiite cleric when he arrived in Istanbul. For more details about the Shuster episode, see Janet Afary, The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911 (New York: Columbia U Press, 1996). Trans.]  

17. [Undoubtedly £160 sterling was meant. 'Abdu'l-Bahá remained in Paris for nine weeks. Trans.]
He replied that, “In principle, we prefer freedom as it is one of the divine blessings and pleases God. However, this is not because freedom helps with the diffusion and propagation of our Cause, as it is the opposite—namely, our Cause grows better in a repressive environment.”

What I have noted is the essence of his utterance, as I do not recall the exact words.

A few days later Mírzá Asadu'lláh (dressed as a traditional [Muslim] cleric) in the company of Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh Khán-i-Varqá (who worked at the Russian Bank in Tehran), both of whom were among 'Abdu'l-Bahá's companions, came to see me bearing an affectionate message from 'Abdu'l-Bahá: “The Master wishes you to join him for dinner one night.” I agreed and went there at the appointed evening. When Mírzá Asadu'lláh and 'Azízu'lláh Khán had come to see me, they had spoken of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's deep love for Iran and its independence and said, “The Master is constantly inquiring about what is reported in the newspapers as he is worried, meaning about the Russian ultimatum.” (I suspect that they said such things, as these people [the Bahá'ís] speak to each person depending on his interests to attract hearts. Since they had noted my love and commitment for Iran that has consumed my whole being, they emphasized this aspect of the Master's interest. Of course, it may well be very possible that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, indeed, was not uninterested in the independence of Iran.)

The night that I went to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house for dinner was rainy. When I left my residence at about 8 P.M., it was difficult to locate transportation. Hence I was a little late in arriving (about 8:15 or 8:30) and found 'Abdu'l-Bahá and his companions waiting for me. In that gathering, in addition to Mírzá Asadu'lláh Khán, Tamaddunu'l-Mulk was present as well, but the thing that caused my astonishment was that there was no news of dinner! For a while we continued conversing. I had imagined that dinner would be served at eight o'clock (according to the European custom). I was hungry and perplexed. I waited longer, but still no news of dinner. I thought that I had come late and that they had already eaten dinner. For a while 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Azízu'lláh Khán, and I continued with our conversation. Occasionally, because of my hunger and not wishing to overstay my welcome, I wanted to leave, but, being reserved, I did not say anything. Eventually, perhaps closer to eleven o'clock, one by one the honored companions began to arrive, and it was nearly midnight when they informed us that dinner was served. An extensive table filled with delicious food was spread, including a rice dish that is mixed with ghaymih [ground meat] (apparently it is called islambuli polo or has some other name).

After dinner we returned to the original room to continue our conversation and enjoy coffee. Shortly after coffee was served, 'Abdu'l-Bahá began

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18. [The designation Master (Aqā) was given by Bahá'u'lláh to His son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Trans.]
to appear fatigued, and one of his companions whispered to me that he observes the custom of sleeping shortly after dinner. From this it was evident that 'Abdu'l-Bahá lived according to the Persian customs.

When I rose to leave, he asked, "Do you have an automobile?"

"I will find transportation," I replied.

However, he did not permit me to leave, even though he was sleepy, and insisted that I should wait until one of his attendants located a taxi for me, which he did. With that I returned home.

The conversation that night was charming and delightful. The topic of religion was not discussed that much, and he spoke of the early years of his life and recalled his childhood. He related: "My mother tied a two-qirán silver piece in the corner of a handkerchief and asked me to go out and buy some food. As I was passing through the streets in the Karbila'i 'Abbás-'Ali marketplace of Tehran, one of the youngsters cried out, "This child is a Bábí!" Whereupon the children in the street rushed toward me to beat me. I was frightened and escaped. They chased me, until eventually I was able to hide in the entrance to a house belonging to the father of Șadrul-'Ulamá (apparently the father of Șadrul-'Ulamá and Aqá Mírzá Muhsin, the son-in-law of Siyyid 'Abdu'lláh Bihbahání, who was well-known at the beginning of the constitutional movement, or perhaps their grandfather). I stayed in that dark entrance until the streets were deserted and returned home to find my mother perturbed over my fate."19

Of the events of that night, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's companions had left us to go for a walk, and he and I were left alone, at one point the French maid came in and informed him [in French] that he had a telephone call. He asked me, "What is she saying?"

I translated.

He said, "Find 'Azizu'lláh Khán, and tell him to take the call."

I translated that, too. The maid said that he was not there.

He then said, "Tamaddun should take the call."

The maid responded that he was not there either. Finally, 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself had to take the call, which apparently was from an American Bahá'í woman who spoke Persian, and went to the phone. When he returned, he said to me, "That was the first time in my life that I spoke on a telephone."

He also said that the same French maid had a fiancé who wrote her regularly, but for a few days she had not received a letter and cried constantly, which had caused much distress to everyone. 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself had consoled her and told her that soon she would receive a letter, but she had not regained her composure.

19. [The same incident, with some slight variation, is told by Mírzá Maḥmúd-i-Zarqání, Kitáb-i-Baddy-i'l-Aḥrár (Bombay, 1921; rpt. Hofheim-Langenheim, Germany: Bahá’í-Verlag, 1982) 2:205–06. Trans.]
‘Abdu’l-Bahá with a group of Bahá’ís at the Eiffel Tower, near 4, rue de Camoëns, Paris

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was extremely polite and wise and possessed excellent manners. He left a deep, positive impression on those whom he met. Because he exerted much care for cleanliness and observed European customs, he was very respected. Every time that he went outside and walked in streets or parks wearing his perfectly clean ‘abá [overcoat] and shirt, He attracted people’s attention.20 He also was very polite and respectful toward me. During our first meeting, when I left his bedroom and passed through the large sitting room [occupied with guests], on my exit in the hallway, one of his companions informed me: “The Master has said that we should tell people that you are an Egyptian visitor so that no one would be informed of your visit here.”21

A while later, toward the end of 1912 or the early part of 1913, he was in London, and I was there, too. But I did not see him. I heard that he was informed of my association with the late Professor Edward Browne, and since he was deeply annoyed with the late Browne over the publication and dissemination of the Kitáb-i-Nuqṭatu’l-Káf and certain of his other writings, he must have been annoyed with me too. God only knows.

Apparently the night I had gone to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, he had asked ‘Azizu’lláh Khán, “What do the newspapers and media report of Iran?”

20. [‘Abdu’l-Bahá liked to walk in the Trocadéro Gardens, which are near the rue de Camoëns. He attracted attention wherever He went. Trans.]

21. [‘Abdu’l-Bahá was aware that Taqízádíh’s enemies would use to their own political advantage news that Taqízádíh had met with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and would paint him as a Bahá’í sympathizer. Trans.]
Villa Maria
(Adult Care Center)

There's a quietness in trees
in the Spring the desert wind
makes them sing
in the summer it whips
about the leaves
like a tiger with a twig
but in the fall—

There is a quietness in trees
a lonely sadness
becoming loneliness in winter
yet sweet.
In the autumn—
there is a knowledge in trees

A knowing
born out of sacrifice, love
there is a history in trees
the history of long years
and many windy springs.

—Joan Imig Taylor

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