

The 1844 Ottoman “Edict of Toleration” in Bahá’í Secondary Literature*

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Abstract

In Bahá’í secondary literature, it has been commonly assumed that an Imperial Edict, referred to by Christian and Bahá’í authors as the “Edict of Toleration,” issued in 1844 by the Ottoman government permitted Jews to return to Palestine. The return of Jews to Palestine was widely thought by Christians to be an important event anticipated by biblical prophecy and heralding the Second Advent of Christ. Since the fulfilment of such a significant prophecy seemed to have been made possible by an edict issued in the very year the Bahá’í era began, the Edict naturally captured the interest of Bahá’ís. This article examines the Edict, its origin, the evolution of ideas about it, and re-evaluates its significance.

Résumé

Dans la littérature bahá’íe secondaire, il est généralement admis qu’un édit impérial publié en 1844 par le gouvernement ottoman et connu des auteurs chrétiens et bahá’ís sous le nom d’« édit de tolérance », est ce qui permit aux Juifs de retourner en Palestine. Aussi, ce retour des Juifs en Palestine est généralement reconnu par les Chrétiens comme un événement marquant prophétisé dans la Bible, et annonçant la seconde venue du Christ. Étant donné que l’accomplissement d’une prophétie aussi importante soit le résultat d’un édit publié l’année même où débuta l’ère bahá’íe, il est naturel que cet édit ait retenu l’intérêt des bahá’ís. Le présent article examine donc l’Édit, son origine, l’évolution des pensées s’y rapportant et en réévalue l’importance.

Resumen

En literatura bahá’í secundaria, se supone comúnmente que un Edicto Imperial, conocido entre autores cristianos y bahá’ís como el “Edicto de Toleración” decretado en 1844 por el gobierno otomano, permitió a los judíos regresar a Palestina. El regreso de los judíos a Palestina gozaba de amplia creencia entre los cristianos de ser un evento importante anticipado en profecías bíblicas

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anunciando la segunda llegada de Cristo. Como el cumplimiento de una profecía tan significativa parece haberse hecho posible por un edicto decretado en el año preciso en que comenzó la era bahá'í, el Edicto naturalmente cautivó el interés de los bahá'ís. Este artículo investiga el Edicto, su origen, el desarrollo de ideas en su alrededor, y reexamina su significado.

The Imperial Edict of 1844 was given religious significance largely because of Christian beliefs about the restoration of Jews to Palestine—beliefs that had become central to much Christian chiliastic speculation. Many Christians, particularly in England and to a lesser degree other European Protestant nations, believed that the restoration of Jews to Palestine was prophesied in the Bible—a divinely ordained inevitability—and that, as a movement, should it begin in earnest, it would herald the Second Advent of Christ. The increasing imperial expansion of Europe brought the question of the restoration of Jews to Palestine to a new stage in the nineteenth century. With these developments taking place, many Christians saw an opportunity to encourage the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and to advocate that European governments support it.¹

Given the religious significance attached to the restoration idea, many Christians looked eagerly for some event that would facilitate a mass migration of Jews to Palestine and speculated as to when it would occur. Christians had a long-standing tradition of extracting specific dates from biblical prophecy, and eventually the restoration idea and chronological interpretations were brought together. The year 1844 had already acquired great significance in the estimation of many Christian commentators, and for this reason, when the Imperial Edict was issued by the Sultan of Turkey in 1844, it was noted by a Christian author who assumed immediately that it had some biblical and

1. See, for example, Alexander Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation 1856–1882: Studies in Social, Economic, and Political Development* 61–65 and Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* 42–43. Even as much Christian messianic speculation focused on the year 1844, there were Jews who believed that the Messiah would appear in the year 1840, and some believed that being in Palestine at that time would bring special blessings to those who awaited the Messiah. “The Redemption, he [Vilna Gaon] believed, was imminent. Preparations had to be made. Jews must return to the Land of Israel, and before the messiah would come, the Holy City of Jerusalem had to be rebuilt” (Halper, *Between Redemption and Revival: The Jewish Yishuv of Jerusalem in the Nineteenth Century* 40; see also 41, 47–50, 61–62). Halper discusses the impact growing European power in the region had on the protection of Jews in Palestine and how this contributed to messianism among Jews (see Halper, *Between Redemption and Revival* 61–62). Nevertheless, the restoration movement was largely a Christian idea that received no significant response from the fragmented Jewish communities in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. For a survey of Jews in Palestine during the period 1799–1840, see Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries: The Jews in Palestine 1799–1840*. For a survey of the idea of the restoration of Jews in English Protestant thought, see Vereté, “The Idea of the Restoration of Jews in English Protestant Thought” (Vereté, *From Palmerston to Balfour* 78–140).

chiliastic significance. Since the Bahá’í community shared many similar beliefs about prophecy, interpretive methodology, and the year 1844, the Edict also came to the attention of Bahá’í authors who used it in apologetic literature.

Bahá’í Beliefs about the Restoration of Jews to Palestine

In 1897, the first Zionist Congress was held in Basel, Switzerland, for the purpose of arguing how and where a Jewish homeland might be established. In that same year, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá comments directly on the return of Jews to Palestine:

You have asked Me a question with regard to the gathering of the children of Israel in Jerusalem in accordance with the prophecy.

Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies, is a revered Temple, a sublime name, for it is the City of God . . . The gathering of Israel at Jerusalem means, therefore, and prophesies, that Israel as a whole is gathering beneath the banner of God and will enter the Kingdom of the Ancient of Days. For the celestial Jerusalem, which has as its center, the Holy of Holies, is a City of the Kingdom, a Divine City. The East and West are but a small corner of that City.

Moreover, materially as well (as spiritually), the Israelites will gather in the Holy Land. This is irrefutable prophecy, for the ignominy which Israel has suffered for well-nigh twenty-five hundred years will now be changed into eternal glory, and in the eyes of all, the Jewish people will become glorified to such an extent as to draw the jealousy of its enemies and the envy of its friends.²

Seven years later, in the course of a series of talks given between 1904–06 and recorded by Laura Clifford Barney, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá comments again on the return of Jews to Palestine. The initial context is an explanation of Isaiah 11:1–10. He states:

Universal peace and concord will be realized between all the nations, and that Incomparable Branch will gather together all Israel, signifying that in this cycle Israel will be gathered in the Holy Land, and that the Jewish people who are scattered to the East and West, South and North, will be assembled together. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 65)

A few passages later, he returns to the theme, saying:

. . . Israel, scattered all over the world, was not reassembled in the Holy Land in the Christian cycle; but in the beginning of the cycle of Bahá’u’lláh this divine promise, as is clearly stated in all the Books of the Prophets, has begun to be manifest. You can

2. “According to information received by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States several years ago, this Tablet was revealed by the Master [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] in the year 1897 to a Jewish Community in the Orient” (*Bahá’í News*, no. 250, December, 1951, 5; also *Lights of Guidance* 500, 3d ed.).

see that from all the parts of the world tribes of Jews are coming to the Holy Land; they live in villages and lands which they make their own, and day by day they are increasing to such an extent that all Palestine will become their home. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 65–66)

'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments correlate the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith with the return of Jews to Palestine. This reference to the return of Jews to Palestine is not connected to a specific prophecy, but, rather, is simply mentioned as a feature of "the great events" unfolding in this Day and as a "divine promise . . . clearly stated in all the Books of the Prophets."³

In a separate talk, 'Abdu'l-Bahá discusses the restoration of Jerusalem in relation to specific prophecies. Using a methodological approach and interpretations common to Christian Adventists, 'Abdu'l-Bahá derives the year A.H. 1260 (A.D. 1844) from a prophecy found in the Book of Revelation:⁴

This [Rev. 11:2] prophesies the duration of the Dispensation of Islám when Jerusalem was trodden under foot, which means that it lost its glory—but the Holy of Holies was preserved, guarded and respected—until the year 1260. This twelve hundred and sixty years is a prophecy of the manifestation of the Báb, the "Gate" of

3. The religious importance attached to this event was also held among Christian interpreters as is apparent in Bickersteth's book *The Restoration of the Jews to Their Land in Connection with Their Future Conversion and the Final Blessedness of Our Earth* (294–99). At the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discourse, the progressing return of the Israelites to Palestine was a well-known occurrence and popular topic of discussion. His reference to the return of Jews may have been incorporated into his discussion to illustrate, via an example of commonly accepted literal fulfilment, that the eventual unity of humankind should also be understood and accepted as literal. This is suggested by the fact that he first explains the unity of humankind and then refers to Israel saying "in the same way. . . ." More broadly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicated that he believed that this process of Jewish restoration (1) was divinely foretold, (2) would occur in this age literally, (3) had already begun, and (4) would eventually increase to encompass all of Palestine.

