

Lights of 'Irfán



Papers Presented
at the 'Irfán Colloquia
and Seminars

Book Eight

Lights of ‘Irfán

Studies in the Principal Bahá’í Beliefs

*Papers Presented at the
‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*



Book Eight

Papers published in *Lights of 'Irfán* represent the views of their authors.

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Lights of 'Irfán: Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs
Papers Presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars
Book Eight
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O My servants! Through the might of God and His power, and out of the treasury of His knowledge and wisdom, I have brought forth and revealed unto you the pearls that lay concealed in the depths of His everlasting ocean. I have summoned the Maids of Heaven to emerge from behind the veil of concealment, and have clothed them with these words of Mine — words of consummate power and wisdom. I have, moreover, with the hand of divine power, unsealed the choice wine of My Revelation, and have wafted its holy, its hidden, and musk-laden fragrance upon all created things. Who else but yourselves is to be blamed if ye choose to remain unendowed with so great an outpouring of God's transcendent and all-encompassing grace, with so bright a revelation of His resplendent mercy?

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Preface

“If the Bahá’ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause, they need to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems. We need Bahá’í scholars, not only people far, far more deeply aware of what our teachings really are, but also well-read and well-educated people, capable of correlating our teachings to the current thoughts of the leaders of society. We Bahá’ís should, in other words, arm our minds with knowledge in order to better demonstrate to, especially, the educated classes, the truths enshrined in our Faith.” (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 5 July 1949, quoted in *Scholarship* 4)

The main goal of the Irfán Colloquia and publications is to facilitate and promote what is recommended by Shoghi Effendi in the above-mentioned guidance. In addition to individual efforts in acquiring deeper and systematic knowledge of the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá’í Faith and contemporary trends of thoughts of leaders of society, certain collective and cooperative actions are also necessary in order to maximize the benefits of such endeavors. Irfán activities attempt to provide various opportunities and vehicles for such collaborative efforts and presentation and discussion of the end results of deeper and systematic studies in the fundamental principles of the Bahá’í belief system, their application to the current challenges facing humanity, and comparative studies of various religious trends and different schools of thought from a Bahá’í perspective.

Irfán Colloquia are annually organized and conducted in Europe and North America in English, Persian and German. These gatherings provide open forums for exchanges of studies and research findings, as well as team-building among those interested and engaged in such scholarly activities. The abstracts of all the presentations and the text of selected papers delivered at those colloquia are published in three series of

Abstracts booklets and annual collections of articles in English, Persian and German.

This volume presents a collection of 12 research papers. Four of the papers present studies in the Bahá'í scriptural texts: Bahá'u'lláh's "Lawḥ-i-Maryam" by Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "Tablet on the Functioning of the Universal House of Justice" by Moojan Momen, Shoghi Effendi's "Enfoldment of World's Civilization" by James Thomas, and "Art of Rhetoric in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi" by Jack McLean. The articles on Lawḥ-i-Maryam and Tablet on the Functioning of the Universal House of Justice include a provisional translation of those Tablets.

Fundamental principles of the Bahá'í belief system are dealt with in the articles on "Bahá'í Covenant" by Ali Nakhjavani, "Word is the Master Key" by Wolfgang Klebel, and "Bahá'í Faith and Pluralism" by Grant Martin.

Comparative studies are presented in "Buddhism and the Bahá'í Writings" by Ian Kluge, "Minimalism from Bahá'í Perspective" by Mahyad Rahnemaie, and "Mysticism East and West" by Farhang Jahanpour. These papers attempt to deal with various religious trends and schools of thought.

The fourth category of papers is archival studies. Youli Ioannessyan introduces the content of one of the richest collections of documents on early development of the Bahá'í Faith that were collected by famous Russian Orientalist, Baron Rose. "Chronicle of a Birth" by Amin Egea is the third section of introducing references to the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions in Spain. The first two sections were published in the *Lights of Irfán*, Books Five and Seven.

The section on ELUCIDATIONS includes three memoranda from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice providing clarifying information on the following subjects: Tablet of the Báb addressed to Mírzá Yahyá Azal, authenticity of the contents of the letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, and Daniel's prophecies. These memoranda and their enclosed documents present the results of careful search in the Writings and provide clarifying responses to some

important questions. They offer valuable information for research and studies in Bahá'í Faith.

For those readers interested to know the topics of the papers published in previous volumes of the *Lights of Irfán*, Appendix II presents a list of all those papers. Listing of the papers published in various volumes of the *Lights of Irfán* provides preliminary familiarity with the range, types, methodological approaches and quality of the papers that are welcome to be presented at the Irfán Colloquia and published in the *Lights of Irfán*. In addition to the papers presented at the Irfán Colloquia, research papers related to the main goals of the Irfán Colloquium may also be directly submitted for publication in the *Lights of Irfán*.

Starting from Book Six we have adopted two changes in the 'Irfán Colloquia's style guide. All "authoritative" publications are cited by an abbreviation; see Appendix I, "Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviations Used in This Book." Words of Prophets/Manifestations, i.e. quotations from Sacred Writings, (not including statements by Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice), are italicized.

All papers in this volume present the views and understandings of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors. The writing styles and scholarly approaches are therefore different. Articles are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the author's last names.

Iraj Ayman

Chicago, May 2007

Chronicles of a Birth

Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions in Spain (1873-1895)

Amín E. Egea

Translated by Francisco J. Díaz

On a previous occasion¹ we reviewed Spain's earliest references to Babism. We saw, for example, how news of the uprising in Zanján and the Báb's martyrdom received some national press coverage in 1850. We also demonstrated how the assassination attempt against the young monarch Násiri'd-Dín Sháh in August 1852 received the same amount of coverage in Spain as in other parts of the West. Daily newspapers also gave extensive coverage to the persecution of Bábís in Persia as a result of the foiled plot against the monarch, and, even as late as July 1853, some Spanish dailies continued to offer related news, a fact which gave us the opportunity to comment briefly on what might have been the actual extent of such persecutions. Finally, after considering the readership of each of the daily newspapers reporting stories about the Bábís, we ventured a guess as to the potential number of readers that might have learned about the new religion for the first time.

As we shall now see, additional stories about the infant religion continued trickling into Spain.

Enciclopedia Moderna

Between 1851 and 1855, Francisco de Paula Mellado, a prolific author, was finishing in Madrid what was to become the first truly comprehensive Spanish encyclopedia of the nineteenth century, the *Enciclopedia Moderna, Diccionario*

universal de literatura, ciencias, artes, agricultura, industria y comercio [Modern Encyclopedia/Unabridged Dictionary of Literature, Science, Art, Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce]. The work was actually an adapted and enlarged version of a French encyclopedia bearing the same name and published by the Firmin Didot brothers several years earlier (1846-1851). The Spanish version comprised forty volumes in total. Volume 30 was published in 1854 and contained a reproduction of the definition pertaining to "Persia." The French version identifies the author of the article as A. Bouchot, about whom no further information has yet come to light.

The author's exposition on the history of Persia concludes with the reign of Muḥammad Sháh, to wit: "The son of Feth-Alí, Abbas Mírzá (1831-1833) did nothing of great account and was succeeded by Mahomed-Mírzá [*sic*] (1833-1848). The events surrounding this prince's reign are too recent to warrant any further analysis." Bouchot then immediately describes briefly Persia's fragile state at the time, concluding the final paragraph of his article as follows:

Today she thus finds herself gripped by a decadence that cannot last much longer, inasmuch as the prince now governing her is incapable of asserting his power; he has neither revenues nor a navy nor an army to speak of, unless these are the terms applied to a bunch of unruly soldiers whom he calls upon at his pleasure and on whom he relies so infrequently that he chooses to live among his tribesmen, the only ones he feels safe and secure with. If we add to this the ruin of her trade and commerce, so vibrant in times past, a weakened agriculture, excessive taxation, setback after setback, anarchy, and the subversive doctrines propagated by the Báb's disciples, who preach communion of their property and their women, we cannot but admire how Persia has resisted for so long such powerful forces of destruction.²

Thus we have here a reference to Babism that could not have been penned any later than 1851, and which is very likely older.

Bouchot's statement that the Bábís practiced "communion of their property and their women" was not gratuitous; rather, his article merely reflects a fairly typical misunderstanding about Babism during the movement's early years.³ The reasons for such an accusation are varied, Lord Curzon would comment years later: "Certainly no such idea as communism in the European sense, i.e., a forcible redistribution of property, or as socialism in the nineteenth century sense, i.e., the defeat of capital by labour, ever entered the brain of the Bab [*sic*] or his disciples. The only communism known to and recommended by him was that of the New Testament and the early Christian Church, viz., the sharing of goods in common by members of the faith, and the exercise of almsgiving, and an ample charity. The charge of immorality seems to have arisen partly from the malignant inventions of opponents, partly from the much greater freedom claimed for women by the Bab [*sic*], which in the Oriental mind is scarcely dissociable from profligacy of conduct...."⁴

1857 — False Rumors

For certain, the assassination attempt against Násiri'd-Dín Sháh in 1852 did little to dispel this misunderstanding about Babism. As we already saw, Persia's religious and political authorities took advantage of the incident not only to rid themselves of as many Bábís as they could, but also to foster an aura of ill will against their movement.

In October 1856, Persia annexed the predominantly Shi'a Afghan province of Herat. This maneuver by Násiri'd-Dín Sháh helped to destabilize the region's fragile balance of power and eventually led to war with Great Britain. Persia's defeat was swift, and the impact which the conflict had on the state's coffers led to nationwide public disaffection bordering on civil war.

The Spanish and European press alike provided extensive, in-depth coverage of the conflict. On November 17, 1852, *El Estado*, a Madrid daily newspaper, published the following story in an article about the country's domestic situation:

Several foreign newspapers have written about a plot against the life of the shah [*sic*] perpetrated by an individual belonging to the Bábí [*sic*] sect. *Le Pays* categorically denies this account.⁵

This denial probably reached Spain by way of the news agency Havas, which likely was not the one that distributed news of the alleged attempt against the Sháh, or at least that is what can be deduced after verifying that Spain's major daily newspapers that subscribed to the Havas Bureau did not publish such information.⁶

It would not be the last time that the Western press wrongly implicated the Bábís in assassination attempts, whether real or imagined, against the Sháh of Persia. It happened again in 1869,⁷ 1878,⁸ and twice again in 1896.⁹

The 1860s

In 1862, an expanded translation of Charles Dreyss's *Cronología Universal* was published in Madrid. Its author, Antonio Ferrer del Río, based his translation on the second French edition (1858). The entry for the year 1852 mentions the assassination attempt against the Sháh and the execution of 400 Bábís. That we are aware of, no mention of the religion is made again in any Spanish reference works other than the *Enciclopedia Moderna* and *Cronología Universal* until 1876.

In 1865, two highly significant works were published simultaneously in France that would have a decisive influence on the West's understanding of Babism. One was Mírzá Kazem-Beg's *Báb et les Bábís*, which, beginning that year, was published in installments in the *Journal Asiatique*. The other was *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l'Asie centrale* by Count Joseph A. de Gobineau.

Gobineau's work achieved much greater popularity. Though not exempt from historical errors or critical omissions, the book greatly influenced oriental studies of the period and awakened a certain sympathy toward the nascent religion in intellectual and public opinion circles.

Few in Spain came to know Kazem-Beg's work. Gobineau's book, on the other hand, was very favorably received. Most Spanish authors, as well as the mass media that mentioned Babism from that moment on, based themselves on Gobineau's work, mirroring both its vices and its virtues.

The first publication in Spain taking material directly from Gobineau in its coverage of Babism appeared in 1868, when the first Spanish translation of Ernst Renan's *Les Apôtres* [The Apostles] was published in Barcelona by the printer "La Ilustración." It is quite probable that this publication was originally a supplement in one of the daily newspapers and journals distributed by that publisher, although no such proof has yet been found to substantiate this suspicion. One year later, the same work was published by José Codina, another Barcelona printer.

Juan Valera

One of the nineteenth century's most outstanding writers and thinkers was Juan Valera (1824-1905). Holding degrees in philosophy and jurisprudence, Valera had a long diplomatic and political career. He worked in several consulates in Europe and South America prior to his being appointed ambassador in Frankfurt (1865). He would later serve as ambassador in Lisbon; Washington, D.C.; and Brussels. In 1858, he was elected as a member of the Spanish Parliament, and in 1872 he accepted a senior post within the Ministry of State Education. Also worthy of mention, from a cultural standpoint, are his inductions in 1861 into Spain's Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, and in 1904 into the Royal Academy of Moral and Political Sciences.

As a writer, he was a prolific novelist and essayist. He was also a renowned correspondent. Among his most famous novels are *Pepita Jiménez* and *Juanita la Larga*.

In 1868, he submitted his article titled *Sobre el concepto que hoy se forma de España* [Perceptions of Spain Today], which was published simultaneously in the magazines *La América* and *La Revista de España*.¹⁰ In it, Valera attempted to tackle the issue of Spain's decadence at the time and how the country was

perceived by the rest of Europe. In the first section of his article he posits his theory about the fate of civilizations. To Valera, peoples and races do not perish, but rather alternate between periods of decadence and remarkable achievement. He perceives the peoples of Aryan descent as best exemplifying his theory and, after reviewing the cases pertaining to other nations, has this to say about Persia:

Persia succumbs to Alexander's rule, but once again becomes a powerful, formidable, and feared rival of the Roman Empire under the Sassanid dynasty. In the time of the Ghazna sultans, during the Middle Ages, Persia's civilization shines with extraordinary splendor. Her epic and lyrical poets, her arts and sciences of the time are superior to those of the rest of the world. Later on, her philosophical and religious schools and sects begin to flourish, as well as the lyrical, and even dramatic, poetry that comes into being there in our own age. Recently, the strange historical phenomenon marked by the appearance and spread of *Babism* [*sic*] has made evident the intellectual and moral vigor of that race, that perchance it may become regenerated and arise anew to the heights of its sister European races, when a more fertile and noble coming into being arrives to awaken and bestir it.¹¹

Valera was not to be the only Spanish author that would see in Babism a new hope for Persia's progress. Nor would this be his last reference to the new religion.

In October/November 1889, he published an article titled *La Religión de la Humanidad* [Humanity's Religion] in *La España Moderna*.¹² It was in fact a letter addressed to Chilean philosopher Enrique Lagarrigue (1852-1927). Both authors maintained an interesting correspondence in which they debated the role and future of religion. Valera, contrary to Lagarrigue, believed in the vigor and usefulness of religion. Throughout the development of his argument, he writes:

I believe that we are living squarely in an age of faith, and that if losing it signifies progress, then we could scarcely boast about progress. Even now, in the middle of this century, in 1847, a new religion has appeared in

Persia, one which has made rivers of blood to flow and given the world untold martyrs. This religion's moral core is very pure and tender-hearted; its sacred writings, highly poetic; its beliefs and its love in god and of god [*sic*], profound. Count Gobineau and Mr. Franck, of the French Institute, have set out its doctrines and written the history of this recent religion, Babism, whose cardinal dogma is god's [*sic*] incarnation in nineteen persons.

Upon comparing these two excerpts from Valera's writings against excerpts about Babism from other Spanish authors of the period, we see that they are highly representative of the approach taken by Spanish intellectuals in the final decades of the nineteenth century toward Babism.

Diccionario Universal

Following the publication in 1862 of Charles Dreyss's *Cronología Universal*, we know of no other reference work in Spanish that mentions Babism until 1876, the year in which the second volume of the *Diccionario Universal* edited by Nicolás María Serrano was published.

Said volume contained definitions for the entries *Bab* and *Babism* [*sic*]. All of the information contained in both volumes is clearly taken from Gobineau's *Religions et Philosophies*. The term *Bab* [*sic*] is defined thus:

Bab [*sic*]: *Biog.* Celebrated Persian reformer born in 1825 and killed when he was barely thirty years old; his actual name was Mírzá-Ál-Mohammed [*sic*]; he belonged to the middle class and had received a rigorous education; he planted, so to speak, the seeds of a new doctrine destined perhaps to transform Islamism; always occupied with pious works, he had extraordinarily simple habits and a pleasing tender-heartedness, revealing these gifts through a marvelously enchanting personality and a kindly and penetrating eloquence of speech: he was incapable, those that knew him attested, of uttering anything without shaking the very core of the hearts of his listeners; his doctrine,

which borrows somewhat from Greek philosophy, is full of flowery phrases reminiscent of a “Paradise of roses.”

In defining the term *Babism* [*sic*], the dictionary provides an article comprising ten columns divided into two sections—*Historia del Babismo* [History of Babism] and *Exposición de la Doctrina del Babismo* [Exposition of the Doctrine of Babism]—preceded by a preamble. In total, the article comprises four pages summarizing point by point the very topics Gobineau covered in the chapters he devoted to Babism. As can be gleaned from the quote above, the tone that is used is highly positive. Indeed, it is the very tone that has been generally employed since then, and well into the twentieth century, by all dictionaries and encyclopedias containing an entry pertaining to Babism. Consequently, it replicates those same conceptual and historical errors committed by Gobineau.

It is especially interesting to see how the figure of Táhirih is dealt with: “Not for nothing has a woman been one of the staunchest of apostles, one of the most valiant of martyrs of this new religion; in Guret-ul-Ayn [*sic*] (the Eloquent, the Beautiful), the entire female sex has been liberated, ennobled, glorified; reduced by Islamism to the condition of mere objects, women in Asia will henceforth be considered as persons.” And further on: “Her beauty, her spirit, her eloquence, her knowledge, her singular exaltation is forever engraved in the memory of those that witnessed this drama.”

