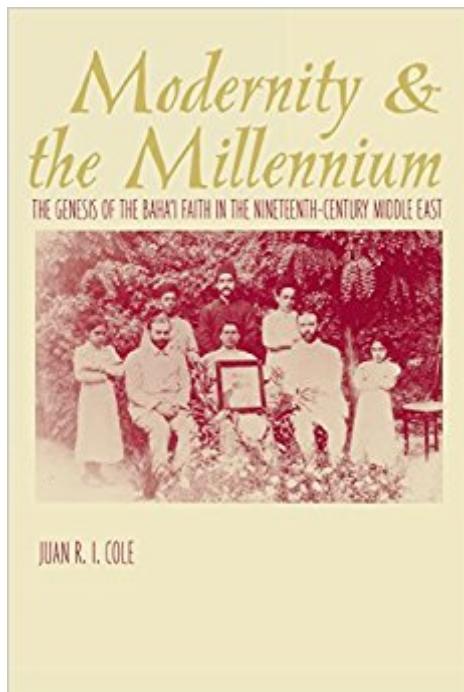


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# Modernity And The Millennium



## **Synopsis**

Modernity and the Millennium is the first book to chart responses in the Muslim Middle East to modernity through an examination of the evolution of the Baha'i faith--a millenarian movement led by the nineteenth-century Iranian prophet Baha'u'llah ("the Glory of God"). This volume illuminates the complexity and ambiguity that characterized the changing relationship of Baha'u'llah and his followers to modernity, considered as a transnational and fluid political and cultural field of contestation. The insights presented here into these responses to modernity illuminate not only the genesis of a new world-religion but also important facets of Middle Eastern--particularly Iranian--social and cultural shifts in the nineteenth century. Drawing on the work of Habermas, Giddens, Touraine and Bryan Turner, among others, Juan R. I. Cole considers some of the ways in which Middle Eastern society was affected by five developments central to modernity: the lessening entanglement of the state with religion, the move from absolutism to democracy, the rise of sovereign nation-states, the advent of nationalism, and the women's movement. He explores the Baha'is' positive response to religious toleration, democracy, and greater rights for women and their "utopian realist" critique of nationalism, militant Jacobin secularization, industrialized warfare, and genocide, oppression of the poor and working classes, and xenophobia.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"This reflective and insightful work... will commend itself especially to those who are concerned with

modernist doctrine, Baha'i responses to that doctrine, and the implications of both for a fuller understanding of important facets of Middle Eastern history." -- Merlin Swartz, "American Historical Review"

This is the first book to chart the evolution of the Baha'i faith--a millenarian movement led by the nineteenth-century Iranian prophet Baha'u'llah (meaning "the Glory of God")--and its transformation against the backdrop of modernity.

This volume is an important study contributing to an understanding of the place of Baha'u'llah, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith, in the intellectual milieu of the late 19th century Middle East. It is not, however, a definitive or well-rounded study on Baha'u'llah. Dr. Cole has been selective about what to emphasize or ignore -- such as some of Baha'u'llah's more challenging claims to divinity and spiritual authority, passages in Baha'u'llah's writings that undermine the author's thesis that Baha'u'llah was strictly committed to a western-style principle of rigid separation of church and state, and other interpretations of Baha'u'llah's writings which are regarded as authoritative by Baha'is. Nevertheless, Cole's is a useful study of the liberality of spirit and wide-ranging influence exerted by Baha'u'llah upon the most important of his Middle Eastern contemporaries. It should not be read as a definitive description of Baha'u'llah's doctrine or as a comprehensive intellectual history of Baha'u'llah's influence, for it was not the Middle Eastern intellectuals but ordinary people who accepted Baha'u'llah's claims to prophethood and built the international Baha'i community. Dr. Cole's book was not written to address Baha'u'llah's longer-range spiritual influence upon ever more followers, the vast majority of whom are in underdeveloped countries. ...

I found the book to be very engrossing. I looked forward to reading sections of it twice a day. As part of my background, I have studied and participated in Sufi activities (1972-1976) and have been a Baha'i since 1972. The book is, by-and-large, very readable, very interesting and sheds some light on the circumstances and conditions of the time of the Babi and Baha'i revelations. I feel I have a better understanding of the culture, customs and history of that time. I also welcome the perspective which the author brings to the subject. As for any controversy regarding this book or its author, the book contains a few points which may disturb the comfort level of some readers, but nothing that shakes my Faith in the essence of the Revelation, or cause me to question the author's point of view or motives.

The negative comments of several Baha'i reviewers on this forum should be completely disregarded, as it - besides the fact that none address the actual content of the book - betrays the overt biases of and systematic assault by the Baha'i institutional administrative propaganda machine which since 1996 has launched an inquisition against all legitimate academic critical historical scholarship and inquiry and those who pursue it, and particularly the author Juan Cole who was forced to resign from the Baha'i religion for fear of being declared a heretic by an ultra-conservative entrenched power elite currently in control of the religion. As such vacuous rhetorical points made by one reviewer about the book being "white liberal academic diatribe" ought to be taken with so many grains of salt and as so many rantings within the context of nonsensical gibberish. Another bogus charge levelled by yet another Baha'i reviewer claiming that Cole wished to become a self-styled "mujtahid," besides being an outright lie and intentional obfuscation of the truth, should also be seen as being at base ideologically driven. Having made the above comments, readers should know that Modernity and the Millenium as a study is one of the first of its kind in that for the first time the underlying social and political dynamics, causes and effects generating the Baha'i movement is analysed and discussed in depth within a single study. Issues such as democracy, colonialism, reform, women's rights, anti-militarism, communitarianism, etc, and the views of Baha'i founders on these key questions are dealt with, soundly demonstrated, and in comparative scope. Cole is to be warmly congratulated for undertaking this groundbreaking work and focusing upon an otherwise neglected aspect of Baha'i history and social thought.

excellent!

If believers in the Baha'i religion are looking for unthinking and uncritical support for their previously held assumptions and beliefs about Baha'i history, this is not the book for them. They are best advised to look to other popular and religiously approved books, of which there are many. Dr. Cole's book is the first fully scholarly and academic study of this period of the Baha'i religion to be published by a university press. It is a full-dress, academic work--and if you find that sort of thing boring, then again you are advised to steer clear and read the popular literature that is available. However, if you are interested in brilliant and original scholarship, well this is it! The book is a thoroughly documented, original, and insightful history and interpretation of the political and social teachings of Baha'u'llah (1817-1892), the founder of the Baha'i religion. This is not an orthodox retelling of Baha'i history, but a new and important contribution to the growing field of Baha'i Studies.

Juan R.I. Cole's \*Modernity and the Millenium\* is perhaps among the most important studies of the early Baha'i movement written the past twenty years. Cole's comparative focus and analysis of political ideas and philosophies in a nineteenth century Middle Eastern setting highlights the impact and relevance of various strands of European Enlightenment thought such as democracy, religious reform and liberalism upon an Iranian millenarian movement such the Baha'i Faith. A must read for any serious student of the Babi/Baha'i movement and especially the Nineteenth Century Middle East.

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