4. See Book of Revelation, chapter 11. The correlation between numeric references in Revelation, ch. 11, and Daniel 12:6–7 is still accepted by evangelical commentators. See Alan Johnson, "Revelation," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 12:503. This type of chronological interpretation was also adopted by Bahá'ís in the East around or before the time 'Abdu'l-Bahá made reference to it in his talks published in *Some Answered Questions*. This is indicated by a May 9, 1904 letter from Bahá'ís in Tehran. See "Translation of a Letter from the Israelitish Assembly of Bahá'ís of Tíhrán, Persia to the House of Spirituality of Bahá'ís, Chicago," *The Bahá'í World: 1926–1928*, 2:275–79. 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes use of the traditional day-year theory accepted by Christian Adventists, and relied on the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation to make calculations culminating in the year 1844 (see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 40–43, 71). He also interprets Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew (24:15) as a reference to the Book of Daniel. It has since become a matter of universal consensus among modern biblical scholars, apart from evangelical commentators, that the Book of Daniel is a work originating in the second-century B.C.E.—especially those portions traditionally understood to be chronological prophecies—and as such, it is argued that its cryptic chronological prophecies were written *ex eventu* to describe the reign of the Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes who desecrated the Jerusalem Temple in 167 B.C.E. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanations, like those of Christian Adventists, are based on, or at least presented in the context of, the traditional belief that the Book of Daniel was written in the sixth century and foretold events far in the future.

Bahá'u'lláh, which took place in the year 1260 of the Hejira of Muḥammad, and as the period of twelve hundred and sixty years has expired, Jerusalem, the Holy City, is now beginning to become prosperous, populous and flourishing. Anyone who saw Jerusalem sixty years ago, and who sees it now, will recognize how populous and flourishing it has become, and how it is again honored.

This is the outward meaning of these verses of the Revelation of St. John; but they have another explanation and a symbolic sense. . . . (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 46–47)

From this passage, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seems to be saying that Jerusalem lost its outward prosperity during the Islamic era and that when this era ended in 1844 (A.H. 1260), the city began to prosper. Presumably, the increased immigration of Jews and the decline of Ottoman rule are seen as central to this process. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions directly neither the restoration of Jews in this passage, nor any edicts issued by the Ottoman authorities.⁵

In 1939, Shoghi Effendi, while referring to the World War of 1914–18 and its effects on Ottoman power, commented on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reference to the return of Jews to Palestine and at the same time alluded to a number of biblical prophecies:

The conclusion of this terrible conflict [War of 1914–18], the first stage in a titanic convulsion long predicted by Bahá'u'lláh . . . marked the extinction of Turkish rule in the Holy Land and sealed the doom of that military despot [Jamál Páshá, the Turkish Commander-in-Chief] who had vowed to destroy ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. . . . and enabled, according to Scriptural prophecy, so large an element of the “outcasts of Israel,” the “remnant” of the “flock,” to “assemble” in the Holy Land, and to be brought back to “their folds” and “their own border,” beneath the shadow of the “Incomparable Branch,” referred to by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His “Some Answered Questions”. . . . (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 305)⁶

At the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prediction, Palestine was still in the hands of the Ottoman Empire, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was himself confined to the city of

5. In a tablet quoted by Shoghi Effendi, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also states, “Praise be to God that whatsoever hath been announced in the Blessed Tablets unto the Israelites, and the things explicitly written in the letters of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, are all being fulfilled. Some have come to pass; others will be revealed in the future. The Ancient Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] hath in His sacred Tablets explicitly written that the day of their abasement is over. His bounty will overshadow them, and this race will day by day progress, and be delivered from its age-long obscurity and degradation” (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 55–56).

6. In this passage Shoghi Effendi uses a number of scriptural phrases that can be found in prophecies commonly associated with the restoration idea. The “outcasts of Israel,” for example, is a phrase found in the King James version of Psalms 147:2 and Isaiah 11:12, 56:8. The term “remnant” appears many times in the Bible with varying meanings, but it is here likely to mean those among the Jews who will survive oppression or a catastrophe so that the blessings of God given to Jews may be carried on, as in Isaiah 10:20–23, 11:11, 46:3. The Bahá’í scholar, Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl, in his book *The Bahá’í Proofs*, writes briefly about the restoration of Jews to Palestine. He refers directly to Romans 11:25–27 and Jeremiah 31:27, 28 (Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl, *The Bahá’í Proofs* 233, 235).

'Akká by the government. Nevertheless, Ottoman power had long been in decline. While Palestine had already experienced a significant upsurge of Jewish immigration, their future was far from clear. Nevertheless, in the first decade of the twentieth century 'Abdu'l-Bahá saw the growing presence of Jews in Palestine as a fulfilment of prophecies that had begun "to be manifest" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 65–66). When Shoghi Effendi wrote *God Passes By* (first published in 1944), he had the advantage of hindsight. Palestine was no longer under Ottoman control, and forces were mounting that would lead to the establishment of the State of Israel in only a few years' time (1948). Shoghi Effendi's writings indicate that he saw the extinction of Turkish rule, which coincided with the Balfour Declaration (1917), as a further stage in prophetic fulfilment. Through this succession of events, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's prediction "that all Palestine will become their home" appeared to be approaching realization.⁷ With these points in mind, it is not surprising that later Bahá'í authors would be interested in Christian references to an Edict issued in 1844 and thought to have facilitated the beginning of the restoration of Jews to Palestine.⁸

Bahá'í References to the 1844 "Edict of Toleration"

The first Bahá'í author to refer to the Edict was George Townshend (1876–1957).⁹ He mentions the Edict in his introduction to Shoghi Effendi's book *God Passes By*, a history of the first hundred years of the Bahá'í era. In this introduction, written between 1943–44,¹⁰ Townshend writes:

7. The courage of faith in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's 1897 statement that Palestine would become a homeland for Jews can perhaps be better appreciated from the later vantage point of this assessment by the Israeli Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, "The Balfour Declaration [1917] is the authentic turning-point in Jewish political history. Before its promulgation the idea of a Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel seemed totally remote from reality. There was not a single factor that argued in favor of its feasibility" (Abba Eban, *Heritage: Civilization and the Jews* 256). In 1919, the reporter Marion Weinstein wrote an article for *Globe and Commercial Advertiser* (New York, July 17, 1919) quoting 'Abdu'l-Bahá as declaring that Zionists must work together with other races: "If Zionists will mingle with the other races and live in unity with them, they will succeed. If not, they will meet certain resistance." See Weinstein, "['Abdu'l-Bahá] Declares Zionists Must Work with Other Races" (*Star of the West*, vol. 10, no. 10).

8. Bahá'í interest in Palestine can also be seen in Alice Simmons Cox's article "Rejoice, O Israel," which takes the position that "the Unseen power of God may be working out an ancient plan" (see *The Bahá'í World: 1938–1940*, 8:872).

9. Townshend was a English Christian clergyman who resigned his Orders after forty years in the Church of Ireland so that he could more freely proclaim his belief that biblical prophecy and Christian messianic hopes had been fulfilled with the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. He first learned of the Bahá'í Faith in 1916, and in 1951 he was appointed "Hand of the Cause of God" by Shoghi Effendi. He was author of several books and articles, including *The Promise of All Ages* (1934), *The Heart of the Gospel* (1939), *The Old Churches and the New World-Faith* (n.d. 1949?), and *Christ and Bahá'u'lláh* (1957).