In late 1876, Francisco García Ayuso published his *Iran* [*sic*] *o del Indo al Tigris* [Iran or From the Indus to the Tigris], devoting three pages to Babism. Meanwhile, his pupil, diplomat Adolfo Rivadeneyra, was making his way to Persia. His chronicle of the trip included a lengthy explanation of the faith taught by the Báb. Several years later, in 1889, Násiri'd-Dín Sháh visited Europe for his third and final time. As a result, the Spanish press, as it had done in 1873, made mention of the Bábís yet again. One important writer, Countess Emilia Pardo Bazán, was able to meet the Sháh. On account of this encounter, that same year she would write *Un Diocleciano* [A Diocletian (alluding to Roman emperor Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus, noted for his persecution of Christians)], a work

whose title hints at its stirring content. We will, on another occasion, deal with this and other subjects in greater detail when we explore references made to the Faith from late 1876 until 1895.

NOTES

- ¹ Chronicles of a Birth, Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions in Spain (1850-1853), in *Lights of 'Irfán*, Vol. V.
- ² *Enciclopedia Moderna, Diccionario universal de literatura, ciencias, artes, agricultura, industria y comercio*. Establecimiento Mellado, Madrid, 1854, Vol. XXX, p. 102.
- ³ This accusation is also reflected in diplomatic correspondence of the period; see Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, George Ronald: Oxford, 1981, pp. 5-8.
- ⁴ George N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, Vol. I, Longmans, Green & Co., 1892, pp. 501-502.
- ⁵ *El Estado*, Madrid, November 17, 1857, p. 1. On November 18, this same story was published in at least two other Madrid daily newspapers: *El Clamor Público* and *La Esperanza*.
- ⁶ The author is aware of two other news stories published that year mentioning the Bábis. Both appear in the Finnish daily newspaper *Allmänna Tidning*. The first one is dated March 13, 1857, and is based on information from the *Indépendant Belge*; the second one is dated April 16 and is based on information from the *Journal de Constantinople*.
- ⁷ See *The Times*, London, August 19, 1869, p. 10.
- ⁸ See, for example, *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico, July 2, 1878.
- ⁹ The events of 1896 will be dealt with briefly on another occasion. Suffice it to say that the "Bábis" were accused of assassinating Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh on May 2 of that year and of allegedly plotting against Muzaffar ad-Dín Sháh in June of that same year.
- ¹⁰ *La América*, Madrid, March 28, 1868, Vol. XII, Issue 6; *Revista de España*, Madrid, March 13, 1868, Vol. I, Issue 1.
- ¹¹ Valera lists Gobineau's *Religions et Philosophies* and Adolph Franck's *Philosophie et Religion* in a bibliographical footnote.
- ¹² *La España Moderna*, Madrid, November 1889, Vol. I, Issue 40. The article was later published in the book titled *Nuevas Cartas Americanas* (Madrid, 1890), which went through several reprintings.

Baron Rosen's Archive Collection of Bábí and Bahá'í Materials

Youli Ioannesyan

Baron V. R. Rosen after his death left behind a vast collection of unpublished materials which among other things are of extreme value for the study of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths as well as for research on the Bábí and Bahá'í studies in Europe especially for those interested in having an historical perspective. These materials are preserved in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, Russia. They comprise Rosen's correspondence with A. G. Tumanski, E. G. Browne (the larger part of the collection), Y. Batyushkov, academic Oldenburg, V. I. Ignatyev, Sebastyan Vuarot, I. Kheyrulláh.

Of special importance are manuscripts (and copies of manuscripts), official reports of Russian diplomats from Persia on the Bábís and reports from Adrianople on the Bábís residing there at the same time when Bahá'u'lláh was exiled in Adrianople.

It would be relevant to say a few words about the key figures featuring in the given collection of materials.

A Russian aristocrat of German descent, Baron Victor Romanovich Rosen (1849-1908) was an academic, professor of Arabic, head of the Oriental Branch of the Russian Archeological Society, and the translator of several Bahá'í Writings into Russian. He prepared for publication in the original Arabic and Persian a volume of Epistles by Bahá'u'lláh and left profound descriptions of many Bábí and Bahá'í manuscripts which now belong to the manuscript collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Rosen also properly identified some important Epistles such as the *Surih-i-Muluk*

(The *Surih of the Kings*) as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. He encouraged his students A. G. Tumanski and others to collect and study materials related to the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths.

Alexandr Grigoryevich Tumanski (born in 1861), who belonged to an old Lithuanian aristocratic stock, was Rosen's student. When he was a young captain in the Russian Imperial army, and while he was serving in the Turkistan region, namely in Ashkabad, he came into close contact with the recently established Bahá'í community there. He undertook a trip to Persia arranged by Bahá'ís and sanctioned by the Russian authorities to collect information about the Bahá'ís in Persia. He was accompanied on his trip by his young wife, and his journey to Persia at that time was a real adventure. Among Tumanski's good friends was prominent Bahá'í scholar Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání. Tumanski was the first translator of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* into a European language (Russian). According to Professor Akimushkin of St. Petersburg, after the so called Bolshevik October Revolution, Tumanski fled with his family into Turkey and died in 1920 on the Prince Islands. His descendents live in Belgium.

The third prominent figure whose correspondence is contained in the archive is the British orientalist E. G. Browne, who does not need any introduction. His letters to Rosen form the largest part of the preserved correspondences in the Archive. The above three figures were pioneers of the Bábí and Bahá'í studies in Europe.

Also represented in the collection of materials are:

1. Academic Oldenbourg, who mentions the Bábís in his letter to Rosen;
2. Vladimir Ivanovich Ignatyev — another of Rosen's University students, diplomat working in Tehran, Ashkabad and Bukhara;
3. Yu. Batyushkov — Persian and Arabic scholar and diplomat working in Tehran in 1893-1899;
4. Sebastian Vuarot — a French Bahá'í.

Let us now briefly describe the materials preserved in the Archive collection. They consist of the following items:

1. Tumanski's letters to Rosen, which date 1892-1899. These comprise over 23 letters (in Russian). The latter deal with a wide range of issues: the Bábí community in Ashkabad, the translation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (and related issues), Tumanski's trip to Persia and some information he gathered there about the Bahá'ís, other subjects. Among these is a news-paper "Kavkaz" article on the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh by Tumanski in which he gives an unbiased account of the history of the Bahá'í Faith and calls Bahá'u'lláh "a prophet."
2. Browne's correspondence with Rosen comprises 73 letters, dating 1889-1902 (one letter is in Persian, the rest are in English). These letters too cover a very wide range of issues and show in what close cooperation with Rosen Browne was doing his research on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths. From these letters one, for example, finds out that Browne used for his work both manuscript copies of the *Persian Bayán* from the St. Petersburg manuscript collection, made available for him owing to Rosen.
3. Ignatyev's correspondence with Rosen comprises 3 letters (in Russian). These throw light on the stance of Russia's Foreign Ministry on the Bábí/Bahá'í issue and reveal the differences between the Foreign Ministry and the Russian authorities in Turkistan in this respect.
4. Batyushkov's correspondence with Rosen consists of 3 letters (in Russian), revealing Batyushkov's attraction to the Bahá'í Faith and his protective attitude towards it.
5. Sebastian Voirot's letter (in French) throws some light on the French Bahá'í community of the time.
6. Kheyrulláh, who was put in touch with Rosen by Browne, offers Rosen his book in his letter (in English).
7. Official reports of Russian diplomats in Persia on the Bábís/Bahá'ís (one is in French, the rest are in Russian written in a Russian script specially modified to make its reading difficult). These cover a period of 1855-1879.

Among them is a report by the Russian Charge d'Affaire in Tehran Mr. Zinovyev to Duke Gorchakov (in French).

8. "The Bábis in Adrianople" – a report by the head of the Russian Consulate in Adrianople based on eye-witness accounts (the report was compiled in Russian on Rosen's request).
9. Manuscripts:
 - The *Lawḥ-i-Samsun* (in Arabic) also known as the *Lawḥ-i-Hawḍaj* (Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in Samsun on his way to Constantinople). The manuscript is preserved in an excellent condition.
 - The *Lawḥ-i-Jawad* (3 pages in Persian).
 - A chapter from the *Qayyúm al-Asmá* ('chapter of Josef') in Arabic.
 - Prayers
 - 'History of Haji Muḥammad Riza' – a history in Persian of the martyrdom of Haji Muḥammad Riza Isfahani in Ashkabad, manuscript in Abu-l-Fazl Gulpáygání's hand.

All the above manuscripts (except for the *Lawḥ-i-Jawad*, included into Rosen's Volume of Epistles by Bahá'u'lláh) have not so far been available for general public, because they have been preserved in the Archive, which accounts for their excellent condition. They are not described in any published descriptive catalogue of manuscripts.

10. Two letters in Judeo-Persian¹ with a translation into regular Persian, giving an account of the events which happened to Bábis (Bahá'ís) of Jewish background in Iran and the persecutions they suffered. One letter is addressed by Agha Sulayman 'Attar Hamadani from Tehran to Agha Sulayman Shalfurush Hamadani in Ashkabad.
11. A letter written by Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání to Tumanski (in Persian) on behalf of Abdu'l-Bahá. The letter is probably a transcript of Gulpáygání's original letter.

From Tumanski's and Browne's correspondences with Rosen we would know many interesting facts. For example, we can retrace fully how these two scholars were proceeding with their work on the translation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and the study of the *Persian Bayán* respectively. We would also know that Abdu'l-Bahá was originally against the publication of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and would find out what were the considerations behind this objection. We would know that Tumanski chose to wait for the Master's consent and approval. We would also find out why Browne after so much labor on the manuscripts was eventually forced to cut his work on the *Persian Bayán* in the middle and give up his attempts to publish it. Since these letters contain and touch upon so many various subjects, it is impossible to class them according to their content. So I arrange them chronologically, sometimes emphasizing the main subject of the letter or quote. All the Russian language materials are quoted in this presentation in my English translation. I would start with Tumanski and several of his letters dated 1892:

The Bábí [community] in Ashkabad consists of very interesting members. Many of them have been witnesses of and participants in very interesting events. Some of them personally knew the Báb. The most interesting of all the Bábís is my friend whom I met last year, a Samarkand dweller, who came to Ashkabad for the sole purpose of helping me translate the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*...

Also I managed to obtain autographs of Bahá'u'lláh² and the Báb. I have also been promised a photo of the house in Akka. As for the picture [of Bahá'u'lláh], it cannot be obtained. The *Tarikh-i-Sayyah* (Traveller's Narrative) mentions a drawing of the Russian Consul. The Bábís are very eager to know whom exactly that drawing was by and whether you are familiar with this drawing. If it were possible to make a copy or take picture of it this could afford great pleasure to Bahá'u'lláh... [February 28, 1892]

Having received the news of the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh Tumanski wrote:

It has finally occurred. The page is turned over. **آن روحه صعد حضرت** ('His Holiness has ascended') – These are the words in which the Bábis of Ashkabad informed me of the passing away of Beha... [July 3, 1892]

He published an article about this event in the newspaper 'Kavkaz,' from which I will read you a quote:

A report has been received the other day about the death of the Head of the Bábis and their prophet, which occurred in Akka..., Syria on 16 May³. This is a remarkable person, who managed to attract about a million followers in different parts of Persia and accorded to Bábiism the peace-loving nature which is now characteristic of the adherents of this religion. This teaching has made a proud shi'ih Persian, who accepts friendship only with his coreligionists and fully turns his back on people of other beliefs (*tabarra' va tavalla*), into a humble person, a Bábí, who considers everybody to be his brother.

Bahá'u'lláh, whose original name was Mírzá Ḥusayn Núrí, was born on 1 November 1817. He was a son of Mírzá Buzurg Núrí, the former minister (*vazir*) of Fath Ali Shah. He spent his youth in his father's house, where constantly moving around cultured and educated people he displayed at quite an early age great mental capacity and a wonderful moral mindset... [July 9, 1892]

About the publication of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* with his Russian translation Tumanski tells Rosen the following:

On the publishing [of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*] I recently received a letter from Mírzá Abu'l-Fazl, in which he asks me to delay the publication due to the Most Great Branch (Ghusn-i-'Azam)'s concern about the possible consequences [of such a publication] for them. Enclosed is a copy of the letter. In response to this letter I wrote Mírzá [Abu'l-Fazl] to reassure their [community] head, saying that no harm would be caused to them by a Russian translation and that I would not proceed with its publication unless I got the permission of his Holiness (*hazrat*).

Tumanski goes on to say:

I have to be on good terms with them, as Bahá'u'lláh's biography is on its way and this is something which would be interesting to get. Please, don't write Browne about it so that he won't beat me to it. If an opportunity presents itself I will translate it together with extracts from the *Tarikh-i-Jadid* (Manukchi) [New History] and the *Maqala-yi-Sayyah* [Traveller's Narrative]. This would serve as a kind of introduction to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*... [October 24, 1892]

Several letters are about Tumanski's trip to Persia. He writes in one of them:

The Bábís with their stories about Persia greatly enkindle the flame of my desire to undertake this trip and draw a picture of a very interesting journey for me. God willing (en sha Alláh). Of course recommendations will not be lacking. By now reports have gone to many places concerning my forthcoming arrival... The point is that to make this trip secret has not worked out, because from the very first this whole affaire has not been handled quietly and before my arrival in Ashkabad almost everybody had already known about my forthcoming business trip, and surely inferred that the Bábís were the main purpose of it... I can only count on the negligence of the Persians themselves and fear lest the English should get in my way...

Is there any news from Browne? How is he getting on with the Bábís [corrected into] Bahá'ís. Has he got along with or most probably broken further apart from them because of his publication of Subh-i-Azal's portrait and writings?... [January 9, 1893]

An extract from another letter shows how Tumanski was proceeding with his work on the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*:

In the next mail I am sending you the translation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* with footnotes. As for the supplements only three of them are ready so far, namely: 1) an extract from the Tablet to Karim Khan, the Shaykhi, 2)

a translation of the Tablet on the elementary reality (*basit al-haqiqā*), in which Bahá'u'lláh touches upon pantheism, 3) a Tablet about the Sufis.⁴ I also intend to add a few Tablets containing commandments (*ahkam*).

No real news so far. Just an increased activity in Bábí's visiting Akka can be seen. A treatise titled *Risala-yi-Siyaysiya* has recently been received from the Most Great Branch (Ghusn-i-'Azam), of which I will give you an account, for I am planning to include its content into my Introduction. In the meanwhile it is now time to end. Let peace and Bahá' abide upon you. [January 21, 1894]

The closing line of the above letter merits special attention. Tumanski uses this expression: 'let Bahá abide upon you' in the closing part of several of his letters. On one occasion Batyushkov does the same in his reference to E. G. Browne. He says: *alayhi Bahá* ("let Bahá abide upon him").

Meanwhile Tumanski ran into some difficulties with the Russian authorities while arranging his trip to Persia. Baron Rosen as it is clear from the given correspondence was instrumental in paving Tumanski's way to that country. After sharing with Rosen some details of his itinerary Tumanski says:

It is going to be organized in the following way. A report will be sent to Akka concerning my journey, and a circular letter will be sent out from there requesting the believers as part of their obligation to give me full assistance. I don't know how to thank you for all this. My fiancée and I are completely delighted. The Bábís are also jubilant, while giving their praises (*zikr'es*) they are promising me the most exciting trip. One of them will be sent from Ashkabad to accompany me on my journey... [January 17, 1894]

As his journey was drawing to a close Tumanski wrote:

I have almost finished my journey. I cannot say that it was an easy one. Though I was never exposed to a real danger, I had a lot of troubles... As to the Bábís I can say that almost everywhere where they exist I came into contact with them and this will be the subject of my

special note which I will include into my report...
[October 28, 1894]

Tumanski takes up this issue in another letter after the completion of his trip. This letter dated January 4, 1895 is of special interest for in it Tumanski among other things gives statistical data about the Bábís living in different parts of Persia. He, for example, says:

Their total number mustn't exceed 100000 or 150000. The figure given by Curson and quoted by Browne is to the best of my knowledge exaggerated. However, this by no means detracts from their importance. Presently there is an especially large number of Bábís in Tehran, among whom you can find very high-ranking and influential people. Moreover, Bábíism also serves as a banner around which elements unhappy with the existing regime group together. Among these there are some very influential khans and chiefs of nomadic tribes... I personally met two highly influential Baktiyari khans and an Arab shaykh from Fars...

Although Batyushkov's letters are few, they also contain some very interesting information.⁵ For example, in a letter dated January 18, 1894 he writes about Mírzá Yahyá:

Finally about Subh-i-Azal, he is said to be dragging out a very miserable existence now. For his sons, who are almost his only adherents, leave no hope for a bright future, though they have traveled extensively around the world. By the way, they have often been to...,⁶ but without showing any tendencies to preoccupy themselves with the salvation of either their souls or other people's. The rest of the Bábís have already become convinced of the meaning of the words of Nuqta-yi-Awla, that Bahá had to be in concealment for 9 years in order to be saved from an inevitable death. Therefore [Subh-i-Azal's] role is limited to this period...

In another letter to Rosen, dated June 3, 1899, Batyushkov writes:

Valentin Alekseevitch⁷ tells me that Tumanski's publication of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is nearing completion

if not already completed. You, surely, know of what importance it is for Persia and how greatly demanded it would be. Some people already made inquiries to me about it and therefore I am wondering if the translation is printed together with the [original] text or separately and in the latter case, if it is possible to have the original text alone. In case of your positive [reply to this question] I would ask you to do me a favor by sending me about 20 copies of the text with the translation and 80 copies of the [original] text without the translation...

