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Desinformation als Methode. Die Bahá'ismus-Monographie des F. Ficicchia
UDO SCHAEFER, NICOLA TOWFIGI, ULRICH GOLLNER, 1995
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Fifteen years ago the former Swiss Bahá'í, F. Ficicchia, published a book on the Bahá'í faith, which has been recommended as a serious treatment of this religion. Thus, it has not only served as a reference tool for all German-speaking non-Bahá'í, but Ficicchia was also asked to write contributions on the Bahá'í faith in various journals and dictionaries. The wide dissemination of his views of the religion caused the Bahá'í community trouble because of a number of serious errors, even more so given Ficicchia's polemics against his former religion. Therefore, three German Bahá'ís, who have written on various topics about the Bahá'í from an academic perspective, present an analysis and rejection

of Ficicchia's claims as well as new investigations of some historic, legal and theological aspects of their religion.

In the first part (pp. 11–110, under the heading 'Method'), U. Schaefer shows how Ficicchia provides information which aims at ridiculing and harming the religion: he blames mainly Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice for falsifying the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Because of its length, this part of the book may be tiresome for some (English) readers who are not acquainted with Ficicchia's book.

The second part (pp. 111–370, under the heading 'Community and Teachings') covers aspects of the Bahá'í faith as a contemporary religion. Referring to misleading passages in Ficicchia's text, U. Schaefer gives a description of Bahá'í theology and ethics. In my view, the chapter on the *Kitáb-i Aqdas* (pp. 237–317), the most holy book of the community, whose official English translation has been published only in 1992, is of great importance. Here, the non-specialist reader finds new information on the history of the text and its translation, and learns about the central position this text has within the community. The *Kitáb* is the theological and legal source for the establishment of Bahá'í institutions (e.g. the Universal and Local House of Justice) and it contains different laws (e.g. on praying, fasting, and pilgrimage, but also on the personal status, e.g. marriage or inheritance) and prohibitions.

The following chapter by U. Gollmer (pp. 319–370) provides concise information about important political aspects of the Bahá'í society, a subject that has rarely been treated before. The author shows how—due to their religious laws—Bahá'ís contribute, on a really democratic level, to a new world order for the welfare of the one human family.

The last part (pp. 371–623, under the heading 'Historical Questions') deals with the early Bábí and Bahá'í history scrutinising some neglected Persian and Arabic sources. N. Towfigh, the author of most of this part, presents important new findings. Her analysis casts fresh light on the literary (and historical) value of some works (e.g. *Kitáb-i Nuqtatu 'l-Káf*; *Tárlh-i Jadid*; *Hašt Bihišt*) showing that they must not be held in the high esteem that Western scholarship had for them following the first investigation of these texts by E. G. Browne at the end of the last century (cf. pp. 387–431). Browne had some sympathy for Bahá'u'lláh's opponent Mirzá Yahyá and considered them relevant sources for the conflict between the two, because these works shed a better light on Mirzá Yahyá and played down the role of Bahá'u'lláh. On the basis of these source materials it becomes possible to assess the Báb's and Bahá'u'lláh's claims better. At first, both reveal their claims step by step only to a very limited number of close followers. Yet, both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh give a new interpretation of traditional religious (mainly Islamic) concepts which—corresponding to the growth of the community—gradually become more explicit. In the case of the Báb, this leads to a total break with Islam in 1848. Bahá'u'lláh's revelation begins in 1852 (the year 1853 on p. 488 is a misprint), when he was imprisoned in Tehran, but for a decade he remains silent, until in 1863, he tells his close followers in Baghdad that he is a new prophet who is sent by god; only in 1867 he openly proclaims his new religion to a broader audience in Edirne, thus leaving behind the religion of the Báb.

A final chapter (by U. Gollmer) deals with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will and the

appointment of Shoghi Effendi as his authoritative successor repudiating the accusations that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will was forged by Shoghi Effendi.

In conclusion, the book is an important contribution to the critical study of the Bahá'í religion in the history of religions despite its apologetic character, i.e. its aims to counteract the influence of Ficicchia on the treatment the Bahá'í faith outside the community. It may be hoped that future descriptions of the Bahá'í religion will no longer depend on Ficicchia's contribution, but take this book into account in order to give a balanced view of a contemporary religion which can also be shared by members of the community.

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