10. See David Hofman, *George Townshend* 69–71.

The fulfillment of the prophecies of Christ and of the Bible has been over a period of a hundred years or more matter of common knowledge and remark in the West. But the full extent of that fulfillment is only seen in Bahá'u'lláh. The proclamation of His Faith was made in 1844, the year when the strict exclusion of the Jews from their own land enforced by the Muslims for some twelve centuries was at last relaxed by the Edict of Toleration and the “times of the Gentiles”¹¹ were “fulfilled.” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* iv)

As the wording of this reference suggests, Townshend was generally aware of contemporary Christian prophetic interpretations, and it is likely that his source of information about the Edict was one or more Christian commentators.¹² Seventeen years later, William Sears (1911–1992),¹³ another prominent Bahá'í author, would give this historical detail much greater emphasis in his book, *Thief in the Night: The Case of the Missing Millennium* (1961). This book was an attempt to prove the truth of the Bahá'í Faith by correlating Christian Adventist interpretations with the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith. Written in the form of a detective story, Sears adopts Christian Adventist interpretations and brings them together with references from Bahá'í scripture and novel interpretations of his own to produce what would become a popular work of Bahá'í apologetic literature that would be reprinted many times. In it, Sears introduces Luke's prophecy concerning the “times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24), quotes the above reference from George Townshend, and adds the following:

Worth Smith also mentions this Edict in his *Miracle of the Ages*. He points out: ‘In the year of A.D. 1844 . . . the (Muslims) under the leadership of Turkey were

11. The “times of the Gentiles” is a phrase from the King James version of the Gospel of Luke. A modern translation is as follows: “For great misery will descend on the land and retribution on this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive to every gentile country; and Jerusalem will be trampled down by the gentiles until their time is complete” (Luke 21:24, *New Jerusalem Bible*). The word *gentiles* is from the Greek *ethnos*, meaning a multitude or group of people, and in particular, peoples other than Jews. The Greek *ethnos* is, in the New Testament context, intended as the equivalent of the Hebrew *gôy* (compare with, for example, Isaiah 42:1, 6). In different translations of the Bible, it has been translated as “nations,” “peoples,” “heathen,” or “pagan.”

12. It may be hasty to accept that there are no other earlier sources. Many early Bahá'ís—most notably Paul Kingston Dealy—were interested in Christian millennial interpretations, and some reference to it previous to Townshend may have been written.

13. William Sears studied theater at the University of Wisconsin and later became a sportscaster and children's show host at WCAU-TV in Philadelphia. In 1953, he left his position at WCAU-TV to move to Africa to help spread the Bahá'í Faith (“Hand of the Cause of God William Sears: 1911–1992,” anonymous, *American Bahá'í* 23:6 (April 28, 1992): 8). Although he had no formal background in religious studies, he sought as best he could to fill a need he saw within the Bahá'í community for apologetic and educational literature. With this in mind, he wrote numerous books, including two popular apologetic books relating to Christian themes: *Thief in the Night, or the Strange Case of the Missing Millennium* (1961) and *The Wine of Astonishment* (1963). His special talents as a charismatic and gifted communicator are perhaps most apparent in his works *Release the Sun* (1957) and *God Loves Laughter* (1960). Shoghi Effendi appointed him “Hand of the Cause of God” in 1957.

compelled by the Western Powers, notably England, to grant religious toleration to all (nations) within their borders.'

This included the Holy Land, Palestine. I was able to secure and study copies of the original letters and documents which led to the signing of the so-called Edict of Toleration in 1844. The Turkish Government agreed to permit religious freedom and signed the document which guaranteed that 'The Sublime Porte (Constantinople) engages to take effectual measures to prevent henceforward' any further religious intolerance. For the first time in twelve hundred years the Jews were guaranteed the right to return to Israel in freedom and security. The date on this document was March 21st, 1844.

Bickersteth in *A Practical Guide to the Prophecies*, wrote: 'In a letter from Tangiers, date June 20th, 1844, given in the public journals, speaking of the difficulties besetting the kingdom of Morocco, it is stated: "It seems that the Moors (Muslims) have always had forebodings of this year. For a long time they have been exhorting each other to beware of 1260 (1844) which according to our reckoning is the present year".' (Sears, *Thief in the Night* 13-14)

These details had an extraordinary and significant appearance from a Bahá'í point of view—1844 was the year the Bahá'í era began with the declaration of the Báb in Shiráz, and scores of Christian interpreters already connected this date with millennial prophecies. Now there was a tangible edict issued in this significant year that appeared to be a *terminus ad quem* for a number of seemingly related messianic prophecies about Jewish restoration to Palestine.

Nevertheless, as will be shown, the importance of the Edict in the estimation of Christian writers was probably the date and not any known impact it actually had on Jews returning to Palestine. Since a large consensus had already formed among Christians about the prophetic significance of the year 1844, the attention given to the Edict may have been a hopeful attempt to find further confirmations of the near appearance of Christ. This possibility becomes clearer when the sources cited by Sears are put into historical perspective with the actual nature of the Edict.

Sources for Bahá'í Beliefs about the "Edict of Toleration"

George Townshend does not provide any sources for his reference to the Edict or other historical details about Jewish exclusion from Israel or Jewish immigration. In his book *Thief in the Night*, however, William Sears cites Reverend Edward Bickersteth, Henry Grattan Guinness, Worth Smith, William A. Spicer, and George Townshend. The Reverend Edward Bickersteth (1786-1850), however, was the original source for all later writings on the subject by Guinness, Smith, Spicer, and Townshend.

Edward Bickersteth was an English evangelical clergyman who served in the Church Missionary Society and wrote the once popular *Practical Guide to the*

Prophecies.¹⁴ He became aware of the Edict through association with his younger friend Lord Ashley¹⁵ (1801–1885), who was the acknowledged leader of the evangelical movement within the Church of England and a member of the House of Commons from 1826 onward.¹⁶ The introduction of the Edict into the sphere of Christian interpretation begins with Bickersteth who was the first to publish diplomatic correspondence on the subject the same year (1844) the Edict was issued in a new edition of his *Practical Guide to the Prophecies*. However, as presented by Bickersteth, the Edict is simply an assurance from the Ottoman Sultan "to prevent henceforward the execution and putting to death of the Christian who is an apostate [from Islam]." This "official declaration" formed a portion of a larger group of letters Lord Ashley shared with Bickersteth. Bickersteth writes:

The papers entitled 'Correspondence Relating to Executions in Turkey for Apostasy from Islamism,' were presented to Parliament, May 3, 1844, and having come before me through the kindness of Lord Ashley, I give the following abstract of them. The correspondence occupied a considerable part of the year—from Aug. 27, 1843, to April 19, 1844. (Bickersteth, *Practical Guide to the Prophecies* 387, cf. Grattan Guinness, *The Approaching End of the Age* 434)

The Edict, therefore, was not about Jewish immigration, but the Islamic penalty for apostasy in the Ottoman Empire. The Edict did concern religious toleration, but only in a rather narrow sense. Broader questions of religious toleration—such as might presumably involve Jewish land rights in the Ottoman Empire and Jewish immigration—are not mentioned in the Edict. Instead, Bickersteth adds this point to the Edict of March 21:

To this must be added the following "Declaration of His Highness the Sultan to Sir Stratford Canning,¹⁷ at his audience on the 22nd of March, 1844.

Henceforward neither shall Christianity be insulted in my dominions, nor shall Christians be in any way persecuted for their religion." (Bickersteth, *Practical Guide to the Prophecies* 392, cf. Guinness, *The Approaching End of the Age* 437)

14. This book was first issued as *Remarks on the Prophecies* in 1824 and went through nine editions. The seventh edition was published in 1844 and included the section on the Edict, which, as will be discussed, was later replicated by Guinness in his book, *The Approaching End of the Age*. Bickersteth was also author of *The Restoration of the Jews to Their Land in Connection with Their Future Conversion and the Final Blessedness of Our Earth* (1841). The question of the future of Jews as relates to biblical prophecy had been a subject of deep interest for him for many years.

15. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Baron, (seventh Earl of Shaftsbury). Called Lord Ashley from 1811–1851. A social and industrial reformer in nineteenth-century England, he also served as president of the British Foreign Bible Society.