Ignatyev's letters are no less interesting. They enlighten us as to the Russian authorities' approach to the Bahá'í Faith and to some controversy characteristic of this approach. Thus Ignatyev wrote:

When correspondence about granting Russian citizenship to the Bábís living in Ashkabad started our Envoy in Tehran informed the Head of the [Transcaspian] Region, that about the spread of the Bábís in Persia there could only be made conjectural assumptions, but there was reason to believe that the number of the Báb's followers reached a million. They are spread among all the strata of society including the upper class. Presently it is still more difficult to judge how successful the propaganda of the Báb's teaching is. Among the Sunnis the followers of the sect are very few.⁸ A Persian told me with certainty that even some Armenians (of the Armenian-Gregorian Church) in Ashkabad had recently become Bábís. He did not want to disclose the names of those Armenians, for they, not without a good reason, fearing persecution from both the [Russian] authorities as well as from their own [former] coreligionists, carefully conceal their adoption of Bábísm. It was expected here that Bábísm was a transitional stage to Christianity and apparently it was hoped that the Bábís, having seen so much kindness, not only would agree to adopt the Russian Orthodox Church's form of Christianity but would moreover have a beneficial effect on other Moslems. However, the opposite has happened: Christians

became Bábís, while not a single Bábí has so far, to the best of my knowledge, embraced Christianity. If others follow the two Armenians' suite, then certain measures, surely, will have to be taken...

From here Ignatyev goes on to say:

It is taken for granted that neither Russia nor England have any reason to support the Bábís, and it seems inconceivable to me that such a reason would ever (at least in the foreseeable future) be found... Not a single European envoy has dared to intercede on behalf of the persecuted with the Shah during the latest executions of the Bábís in Yazd...

I have also to disagree with you that our diplomats should intimidate the Shah using the Bábís and by making threats of a further support for them coerce the Shah to fulfill our demands. Firstly, such a threat could and surely would be ineffective, which would make it uncomfortable for us. Secondly, as I have already pointed out above, we can only harm ourselves by such a threat. For we are going to set against us the vast majority of Moslems and the clergy. What if the Shah responds to the threat saying to us: 'So be it. I will meet your terms if you do not accept the Bábís in your country and extradite those whom you have already accepted'? In what situation shall we find ourselves? Definitely, under no circumstances can we extradite the Bábís. Because their extradition would not correspond to Russia's image as a great power [March 25, 1892].

Needless to say that the assertion sometimes made in Iran by some Iranian circles that Bahá'ís were supported and used in Iran by foreign (Western) powers to promote their own political aims, in the light of the above confession made by the high-ranking Russian diplomat, appears totally unfounded. In another letter to Rosen Ignatyev touches upon the passing of some Bahá'í Writings to Russian officials:

In reply to your letter dated April 8, which I received on 20th I need to inform you urgently that for some

political considerations, when publishing Bábí documents it seems to me more proper not to mention my name as well as the fact that these documents were presented by the Bábís to General Kuropatkin.⁹ As you well know, our Ministry is not quite sympathetic to the attempts of the authorities of the Transcaspian Region to offer the Bábís exceptional support. The mention of my name, given my official status here, would accord to the delivery of Bahá'u'lláh's epistles into my hands by the Bábís a somewhat official character, which is undesirable... [April 23, 1892]

I will now turn to the "Report on the Bábís in Adrianople," which was compiled on Baron Rosen's special request by the Russian Consul of the time. It comprises several accounts made by different individuals. All the accounts emphasize that the Bábís lived quite peacefully in Adrianople and were far from being trouble-makers. Among these materials there is a document titled: "A rough translation from German of the petition of the Bábí Shaykh (i.e. Bahá'u'lláh) to the Austrian Consulate" concerning the new upsurge of persecutions that befell the Bábís, by which Bahá'u'lláh's banishment to Akka is implied. I will not quote this document here. Instead I will read you an extract from a report based on the accounts of some Sufi Shaykhs in Adrionople:

According to the testimony of old Adrionople dwellers (Shaykhs belonging to the dervishes of the Mevlevi and Qadrikhane Sufi orders..., who were people with whom Shaykh Ḥusayn Ali had a personal relationship), the Bábís lived a quiet and humble life. Shaykh Ḥusayn Ali was a very clever and respectable person. He was engaged in the study and interpretation of many theological issues. Haji Izzet Pasha finds that the Bábí teaching is an aspiration for self-perfection. The *Báb* is the outward sign of a gate leading the soul to Paradise. Humility and self-possession, and also firmness in sustaining sufferings purify the soul and open for it the gate (*Báb*) of Paradise. The person preaching this, enlightening people and guiding them unto salvation is the one who is the *Báb*. This is also what the Gospel speaks about. Isa (Jesus Christ), the prophet, calls

himself the *Báb*, for through him people enter Paradise. According to Hadr and Izzet Pasha, the *Báb*'s pure doctrine was distorted by uneducated people, while in essence it by no means contradicts Islam. Muḥammad, in the exalted sense of the word, was also the *Báb*, and Musa and Isa, as well as all the great saints and wise men, who taught and corrected humankind.

Turning now to E. Browne's correspondence with Rosen, we will start with a quote from a letter in which the British scholar describes his recent journey to Cyprus and the Palestine. He says:

My journey — as I daresay you will have desired was intimately connected with the same object. It appeared to me that for a proper understanding of the subject (apart from the great interest one feels in beholding face to face the prime movers in a great national or religious movement) it was very desirable to have a personal interview with the chiefs of both parties of *Bábís*, since from them (if they chose to speak) the most authentic and detailed accounts might be expected.

So, having obtained some extension of the Easter vacation, I once more turned my face Eastwards, and on March 19th landed in Cyprus...

As regards the history of the Cyprian exiles, there, I believe that I have all the information obtainable, and of all the papers I took copies which are now in my possession.

After leaving Cyprus (on April 5th) I proceeded to Beyrout, & thence, after a delay of 5 days (for I had to obtain permission from Beha to approach him) to Acre. This delay unfortunately reduced my time at Acre to 5 days) (for the ride thither & back occupied 3 days each way), but during these 5 days I was completely amongst the *Bábís*, who treated me with unbounded kindness. I was granted 5 interviews with Beha himself, but of course I could not ask him any questions. I sat humbly before him while he talked. His discourse was oracular but rather general in character.

He spoke as 'one having authority,' but not exactly as I had expected — like a Master, and a Prophet — but not as an Incarnation of the Divinity... His manner is gracious and dignified, but somewhat restless, suggesting great stores of energy. He talked for the most part of the necessity of all nations choosing one language as a means of international communication & one writing (a sort of sermon on the concluding text of the *دساق و حل*)¹⁰ & of the necessity of putting down war & international jealousy & hostility. Of doctrine properly so called he spoke little.

I might write pages on all I saw & heard, but to the present I must confine myself to the above brief outline. Of course I hope to publish the result of my journey ere long... [From a letter dated May 6, 1890]

The following letter helps us to understand how Browne classified and selected Bábí and Bahá'í writings from the standpoint of their importance. He wrote:

But of course the printing of oriental works is expensive, & we cannot publish the whole of the extensive literature which the Bábís have managed to produce in this short time, so that I am anxious to make a wise selection... As regards the work about the Bábís, I think it would be a good thing to publish -

(i) Selections from the Báb's writings, including the whole of the Persian Beyan, the *Dala'il-i-Sab'a*,¹¹ portions of the Commentaries on the *Suras* of Joseph, *قره ب*, *ال عصر و*,¹² one or two of the *آراتزی*; ¹³ & other shorter writings,

(ii) Selections from Beha's works, including,

اق دس کتاب ¹⁴

نصی و حل

مکنونه لماتک

فردوسیّه لماتک

Some other of the shorter الواح (Tablets) which you have not published, and selections from the قانای (Kitáb-i-Íqán)

(iii) Selections from Subh-i-Ezel's writings, including portions of his الروح غماتن , (Persian)

مجالى ئالىى and the short account of the Bábí movement which he wrote for me.

... If you would give me your advice as to how I had best proceed I should be very grateful. I think that the Persian Beyan is very important, but my MS. is not a very good one, & I am waiting an opportunity (sic) to spend a few weeks in London to collate it with the British Museum MS. Unfortunately their rules are very stringent, & it is impossible to borrow any MS... [From a letter dated July 12, 1891]

In another letter Browne says:

I am very glad to hear that your Collections Scientifiques¹⁵ are so nearly ready, as they will be a very great acquisition not only to 'Bábology," but to Oriental Studies in general...

As you say that M. Tumanski¹⁶ is at present working at a popular resume of his sojourn amongst the Bábis in Ashkabad, & that he thinks of adding to it a brief account of my investigations, and also that he will soon be returning to his military duties in Asia, I thought that it might perhaps be convenient to him to be able to refer to my forthcoming work without further delay...

Still I think there can be no doubt that you are right as to the فارسی یان ب¹⁷ being more important by far, and it would be a pity if the University Press after finishing the جدید اریخت,¹⁸ should weary of spending money on what one of my un-initiated friends had termed "a religion of which nobody ever heard before" I shewed what you had written to Professor Robertson Smith, by whose opinion the University Press Syndicate would be chiefly guided in the matter, & I also shewed him my

MS. of the text & translation of the دیج اریخت, and he said that he did not think it would be advisable to urge the Press to incur the expense of publishing so large a work unless you, who were best able to judge impartially of its value, recommended it strongly. He also said that he thought that they would certainly print the Persian Beyan for me if I prepared a text; and if I have decided to get to work on that as soon as possible ... So now I have decided to concentrate my energy on the فارسی یاناب. It rests with your kindness to tell me how I should proceed with a view to obtaining the loan of the St. Petersburg MSS. I should be glad to begin the work during the vacation if it were possible, for from now till October 10th I shall have much more leisure than when term time begins... [From a letter dated July 28, 1891]

The theme of the *Persian Bayán* also features in Browne's following letters:

First of all as to the Persian Beyan. It is unfortunate that delay is unavoidable, but it is very generous of your librarian to allow their MSS. to go abroad at all, and eager as I am to commence the work, I cannot but feel that they are right in safe-guarding possessions so precious in whatever way seems best to them. And after all I can always be employing myself in collating my own two MSS, & if I am in London, the British Museum codex also. I am chiefly sorry to give you so much trouble... [From a letter dated August 15, 1891]

...I returned to Cambridge after my vacation at the end of last week... this morning to my great delight I received from our Foreign Office the MS. of the Persian Beyan belonging to the Academy of Sciences, which had been transmitted to me through them from the Russian Ambassador. I need not say how much pleasure its arrival gave me, and I know not in what words sufficiently to express my deep sense of gratitude to you for all the trouble you have taken in the matter and to the Academy of Sciences for the generosity with which they have placed at my disposal

so precious a manuscript. Pray convey to them my most sincere and warmest thanks.

Two days ago I dispatched the application for the other MS. belonging to the Institut. I was unable to do it sooner, as I wished to obtain a formal endorsement of my application from the Vice-Chancellor, thinking that too would strengthen it. My application and the Vice-Chancellor's "covering letter" were advanced to Sir Robert Morier, the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg. I hope they may prove as effective as your kind offices have done in the other case.

As I now have three MSS. in my possession (two of my own and the copy belonging to the Academy) I can begin the work of collation at once... [From the letter dated October 15, 1891]

...I have been steadily collating my best MS. of the Beyan with the MS. so kindly lent me by St. Petersburg Academy. It is rather tedious work, and I find I cannot satisfactorily do more than 3 pages of the St. P. MS. a day, as the attention begins to be blunted after that. However

¹⁹قطرۀ با قطرۀ دری شود

And I have already collated nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ of the whole, so that, all being well, I hope to have finished with it before the six months have passed.

I told [you] that I had applied to our Ambassador Sir Robert Morier, to obtain for me the loan of the MS. belonging to the Institut. I did this chiefly to avoid the delays inseparable from doing anything through the Foreign Office. Unfortunately Sir Robert Morier had just left St. Petersburg for England on account of his health. Consequently my letter fell into the hands of his Charge d'affaires, who not feeling the same interest in the matter...

The Academy MS. evidently belongs to the same "family" as my own, the variants being on the whole

few & unimportant, & mostly evident slips and errors. Still I suppose they should be collated... [From a letter dated November 10, 1891]

Quotes from a few more letters I will read without comments. For they speak for themselves:

You will see therefore, that my trip to Paris has not been fruitless. I have found a new M.S. of the Persian Beyan, as I believe, the original of the الاحكام تابك²⁰ translated by Gobineau; and, most interesting still, as I think, a book that would appear to be the original from which the compilers of the جدید اریخت²¹ got most of their circumstantial narratives...

What you tell me about M. Gamazof inspires me with the highest admiration for his enterprise and disinterested love of science. How I wish we had, such a publication in England.

I safely received the proof-sheets of the الملوک ورقة²² & etc which are being printed by the Academy of Sciences, and also the Zapiski (vol. vi, 1-4),²³ for which very many thanks. I have not yet had time to examine them carefully...

How I wish I could read Russian; unfortunately I cannot, so that the Russian part of the Zapiski is a sealed book to me. I must try and learn some when I get a little time, but a brief examination of Russian grammar which I once indulged in led me to the conclusion that it is a very difficult language...

As to the copies of my Traveller's Narrative which M. Toumanski says the Bábís at Ashkabad wish to buy, I need not say that it would be likely to encourage the University Press very much in the publication of other such works if so large a number were sold all at once. I have written to them to give me an estimate of the cost and weight of —

- 50 copies of the English
- 100 copies of the Persian bound in cloth like your copy.

- 100 copies of the Persian in a special paper cover to diminish the weight

...The only difficulty I see is, will the books be allowed to pass through Russia without difficulty? I understand that there are difficulties in the transmission of books through Russian territory. They would, I suppose, be most cheaply sent by steamer to Odessa or Batoumi, thence rail to Baku, steamer to أطه وزون,²⁴ and rail to Ashkabad...

I am less anxious for the English volumes to go than the Persian, firstly because I doubt if they would meet the approval of any Bábí (the Beha'ís would not like Note W), and secondly because I very much doubt whether there are 50 Bábís or even Persians sympathizing with Bábís who know English, and I do not see what use they would have for so many copies. Indeed my feelings about the Traveller's Narrative are curiously mixed: I sympathize profoundly with the Bábís as a whole, but hardly know what to think as between Beha and Subh-i-Ezel. My book would certainly please neither: the former would by no means approve of the English, the latter would never forgive me for editing Persian... [From a letter dated April 10, 1892]

...Many thanks also for your notices on the St. Petersburg فسي‌الاسماء.²⁵ I have not yet had time to compare them with my copy...I must also thank you for pp. 89-104 of the collection of الواح (Tablets) which you are printing, and for calling my attention to the expression[:]

²⁶ الامكان بدن في كالشردى ان نبأضراً نك

Which is interjected by the Ezeli's in so sinister a manner. Very probably you are right (and on the whole I hope so) in supposing that they have invented the context in which they place it... [From a letter dated October 9, 1892]

...I have to thank you very sincerely for your letter of April 15th with its very interesting enclosure, all the

contents of which were entirely new to me, (except for the resume of the ...²⁷ facts which you so kindly gave me in a letter some months ago). No copy of the رسالة²⁸ اسكندری has come to me, and I fancy I have become suspected amongst my good friends at Acre & Alexandria of Ezeli proclivities. Anyhow some months have elapsed since I heard anything from them, and the last letter had a tone of reproach... It is a most fortunate thing that, thanks to M. Tumansky's energy & tact my excommunication will not injure the cause of science... [From a letter dated April 27, 1892]

... I am very glad to hear that M. Toumansky is getting on so well at Ashkabad, and I confidently anticipate the most precious results of his labours. To his last memoir on the Tarikh-i-Jadid²⁹ & etc I owe, as I said, a very great debt of gratitude. I wish I knew the truth about Aka Seyyid Jawad of Kerbela!... [From a letter dated May 31, 1893]

...Many thanks for your kind letter of July 31, and for the corrections you point out. It was very stupid of me not to see that the title رسالة اسكندری bore reference to M. Toumansky's name and that it should be translated "Epistle of Alexander" — luckily the proofs, though passed, had not been printed off, and I was able to make the required correction. I am very grateful to you for having saved me from so stupid a blunder... [From a letter dated August 22, 1893]

...I cannot tell you how pleased I was to receive your kind letter together with the last number of the Zapiski and the "authorized version" of the Bábí scriptures, for all of which I offer you my most sincere thanks... I am extremely grateful to you for obtaining for me this new collection of Bábí scriptures, for as you know, my relations with Acre have ceased; at least it is a long time since I have heard from them, & from the Ezelis either...

As regards the Bábis I am rather doubtful whether I shall go on with any more of their books or not. I should like to publish both the كتاب³⁰ and Haji Mirzá

Jani's history, but most of my orientalist friends have dissuaded me, saying that enough has been done for the present. However می‌خواهد هیچ خدا ات³¹ I should be sorry to abandon the Beyan after going through the labour of collating 3 MSS. [From a letter dated November 19, 1893]

The following letter explains what he means:

I feel my countrymen are tired of Bábis (sic), and that there is little chance of my getting either the Beyan or Mírzá Jani's history published, unless it be at my own expense... [From a letter dated October 27, 1894]

...I thank you very sincerely for what you say about the Beyan. I am almost certain that it would be impossible to get it printed here, unless it were at my own expense: and I fear I could not afford this. To show you how difficult it is to get books, which cannot prove remunerable, published here, I may tell you that I have just applied to the Press to print my Catalogue of Persian MSS. in the University Library, and that even about this I am having some difficulties and anxiety... [From a letter dated December 23, 1894]

...Your letter of Feb. 26 reached me in the Island of Cyprus at Famagusta, and I wrote a short reply from thence...

The assassination of the Shah of Persia is naturally enjoying a great deal of attention here.³² I am very sorry that the first telegrams connected it with the Bábis, as I am convinced that they have nothing whatever to do with it, but no doubt it will be made an excuse for renewing the persecutions. My own belief is that the assassination is the work of a political Society organized by Sheykh Jemalu'd-Din el-Afghani — an able but dangerous man, who has been expelled from nearly every country in Western Asia. I met him in London in 1891, where he was trying to stir up public feeling against the Shah by articles in the magazines on what he called "The Reign of Terror in Persia." He conducted an Arabic newspaper called الوشقى لغرقة³³ in Paris... intended to stir up Muḥammadan feeling against the English. He was also concerned in a reactionary

Persian newspaper called the انذوق³⁴ published in London in 1890-1. He has nothing whatever with the Bábís, but is a zealous Muḥammadan whose ideal is the union of all Muḥammadans to resist European influence. He is, I suppose, safe for the present as I see that the Sultan refuses to give him up to the Persian Ambassador at Constantinople... [From a letter dated May 9, 1895]

The theme of the emerging Bahá'í community in America is also reflected in Browne's letters. It is touched upon in 3 of the 4 letters with which I would like to conclude this presentation:

P.S. I think I told you about the Bábís in America (Chicago). There are Americans who account themselves of the sect. I send you herewith (enclosed with the J.R.A.S.³⁵ extracts) a little work published by their leader, Kheyru'lláh, which may amuse, though it can hardly instruct you... [From a letter dated February 2, 1898]

... I hope that you are well, and that your official work leaves you some time free for the Bábís. I think I told you that the sect has established itself in America. And has several hundred ardent behaits in New York, Chicago and San Francisco. I had a visit from one of them last June. As a rule they seem to know very little about it, but some of them perform pilgrimages to St. Jean d'Acre, and are received there by the صانغ³⁶... [From a letter dated November 1, 1899]

...I am most delighted to receive yesterday Captain Toumansky's edition and translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and other Bábí works, with Commentary, Introduction, etc. As I do not know his address, I am taking the liberty of sending you my letter of thanks to him, hoping that it will not trouble you too much to forward it to him. I have naturally only had time at present to glance at it... [From a letter dated February 6, 1900]

... I had a visit last week from a Bábí عید³⁷ on his way to America — a very serious intelligent & interesting man, who put me en courant as to the very serious

quarrel and schism which has arisen between 'Abbas Efendi – اعظم صرخ – and his younger brothers. The latter represent the stationary or conservative element, while the former, so far as I can learn, wishes to be regarded in the same light as Behá'u'lláh... [From a letter dated February 10, 1901]

In conclusion I would like to say that what I have presented to you is but a glimpse of the highly valuable materials preserved in Baron Rosen's archive in the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. I would also like to stress again that this collection has so far neither been published nor even referenced. Some of its items such as manuscripts of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings and Abu'l-Fazl Gulpáygání's autograph of the "History of Haji Muḥammad Riza Isfahani" have a special value of their own. In order to make this collection available to the public the soonest publication of all these materials in the original languages and translation (with all the necessary references) seems to me highly desirable.

NOTES

- ¹ By Judeo-Persian we imply the peculiar Persian dialect of Iranian Jews using Hebrew characters in writing.
- ² One of these autographs might be the manuscript of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner now preserved in the manuscript collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The manuscript is presumably an autograph of Bahá'u'lláh (though this still needs to be confirmed) and was sent to St. Petersburg from Ashkabad. The sender could well have been Tumanski. My article on this manuscript, its content and related issues is now forthcoming in the Journal published by the above Branch.
- ³ This and some other dates featuring in the correspondence are according to the old calendar used in pre-Revolutionary Russia.
- ⁴ The numbers are mine.
- ⁵ Batyushkov, as it appears from one his letters, preserved some Bahá'í Writings from extinction after the death of their owner.
- ⁶ The word is unclear.
- ⁷ Valentine Alekseevitch Dzukovski – a prominent Russian Persian scholar of the 19th century.
- ⁸ Probably the Sunnis of the Transcaspian region, e.g. Turkomans are implied here.
- ⁹ General Kuropatkin was Russia's General-governor of the Region.

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- ¹⁰ The *Most Holy Tablet*, probably the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is implied.
- ¹¹ The *Seven Proofs* by the Báb.
- ¹² Chapters 2 ("The Cow") and 103 (The Afternoon).
- ¹³ *Visitations*.
- ¹⁴ Mentioned here respectively are: *The Most Holy Book*, *The Tablet to Nasir*, *The Hidden Words* and *The Words of Paradise*.
- ¹⁵ Here and below highlighted by E. G. Browne.
- ¹⁶ Tumanski's first and second names were Alexandr Grigoryevich. The letter "M" preceding Tumanski's family name in Browne's letters to Rosen must originally have stood for "Mr.," which was possibly mistaken by Browne for the abbreviation of the first name.
- ¹⁷ The *Persian Bayán*.
- ¹⁸ The *New History*.
- ¹⁹ "A drop upon a drop makes a sea" (Persian).
- ²⁰ "The Book of Precepts."
- ²¹ *New History*.
- ²² The *Surih of the Kings*.
- ²³ The full title of this academic journal edited by V. Rosen is: "Zapiski Vostochnovo Otdeleniya Rossiyskovo Archeologicheskovo Obshestva" ("Notes of the Oriental Branch of the Russian Archeological Society").
- ²⁴ Uzun-Ata — a town in Turkistan.
- ²⁵ Tafsir al-Asma' ("Commentary on the Names").
- ²⁶ "Be pulsating like the artery in the body of the world of creation" (Arabic).
- ²⁷ The word is unclear.
- ²⁸ "The Treatise of Alexander" (e. g. Alexander Tumanski). See also below.
- ²⁹ "New History" (Persian).
- ³⁰ *The (Persian) Bayán*.
- ³¹ "Let us see what God wills" (Persian).
- ³² E.g. in England.
- ³³ "The Sure Handle."
- ³⁴ "The Law."
- ³⁵ An abbreviation which stands for the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.
- ³⁶ "Aghsans" (Branches) — descendants of Bahá'u'lláh.
- ³⁷ This term usually applied by the Isma'ili's to their traveling preachers can in the given context be translated as "a teacher."

Mysticism East and West

Farhang Jahanpour

During recent years there has been a great debate about the clash of civilizations, which ultimately boils down to a clash between religions, because religions form the moral and spiritual basis of all civilizations. There is no doubt that there is a great deal of diversity and even fundamental differences between various different religions. It is an undeniable fact that established religions have given rise to many conflicts throughout history, but the main question is to what extent have those conflicts been based on fundamental religious differences and to what extent have they been due to political and historical differences? True interfaith work needs to be carried out with a full awareness of our differences and disagreements as well as our commonalities and similarities. Interfaith collaboration means to trust and respect one another enough to be able to differ, to be able to exchange unbiased and constructive criticism without wishing to trivialize other faiths or diminish mutual respect.

Even a cursory glance at the main teachings of the Eastern and the so-called Semitic or Abrahamic religions would reveal some basic differences between them.¹ Eastern religions generally believe in Monism or the Oneness of Being, and maintain that man will be ultimately united with God; while Semitic religions believe in Monotheism and maintain that God is and will always remain transcendent. Therefore, although man may attain God's presence, union with the divine essence will be impossible.

At the same time, although it would be inaccurate to suggest that all religions are identical in their outward teachings and their worldview, nevertheless, in the area of mysticism we have the greatest degree of unity and similarity of views among the mystics from different religious traditions. While religious

dogma and theology that are solely based on concepts and ideas create differences and disunity, the mystical understanding of the underlying reality of all religions can provide a basis of unity between them. Each mystical tradition speaks about the 'journey in God,' of intense longing for God and devotion of the soul to God, of surrender and purification, of renunciation and abandonment, through union in Love. It has been said that all mystics recognize one another, because they come from the same spiritual country.

The late Professor Cantwell-Smith of McGill University believed that religions could be divided into two parts: 'Faith,' which is a personal matter and concerns belief in spiritual values, and the other aspect of religion which he called 'accumulated tradition.'² Another way of putting this idea is to say that one can distinguish between the 'original revelations' as far as they could be understood by going to the original sources, and the 'accumulated traditions' and various interpretations to which the original teachings have been subjected. Naturally, the 'accumulated traditions' by which most religions are known today have been responsible for most of the differences between religions and also between the contemporary forms of religions and what their founders originally revealed.

Additionally, one can make a further distinction, between the esoteric and the exoteric aspects of religions, between the mystical essence and the outward and time-bound teachings and laws. Most religious scriptures have made references to the distinctions between the literal texts and their deeper meanings, "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."³ The Koran refers to *Muhkamat* and *Mutishabihat*.⁴ *Muhkamat* refers to the plain texts that could be understood by all, and *Mutishabihat* refers to the allegorical and symbolic meanings of the text that can be understood only by those who are 'firmly grounded in knowledge.' This is why religious scriptures exhort the people to read the verses with the eye of the soul. They speak about the need for awakening, for enlightenment, for proper understanding, for opening one's eyes, one's ears, and one's heart.

This shows that the true meaning of the scriptures cannot be understood by mere reading, but through contemplation, by becoming blind in order to see, by becoming deaf in order to hear, by becoming ignorant in order to receive wisdom. (HW Per. 11) In the words of St Augustine, "I believe in order to understand."⁵ A deeper understanding of the words of God is one of the functions of *Irfán* or mysticism. In the words of Rumi:

Gusham shanid qesse-ye iman-o mast shod.

Ku sahm-e chashm surat-e imanam arezust

My ears heard the story of faith and became intoxicated.

Where is the portion of my eyes, my wish is to see the face of Truth.

In Arabic, the term *'Irfán* (mysticism) comes from the root *'Arafa*, to know, to recognise, rather than to be acquainted with. It refers to seeing and feeling and knowing the Truth, rather than having heard or read about it. It denotes *gnosis* rather than knowledge. In English, the word mysticism comes from the same root as 'myth' or 'mystery.' All are derived from the Greek word *musteion*, which means to close the eye or the mouth, to close oneself to the outside world. All three words are therefore rooted in an experience of contemplation or silence. These words often have negative connotations in the West today. The word 'myth,' for example, is often used as a synonym for a lie; in popular parlance, a myth is something that is not true. Also the word 'mystery' is something that needs to be cleared up, to be sorted out. It is frequently associated with muddled thinking. Similarly, 'mysticism' is frequently associated with the superstitious, with people who lack rationality.

It is curious that even in some supposedly religious systems, such as the present regime in Iran or under the Safavids, or the Wahhabis or the Puritans in Christianity, mysticism is frowned upon. Both under the Safavids, the Wahhabis, and the Taliban the Sufis were persecuted. It should be borne in mind, therefore, that mysticism is not the same as dogmatic religion. In many ways, it is its antithesis. So when we speak of Islamic,

Jewish, Christian, Buddhist or Hindu mysticism we are not talking about Islamic, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist or Hindu theologies and codes of law, but about their spiritual concepts that have a great deal in common.

However, mysticism does not deal merely with mystery, but also with the sacred. Sacred, too, is one of a whole group of cognate words: sacrament, sacrilege, consecrate, sacrosanct, sacrifice which means to make sacred. The root of the word sacred, *sacra*, means belonging to a deity. It has the connotation of the divine. One can make a few generalisations about what follows from the terms *ʿIrfân*, mysticism and sacred.

1) Sacred presupposes the divine. You cannot speak of sunlight without the sun. Without the presupposition of a deity there cannot be any concept of sacred. The main habit of a materialistic or atheistic mind is that it denies the existence of the sacred. If there is no God, it follows logically that nothing can be sacred. We may respect certain ideas or certain places due to their utilitarian nature, but their importance lies in what we derive from them, not in what they are in themselves; while the term sacred refers to their innate or intrinsic value.

2) Just as there can be no sacred without God, there can be no wholeness without God. According to a materialistic outlook, the universe is made up of disjointed or continuous particles that follow the blind laws of physics, and there is nothing that will link them together and that will give them meaning. The world may be fantastic and mind-boggling, but ultimately it is “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”⁶ Even worse, according to the post-modernist thinking, it is not even a tale told by idiot, but the hallucinations of a sick mind. Either the world is the Word of God, the revelation of God, the will of God — “Be and it was” — or if, according to Nietzsche, God is dead, by definition the world is also dead.

It is the loss of contact with the divine, with the sacred and with the mystery that constitutes the Fall from Grace. This loss makes man a lowly and a lonely wanderer in an absurd, pointless and degenerating universe. According to mysticism,

on the other hand, God exists and is the ground of being, and gives meaning, purpose and significance to man's life.

3) The third presupposition is God's immanence, His indwelling. The mystics speak of creation as the moving image of the eternity, or a reflection of the divine. God reveals himself in His creation. It does not mean that God and matter are one and the same, but that matter is not conceivable without God.

The concept of God's immanence is not limited to Hinduism and Buddhism. Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith are also full of references to God's revelation in the world. The Bible teaches that God created man in His own image.⁷ The Koran teaches that "Whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God."⁸ In Bahá'u'lláh's *Hidden Words* we read:

O Son of Being! Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy radiance and seek none other than Me. For I have created thee rich and have bountifully shed My favour upon thee. (HW Ar. 11)

4) God is never an object. He can be known only through Himself becoming the absolute subject of our being, an epiphany. In other words, we know God through Himself. The Sufis say that God is both the lover and the beloved. Man is thirsty for God and God is thirsty for man. Man seeks God and God seeks man. There is a union or trinity between Love, the Lover and the Beloved. In the words of Rumi:

Parro-bal-e ma kamand-e eshq-e ust.

Mukeshanash mikeshad ta kuy-e dust

Our wings and feathers are the lassos of His love.

They pull us by our hair to the realm of the Beloved.

As Bahá'u'lláh says, "Love Me that I may love thee."⁹ Or:

O Son of Spirit! I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest

*find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.*¹⁰

5) Creation is a revelation not about God, but revelation of God itself. "The heaven and earth are full of thy glory. The heavens declare the glory of God."¹¹ If God is not present in a grain of sand he is not present in heaven either. In the words of William Blake (1757-1827), true knowledge consists of:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an Hour.¹²

The same universality that exists in the material laws also exists in spiritual realm. If this was not so there could not be any contact with the sacred either in life or in art or in religion and mysticism.

Immanence and Transcendence

Hinduism and Buddhism are often described as religions of monism. They allegedly believe that the whole universe is part and parcel of God, and they do not make any distinction between the world of the matter and the world of the spirit. But Brahma, which is the Sanskrit word for the Absolute, is the supreme divinity, who is transcendent as well as immanent, beyond all limitations and definitions. He is the principle of search as well as the object sought, the animating ideal and its fulfilment. *Mundaka Upanishad* says about Him: "He is the Lord of all, that from which all things originate, and in which they finally disappear."¹³

Brahma is the immanent ground and operative principle in all subjects and objects. At the beginning of *Kena Upanishad* we read: "What cannot be spoken with words, but that whereby words are spoken; know that alone to be Brahma, the Spirit, and not what people here adore. What cannot be thought with the mind, but that whereby mind can think; know that alone to be Brahma, the Spirit, and not what people here adore."¹⁴

Chandogya Upanishad expresses the spiritual experience of Brahma in these words: "There is a Spirit which is mind and life, light and truth and vast spaces. He contains all works and desires and all perfumes and all tastes. He enfolds the whole universe, and in silence is loving to all."¹⁵

If we ask where is Brahma, the Spirit of the Universe, the answer is given in *Kena Upanishad*: "He is seen in nature in the wonder of a flash of lightning. He comes to the soul in the wonder of a flash of vision."¹⁶ The glory and majesty of Brahma are expressed in these beautiful words of the *Bhagavadgita*: "If the light of a thousand suns suddenly arose in the sky, that splendour might be compared to the radiance of the Supreme Spirit, and Arjuna saw in that radiance the whole universe in its variety, standing in a vast unity in the body of God of Gods."¹⁷ The following passage from the *Bhagavadgita* expresses the all-inclusive nature of Brahma:

I am the creation and the dissolution of the whole universe. There is not anything greater than I, and all things hang on me, even as precious gems upon a string. I am moisture in the water, light in the sun and moon, invocation in the Vedas, sound in the firmament, human nature in mankind, sweet-smelling savour in the earth, glory in the source of light. In all things I am life; and I am zeal in the zealous; and know O Arjoon! that I am the eternal seed of all nature. I am the understanding of the wise, the glory of the proud, the strength of the strong, free from lust and anger.¹⁸

Mudaka Upanishad expresses the same doctrine in a different way:

As from a well-blazing fire, sparks
By the thousand issue forth of like form,
So from the imperishable, my friend, beings manifold
Are produced, and thither also go.¹⁹

Hinduism preaches an unbounded toleration of all other religions, because although they may differ in appearance yet in reality they are all of the same substance. A Hindu song says:

Into the bosom of the one great sea

Flows streams that come from hills on every side;
 Their names are various as their springs;
 And thus in every land do men bow down
 To one great God, though known by many names.²⁰

In the Upanishads again we read: "My names are many as declared by the great seers." Again, "Him who is the One Real, sages name variously." "This indestructible enduring reality is to be looked upon as one only."²¹

Hinduism makes allowance for the different stages of people's spiritual maturity and allows different people to approach God in the way that best suits them. *Chandogya Upanishad* teaches us that the man of action finds his God in fire, the man of feeling in heart, and the feeble-minded in the idol, but "the strong in spirit finds God everywhere."²² To the Hindus, God's true essence is completely beyond the understanding of even the wisest of men and so no matter what we call him is a creation of our mind and is ultimately of little importance. The best thing is if we can rise above the names and attributes of God and worship him in his abstract reality:

The worshippers of the Absolute are the highest in rank; second to them are the worshippers of the personal God, then come the worshippers of the incarnations like *Rama*, *Krishna*, *Buddha*; below them are those who worship ancestors, deities and sages, and lowest of all are the worshippers of the petty forces and spirits.²³

This is why when it comes to the definition of God, the Hindus prefer to answer in negative terms: *neti, neti*, no, no. Hindu thinkers bring out the sense of the otherness of the Divine by the use of the negatives: "There the eye goes not, speech goes not, nor mind, we know not, we understand not; how one would teach it?"²⁴ In essence, they say that we know all that God is not, but what He is we do not know.