16. According to Ashley's biographer, Edwin Hodder, Bickersteth seems to have been his closest friend. Hodder writes, "on almost every subject their views were identical, and many a solemn hour had they spent together . . . pondering over unfulfilled prophecies . . . in talking over the restoration of Israel to their promised land, and dearer than all, in hoping and praying for the Second Coming of the Son of Man." See Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftsbury* 2:310.

17. Sir Stratford Canning (1786–1880) was the U.K. Ambassador at the Porte. He represented Great Britain at the Ottoman Court for almost twenty years (intermittently between 1810 and 1858) and encouraged the program of limited Westernizing reforms known as *Tanzimat*.

From this, Bickersteth does not expound on the fulfilment of prophecy through a related increase in Jewish immigration but instead concludes, "the power of the Mohammedans to persecute Christianity passed away, and liberty is given for Christian worship, the true cleansing of the sanctuary." The "cleansing of the sanctuary" is a phrase found in the Book of Daniel (8:13–14) and commonly interpreted by Christians as having important messianic significance.¹⁸

Bickersteth was fifty-eight years old when the Edict was issued and would die only six years later. He was, in fact, well placed to learn of the Edict and immediately to incorporate mention of it in his 1844 edition of *Practical Guide to the Prophecies*.¹⁹ Since he died in 1850, he did not live long enough to witness similar edicts and what he might have come to regard as more important subsequent events (the "Edict of Toleration" was, for example, neither the first nor the last edict involving Christians and religious toleration in the Ottoman Empire). Moreover, time did not allow him to put even his own interpretation of the Edict into historical perspective with, for example, the general failure of the missionary movement to convert the Islamic world or large numbers of Jews to Christianity. Nevertheless, his book would be published again in its final edition in 1852. The reference to the Edict remained unchanged, and his initial enthusiasm was perpetuated uncritically by later authors.

18. The "cleansing of the sanctuary" is a phrase from the King James Version of the Book of Daniel: "And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (Daniel 8:14). This prediction concerning 2,300 days was understood to mean years by Christian commentators who also connected this prediction with the 1,260 days mentioned in the Book of Revelation (ch. 11). Christians understood the cleansing of the sanctuary to come after the sanctuary was made desolate, based in part on a reference in the New Testament. The Gospel according to Matthew attributes the following words to Jesus: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place . . . flee to the mountains." (Matthew 24:15–16, The New King James Version). Because of the archaic language of the King James Version, William Sears thought Matthew 24:15 meant that Jesus was telling his disciples to stand in the holy place (see *Thief in the Night* 19, 94), whereas scholars now concur Jesus was telling his disciples to flee to the hills when they saw the abomination standing in the holy place (i.e., the Temple). The terminology "abomination of desolation" originates from Daniel 11:31, 12:11, and 1 Maccabees 1:54 and refers to some act, most probably the placing (or standing up) of an idol (an abomination) in the holy place (i.e., the Jerusalem Temple) which brings desolation to the Temple. See Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 1:598–600 and John E. Goldingay, *Daniel* 301–2. Typically, Christians understood the desolating and later cleansing of the Temple in both literal and symbolic ways, usually involving ideas about the destruction and rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, as well as anti-Catholic and anti-Islamic beliefs. When Grattan Guinness stressed the importance of the Edict, he connected the abomination of desolation with the Catholic Pope and Muslims. Guinness believed cleansing the sanctuary (the holy place) of abomination would be brought about in steps symbolically with the end of the temporal power and influence of the Pope and of Muslim rule in the Middle East. The 2,300- and 1,260-year periods were understood to be periods that ended with the cleansing of the sanctuary. Many Christian commentators thought these periods ended in 1844. See Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* 404–5.

19. In this book, Bickersteth included a chart listing significant events in the fulfilment of prophecy. Since the book was published in 1844, the chart culminates with the 1844 Edict (see Bickersteth, *Practical Guide to the Prophecies* 418–19).

The role of later authors can also be observed in the work of William Sears. After referring to Bickersteth, several pages later, Sears again refers to the Edict (*Thief* 20), this time quoting E. P. Cachemaille, "sometime scholar of Cambridge University" from a new edition of Henry Grattan Guinness's book *Light for the Last Days*.²⁰ Cachemaille refers to the Edict only by way of quoting Guinness. Sears mentions that Cachemaille maintained that Guinness's book had been recognized for over thirty years as a standard work of chronological prophecy. Like Bickersteth, Grattan Guinness (1835–1910) was an English Christian evangelical and interpreter of prophecy who was interested in the question of Jewish immigration to Palestine.²¹ To supplement his arguments about prophecy in his book *The Approaching End of the Age*,²² Guinness provides a footnote nearly five pages in length (434–38) consisting of an excerpt from the ninth edition of Bickersteth's *Practical Guide to the Prophecies*.²³ Thus, both Guinness and Cachemaille were relying on a further reprinting of Bickersteth's writings, whose assessment they perpetuated without any apparent independent investigation. The emphasis Guinness seems to place on the Edict appears to be derived from his desire to locate dates that signify an important *terminus ad quem* for prophecies. Once printed, Bickersteth's view about the Edict became authoritative, and once cited in Guinness's popular book, the Edict's importance began to acquire added weight.²⁴

Guinness, however, did not merely repeat Bickersteth's assessment, he elaborated on it by broadening the element of "religious toleration" to embrace the prophesied return of Jews to Palestine. As will be shown, the Edict did, in some senses, reflect the decline of Ottoman power, and based on the information Guinness had, this decline could be interpreted in a broad sense to mean that Ottoman obstacles to increased Jewish immigration were less likely. This is the reasoning into which Guinness placed the Edict.

20. Guinness's *Light for the Last Days* discusses the Edict sometimes verbatim from his earlier *The Approaching End of the Age* 259–60. There are several sections in the book that focus on the decline of Islamic power and the return of Jews to Palestine. His writings in *Light for the Last Days* indicate an awareness that a broader range of events were assisting Jewish immigration (cf. his views in the 1882 preface to the eighth edition of *The Approaching End of the Age*).

21. He founded, and directed until his death, the East London Institute for Home and Foreign Missions.

22. *The Approaching End of the Age: Viewed in the Light of History, Prophecy, and Science*, London: Hodder and Stoughton (1st ed. 1878, 2d ed. 1879, 5th ed. 1880, 8th ed. 1882).

23. The same material quoted by Guinness appears in the 1844 seventh edition of Bickersteth's *Practical Guide to the Prophecies* 387–94.

24. Guinness seems to give importance to the Edict, not for any actual evidence that the Edict was known to the Jewish communities of Europe, or that it was in any way influencing Jewish immigration, but rather because it coincided with the prophetically important year of 1844 and could be connected with the weakening of Ottoman power, which would in itself facilitate the return of Jews to Palestine. When the eighth edition of Guinness's book *The Approaching End of the Age* appeared in 1882, some thirty-eight years after the Edict was issued, he still includes the reference. In this edition, he discusses the financing of the resettlement of Russian Jews in Palestine following the Russian persecutions (see preface, eighth ed.).

The remaining two sources for the Edict cited by Sears are the Seventh-Day Adventist writer William A. Spicer's work, *Our Day in the Light of Prophecy* (1925), and Worth Smith's *Miracle of the Ages* (1934). Spicer, in my opinion, understands the Edict more correctly, as he writes: "In 1844 Turkey was prevailed upon to recognize the right of Moslems to become Christians" (Spicer, *Our Day in the Light of Prophecy* 309). Concerning Worth Smith's work, he was apparently an enthusiastic student of biblical prophecy and Adventist literature occupied with the theory, based on Jeremiah 32:18–20, that the great Pyramid of Giza contained a series of encoded prophecies referring to the end of the age.²⁵ Smith does not provide a bibliography, so it is unclear where he learned about the 1844 Edict, though it is likely that he found this detail in the popular Christian literature of his day—most likely, in the work of Guinness, since he interprets the Edict as granting a broad "religious toleration"—in Smith's words "to all within their borders who were Christians as well as to those of other faiths" (115, 1937 ed.). If Smith had researched the subject of Ottoman edicts involving religious toleration, it is likely that he would have found references to other well-known edicts, since the 1844 Edict does not appear to have been well known apart from citations in Christian literature concerning prophecies. His reference to it, therefore, indicates the probability of his dependence on Guinness or some other Christian source reflecting Guinness's interpretation of the Edict's significance.