At the same time, in many Hindu texts one can see a distinction between the world of being and the revelation of Brahma and his essence. If read properly, *Bhagavadgita* is indeed a kind of *Mantiq at-Tayr* or *The Conference of Birds* by Farid al-Din Attar (ca. 1142 – ca. 1220),²⁵ or *The Seven Valleys* by Bahá'u'lláh.²⁶ It talks of the stages of *Arjuna's* gradual

development from bewilderment to search, to detachment, to humility, to submission, to enlightenment and to union with the Brahma. While at the beginning of the book *Arjuna* is the lord and master and Krishna is his charioteer, at the end the roles are reversed and *Arjuna* discovers the glory of Krishna. At times we feel that the words of *Arjuna* are our own words: "Speak to me again of thy power and thy glory, for I am never tired, never, of hearing thy words of life."²⁷

At this point, the *Bhagavadgita* rises to the highest points and *Krishna* reveals: "I am the beginning, I am the middle, I am the end. I am the undying Lord of creation. Whenever there is the decay of religion and an ascendancy of irreligion I am revealed from age to age."²⁸

Buddhism and Nirvana (Nibbana)

Many Western observers have seen something negative in nirvana as a goal. This seems perverse to the Buddhists, for whom nirvana is above all supreme happiness. The main schools of Indian Buddhism agree that nirvana is not a mere negation. Rather it is unconditional *dharma*, not expressible in spatial or temporal terms; knowledge of it dissolves ignorance and ends craving.

Nirvana means total extinction. However, Nirvana is not total nothingness. It contains the concept of the Void, the *sonyata*, but also of fulfilment. By avoiding the two extremes, indulgence in sensual pleasure and self-mortification, one gains the enlightenment of the middle path which produces insight, produces knowledge, and conduces to tranquility, to higher knowledge, to Enlightenment, to Nirvana. According to Buddhist scriptures, Nirvana is ineffable and inexpressible, and we cannot employ any category to describe what the Void is. Nothing can be said of it. However, it is something. It is that thing out of which everything comes. The Buddhists call it *Suchness*, it is *Whateverness* of being. It is the underlying unity of all things. It is the great reservoir of all possible potentialities. It is the ground of being, in the same way that the ocean is the ground of the waves. All waves, whatever their shapes and forms, have the same water and formlessness as their substance, their suchness.

Often Nirvana is referred to in positive terms. Buddha describes Nirvana as:

...the far shore, the subtle, the very difficult to see, the unaging, the stable, the undisintegrating, the unmanifest, the unproliferated, the peaceful, the deathless, the sublime, the auspicious, the secure, the destruction of craving, the wonderful, the amazing, the unailing, the unailing state, the unafflicted, dispassion, purity, freedom, the unadhesive, the island, the shelter, the asylum, the refuge...²⁹

In its negative aspect, it is our total extinction to the self and all that is not God. In its positive side, it is the union of us with the great Source. Nirvana is release because it is the awareness of the illusoriness of all phenomenal being and their union with the great Void. Life is like an ever-flowing river, never being the same. We want to cross the river to the other side, which is Nirvana. Buddhism is the boat, which will carry us to the other side. After crossing not only one leaves behind the first shore and the river, but also the boat that has transported one to this shore; so that at that point even Buddha and Buddhism do not exist any longer. One achieves one's own Buddhahood and Enlightenment.

However, it has to be borne in mind that Nirvana is not merely a negative state, but plays a role in Buddhist life that is analogous to union with God. Edward Conze points out that the Buddhists often use the same imagery as the theists:

We are told that Nirvana is permanent, stable, imperishable, immovable, ageless, deathless, unborn, and unbecome, that it is power, bliss and happiness, the secure refuge, the shelter and the place of unassailable security; that it is the real Truth and the supreme Reality; that it is the good, the supreme good, and the one and only consummation of our life, the eternal, hidden and incomprehensible Peace.³⁰

Buddha insisted that Nirvana could not be defined or discussed as though it were any other human reality. Buddha always refused to answer questions about Nirvana or the Ultimate Reality because it was 'improper' and

'inappropriate.' We could not define nirvana because our words and concepts are tied to the world of sense and flux. Buddha taught:

There is monks, an unknown, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded. If monks, there were not there this unborn, unbecome, unmade, uncompounded, there would not here be an escape from the born, the become, the made, the compounded. But because there is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded, therefore, there is an escape from the born, the become, the made, the compounded.³¹

The reason given for the Buddha's silence regarding the nature of God or Nirvana is practical: such matters are time-wasting and distracting; they do not conduce to the aim. However, it is totally wrong to see the Buddhism as a form of atheism or Nirvana as nothingness.

Zoroaster's Teachings

The first important point which Zoroastrian sacred books preach is the existence of an Omniscient Creator called Ahura Mazda. The name Ahura Mazda is full of significance. *Ahura* (Sanskrit *Asura*) means "Lord of Life." He is the Creator and upholder of all life, and thus represents the spirit side of the universe. Mazda may be explained as made up from *maz* (Sanskrit *mah*) and the root *da* (Sanskrit *dha*), and the word may be translated as "Creator of Life and Creator of Matter." Thus this name brings out the fundamental duality of our visible universe — Spirit and Matter. It implies that the Supreme Being is the Creator and Upholder of these two great principles.

This supreme Ahura Mazda is necessarily invisible and intangible to our physical senses. He can only be "seen" through the "eye of the spirit."³² For human beings, He must necessarily remain a mere name. To understand Him, therefore, Zoroaster has pointed out a method through the *Amesha-Spenta* (usually translated as the 'Holy Immortals'). In later ages, these have been understood as almost equivalent to Arch-angels, deities

standing next to the Godhead in rank, each with a special 'department' of the universe assigned to him or her to look after. They can also be described as God's names and attributes.

Western scholars have tried to explain them as 'personified qualities of Godhead,' but that seems somewhat inadequate. To begin with, they are six in number, divided into two groups of three each. In one group all three bear names in the feminine gender and represent the Mother-side of the Supreme. In the other group the names are actually in the neuter gender, but they stand for masculine concepts and represent the Father-side of the Supreme. Thus we have among the highest divinities two clear groups, one representing the active side, the Fatherhood, and the other representing the passive side or the Motherhood of the Supreme. These two also correspond respectively to the *Ahura* and the *Mazda* side of God.

It must not be forgotten that all these six are not different Beings, nor even the 'creation' of the Supreme. They are in very truth aspects of *Ahura Mazda*. A better comparison would be with the 'rays' of various colours that make up the white light of the Sun. These six 'Holy Immortals' together with *Ahura Mazda* Himself make a *Heptad*, who are known in later literature as the "Seven *Amesha-Spenta*." But the phrase used for these seven in the *Gathas* is very significant — they are called there 'the *Ahura Mazdas*' (in the plural number).³³

The three 'aspects' of the Supreme on the Father side are named *Asha*, *Vohu Mana* and *Kshathra*. These names have been usually translated "Righteousness or Law," "Good Mind" and "Power or Domination." But these renderings convey a very faint idea of all that these signify in the *Gathas*.

Asha stands for the knowledge of the Law of God and for the Law itself. In many places *Asha* stand for the 'Eternal Law of God,' which is identical with Righteousness. In later theology *Asha-Vahishta* (the Highest *Asha*) becomes identified with the Sacred Fire, the physical symbol of Zoroaster's religion. The worshipper expresses this wish: "Through the highest *Asha* through the best *Asha* may we catch a glimpse of Thee, may we draw near unto Thee, may we be in perfect union with Thee."³⁴ *Asha*, in short, is the Righteousness of the Father in Heaven,

which we should seek first so that all other things 'should be added' unto us.

There are six *Amesha-Spentas*, three masculine and three feminine. The masculine ones are:

1. *Asha*, the Eternal Law of God or the Supreme Righteousness.
2. *Vohu-Mana*, 'the Loving Mind' or 'Love.' In Yasna the worshipper and the worshipped are called 'the Lover and the Beloved.'
3. *Kshathra*, After achieving Righteousness and Love one should translate them into action. He must seek the help of the third 'Aspect' of the Lord, *Kshathra*, who represents the strength of the Lord — bestowed upon those who truly serve their brothers. It is the Creative Activity of the Supreme.

Feminine *Amesha-Spentas* are:

4. *Armaiti*, usually translated piety, it is the counterpart of Asha on the Mother side. She is the 'Daughter of Ahura Mazda' and our ultimate refuge.³⁵
5. *Ameretat* is immortality.
6. *Hauravatat* is Wholeness or Perfection.

This wonderful and poetic teaching of the Holy Immortals may be summed up thus: Every human being must understand the Eternal Law of God of Truth and Righteousness. He must realise the power of Love, and he must translate both these into acts of Loving Service. All through his striving he must hold fast to Faith and thus attain the Goal of Perfection and Immortality.

The terms used to describe Ahura Mazda are always warm and friendly. He is portrayed not as a stern judge but as loving and accessible. He is over and over celebrated in the *Gathas* in many beautiful terms. Ahura is always referred to as a "Kind Friend" or a "Loving Father."³⁶ He is consulted at the time of difficulties. He is questioned at moments of uncertainty.

Communion with Him always leads to satisfaction and assurance.

Semitic Religions

The biblical God is also both immanent and transcendent. He is the God of the farthest remoteness and yet he is the One who is with man and to whom man may cry "Hear my prayer!"³⁷ "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth."³⁸ "Seek thee the Lord while he may be found, call thee upon him while he is near."³⁹ Hence, to speak of the expansion of life may be a true word of prayer: "Out of straitness I called upon the Lord: the Lord answered me, and let me into enlargement."⁴⁰

In Hebrew scriptures He and Thou are made to follow immediately upon one another; all meditation about God soon resolves itself into invocations addressed to him, into an expression of personal intimacy and connection: "The Lord is a high tower for the oppressed, a high tower in times of trouble, and they that know thy name put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee."⁴¹

To know of this One God, in whom all things and each thing find meaning and significance, to bear witness to Him, constitutes the monotheism given to the world by the Prophets of Israel. Man experiences in himself the meaning of breathing in that air of infinitude and eternity which embraces his earthly existence. "The nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge."⁴² Thus, the Psalmist expresses his yearning: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein."⁴³ "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory."⁴⁴

"All nations are as nothing before him, they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity."⁴⁵ They are only a "drop in a bucket" or "the small dust of the balance."⁴⁶ The parts of the earth are like "a grain of sand," and a thousand years are in his sight "but as yesterday when it is passed."⁴⁷ "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork."⁴⁸ "O Lord our God, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Thou has set thy glory above the heavens."⁴⁹

God is "from everlasting to everlasting," and yet has "been our dwelling place in all generations."⁵⁰ "For thus says the High and Lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy and: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."⁵¹ Anxiety and confidence unite together. There is exaltation and there is awe. As the prophet, in like mood says: "and thy heart shall tremble and be enlarged."⁵²

The above verses would be very familiar to Muslims. Compare with these verses the following verses of the Koran: "Whithersoever you turn there is the face of God."⁵³ "We shall show them our signs in the heavens [in the firmament] and in their own souls."⁵⁴ So God is manifest both in the world of nature, as well as, supremely, in the soul of man. "If my servants inquire of thee concerning Me," God charges Muḥammad, "lo, I am near."⁵⁵ Indeed, "God is closer to man than his own jugular vein."⁵⁶ The Islamic prayer addresses God as "He who is far and cannot be seen and is close and hears every whisper." In the Light Verse, we read:

*God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth. His Light is like a niche wherein is a lamp, the lamp encased in a glass, the glass as it were a glistening star. From a blessed tree it is lighted, the olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would well nigh shine out, even though fire touched it not. It is light upon light.*⁵⁷

This closeness to God is frequently reflected in the Koranic verses, too. The merging of the Lover and the Beloved is a recurring theme in the Koran: "Then He turned to them, that they might turn."⁵⁸ "God was pleased with them, and they were well pleased with God,"⁵⁹ so God addresses the blessed saints in Paradise: "O thou soul in peace, return to thy Lord, pleased with Him and He pleased with you;"⁶⁰ for "He loveth them and they love Him."⁶¹ This last verse is of great significance as supporting the Sufi doctrine of Love (*mahabba*) and as providing the ultimate authority for the idea of a trinity of Lover, Beloved and Love.

Therefore, while superficially one may be able to differentiate between the beliefs of the Eastern and the Semitic

religions regarding God and the Absolute, a deeper reading of them shows that in essence they are much closer to each other than often realised. They all believe in a supernatural force behind the creation. Although they may differ in their definitions of the Supreme Being, they all maintain that words are inadequate in defining him. They maintain that the divine essence is also manifest in the world and especially in man. They stress that the divine force is loving towards its creation, and they also believe that there is an inherent, mutual feeling of love and attraction in man towards that divine reality, and that the highest aim and end of life is closeness or union with the Beloved. Therefore, regardless of whatever name is given to that divine reality, all paths ultimately lead to the same source.

NOTES

¹ Many of these differences have been examined by Dr Moojan Momen in his erudite paper, "Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics," published in *Studies in Honor of the Late Ḥusayn M. Balyuzi: Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions* vol. 5, ed. Moojan Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1988).

² Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Mentor Books, 1962),

³ *2 Corinthians* 3:6

⁴ *Koran*, 3: 7

⁵ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 43, 7, 9: PL 38, 257-258. "I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe."

⁶ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 5.5

⁷ *Genesis*, I: 27

⁸ *Koran*, 2:115

⁹ *Ibid*, Arabic, 2

¹⁰ *Ibid*, Arabic, 13

¹¹ *Pslams*, 19:1

¹² William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

¹³ *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3:12

¹⁴ *Kena Upanishad*, I:1-7

¹⁵ *Chandogya Upanishad*, III-xiv-1

¹⁶ *Kena Upanishad*, IV:3

¹⁷ *Bhagavadgita*, XI:12

¹⁸ *Ibid*, VII:6

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- ¹⁹ *Mudaka Upanishad*, II.i.1-5
- ²⁰ Charles E Gover, *The Folksongs of Southern India* (1995, p.165)
- ²¹ *Katha Upanishad*, chapter 5
- ²² *Chandogya Upanishad*, III-xvii-7
- ²³ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (1926, p 64)
- ²⁴ *Kena Upanishad*, I:3
- ²⁵ For a translation of this book see: Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis, *The Conference of Birds* (Penguin Classics)
- ²⁶ See Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1986)
- ²⁷ *Bhagavadgita*, 10:18
- ²⁸ *Bhagavadgita*, 10:20-21
- ²⁹ *Samyutta Nikaya*, SN43:14
- ³⁰ Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, Oxford U.P., 1959, p 40.
- ³¹ *Udana* 8:13; quoted and translated in Paul Steintha, *Udana* (London, 1985), p. 81.
- ³² *Yasna*: 45:8
- ³³ *Yasna*, 30:9 and 31:4
- ³⁴ *Yasna* 60:11
- ³⁵ *Yasna*, 45:4
- ³⁶ *Yasna*, 31:21
- ³⁷ *Psalms*, 4:1
- ³⁸ *Psalms*, 145:18
- ³⁹ *Isaiah*, 55:6
- ⁴⁰ *Psalms*, 118:5
- ⁴¹ *Psalms*, 9:9
- ⁴² *Psalms*, 73:28
- ⁴³ *Psalms*, 24:1
- ⁴⁴ *Isaiah*, 6:3
- ⁴⁵ *Isaiah*, 40:17
- ⁴⁶ *Isaiah*, 40:15
- ⁴⁷ *Psalms*, 90:4
- ⁴⁸ *Psalms*, 19:1
- ⁴⁹ *Psalms*, 8:1
- ⁵⁰ *Psalm*, 90:1-2
- ⁵¹ *Isaiah*, 57:15
- ⁵² *Isaiah*, 60:5

⁵³ *Koran*, 2:109

⁵⁴ *Koran*, 41:53

⁵⁵ *Koran*, 2:186

⁵⁶ *Koran*, 50:16

⁵⁷ *Koran*, 24: 35-37

⁵⁸ *Koran*, 9:118

⁵⁹ *Koran*, 58:22

⁶⁰ *Koran*, 89:27

⁶¹ *Koran*, 5:57

The Word is the Master Key for the Whole World

The Bahá'í Revelation and the "Teaching and Spirit of the Cause" in Dialogical and Personal Thinking

Wolfgang A. Klebel

Introduction¹

The title of this paper concerns the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh: "*The Word is the master key for the whole world...*" This inquiry is about the meaning of this statement, and especially about the following statement, which further develops the meaning and role of the Word: "*...inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked.*" (TB 173)

In other words, the Word is like a key, actually, like the master key, that is a key that opens all doors and is, at the same time, the origin of all other keys. This key assures, uniquely and dependably, the opening to the meaning of the whole world and its relationship to heaven. The Word is this special key to the hearts of men, to the human spirit, which opens this world towards the doors of heaven.

In a prayer Bahá'u'lláh has described the power of the Word of God for the believer and connects it to unity, knowledge, assurance and steadfastness:

I implore Thee, O my God and my Master, by Thy word through which they who have believed in Thy unity have soared up into the atmosphere of Thy knowledge, and they who are devoted to Thee have ascended into the

heaven of Thy oneness, to inspire Thy loved ones with that which will assure their hearts in Thy Cause. Endue them with such steadfastness that nothing whatsoever will hinder them from turning towards Thee. (PM 188)

In the same way ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained the biblical and Bahá’í meaning of “heaven” connecting it to the Word, which He calls the supreme station and the seat of the Sun of Truth:

He (Christ) said: “I came down from heaven and likewise will go to heaven.” By “heaven” is not meant this infinite phenomenal space, but “heaven” signifies the word of the divine kingdom which is the supreme station and seat of the Sun of Truth. (TAB 192)

To follow the meaning of this momentous and weighty statement about the Word of God in the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh is the purpose of this paper.

The method used is to first explore the meaning of these concepts in the Bahá’í Writings and then, in a second section, to compare the Sacred Words with the writings of Ferdinand Ebner and others, who have developed what is called a philosophy of dialogical and personal thinking.

This philosophy seems to be inspired, at least in the understanding of this writer, by the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, even though Ferdinand Ebner, as well as his interpreters, have most likely never heard of this Revelation. The fact that this is possible is based on the statement of Bahá’u’lláh when He said in the “Tablet of Wisdom”:

A true philosopher would never deny God nor His evidences, rather would he acknowledge His glory and overpowering majesty which overshadow all created things. Verily We love those men of knowledge who have brought to light such things as promote the best interests of humanity, and We aided them through the potency of Our behest, for well are We able to achieve Our purpose. (TB 150)

Certainly, Ferdinand Ebner would neither deny God nor His evidences, and since his philosophy corresponds so widely with the Bible and Bahá’í Writings, as will be demonstrated in this

paper, this writer makes the personal assumption that he was not only aided but also loved by Bahá'u'lláh. Should we not apply this sentence to the philosophers who lived after the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, as well as, to the philosophers before Him, whom He extolled, praising the merits of philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle?

The idea, that there might be a correspondence between modern philosophy and the Bahá'í Revelation, is not much explored by Bahá'í writers and researchers. Nevertheless, there are courageous attempts made in this direction.²

It is interesting to note that, for example, Terry Culhane³ never raises the question of how to explain the similarity of ideas when comparing thoughts of Ken Wilber with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. In his otherwise excellent book he describes Ken Wilber's theory about modernity, and he noted parallels in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh without any further consideration so that a reader could possibly believe that both Wilber and Bahá'u'lláh are inspired by the same source. The uniqueness of the Bahá'í Revelation is lost, and its world-moving and world-creating influence can easily be overlooked. In other words, what Bahá'u'lláh said about His Revelation is not really taken into account.

This writer has in another paper⁴ not only described the similarities of Wilber's thoughts with some Bahá'í principles, but has also noted the substantial differences between their basic philosophical understanding. Wilber's philosophy is basically pantheistic, and in his mystical tendencies he attempts to find a way to God through the development of the human rational ability, independent of all Manifestations. Wilber explains that the previous founders of religions were constrained by pre-scientific thinking, and he regards them as unimportant and irrelevant. Therefore, his thinking can be described as "spiritual materialism," because the goal of his meditations are to reach the divine through higher developed spiritual abilities of man. He does not speak of a personal God, but of "the all-pervading World Soul," and he states that: "every I becomes a God, and every WE becomes God's sincerest worship, and every IT becomes God's temple."⁵

This paper is another endeavor of this kind, and while certainly provisional, and on the level of a personal opinion; it follows a statement written on behalf of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, which said:

It is specially gratifying to see you realize the fact that when the world has developed and been enlightened enough through the unseen Powers of the Almighty, to be led to the teachings and spirit of the Cause, it will be our shameful task to go round proclaiming such principles as we were taught so many years before and none of which we had lived up to. (MSEI 56)

Can it be denied that the unseen powers of the Almighty *can and have* actually influenced philosophers who lived after this Revelation to be led to the teachings and the spirit of the Cause? And should we avoid the admittedly shameful task, as the Guardian instructed his secretary to write, to proclaim the principles of the Faith by using the enlightened findings of these philosophers? And when the above quote continues by stating that we have not lived up to these principles, it seems to point a finger at the sore spot of our present situation, which has not changed much since these words were written.

What easily is overlooked is the fact that we have no absolute choice in the philosophical assumptions and preconceptions we bring to the Faith. We are frequently warned by Bahá'u'lláh that knowledge can be a veil preventing understanding of His revelation, nevertheless, we in the West come from post-Christian, Christian and often Protestant backgrounds, and carry the eggshells of our previous understandings with us.

Consequently, we think and perceive the world in the light of our philosophical tradition and tend to explain the Writings in that sense, often enough without reflecting on that fact. As much as most Bahá'ís try to think in the way of the Writings, traditional influences can never be totally avoided. Therefore, any modern philosophical vision, which is critical of these assumptions and which seems to be closer to the original Christian and Bahá'í Revelations, can be very helpful indeed.

As a matter of fact, it is the purpose of this paper to show that the Bahá'í Revelation has changed the way we need to think

about the basic reality of this world, to change the ontological assumptions of traditional philosophy. The Bahá'í Revelation has (we can describe it in a dialectic process) abolished the old forms of understanding, has conserved their perennial truth and has elevated them to a new understanding. And it is now our obligation to find a new philosophical footing in the Bahá'í Writings. Cannot what Shoghi Effendi said (below) about the religions of the past also be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the philosophies of history?

These divinely-revealed religions, as a close observer has graphically expressed it, "are doomed not to die, but to be reborn ... 'Does not the child succumb in the youth and the youth in the man; yet neither child nor youth perishes?'" (WOB 114)

The basic and underlying thought presented in this paper can be stated here, anticipating its final conclusions.

- If the reality of the world is fundamentally personal and spiritual and not substantial and material, and
- if the Word is the cause, the mediator and key to all spiritual reality

Then it follows that

- *The Word and only the Word* is the cause and origin of all reality.
- It brings into being all creative change in this world.
- The Word is further the cause of the beginning and end of the world,
- as well as being the cause of and creating the New World Order.

Before this comparison of the Writings and the dialogical thinking can be made, it is necessary to explore the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh in this new area of understanding. What does He say about the Word; what is His understanding of the relationship between the Word, between spirituality or what He calls the doors to heaven? The first three chapters are dedicated to this task, yet, it must be mentioned that this

research was done with some understanding of Ebner's philosophy, because without this new understanding, the traditional approach would act like a veil, preventing one from having insight into the sacred Words.

This is actually not only a philosophical consideration; it was a very personal experience. The book that introduced me into Ebner's writings was given to me when I had only an initial knowledge of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. At that time I could not understand the writings of Ferdinand Ebner and laid the book aside, without attempting to read more than a few paragraphs. Ten years later, when I accidentally looked again into this book, I was fascinated by its philosophy and could not prevent comparing it with many statements of the Bahá'í Faith, reading and re-reading it and finding other books about this seminal philosopher and others who presented similar ideas.

In fact, the understanding of the Faith led me to an understanding of Ferdinand Ebner's thoughts. The correspondence was evident after I had only read the first chapter, and it fascinated me throughout the reading. The meaning of this experience can be best explained with the words of the Guardian, as quoted above. I personally was surprised by the idea that the power of the Almighty could have enlightened Ferdinand Ebner among others,⁶ who, after the devastating experience in the ditches and battle lines of World War I, had developed this philosophy based on a new understanding of the Christian faith.

The other basic statement of Bahá'u'lláh about philosophy is equally verified where He said: *The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets.* (TB 145) Ferdinand Ebner bases his thinking on the Christian message, mainly following Kierkegaard, yet developing his thinking further. In a new and original way, he based his thinking on the Prolog to the Gospel of John about the Word that was in the Beginning with God. Of this passage 'Abdu'l-Bahá had said:

Consider the statement recorded in the first chapter of the book of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This

statement is brief but replete with the greatest meanings. Its applications are illimitable and beyond the power of books or words to contain and express.
(PUP 154)

While starting out from the philosophical understanding of the word in concrete speech, all of Ferdinand Ebner's philosophy concludes in this statement, and when he speaks about his philosophical findings about man, he states that it is not original to him, because it has been stated before in the Gospel of John.

It became clear to me that man is through the word, what he is i.e., a human being. That in the word is the key to his spiritual life. This basic thought is essentially a 'revolutionary' thought, it is the most revolutionary thought, humankind will ever think. But this thought is not from me, and from whom it is, it is not only a thought, but a life: 'The Life.'⁷

With these words he is referring to John 1:1-3

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

It has to be clearly stated in the beginning of this paper that this writer is not an expert in the philosophy of Ferdinand Ebner. As a matter of fact, Ebner's original opus⁸ is not even available to him. He basically relies on two excellent descriptions of Ebner's work in which a rich selections of Ebner's statements are quoted, giving quite a thorough understanding of Ebner's original writings.⁹

Nevertheless, even in this form the parallels with the Bahá'í Scriptures cannot be overlooked, and many concepts of Ebner allow a better understanding of Bahá'í principles compared to the attempt to understand the Writings with the tools of classical and traditional philosophies.

The claim frequently made that the Bahá'í Writings are presented in the frame of Platonic or Neo-platonic philosophy will be especially clarified and criticized. The difference between an idea and the word; between idealistic or substantive thinking and dialogical and personal thinking, is clearly developed by Ebner and seems to distinguish Platonic or Neo-platonic thinking from the new dialogical thinking.

Without going any further into this issue at this point, the traditional understanding of the Christian message needs to be questioned as well, as far as "the Word" of the Gospel of John is concerned. Has it not suffered the same fate, being understood in the Platonic tradition, rather than the biblical Tradition of Genesis?

Ebner anticipated the critique of traditional metaphysic by Heidegger, but placed it strictly in the frame of substantial thinking versus dialogical thinking, as will be explained below. If the statement of Bahá'u'lláh in the title of this paper would be following the Platonic tradition, He would have to say that the "Idea is the master key to the whole world." But it is not the idea and/or the realm of ideas, but rather the Word, like in the biblical tradition.¹⁰ The fact that the Greek word *logos* can mean reason, idea and word has been one of the causes of this confusion. With Ebner we must interpret the *logos* in the tradition of Genesis 1:3 "*And God said, Let there be light: and there was light;*" and it seems that this is the interpretation which is indicated in the Bahá'í Writings as well.¹¹

Ebner's critique on traditional metaphysic and philosophy, therefore, is helpful in understanding the Writings of the Faith. This will become clearer in the section about dialogical and personal thinking.

Bahá'u'lláh

In the following three sections some Writings of Bahá'u'lláh are presented, which indicate the connection of His Revelation with the Revelation of Christ, especially as it is expressed in the Prolog to the Gospel of John. The second chapter will compare the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh with the New Heaven and New Earth of the book of Revelation, and will present a different

understanding of Revelation in the light of the Words of Bahá'u'lláh. The final section will relate these findings to the concept of the unity of the spiritual and material world.

The Word of Bahá'u'lláh

A high number of quotes can be found about the meaning of the “Word” and the “Word of God” in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Here only a few and significant samples are mentioned to get a comprehensive look of how the “Word” is used in the Writings. The first is a description of the Word of God, as used in the title of this paper, and what it means.

*O friend of mine! The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable. It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being. The Great Being saith: The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked. No sooner had but a glimmer of its effulgent splendour shone forth upon the mirror of love than the blessed word 'I am the Best-Beloved' was reflected therein. It is an ocean inexhaustible in riches, comprehending all things. Every thing which can be perceived is but an emanation therefrom. High, immeasurably high is this sublime station, in whose shadow moveth the essence of loftiness and splendour, wrapt in praise and adoration.*¹²

The above paragraph is divided and commented on below, sentence by sentence, to demonstrate its meaning.

O friend of mine! The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable.

In this first sentence the Word of God is called the king of words and its influence is called incalculable. How do we understand that? A king is not only representative of the whole country; in him the country is embodied and supported. So the Word of God is representative of all words; it is also the origin and cause of all words. It is, in other terms, the necessary and sufficient condition of all spoken words between humans. The

emphasis is here on the spoken word, which will be clearer in the section about dialogical thinking. The word is used not in a metaphysical, symbolic or abstract way and does not include derivatives such as mind, thought, reason and imagination. It is not used in the specific way of Platonic or Hellenistic thinking, in the way the term “logos” of John 1:1 was often interpreted.

It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being.

What is said in this sentence is an explanation of the absolute royalty of the Word of God. It dominates not only thinking and reasoning, nay; it dominates the realm of being. Quite simply, the Word of God relates not only to the words of man but to the whole realm of being, that is, the whole world, in the past, present and future. In other words, all that exists is dominated by the Word of God, not only the spiritual realm, but matter equally so. There are no exceptions, whatever is; whatever exists, is dominated by the Word of God. That this understanding has implications towards the realm of being, towards the ontological understanding of the world, is evident and will be described later.

The Great Being saith:

The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked.

Here another aspect of the Word of God is described. The picture of the master key (interestingly enough the term “key” for the word is used by Ebner several times in a similar context) is describing the fact that the Word of God opens up the meaning of the whole world, brings us into the middle of what is important in this world, and by doing so, leads us through the hearts of men into heaven, into the realm of God.

Without this Master Key, the world becomes opaque, dark und incomprehensible, no matter how many inventions and natural laws modern science may detect.¹³ We must consider that in the process of secularization the inner world of man has become more obscure and less understandable in spite of all the

progress in the sciences and in psychology and anthropology. The most important aspects of the Word of God are the fact that it originates and dominates the realm of being; that it opens up the understanding of what is and makes manifest the relationship this world has with its creator, with heaven.

No sooner had but a glimmer of its effulgent splendour shone forth upon the mirror of love than the blessed word 'I am the Best-Beloved' was reflected therein.

Again, here we have a specific, spoken word used to demonstrate the effect and meaning of the Word of God. Another important point of this sentence is the fact that the Word of God in its splendor is related to love and affection.

It is the creative Word of God that through love and affection brings the world into existence and keeps it in existence. The actual word quoted here, "*The Best-Beloved*," is not just any word, it is the Word said by the Maid of Heaven¹⁴ bringing Bahá'u'lláh the message of His mission as a Manifestation of God while He was imprisoned in Teheran, which event He describes in the following words:

While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden – the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord – suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God's honoured servants.

Pointing with her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His glory unto

all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive. This is He Whose Presence is the ardent desire of the denizens of the Realm of eternity, and of them that dwell within the Tabernacle of glory, and yet from His Beauty do ye turn aside. (SLH 5)

We have interrupted the sequence of the sentences of the paragraph from the Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh with this statement in order to explain what the Word *'The Best-Beloved'* means. It needs to be mentioned here, that this Word, like other Words in the Revelation of God, can only be heard and really understood by the inner ear, the ear given by the Manifestation. And yet it is a word spoken to the inner and outer being, as Bahá'u'lláh stated above. This is stated by Bahá'u'lláh in the Valley of Unity: "*With the ear of God he heareth, with the eye of God he beholdeth the mysteries of divine creation.*"¹⁵

Here we have the question of how a spiritual hearing, a hearing *with the ear of God*, transfers to the *outer being*, to the rational mind and to external perception. This certainly is an important theological question, which will not be further pursued here. What needs to be mentioned here is the fact that this issue presupposes the unity of spirit and matter, which finds in man its highest expression and which has been described by the mystics of all times.

It may suffice here to recognize that Bahá'u'lláh describes the message of the Maid of Heaven in the following words: "*She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God's honoured servants.*" With these words He describes the mystical experience of His soul as a spiritual (inner) and as a sensory (outer) experience. The others, who do not listen with this ear, are, as it is said here, unable to comprehend, unable to understand and perceive, and so they will turn aside.

These Words to Bahá'u'lláh can be compared with the Words of God in the Bible spoken to Adam, Abraham and Moses, and the Words spoken to Christ during His baptism by John the Baptist: "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*"

(Matthew 3:17) The vocation of Paul on his way to Damascus can be seen as another Word spoken by God.

We can follow the modern Bible Critique, which claims that all these words are invented by the writer and only meant symbolically, i.e., that they were never spoken, but only recorded to convey a spiritual meaning. That way of misinterpreting what the Scriptures actually says is more difficult in the case of Bahá'u'lláh, because He recollects these words Himself, and reports them as spoken to Him, and He mentioned them several times in His Writings, even though in different ways of description.¹⁶

Many times in this paper, the reader is asked to make a choice. It is the choice indicated in the words of the Maid of Heaven. Do you hear these words and accept them, or do you not understand and turn aside? That this is not only a religious decision which is asked, but also a decision that encompassed the whole of man, his body, his mind, his intellect and spirituality, is obvious. Equally evident is the fact, that the whole life of a person depends on this choice, as well as all the other choices and decision he will make. So it is not a question of exegesis, it is a question of the fundamental aspect of being human. This fundamental aspect of man, i.e., his spirituality and its connection with the word, will further be clarified in the section on Ferdinand Ebner.

Turning back to the last sentence from the paragraph of the Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh we read about the Word of God:

It is an ocean inexhaustible in riches, comprehending all things. Every thing which can be perceived is but an emanation therefrom. High, immeasurably high is this sublime station, in whose shadow moveth the essence of loftiness and splendour, wrapt in praise and adoration.

Two essential things are said here about the Word: that it is inexhaustible and comprehends all things, and that nothing that is perceived can be perceived independently from it. The other statement is the fact that it is sublimely elevated, beyond understanding, and that in His shadow all splendor, all praise, and adoration is presented.

From this paragraph, several important conclusions can be drawn in order to understand what Bahá'u'lláh means when He speaks about the Word of God. We will present the following conclusions here:

1. The Word of God is the actually spoken Word to the Manifestation and to mankind.
2. The Word of God is the Manifestation.
3. All that exists, all that is created, is created by this Word
4. Therefore all that exists is a creation of God and can be perceived only on that basis. The Word is the vehicle of all creative processes; of the existence of the world and the vehicle of the possibility to understand and perceive the world in its condition as creation.
5. Consequently, all other understanding and scientific inquiry is secondary to this understanding of the Word of God.

While these words could be interpreted to mean that God and the world are one, this pantheistic misunderstanding is clearly refuted by Bahá'u'lláh. He states:

No tie of direct intercourse can possibly bind Him to His creatures. He standeth exalted beyond and above all separation and union, all proximity and remoteness. No sign can indicate His presence or His absence; inasmuch as by a word of His command all that are in heaven and on earth have come to exist, and by His wish, which is the Primal Will itself, all have stepped out of utter nothingness into the realm of being, the world of the visible. (KI 98)

The absolute separation of God from His creation is affirmed, and then it is stated that the Word of God is the cause of creation. The Word is identified as God's Will, or His Primal Will in which reality is becoming real, "out of nothingness." So both the biblical and the Islamic tradition said the same, using different terms, the Word of God for the Bible and the Will of God for Islam. Bahá'u'lláh combines these two traditions in the above sentence and in other places. The

Báb already had made statements applying the Word as well as the Primal Will to Himself and to all Manifestations or Prophets, saying:

*Verily I am none other but the servant of God and His Word, and none but the first one to bow down in supplication before God, the Most Exalted; and indeed God witnesseth all things.*¹⁷

And He identifies the Manifestation with the Primal Will as well.