After William Sears's 1961 publication, a number of other Bahá'í authors published references to it. Three such lesser known Bahá'í sources referring to the Edict are Elena Maria Marsella's *The Quest for Eden* (127, 207, 230), R. H. Backwell's *The Christianity of Jesus* (101), and Robert F. Rigg's *The Apocalypse Unsealed* (149, 155, 293). A more recent Bahá'í apologetic book mentioning the Edict is Hushidar Motlagh's *I Shall Come Again* (266–67). In the works of these writers, no new detail or research is added. The Edict is presented in a way that continues to reflect the same basic significance given to it by Guinness and adopted by Townshend and Sears.

Apart from these few Bahá'í and Christian authors who had the benefit of knowledge derived largely from Bickersteth's acquaintance with Lord Ashley, the Edict remained virtually absent from the works of historians. No one, except

25. According to Smith, information derived from the pyramid and biblical prophecies indicated that in 1953 the world will be "cleansed of its pollutions" and prepared for the actual "beginning of Christ's Millennial Rule, 'the Thousand Years of Peace', but not later than September 17, 2001." See Smith, *Miracle of the Ages* 149 (1937 ed.). Smith's book may have caught the attention of some Bahá'ís other than William Sears, as there are two letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi that involve pyramids and prophecy: ". . . no reference is to be found in the Bahá'í Teachings regarding the pyramid of Cheops, and as to its being considered a monument of prophecy" (dated July 10, 1939) and again, "We have nothing in our writings about the so-called prophecies of the Pyramids; so he does not think you need attach any importance to them" (dated Nov. 21, 1949). See *Lights of Guidance* 520.

a few Christian commentators, and later a few Bahá'ís who accepted Guinness's view of the Edict, thought it was important to the phenomenon of nineteenth-century Jewish immigration. Had the Edict been important to Jewish immigration, one would expect to find references to it in works by Jewish historians. Instead, had it not been for the close friendship between Lord Ashley and the Reverend Edward Bickersteth, it is even doubtful that the Edict would have been referred to in connection with biblical interpretations. Since Bahá'í beliefs about the Edict are derived from Guinness, it is worth taking a closer look at how Guinness developed his interpretation of the Edict.

Grattan Guinness's Interpretation of the 1844 “Edict of Toleration”

According to Seventh-Day Adventist LeRoy Edwin Froom's monumental apologetic study of Christian Adventist interpretations, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, numerous Christian commentators believed that the return of Jews to Palestine would herald the end of the age and the Second Advent of Christ. Summarizing what he believed to be the benefits derived from the historic and long-standing study of prophecy among Christians, Froom also includes its impact on the destiny of Jews:

The awakening of interest in the prophecies in England during the early nineteenth century caused considerable effort to be put forth to convert the Jews, and it is not improbable that public interest in their behalf hastened the relief of English Jews from civil disabilities. Certain it is that one of these English missionary enterprises resulted in making Lewis Way's influence felt in obtaining a measure of emancipation for the Jews of Russia.

In more recent years the strong support Zionism has found in numerous Christian circles is based mainly on the belief that the return of the Jews to Palestine will fulfill their interpretation of certain prophecies. (Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* 1:25)

In his own day, Guinness was himself influenced by these trends in Christian thought. He writes with confidence

that the remnant or remainder of the Jewish nation, will be restored to Palestine before the millennium, brought there into great trouble, and prepared by it to say, “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord,” that Christ will appear for their deliverance, and that they will be converted at the sight of Him, this much seems clear from Scripture. (Guinness, *The Approaching End* 137)

With this in mind, it becomes easier to see the reasoning process at work as Guinness tries to understand the possible significance of the Edict in relation to the prophetic year of 1844.

For Guinness, the Edict signaled an important closing point in the decline of “Mohammedan power.” Interpreting the cryptic prophecies of the Book of

Revelation, he argued, like others, that the “outpouring of the sixth [vial], brings us to the other event we are seeking, the decline and fall of the Mohammedan power” (*The Approaching End* 366). Like the extinction of the Pope’s political power, Protestants like Guinness believed that the same must occur with Islam, and in the nineteenth century, Islamic political power was represented most clearly in the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire:

We have not yet seen the complete extinction of the political power of the Sultan, as we have that of the Pope; but it is already almost annihilated in Europe; crippled and restricted where it still exists; and events, as well as Scripture prophecy indicate, that its hold over Syria cannot last much longer. (Guinness, *The Approaching End* 366, cf. 431)

The rise of Islam was understood by Guinness, as it had been understood for centuries by many Christians, “as a judgment on Christendom for its depravity and apostasy” (Guinness, *The Approaching End* 366). Guinness then retraces what he regards as the salient features of the Ottoman Empire’s political decline, which culminates in this passage:

In 1844 the Porte was compelled, under threat of European interference, to issue an edict of religious toleration, abolishing for ever its characteristic and sanguinary practice of execution for apostasy (i.e., for the adoption of Christianity). This compulsory sheathing of its persecuting sword was a patent proof that its independence was gone, and a marked era in its overthrow. (Guinness, *The Approaching End* 368)²⁶

In the above passage, the Edict is seen in a broader context of Ottoman decline. Later, using the following diagram, Guinness eventually ties the decline of Ottoman power together with the restoration of Israel and the fulfilment of prophecies in the Book of Daniel (prophecies that are understood as relating to a prophetic period of 2,300 years):

First, then, with reference to the earlier of the two terminations of the 2300 years already named: —

B.C. 457 _____ 2300 years to the cleansing of the Sanctuary, _____ A.D. 1844, —

Let it be remembered that all great movements have almost imperceptible commencements, just as great rivers spring from little brooks. Israel’s restoration and the destruction of Mohammedan rule, i.e., “the cleansing of the sanctuary,” are not

26. In his book, *Light for the Last Days: A Study Historic and Prophetic* (1882), Guinness includes a whole section detailing the decline of the Ottoman Empire called “The Time of the End—Eastern, or Mohammedan Aspect” 142–56. A reference to the Edict appears on pages 146–47.

events to be accomplished in a day or in a year, any more than the overthrow of the city and temple and national existence of the Jewish people, was accomplished in a day or in a year. (Guinness, *The Approaching End* 433)

Guinness, reiterating the decline of Ottoman power, notes, "Aliens, or non-Mussulmans, are now allowed to hold landed property in Palestine,²⁷ and the number of Jews resident in their own land is every year on the increase" (439). Later, Guinness attempts to summarize the signal events, prophecies, and dates as follows:

Let the "seventy weeks," and with them the prophetic period and astronomic cycle of two thousand three hundred years, be reckoned from B.C. 457, then will the end of the 2300 years coincide, not only with the 1260th year of the Mohammedan era, but also with the end of the prophetic "day, month, and year" period of the Ottoman Empire. (Guinness, *The Approaching End* 540)

In addition to this same summary, he adds:

From A.D. 622 to A.D. 1844–5 are 1222 solar years, and therefore 1260 lunar years. (The 1260th year of the Hegira began in the middle of January, 1844, and ended early in January, 1845.)

Thus, from the overthrow of the throne of David, B.C. 602, to the Mohammedan Edict of Toleration in 1844, there is an interval of "seven times" in lunar years, and this period is bisected by the rise of the Mohammedan power—"times, times, and half a time," extending to the Hegira date, A.D. 622; and "times, times, and half a time," from that date to the Edict of Toleration in 1844; which later date is that of the termination of the 2300 years from the commencement of the "seventy weeks," B.C. 457. . . . (Guinness, *The Approaching End* 542)

A variety of significant characteristics emerge in Guinness's analysis. Since his eighth edition to *The Approaching End of the Age* (the text used in this article) was published in 1882 (1st ed. 1878, 2d ed. 1879, 5th ed. 1880) a number of years had passed since 1844, possibly the peak year of messianic expectation in Europe and North America. Guinness's beliefs precluded the possibility that the Parousia, or Return of Christ, could have already occurred, but he is still looking for events leading up to Christ's return. He continued to see 1844 as a likely and significant terminus for the key prophetic 1,260- and 2,300-year periods understood from references in the Book of Daniel.²⁸ He has also become aware of the correspondence between the Gregorian calendar year 1844 and Islamic calendar year of 1260. In addition to these observations, he is

27. Concerning Ottoman laws restricting land ownership by Jews and other related laws, see Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *Jerusalem in the 19th Century: Emergence of the New City* 360–64.

28. See Daniel 8:13–17, 9:24–27, and 12:6–12.

looking for evidence of the decline of Ottoman rule and the return of Jews to Palestine. The Ottoman Edict, occurring as it does in 1844, becomes an evidence of these two events.²⁹

In his concluding remarks, Guinness writes:

We must therefore briefly review the evidence of the nearness of the end of the age³⁰ which is afforded by chronologic prophecy, and confirmed by non-chronologic predictions, and we must show, that while there is irresistible evidence to prove that the end is near, there are positively no data to enable us to fix on any exact year, as the probably predestined time of the consummation. According to the testimony of the sure word of prophecy, the end is near, but none can say how near, or determine its actual epoch. (Guinness, *The Approaching End* 471)

He then explores two points, one concerning dispensations and a second concerning the "Antichristian apostasy." After this he comes to his third and final point of central evidence:

And thirdly, the prediction relative to the cleansing of the sanctuary does the same. The Holy Land, the Holy City, the site of the Temple or Sanctuary of God at Jerusalem, are to be finally "cleansed" 2300 years from some starting point which is not exactly defined, but which appears from the prophecy to be closely connected with the restoration of Judah from Babylon; that is, Jerusalem is, after that period, to cease to be trodden down of the Gentiles, the times of the Gentiles having been fulfilled. Dated from the earliest possible starting point, the commission given by Artaxerxes to Ezra, B.C. 457, this period expires as we have seen in 1844, which was a marked epoch in the fall of that Mohammedan power which has long defiled the sanctuary and trodden down Jerusalem. . . . We have noted various indications in the condition of Palestine and of Israel, and in the political events of our own day which seem to indicate that the cleansing of the sanctuary and the restoration of Israel are not distant. When these shall take place . . . when the nations of Europe, actuated it may be merely by mutual distrust and political jealousy, or it may be by higher motives, shall conspire to reinstate the Jews in the land of their forefathers, then the last warning bell will have rung; then the last of the unfulfilled predictions of Scripture as to the events prior to the great crisis, will have received its accomplishment, then the second advent of Israel's rejected Messiah to reign in conjunction with his risen and glorified saints as King over all the earth, will be close at hand, then the mystery of God will be all but finished, and the manifestation of Christ immediate. . . . (Guinness, *The Approaching End* 473-74)

29. Guinness's views involve considerable complexity. Even as he continued to stress the 1844 Edict as a terminus, he thinks of the return of Jews to Palestine as a prophetic event belonging to an extended period with a number of significant dates. This becomes apparent in several sections of his book *Light for the Last Days* (esp. 142-260) and is also illustrated in the chart attached to the title page. It almost seems that he simply felt that the 1844 year was too important to not stress at every opportunity. For Guinness, earlier events of greater importance could not be rated like any event that occurred in 1844.

30. Guinness understands that the age will end, not the "world" as translated in the King James Version. "Christ when on earth often alluded to the end of the age (or world, as *aión* is often wrongly rendered in the A. V. [Authorised Version]), and He did so most definitely in his parting command to his apostles" (486).

From the above analysis, all the central connections are made between the Edict, the year 1844, the decline of the Ottomans, and the return of Jews to Palestine. Even though he has stressed the 1844 Edict, he nevertheless is not rigid about it. Rather, he says these things “seem to indicate that the cleansing of the sanctuary and the restoration of Israel are not distant.”

As can be observed, the Edict first appears in Christian literature in Bickersteth’s presentation in *Practical Guide to the Prophecies*, and Guinness gives it added significance in his literature by connecting it with Jewish immigration to Israel. Guinness, however, does not state explicitly that the Edict ends a 1,260-year period of strict Jewish exclusion from Palestine, or that such exclusion was enforced by Muslims, as stated by George Townshend and later by William Sears.

Re-evaluating the Significance of the 1844 “Edict of Toleration”

To understand the actual significance of the 1844 Edict, it is necessary to view it in its nineteenth-century political and religious context—a context that involves the colonial and Christian missionary ambitions of European countries and the decline of Ottoman power. Christian groups within the Ottoman Empire (most notably the Balkans and Greeks outside of the newly formed Greek state) were struggling for self-determination, and European powers were constantly assessing the advantages and disadvantages of assisting the Greeks and other Christian minorities under Ottoman control. Christians involved in missionary work sought to strengthen ties with Christians in the Middle East and lobbied on their behalf. In this way, political interests and Christian interests were closely tied together.

Missionary activities could, however, be extremely hazardous—especially in Muslim countries. Missionaries, therefore, applied whatever pressure they could to gain the assistance and protection of the imperial powers of their day. The 1844 “Edict of Toleration” was both the product of such pressure and a reform movement working within the upper echelons of Ottoman government. Through the press and numerous journals, Christians kept a watchful eye on missionary activities, and when news reached the West of Christians being executed for converting from Islam (actually, reverting back to Christianity),³¹ governmental representatives were called upon to protest to the Ottoman authorities. Judging from the letters that constitute the basis of Bickersteth’s evaluation, the purported aim of this particular Edict, as already shown, was to grant such individuals the right to convert to Christianity without fear or persecution, even after having first converted to Islam (see figure 1).

31. See “Correspondence Relating to Executions in Turkey for Apostasy from Islam: Presented to Her Majesty’s Command to the House of Commons, in Pursuance of Their Address of the 3rd of May, 1844” (pages from the Official Papers) *Accounts and Papers*, vol. 51, entry no. 1, 1844.

Official declaration of the Sublime
Porte relinquishing the practise of
executions for apostasy.

It is the special and constant intention of
His Highness the Sultan that his cordial
relations with the High Powers be preserved,
and that a perfect reciprocal friendship be
maintained, and increased.

The Sublime Porte engages to take
effectual measures, to prevent henceforward
the execution and putting to death of the
Christian who is an apostate.

2^d Revueil evvel 1260.

March 21st 1844.

Figure 1. Both Figure 1 above and Figure 2 on page 72 show the original documents in the handwriting of the British Ambassador to the Porte, Sir Stratford Canning. These are the documents that were entered into the Official Papers (*Accounts and Papers*, vol. 51) published in 1844, containing *Correspondence Relating to Executions in Turkey for Apostasy from Islamism*, as presented to the House of Commons. Pages 37–39 contain the published report as they would have been seen by the Reverend Edward Bickersteth. The above letter is transcribed as follows in the Official Papers: “Inclosure 1 in No. 36. ‘Official Declaration of the Sublime Porte, relinquishing the practice of Executions for Apostasy. (Translation.) It is the special and constant intention of His Highness the Sultan that his cordial relations with the High Powers be preserved, and that a perfect reciprocal friendship be maintained, and increased. The Sublime Porte engages to take effectual measures to prevent henceforward the execution and putting to death of the Christian who is an apostate. March 21, 1844.’” Document from the papers of Sir Stratford Canning (FO 78/555). Courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew, Richmond, United Kingdom.

During the reigns of Abdül Mecid I [‘Abdu’l-Majid] (reigned 1839–61) and Abdül-Aziz [‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz] (reigned 1861–76) a series of Ottoman reforms known as “Tanzimat”³² were promulgated. The best known of these reforms are the “Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber” (*Hatt-i-Şerif of Gulhane*, Nov. 3, 1839) and the Imperial Edict of 1856 (*Hatt-i-Humayun*, Feb. 18, 1856), both of which contained points concerned in part with the religious rights and liberties of subjects in the Ottoman Empire. According to the historian Moshe Ma’oz, the Imperial Edict of 1839 reads as follows: “The Muslims and other peoples (*ahali-i-islam ve milel-i-saire*) who among the subjects of our imperial sultanate, shall be the object of our imperial favours without exception.”³³ The Imperial Edict of 1844 was a brief document that concerned only religious liberties, but it fell into the same general scope of reform offered by the other more frequently noted edicts issued during this period (see figure 2).