*It is this Primal Will which appeareth resplendent in every Prophet and speaketh forth in every revealed Book.*¹⁸

While the theology of the Word and the Primal Will are an important part of the Faith, it is here mentioned mainly as basis for understanding the ontological questions about the being of this world and its fundament. The crucial difference of this understanding with the understanding of the Platonic or Neo-Platonic school of thought is the difference between the idea as something that can be thought about (by God and by man) and the word as a personal and dialogical statement from the "I" to the "Thou," establishing both in their spirituality, as Ebner would say. This difference will be closer examined below.

The second aspect to be considered here is the fact that the perception of reality is fundamentally dependent on the Word of God, which means that it depends on the word and not on reason or intellect, that is, the faculties of perception. The relation between the word and reason will have to be followed up in the section on dialogical and personal thinking.

Consequently, the Word of God is the cause of existence, and all that was created was created by the Word as stated in John 1:3: "*All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*"

There is another important verse of Bahá'u'lláh about the Word of God which will be mentioned here. It describes the unifying effect of the Word in relation to the multiplicity of this world. This issue was presented by this author previously in his paper about the Tablet of Wisdom.¹⁹

In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* Bahá'u'lláh stated:

Please God, that we avoid the land of denial, and advance into the ocean of acceptance, so that we may perceive, with an eye purged from all conflicting elements, the worlds of unity and diversity, of variation and oneness, of limitation and detachment, and wing our flight unto the highest and innermost sanctuary of the inner meaning of the Word of God.
(KI 160)

Again, this paragraph will be described in its pertinent sections.

Please God, that we avoid the land of denial, and advance into the ocean of acceptance, so that we may perceive, with an eye purged from all conflicting elements...

Here it is pointed out how to approach the truth presented in the following verse. Bahá'u'lláh states the negative conditions, which would prevent the understanding of the following statement, and then mentions one positive condition for this understanding.

Living in the land of denial and having eyes contaminated by conflicting elements makes it impossible to understand the following statement. This land of denial is, in this writer's opinion, the materialistic and scientific misunderstanding of reality. The contamination of the eye is the inability to see the whole, as well as being confined to the area of the particular, which consequently results in a reductionistic understanding of the universe, and ignores all meaning and final causes of being. The land of denial is a description of living a life that denies all higher values, all spiritual realities, and consequently reduces all to its material aspect.

The best expression of this view and its consequences is presented by Teilhard de Chardin, who has clearly described the limitation of modern science (in an allusion to Darwin, who speaks about the evolution of men's bodily frame or bones²⁰), when he stated:

We know the history of his [of man's] bones: but no ordered place has yet been found in nature for his reflective intelligence. In the midst of a cosmos in which primacy is still accorded to mechanism and change, thought – the redoubtable phenomenon which has revolutionized the earth and is commensurate with the world – still appears as an inexplicable anomaly.²¹

If, in the Darwinian worldview, man is an anomaly, then something must be wrong with this view, which is based on a cosmology of material mechanism and change. Consequently, Darwin's explanation of evolution, as dependent on random change and natural selection, must be fundamentally incorrect if it cannot explain the phenomenon of man. These are the scientific findings of the Teilhard de Chardin, who in his book *"The Phenomenon of Man"*²² has explored the evolutionary understanding of the world and starts with the phenomenon of man, describing an evolutionary vision which cumulates in this phenomenon, rather than the vision that reduces the phenomenon of man to material causes and mechanical systems.

If we live in this materialistic and reductionistic understanding of reality, we cannot understand what is said next about this world, which is described in these three statements. Bahá'u'lláh states that we may perceive *"the worlds of unity and diversity, of variation and oneness, of limitation and detachment."*

In the logic of the traditional understanding these three statements are contradictory. Unity is the opposite of diversity, variation is the opposite of oneness, and limitation and detachment are not related. Only when we leave the land of materialistic denial and reductionistic understanding of this world, only when we raise our minds above the scientific abstraction²³ of reality, could we possibly understand these words. They place opposites not against each other, but perceive one through the other and combine them to express a better, more real and, what could be called, a more spiritual understanding of reality. This is made clear in the next section, where we are encouraged to *"wing our flight unto the highest*

and innermost sanctuary of the inner meaning of the Word of God."

It is here made quite clear what allows us to understand the integration of the opposites in the previous statements; it is the inner meaning of the Word of God. This is described as the highest and innermost sanctuary of human understanding. Any lower level of understanding is not necessarily wrong, but it cannot see the true reality of this world. So we must ask here, what is this reality?

The Bahá'í principle of unity in diversity in all its different applications becomes a more adequate and functional principle of understanding this world. This will be further explained later in this paper. The same is true about variation and oneness, which is the old philosophical question about what is prior, that is, what is more important, the whole or the parts? This philosophical question has vast social applications, which reach from absolute dictatorship to anarchy as the guiding principle of human society.

We have seen during the last century the pernicious and devastating effects of any one-sided understanding of reality, where the whole is given priority over the parts or the part over the whole. In the first case the parts, the individuals, are not only neglected, but often disregarded and eliminated when perceived to be in the way of the false understanding of unity, of the whole. This happened in the monolithic and uniform social arrangement in Nazism and Communism. The opposite position, held in the world of individualism and gross capitalism, has equally brought devastation and reduction of human beings to means of production in this more particularistic understanding of social relations.

This one-sided understanding of society and of the relation between people can only be corrected through the *inner meaning of the Word of God* as Bahá'u'lláh stated.

The conclusion to be made here and later in this paper is the fact that the Word is the key of reality, and only in the proper application of the Word is the reality seen correctly, so that social and individual evil and wide spread devastation can be prevented.

The New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh and the New World of the Book of Revelation

In this section the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh are discussed which speak about the New World Order and their relation to biblical statements in the book of Revelation about the new heaven and new earth to come with the return of Christ. Shoghi Effendi himself quotes this passage (Revelation 21:1-2) as a prediction for the coming New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and the real unity of mankind, when he states:

The writer of the Apocalypse, prefiguring the millennial glory which a redeemed, a jubilant humanity must witness, has similarly testified:

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."
(Revelation 21:1-2)²⁴

It will be shown that these statements are accepted as signs for the return of Christ, which is fulfilled in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh has interpreted this statement about the new heaven and earth in a new way, different from the common Christian understanding, by stating:

On the contrary, by the term "earth" is meant the earth of understanding and knowledge, and by "heavens" the heavens of divine Revelation. Reflect thou, how, in one hand, He hath, by His mighty grasp, turned the earth of knowledge and understanding, previously unfolded, into a mere handful, and, on the other, spread out a new and highly exalted earth in the hearts of men, thus causing the freshest and loveliest blossoms, and the mightiest and loftiest trees to spring forth from the illumined bosom of man. (KI 47)

Clearly the new heaven and earth, as well as the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven, is the new divine Revelation of the Manifestation, and the earth is the understanding and

acceptance of this new Revelation. This is an understanding of this word from the book of Revelation that is different from what Christians usually believe.

The common Christian understanding of this passage implies that at the return of Christ, the whole physical world will change into a heavenly world. The passing away of the first earth and the coming down of the new heaven and earth are understood materialistically and physically. Consequently, the return of Christ becomes the end of this world, which interestingly is contrary to the actual words of the bible, which speak of the end of an eon, not the end of the world. This difference is not noted in most translations where the Greek word: "the end of 'αιωνος' (aiwnos), eon," is translated as end of the world, instead of the end of an eon, of a long period of time. (See Matthew 24:3 and 28:20)

At the conclusion of the gospel of Matthew, Christ did not say: "*I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen,*" as translated in the King James Bible (Matthew 28:19). The original Greek words of the Bible have Christ actually say: "*I am with you always; even unto the end of the eon. Amen.*" This fact demonstrates how easily a theological preconception can influence translation and understanding of the actual words of the Bible.

This understanding of the end of the world at the return of Christ is based on the theological assumption that there will be no other Revelation of God after the Christian Revelation. The same assumption is made in the Islamic theology. In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* Bahá'u'lláh stated that this interpretation has more to do with the influence and power of the clergy, rather than with the words of Christ.²⁵

Contrary to that, Bahá'u'lláh addresses the followers of Christianity and Islam, who believe that God's Revelation is closed with their respective Books, with the Bible or the Qur'án, in these words:

Think ye, O My servants, that the Hand of My all-encompassing, My overshadowing, and transcendent sovereignty is chained up, that the flow of Mine ancient, My ceaseless, and all-pervasive mercy is

checked, or that the clouds of My sublime and unsurpassed favors have ceased to rain their gifts upon men? Can ye imagine that the wondrous works that have proclaimed My divine and resistless power are withdrawn, or that the potency of My will and purpose hath been deterred from directing the destinies of mankind?

Why have ye struggled to hinder the Manifestation of the Almighty and All-Glorious Being from shedding the radiance of His Revelation upon the earth? Were ye to be fair in your judgment, ye would readily recognize how the realities of all created things are inebriated with the joy of this new and wondrous Revelation, how all the atoms of the earth have been illuminated through the brightness of its glory. Vain and wretched is that which ye have imagined and still imagine! (GWB 323)

This difference in the understanding of the return of Christ and the end of the world is crucial for the understanding of what the world is in reality, and creates a different ontological view of this world.

The traditional Christian theological view of the world places the reality of the world into the physical world, and then a spiritual or supernatural realm is superimposed on this physical world. Heaven and Earth are understood as those two components of the world; the physical earth of man is contrasted with the divine heaven, where God and all supernatural entities are housed, and where the saved humanity eventually will find its mansions.

Consequently, the origin of the world in the Word is understood symbolically, and Christ is identified with God, so that there is no need to explain the words of the gospel of John because the Logos, the Word, or Christ is part of God in the Trinity and is in heaven, so that the earth is the physical realm where man lives and where God (Christ) descended to save man in order that all saved ones can go to that very heaven. Christ will return and complete this process, and then there will no longer be a physical world and the history of this world will have been ended.

In this theological worldview, Bahá'u'lláh's declaration that He is the return of Christ makes absolutely no sense, because with His arrival, the world did not end and the physical explanation of the book of revelation does not make sense under these assumptions.

The only way of making sense of Bahá'u'lláh's statement is to base the existence of this world on the Word of God, as John 1 seems to do. If the Word is the basis of reality and not the physical, material world, the substance of beings, then the Word can change, renew and create a new world whenever it is spoken anew by God. And that is exactly what Bahá'u'lláh said in this prayer:

I testify that no sooner had the First Word proceeded, through the potency of Thy will and purpose, out of His mouth, and the First Call gone forth from His lips than the whole creation was revolutionized, and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths.

Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing, in both the contingent world and the heavenly kingdom, entities of a new creation, and revealing, in the unseen realms, the signs and tokens of Thy unity and oneness.

Through that Call Thou didst announce unto all Thy servants the advent of Thy most great Revelation and the appearance of Thy most perfect Cause. (PM 295)

Again, note that in this statement the Word is not understood symbolically, it is “out of His mouth,” and “gone forth from His lips”: it is the actually spoken words, spoken to the world, spoken to humankind. This Word causes a revolution of the realities of all created things, of the whole creation; it shakes, divides, separates, scatters the whole reality of this world and finally combines and reunites it.

It needs to be emphasized that the reality of the whole creation includes both the contingent and the heavenly kingdom.

This process caused by that Word is explained as a new creation of the contingent and heavenly kingdom, and in these seen and unseen realms are revealed the signs and tokens of God's unity and oneness. God's unity and oneness are unseen, are spiritual, and are present in both worlds, in the contingent and in the heavenly world. One could formulate this vision meaning that God's Word creates the unity and oneness of these two kingdoms; it unites the contingent world with the spiritual word.

In other words, the spiritual world, caused by the Word is the uniting factor of this contingent, diverse and manifold world. And it has far reaching ontological implications, basically replacing the concept of substance with the concept of the Word, implying the spiritual aspect of the contingent world. This spiritual understanding is the new world of the book of Revelation. This description is actually the condition of the possibility to understand the new heaven and earth coming from heaven with the new Manifestation.

It is clear that the traditional interpretation of the end of the world with the returning Christ will prevent us from even conceiving of the possibility that Christ has already returned. This situation is similar to the position of the Jews at the time of Jesus, who expected the Messiah to liberate Israel and destroy the Romans. Since Christ did not do that, He could not be the true Messiah. In the same way, since Bahá'u'lláh has in no obvious way changed the physical world as we know it; He cannot be the returned Christ.

On the other hand, if the new heaven and new earth is not the physical renewal but a renewal of heaven and earth, of the contingent and heavenly kingdom in a spiritual way, than these questions remain: what does this say about heaven and earth; what does this say about the ontological question; and, what is the being of this universe? In order to be able to accept the words of Revelation, we have to search for a different understanding of the world – of earth and heaven, as the Bible calls it.

The gospel of John gives us the key. If all what was created was created by the Word of God, then the creation must be understood from the Word and not from its physical and

substantial reality. This is, in this writer's opinion, the revolutionary aspect of which Bahá'u'lláh speaks when talking about His New World Order.

It is quite clear that the coming of Bahá'u'lláh has in no obvious way changed the physical world where we live. The reality we face in our life, as well as the reality science is exploring, seems to be the same than before, and all changes in the spiritual understanding of this world and the meaning of life do not seem to amount to such a drastic statement, that is, the old world has passed away and the new world has come down from heaven with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

In other words, we must ask, is this statement of Revelation only a spiritual truth, or is it an ontological statement, explaining what created being is and what the fundament of our physical world is. It could be formulated as the question about what is material and what is spiritual and how these two concepts belong together.

In his article on Bahá'í Ontology, Ian Kluge²⁶ makes a point in his rejection of Phenomenalism, quoting 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement:

*Some think that the body is the substance and exists by itself, and that the spirit is accidental and depends upon the substance of the body, although, on the contrary, the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident – that is to say, the body – be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains.*²⁷

What is stated here certainly does use the term substance in the traditional meaning, but it makes a drastic difference to the understanding of this term. In Idealism (of Hegel) the substance is the spirit ("der Geist"), in materialism (by Marx) the substance is matter. 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to indicate that they are not separated, and if the term substance needs to be used, it better applies to the spirit rather than to matter, which He describes as being accidental to the spirit, the soul. It is this writer's opinion that this statement has to be based on the principle that the Word is the key to the understanding of this relationship between spirit and matter, body and soul, which is

clearly expressed in the Writings, as exposed above. In this context, the words about substance are not indicating that the substance is the final and ultimate element of being, which Kant has criticized, distinguishing between noumenon and phenomenon, and this distinction will be explained below in the section of Ebner, who places the emphasis on the Word, as the Writings seem to do as well.

This question, about what is the substance and what is the world, leads us into the next chapter about the Unity of the Material World and the Spiritual World, of the contingent kingdom and the heavenly kingdom.

Unity of the Material World and Spiritual World

The thoughts presented in this chapter have been developed by this author in a paper called “Unity and Progressive Revelation, Comparing Bahá’i Principles with the Basic concepts of Teilhard de Chardin” at the Irfán Colloquium 2003 in Bosch, California²⁸ and will be presented here abbreviated and further developed. The reason why Teilhard was chosen in this comparison is similar to the reason for choosing Ferdinand Ebner for this paper, as explained in the Introduction to this paper (above). In this paper (Klebel, 2003) it was stated:

Teilhard de Chardin was chosen for this investigation as representing the progressive movements of today. While writing in the first half of the last century Teilhard has a rather significant following today. It has been shown that he is the most quoted author in the writings of the “New Age” literature and does seem to attract many seeking souls of today.²⁹ In addition there is a rather significant influence of his thinking in today’s discussion of religion and of the future of the world, which makes him an author, whose importance might be rising, rather than diminishing. There are a number of books available about him and his books are available in new editions.

Two statements were compared about this issue, from Teilhard and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Teilhard:

It (the spirit) in no way represents some entity, which is independent of matter or antagonistic to it, some force locked up in, or floating in, the physical world. By spirit I mean 'the spirit of synthesis and sublimation,' in which is painfully concentrated, through endless attempts and setbacks, the potency of unity scattered throughout the universal multiple: *spirit which is born within, and as a function of matter.*³⁰

'Abdu'l-Bahá presents the following understanding of the relationship between material things and the spiritual world, and He claims that even the smallest particles in the world of being are manifesting the grace and bounty of God, indicating the union of spirit, or grace of God and matter:

*From separation doth every kind of hurt and harm proceed, but the union of created things doth ever yield most laudable results. From the pairing of even the smallest particles in the world of being are the grace and bounty of God made manifest; and the higher the degree, the more momentous is the union.*³¹

The conclusion from this comparison is the fact that unity of spirit and matter was expressed in the Bahá'í Writings and is found as well in modern philosophy by Teilhard and others. As pointed out above, Bahá'u'lláh stated "*the worlds of unity and diversity, of variation and oneness, of limitation and detachment*" can only be understood when we elevate our thinking, "*and wing our flight unto the highest and innermost sanctuary of the inner meaning of the Word of God.*"³² This flight is necessary in order to understand the world as seen by Bahá'u'lláh, and this world is the New Heaven and New Earth of Revelation, or the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Unity of humanity and of all nations is one of the familiar principles of the Bahá'í Faith. This author attempts to show how this unity is not only a political and social phenomenon, but an ontological principle that pervades the Bahá'í Revelation, even though it is mainly expressed in the principle of the Unity of Mankind. This development is, in this

writer's opinion, already clearly stated in the Writings, but usually not noticed theoretically.

Ferdinand Ebner has expressed this idea of the unity of mankind as an ontological principle, which follows from the "I" – "Thou" relationship between God and man, when he stated:

In this world we people live separately from each other as millions of 'I-s' – what a desperate word formulation – only connected through love. Yet, before God we are all – absolutely all: criminal and saint, good and bad, mentally healthy and mentally ill – one unique 'I' towards the unique 'Thou.' Because the 'I' and the 'Thou' does not know 'plurality.'