The 1844 Edict came about under pressure from European powers responding to an incident involving an Armenian Christian. This young Armenian Christian had embraced Islam but then reverted to Christianity, and under Ottoman law was executed. According to the British Ambassador to the Porte, Stratford Canning, he was tortured and “finally decapitated in one of the most frequented parts of the city with circumstances of great barbarity.”³⁴ This news outraged Europeans and their governments, some of which threw their diplomatic weight behind the British effort to reverse the practice. The Ottoman officials perceived this law as a divine law that was binding on account of teachings in the Qur’án. According to Lane-Poole’s biography of Canning, “the Porte,” Rif’at Pasha said, “not only could not alter a divine law, but could not risk her character as a Musulman Power even by a written reply to the remonstrances of the five Powers led by the British ambassador” (Lane-Poole, *The Life of the Right Honourable Stratford Canning* 91).

32. *Tanzimat*, or *Tanzimât-i-Khairiye* “beneficent legislation.” See Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire* 147, 155, and *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 4:656. For a survey of Western sources on *Tanzimat*, see Roderic H. Davison, “Western Publications on the Tanzimat” 511–32.

33. Moshe Ma’oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840–1861: The Impact of the Tanzimat on Politics and Society* 22. J. H. Krames offers an alternative translation, stating that the *Hatt-i-Şerif of Gulhane* “expressly laid down that all subjects, to whatever religion they belong (*ehl-i islâm we-milel-i sâ’ire*) should be equal before the law, without exception” (s.v. “Tanzimât.” *Encyclopedia of Islam* 4:656). The historian of Turkish and Near Eastern history Stanford J. Shaw writes, “The Tanzimat Imperial rescripts which declared the objectives and programs of modern reform, issued on 3 September 1839 and again on 18 May 1856, promised full legal equality for all subjects of the sultan regardless of religion, beginning a policy by which all the legal limitations imposed on members of society according to religion were brought to an end” (Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* 155).

34. Historians debate whether or not these two better-known edicts were sincere or mere gestures to win European favor—gestures that were intentionally negated by other concurrent acts of government policy. See Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* 103–28. See also Moshe Ma’oz, *Ottoman Reform*, and “Changes in the Position of the Jewish Communities of Palestine and Syria in the Mid-Nineteenth Century” 154–57. For a very positive, but general, appraisal of the reforms, see Ezel Kural Shaw’s “Tanzimat Provincial Reforms as Compared with European Models” 51–67.

Declaration of His Highness the Sultan
to Sir Stratford Canning at his audience
on the 23rd of March 1844.

"Henceforward neither shall Christianity
be insulted in my dominions, nor shall
Christians be in any way persecuted for
their religion."

Figure 2. The above letter is transcribed as follows in the Official Papers: "Inclosure 4 in No. 38, entitled 'Declaration of His Highness the Sultan to Sir Stratford Canning at his Audience on the 23rd of March, 1844. 'Henceforward neither shall Christianity be insulted in my dominions, nor shall Christians be in any way persecuted for their religion.' ' ' ' Document from the papers of Sir Stratford Canning (FO 27/695). Courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew, Richmond, United Kingdom.

The European diplomatic attempts made to stop the practice of punishing apostates following the death of the Armenian Christian failed, but later another Christian, this time a Greek, was also executed. The European response was more threatening, but Rif'at Pasha was obstinate, and Canning resorted to a study of the Qur'án to prove that the law was without foundation. Finding what he regarded as evidence, he challenged the orthodox view. This interesting debate did not seem to end successfully. According to Lane-Poole, "the fact of the ambassador's venturing to carry the war into the sacred boundaries of Koranic hermeneutics brought dismay to the Turkish ministers. Council after council was held, with no result."³⁵ Through his persistence and the threat of a breach in good relations with Great Britain, Canning was eventually successful in securing the Edict, as well as an additional assurance as to the meaning of the Edict. But if the Edict had any impact on the prosecution of Christians for apostasy in the empire, it was probably very limited. Moshe Ma'oz makes this brief reference to the Edict, which he refers to as the "Imperial order of March 1844":

A noticeable number of Christians and Jews, particularly children, were forced to adopt Islam, and only a small proportion of these returned to their original faith after intervention by the Pasha (usually under a consul's pressure). Similarly, although the Imperial order of March 1844, that apostasy from Islam would not be punished by death, was generally kept in Syria, Muslim converts to Christianity were usually persecuted and forced to leave their homes in order to save their lives. (Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine* 189–90)

Some historians believe that Ottoman edicts of reform went unenforced and were ineffectual (hence their repetition) and that it can be argued that any changes that came about were due to the increasing influence and threats from European powers.³⁶

These facts indicate that Bickersteth's ideas about the importance of the 1844 Edict are greatly exaggerated and that it was a further mistake on the part of Guinness to view the Edict as a document permitting Jewish immigration. The further idea that the Edict ended a 1,260-year period of strict exclusion of Jews from Jerusalem was added by George Townshend. The basis for this idea about strict exclusion is suggested in Guinness's writings but can be found more clearly in other sources available to George Townshend. The Bahá'í scholar and apostle of Bahá'u'lláh, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, for example, mentions

35. From Canning's memoirs, Lane-Poole quotes the events that brought the case to his attention before the execution (Lane-Poole, *The Life of the Right Honourable Stratford Canning* 90–91). Canning's efforts to stop the execution failed. The event illustrated the attitude of Ottoman authorities with regard to intolerance of the rights of religious minorities.

36. Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Life of the Right Honourable Stratford Canning* 94.

this idea in his book *The Bahá'í Proofs* (1902) when he summarizes the plight of Jews as follows:

. . . the Israelites were established and tranquil in the Holy Land, but after the Appearance of Christ they were scattered by the conquest of Titus the Roman, who destroyed Jerusalem and slew over one million of the Jews, according to historical record. Afterward he sold the remnant of them to the nations as beasts of burden. Their humiliation and misery still increased when Omar, the Mohammedan Kalif, vanquished the city of Aelea (Jerusalem), and made a compact with Saphronius, Bishop of Jerusalem, forbidding the Jews to inhabit Palestine. With this decree and compact he destroyed their daily sacrifice; the Holy Land fell into the hands of foreigners and became the arena of murder and field of conflict between the Arabs, Romans, Turks, Crusaders and Mamelukes. The Jewish cities were ruined, their buildings overthrown, their dwellings desolated, their societies scattered; and during these long generations this forlorn people became the plaything of storms of calamities, the subject of whirlpools of afflictions, until the nineteenth century. (Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, *The Bahá'í Proofs* 232)

Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl is presenting a somewhat exaggerated view of the so-called Covenant of Omar as recorded by the tenth-century Muslim scholar, Tabari.³⁷ This account records that Omar prohibited Jews from residing in Jerusalem with Christians, which somehow Abu'l-Faḍl took to mean all Palestine. In any event, a preponderance of other early accounts contradicts this prohibition.³⁸ There were apparently varying and inconsistent restrictions on Jewish activities in Jerusalem from the time of Hadrian onwards. Under Muslim rule, the situation for Jews in Jerusalem varied, but their worst crisis seems to have occurred with the arrival of Christian Crusaders in 1099 who massacred much of the Jewish community. After Saladin's victory over the Crusader Kingdom, a Jewish community redeveloped in the city, but subsequent invasions by Turks and

37. See F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem* 185–86.

38. See F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem* 186–94. Opinions about the presence of Jews in Palestine after the first century seem to vary according to which source is relied upon and how much it is trusted. Concerning Jews in Palestine before the Arab conquest, the historians Eliyahu Ashtor and Rabbi Haím Z'ew Hirschberg write, "The prevailing opinion, which is based on Christian sources, that the Jews were not allowed to live in the Holy City or its surroundings during the whole Byzantine period is not confirmed by any non-Christian source. One suspects that these reports are biased in order to glorify the victory of the Church, as there is extant literary and archaeological evidence that there was a synagogue on the so-called Mt. Zion where the Cenaculum now stands" ("Jerusalem," *Encyclopædia Judaica* 9:1409). Concerning Jews in Jerusalem after the Arab conquest, "A document (in Judeo-Arabic) found in Cairo Genizah reveals that Jews asked Omar for permission for 200 families to settle in the town. As the patriarch opposed the action strongly, Omar fixed the number of the Jewish settlers at 70 families. The Jews were assigned the quarters southwest of the Temple area, where they lived from that time . . . As various texts show, they could also pray in the neighborhood of the Temple area" ("Jerusalem," *Encyclopædia Judaica* 9:1409). For more detailed information on Jewish life in Palestine after the Muslim conquest, see also Gil, *A History of Palestine* 65.

Mongols depopulated the city once again. In time, the Jews would again return and establish a community. The Jewish historian Rabbi Haïm Z’ew Hirschberg asserts that “the messianic ferment that increased in the Diaspora at the end of the 17th century was connected with increased immigration to Erez Israel” (“Land of Israel: Reconstruction of the Jewish Community,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 9:292). Briefly, it can be seen that evidence and records show that Jews had lived in Palestine throughout the centuries and that immigration—though sporadic and insignificant—had also occurred before 1844.³⁹ Nevertheless, after the Jewish revolt in the first century C.E., Jerusalem fell into decline, and Jewish control over the city ended.

For a time in the nineteenth century, new Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were forbidden to settle in Jerusalem, but attempts were made to have this decree by the Ottoman authorities abolished, and, according to Rabbi Haïm Z’ew Hirschberg, in “1836 Muhammad Ali published a firman which laid down the conditions for legal arrangement for the *resumption* of immigration to Jerusalem from Eastern Europe” (Hirschberg, “Jerusalem: Under Ottoman Rule 1517–1917,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 9:1448; emphasis added). Even though these sources indicate that Jews were not strictly excluded from Palestine prior to 1844, only a very small number of the total worldwide Jewish population lived in Palestine, and it was not until the 1840s that circumstances really improved for Jews in Palestine. It was, in fact, continued immigration prior to the mid-nineteenth century that enabled the Jewish population in Palestine to sustain itself.⁴⁰ From the 1840s onward, the population of Jews steadily increased until the first large-scale migration of Jews to Palestine took place in the late nineteenth century following severe persecutions in Russia. Whatever the significance placed on the Imperial Edict, the year 1844 does belong to an important transition period, as expressed in this comment by Hirschberg:

39. For statistical information concerning Jews in Palestine, see Tudor Parfitt, *The Jews in Palestine 1800–1882*. Parfitt provides detailed population charts for the main cities and gives his sources for the estimates. He also includes a chapter “The Jews and the Ottoman Authorities” (159–74; no reference to the 1844 Edict). See also Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, “The Population of the Large Towns in Palestine during the First Eighty Years of the Nineteenth Century. According to Western Sources” in *Studies on Palestine during the Ottoman Period*. Ben-Arieh writes, “To sum up, we would estimate population-growth of Jerusalem in the nineteenth century as follows: 1800: 8,000–10,000; 1840: 12,000–14,000; 1860: 18,000–20,000; 1880: 30,000; 1890: 40,000; 1922: 65,000” (*Studies on Palestine during the Ottoman Period* 53).

40. Uziel O. Schmelz writes, “Until the 1860’s, the Jewish population of Jerusalem was small, poverty-stricken and unstable. . . . it was subject to very high mortality, which resulted in a remarkable deficit of the natural movement of that population, i.e., an excess of deaths over births. This deficit was balanced by relatively large immigration from abroad” (Schmelz, “Some Demographic Peculiarities of the Jews of Jerusalem in the Nineteenth Century,” *Studies on Palestine during the Ottoman Period* 119). See also Jacob Barnai, *The Jews in Palestine in the Eighteenth Century under the Patronage of the Istanbul Committee of Officials for Palestine*.

In the history of the Jews of Erez Israel there is a distinct contrast between the periods 1800–40 and 1841–80. In the first 30 years of the 19th century the corruption of the Ottoman rule reached heights of perversion. The eight years of the Egyptian conquest [of Ottoman Palestine] (1832–40) were a kind of transition period. After 1840 the Jews were drawn into international conflicts connected with the Eastern problem, but began to enjoy the protection of Western powers. Their numbers increased considerably, as did their economic and cultural influence. . . . (Hirschberg, "Land of Israel," *Encyclopædia Judaica* 9:297)

Factors allowing and encouraging Jews to return to Palestine involve a number of complex social, political, economic, and religious occurrences, such as the general trend of people in Europe to develop national identity and a sense of their own particular homeland; the growing influence of European powers in Palestine with the increased security it provided for non-Muslims, especially in Jerusalem; the decline of Ottoman influence in Palestine and liberalizing reforms initiated by the Ottoman government; the severe persecution of Jews in Russia; the encouragement and financial support of European Christians and Jews; and Messianic expectation among Jews and Christians. These seem to be among the chief factors contributing to the dramatic upsurge of Jewish immigration to Palestine in the nineteenth century.⁴¹ The 1844 Imperial Edict was only an insignificant part of a larger picture of Ottoman reforms.

Factually, it can be said that the British Ambassador to the Porte, Stratford Canning, secured an edict from the Ottoman government granting apostates freedom from punishment and that Lord Ashley heard of this as a member of the British House of Commons and passed it on to his friend the Reverend Edward Bickersteth who then referred to it in the 1844 edition of his book *Practical Guide to the Prophecies*.

This information was correlated to interpretations involving Jewish restoration and prophecy by Henry Grattan Guinness whose views were also cited by later authors interested in prophecy. At some point Guinness's view came to the attention of George Townshend who merely referred to it in an introduction to another work—and not with any pretense to scholarly research—but while doing so, added a new element by involving the accepted Adventist's "1260-year period" with the idea of strict Jewish exclusion enforced by Muslims.

41. Guinness provides his own historical overview of events leading up to the return of Jews to Palestine in *Light for the Last Days: "The Time of the End.—Jewish Aspect, or The Modern Renaissance of the Jewish People"* 157–218. Concerning European protective rights for non-Muslims, see Halper, *Between Redemption and Revival* 61–62. Jews were also persecuted by Christians within the Ottoman Empire. Apparently, Jews often supported the Ottoman government, causing the separatist Christians in the European part of the empire to attack them. See Shaw, *The Jews in the Ottoman Empire* 188–206. This may have led some to migrate further into the empire to Palestine.

As noted above, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, when speaking about Jerusalem’s revitalization, connects this with the ending of the 1260 years period and the decline of Islamic rule over the city. Although ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes this connection, he does not mention the idea of strict exclusion. This connection would appear to be a logical, but unhistoric, conclusion by Townshend, based on his trust in the sources most readily available to him. In the nineteenth century many European Christians favored a homeland or nation-state for Jews in Palestine, whereas Muslims did not, and insofar as they could, many Muslims would have likely opposed it. Nevertheless, while it is true to say that Jews were often treated unfavorably, even at times severely by Muslims, the same is true with regard to the treatment they received from Christians, particularly in some European countries such as Spain and Russia. So it is hard to argue that prior to the 1800s Muslim treatment deterred them from returning to Palestine—it was after all Christian maltreatment that in fact prompted the largest migrations of Jews to Palestine in the nineteenth century.

Whatever way this idea about strict exclusion was formed, it, along with previous Christian notions, was then adopted uncritically by a number of Bahá’í apologists. In the end of this evolutionary process, there came to be accepted as facts four basic points in Bahá’í apologetic literature that cannot be supported: (1) Jews were strictly excluded from Palestine for 1,260 years prior to the year 1844; (2) Muslim authorities were responsible for the exclusion of Jews from Palestine; (3) the 1844 Edict ended the exclusion and enabled Jews to immigrate to Palestine; and (4) the 1844 Edict brought about the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning the “times of the Gentiles.”

Although some Bahá’í authors used sources uncritically and thus misconstrued and exaggerated the significance of the Edict, it nevertheless remains the case that Jewish immigration to Israel did markedly increase at the end of the nineteenth century, that is, after the birth of the Bahá’í Faith, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remarked. It is also the case that this historic fact is congruent with the expectations of many Christian interpretations of biblical prophecy.

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