This unity of humankind is based on the ontological unity of the creation; it seems to be the opposite of the statement of Jesus:

Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows. (Luke 12:6-7)

Again, this looks like a contradiction that before God humankind is a unity; nevertheless, all the hairs of our heads are numbered by God. Nevertheless, it just gives us an understanding what unity in diversity really is, the more unity, the more the diversity and specialty of the individual is possible. This understanding of unity in diversity is only possible when we "*wing our flight unto the highest and innermost sanctuary of the inner meaning of the Word of God,*" as Bahá'u'lláh stated.³³

It has to be noted that this understanding of the ontological spiritual unity of reality was communicated basically to all Bahá'is who met Bahá'u'lláh and believed in Him. Their readiness to martyrdom can hardly be explained any other way. In their love for Bahá'u'lláh they knew and were certain that the spiritual world of Unity with God is real and present, and the material life is only a temporary situation that can easily be sacrificed for this heavenly value, as Bahá'u'lláh stated in a prayer:

*Thou art He Who, through a word of Thy mouth, hath so enravished the hearts of Thy chosen ones that they have, in their love for Thee, detached themselves from all except Thyself, and laid down their lives and sacrificed their souls in Thy path, and borne, for Thy sake, what none of Thy creatures hath borne.*³⁴

The Báb before Him had said something similar about those who exalt the Word and Unity of God:

*How numerous the souls raised to life who were exposed to dire humiliation in Thy Path for exalting Thy Word and for glorifying Thy divine Unity! How profuse the blood that hath been shed for the sake of Thy Faith to vindicate the authenticity of Thy divine Mission and to celebrate Thy praise!*³⁵

At this point it is necessary to further explain how this ontological principle needs to be understood. These are the conclusions of this section about the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, made in the first chapter of this paper:

1. The Word of God is the actually spoken Word to the Manifestation and to mankind.
2. The Word of God is the Manifestation.
3. All that exists, all that is created, is created by this Word
4. Therefore all that exists is a creation of God and can be perceived only on that basis, the Word is the vehicle of these processes, of the existence of the world and the vehicle of the possibility to understand and perceive the world in its condition as creation.
5. Consequently, all other understanding and scientific inquiry is secondary to this understanding of the Word of God.

The second chapter explained that the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is the direct explanation of the Words of Revelation, as stated by Shoghi Effendi.

6. The New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is a new understanding of this world of being and is based on

Bahá'u'lláh as the return of Christ and His statement of the fundamental renewal of the whole world.

7. This New World Order is created through the Word of God, coming out of the mouth and from the lips of the Manifestation, dissolving and renewing the ontological existence of this world.

In the last chapter again the relationship of the world of contingency and the world of unity was explained, and the philosophy of Teilhard de Chardin was used to put these thoughts into modern terms. Therefore we can conclude that

8. The Unity of Humanity is based on the understanding of the fundamental unity of matter and spirit as a new ontological principle, which is based on the Word of God as expressed in the Bahá'í Writings, and before in the Prolog of the Gospel of John.

“Teachings and Spirit of the Cause” in Today's Thinking

In the following sections we pursue the words written on behalf of the beloved Guardian stating that:

*the world has developed and been enlightened enough, through the unseen Powers of the Almighty; to be led to the teachings and spirit of the Cause.*³⁶

What is understood here by “world”? We have to interpret this statement in the context of another description of the world today:

*Such simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other, are but aspects of a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá'u'lláh, the theater of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind.*³⁷

These processes, “authored” by Bahá'u'lláh, are presently overshadowing the world. There are forces, views and thoughts

that lead into fall, disintegration and chaos of the old order, simultaneously intermingled with the opposite forces of integration, rise and order, all leading to the unity of mankind and the new World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

We must conclude, therefore, that it is required for us to distinguish between these opposite forces and to judge today's thoughts and worldviews on this line of demarcation. The Writings of the Prophet are the guidelines we need to use. Any judgment must follow the statement of Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of Wisdom quoted above about the true philosopher: that he "*never deny God*," that he "*promote the best interests of humanity*," and that he is "*loved*" and "*aided*" by Bahá'u'lláh.³⁸ It is understood that such a judgment, unless clearly supported by the Writings, is personal, individual and tentative. In no way is it authoritative, and therefore it is open to consultative dialogue and revision, yet we are encouraged by the Guardian not overlook this fact.

Several different developments are considered here in this light. Being a professional psychologist, I start with psychological writers, presenting this new understanding, and after that the philosophical thinkers of it will be discussed. The selection is personal and limited, yet it is hoped that in the future others can be added and the topic can be expanded.

First the psychological understanding of human reality by D. W. Winnicott³⁹ is selected in his concept of play and culture, and the analysis of the therapeutic situation in Robert Lang's⁴⁰ thoughts about the Bipersonal Field. Both think in the psychoanalytic tradition but are expanding Freud's thoughts into the area of culture and dialogue. What is here called culture as a psychological concept opens up the discussion into the area of religion and spirituality.⁴¹ We conclude this section with some new findings of the new science of neurocardiology, indicating the role of the heart in this process.

Another important thought to be considered here is that modern physics, especially quantum mechanics, does provide a philosophical basis of a new understanding of reality, which is more congenial to the Bahá'í Writings than the Newtonian worldview of a mechanical system in space and time.

The next step in this process of finding the forces of integration, rise and order in today's psychological and philosophical thinking is to turn to those philosophers who have developed the personal-dialogical thinking. We will concentrate our investigation on Ferdinand Ebner as the representative of this thinking that comes closest to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, as will be shown below.

It needs to be noted that this list is neither comprehensive nor is it optimal, due to the fact that it is personally developed by this writer, and needs to stand the test of time and critical evaluation. Another issue is the fact that there needs to be more time to be able to overlook the present development of the world's thinking and to make a more definite judgment. On the other hand it appears that this sorting out of modern thinkers has to start and is most valuable in the process of discriminating and understanding the above mentioned process of integration and disintegration, of order and chaos in today's world, which must be applied, not only to politics and economics, but also to philosophy and thinking.

New Findings in Psychology and Neurocardiology

Psychology

This section will be relatively short and more descriptive than explorative. Winnicott⁴² describes the origin of the cultural space in the developing child. He calls this space "the place where we live," indicating the ontological and personal aspect of it. He describes that this space is initiated in the child, sitting on the lap of her mother, looking at her, touching her, and eventually listening and talking to her, and in this process recognizing the otherness of mother, and eventually the selfness of herself.

This rather enchanting developmental picture indicates that culture and all other experiences of the "inner" space "where we live" are originated and developed in the dialogue between mother (or the mothering one) and the child, and that the establishment of the cultural space is based on this interaction, on this in-between, as Winnicott calls it. This is the place where the growing child finally is able to call herself "I" and

speak to the “You” (or “Thou” as used forthwith), in the other, recognizing herself in the other. This experience originates the development of the conscious self and the cultural realm of this consciousness, which in the Bahá’í Writings is called the inner, the hidden or the unseen realm of reality, which can be called the spiritual realm as well.

The question of where culture comes from originally is not addressed by Winnicott but can be answered in many ways. Today in science the answer is often given in the Neo-Darwinian sense, that culture developed through accidental mutation and selection of the fittest in the struggle of survival.

This is a gratuitous assumption, which certainly cannot and has not been proven by science.⁴³ This assumption is made by all who refuse to accept anything higher than the material, who do not see the unity and wholeness of this world, and who have to find an explanation for things not material, therefore relying on the understanding as presented in the philosophy of reductionism, i.e., reducing the higher to the lower, and explaining the development of the higher through an accidental aggregation of the lower.

Consequently in this materialistic view, the higher concepts, such as culture, have no independent existence, are really “not real,” and therefore are often compared to fairytales like Santa Claus. Winnicott sees the whole human being and asks how does it develop and brings the example of a tradition of culture from one generation to the next. The question of the origin of culture does not come into his view.

The Bahá’í Writings speak of the new, spiritual civilization which is brought about by every Manifestation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His speeches in Europe mentioned the fact that the Christian Civilization was originated by Christ, and that even the material civilization is dependent on the Prophets, following a statement of Bahá’u’lláh that the “*The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets.*”⁴⁴ So ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated:

*The philosophers have founded material civilization.
The Prophets have founded divine civilization. Christ
was the Founder of heavenly civilization. Mankind*

*receives the bounties of material civilization as well as divine civilization from the heavenly Prophets.*⁴⁵

He affirms the same for the Jewish civilization and the civilizations of the East, when He stated:

*The Jews were in the lowest condition of ignorance, and captives under Pharaoh when Moses appeared and raised them to a high state of civilization.*⁴⁶

*In former days, in the time of the Buddha and Zoroaster, civilization in Asia and in the East was very much higher than in the West and ideas and thoughts of the Eastern peoples were much in advance of, and nearer to the thoughts of God than those of the West.*⁴⁷

Concluding this train of thought, it can be stated that the Bahá'í Writings clearly attribute the origin and the renewal of all human civilization (and culture, we might add) to the Founders of the world religions, and not to any accidental change that allowed better adjustment in the struggle of survival. In the present debate between the “intelligent design” and the so-called “scientific” understanding of the world, this distinction would be helpful.

Back to psychology. Robert Langs⁴⁸ has developed the communicative approach in psychoanalysis. He starts with an analysis of the dialogue between therapist and client, and develops some remarkable insights into this process that have never been studied as closely and systematically before. Here only some of his findings will be commented about. One is the importance of what he calls the Bipersonal Field, a concept he developed. The in-between space between the therapist and the client is not unique; it is only more specific and can be studied easier than the space or field in which all serious dialogues occur.

The interesting point to be made here is the fact that in this dialogue, even if factual issues are discussed, the deeper meaning is always personal, or as Langs says it, there is always an adaptive context involved, and this context relates directly to the other in this dialogue. What does that mean in the frame of this paper? What Langs has shown so convincingly and elaborated so thoroughly is the fact that all communication is

primarily personal, and only secondarily conferring information about other things.⁴⁹ It is the word that creates this ability of communicating between the “I” and the “Thou” between the patient and the therapist in this case. Philosophically, it appears to be legitimate to expand this concept of the Bipersonal Field to all meaningful communication, but only a few consequences of this expansion will be followed up here.

A. Bonac has developed a study on child development following Langs’ communicative approach, and he established, among others, an interesting principal theorem, stating that “The capacity to unconsciously perceive interactions with others in a veridical manner is an inborn capacity of the human mind”⁵⁰ He applied the principles of the communicative approach to the study of children and found that to unconsciously perceive interactions with others in a veridical manner is true even for newborn children in their interactions with their mother. There is, therefore, an inborn ability to relate, to truly, even if unconsciously, relate to the other. This is the psychological pre-condition not only of therapy, but also of all human relationships. It appears that this inborn capacity to relate is the beginning of what we call the inner, or the spiritual aspect of life.

Another issue mentioned by Langs is his instruction to the therapist to start the therapeutic session without desire, memory and understanding.⁵¹ This alone guarantees that the patient will be heard, and this will enable true communication, excluding all counter-transferences and all attempts by the therapists to place his understanding into the patient.

It is interesting to note that these three issues are mentioned similarly by Bahá’u’lláh among the preconditions for a true seeker and for listening to His Words.

O My brother! When a true seeker determineth to take the step of search in the path leading unto the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy.

Here the heart has to be cleansed from all obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, which is equally important if we want to understand our fellow man, as it is an absolute requirement to hear the message of the Prophet. Further it is said:

*He must so cleanse his heart that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, lest that love blindly incline him to error, or that hate repel him away from the truth.*⁵²

He must therefore, refrain from all desire, from love and hate, in order to be able to see the truth. This similarity of approach is probably not a coincidence, and it seems to be inherent in the process of listening to real communications.

This interesting parallel of thought leads us directly to the next chapter on Ferdinand Ebner, in whose philosophy the meaningfully spoken word between the "I" and the "Thou," where the communication through the word plays such an important role. True, Ebner speaks from a different tradition than Langs, but he was not unfamiliar with Freud, whose thinking can be regarded as the bridge between these two thinkers.

Another difference is that neither Winnicott nor Langs is interested in the religious or spiritual aspect of the therapeutic communication, while Ebner's writings are concentrated on these issues. And Langs speaks in the American tradition of psychoanalysis, while Ebner comes from the thinking of Kierkegaard and the other dialogical thinkers.⁵³

Neurocardiology

Besides the psychological conditions of true communication there are other new aspects to be considered. This is the new field of neurocardiology. The findings of this discipline culminate in the fact that the heart has not only what can be called a brain, that 60% of the heart are nerves, but additionally the heart has memory, predilections and does make decisions. This not-well-explored field gives us, at least speculatively, the possibility to place "the capacity to unconsciously perceive interactions with others in a veridical manner" as being "an

inborn capacity” not in “the human mind,” but more likely in the human heart.

In order to give this speculation more substance it might be considered that the brain of the newborn child is in a very primitive state and needs several years to develop. Contrary to the brain, the heart starts functioning early during the fetal life and is fully developed with the first cry of the baby when replacing the maternal heart. It is not unlikely that the child’s heart develops under the influence of the mother’s heart. It may be likened to a heart transplant, where the heart functions satisfactorily long before neural connections to the brain can be established.

The function of the heart to communicate emotional states to other people close by has been proven scientifically as well, and seems to open up new horizons of unity and communication.⁵⁴

New Findings in Physics: Quantum Mechanics and God

Here a note about quantum mechanics seems to be appropriate. Recent developments in this branch of physics have lead to astonishing results. Even a regular textbook on Quantum Mechanics, like the one written by Alastair I.M. Rae for example, ends in a chapter which indicates that Quantum Mechanics raises the question of ontology, the question: ‘what is reality.’ This book leaves the answer open and concludes “that there are still some real problems in the grey area where physics and philosophy meet.”⁵⁵ There are several theories about the ontological meanings of physics as it evolved. They all try to find a new philosophical basis for the findings of this new research, which has certainly put to rest the old Newtonian, mechanistic and materialistic worldview that was prevalent in science before.

Other physicists are more courageous and try to find conclusions that include not only physics but also human conscience. The most elaborate description of this point of view is the book by Evan Harris Walker, *The physics of consciousness, Quantum Minds and the Meaning of Life*.⁵⁶ In this book the question of God is raised, after a thorough description of Quantum Mechanics and an ongoing

discussion about the philosophical and systematical implication of the different theories of this new science. So he says: "We have examined the world, the physics of particles, the nature of mind and will, and the things that tie it all together."⁵⁷ He clearly distances himself from any materialistic worldview of the old physic when he says: "But it has only been with the advent of quantum theory that we have discovered proof that we exist as something more than pieces of matter."⁵⁸

He states that he started out as a "most ardent student of objective science," and that he was led to this new understanding in his pursuit of scientific search: "The tools of science permit us to question, test, and dispute atheistic doctrines posing as scientific principle."⁵⁹ And he speaks of the consequences to religion of this scientific theory. Consequently, he speaks of the unity of all religions in an interesting development of his physical theory of Quantum Mechanics when he states:

We need a better way to seek out truth, to assimilate the jewels of all our religious teaching into one universal faith founded in knowledge that we can verify as we do the facts of science. I hope that the discoveries recorded in this book are the beginning of such a mission. No one who believes in the truth of any of the world's great religions should fear losing any essential part of that faith by testing its truth against what we can learn with this new science.⁶⁰

This statement, which sounds almost as a description of the Bahá'í principles of progressive revelation and independent investigation of truth, and of one universal faith, from a physicist? When talking about the fabric of reality he concludes: "This is the Omnipresence, the Omniscience, the Omnipotence of Abraham's God, at once personal and supreme."⁶¹ He concludes his study of Quantum Mechanics and summarizes his study of physics with the words: "We have seen that the universe springs from every thought of God and matter from the very existence of mind. We have looked to find reality. We have seen beyond the open door."⁶² Again, this can be understood as a proof of the Bahá'í principle of the harmony between science and religion.

From these findings we can at least conclude, that recent scientific findings are not necessarily materialistic and atheistic. They certainly do open the philosophical basis of religion and its entire moral, ethical system of values. This is a far cry from what was thought during the 19th century and can be seen as a progress of human development that has not yet reached the majority of humanity, but is changing the world in which we live. Concluding this section on physics, we again will quote from the book of Walker:

We have searched back to the beginning of time and to the origin of the universe to find the first thought, the first word of God springing into existence as consciousness and physical matter.⁶³

Nothing more needs to be said in support of the topic of this paper, following the words of Bahá'u'lláh describing God's *Word as the Master key of the whole world*.

Concluding this section, it can be stated that some recent psychological, neurological and physical developments have lead us into a better understanding of what the in-between, or the Bipersonal Field is, and how it is concentrated in the heart. Culture and communication is placed in the in-between in which the healing process of therapy is applied. These findings prepare us to see the "place where we live" in the communicative or Bipersonal Field, which findings will be expanded by Ebner, into the Word that was "in the beginning" and that constitutes the essence of man, his spirituality, as well as the real nature of the world and its physical and conscious aspects. From there is only a small step to conclude to the passage in Bahá'u'lláh's Writings that "*the Word is the master key for the whole world,*" or as Ferdinand Ebner says, that

...in the word is the key to men's spiritual life, the key not only to 'objective knowledge' but also and foremost to the "subjective" (and one could say existential) opening of his spiritual life.⁶⁴

Ferdinand Ebner, The "I – Thou" relationship and Spirituality

In this section the dialogical thinking of Ferdinand Ebner⁶⁵ and others will be briefly summarized, especially as it relates to the Bahá'í Revelation about the Word, *the master key for the whole world*, as commented in the first section of this paper. Obviously, to present here a comprehensive description of Ferdinand Ebner's thoughts is impossible. As much as possible in this paper, we are attempting to let Ebner speak in his own words to make the reader familiar with him. Hence the number of quotes.

In the introduction, Ferdinand Ebner's (1882-1931) basic thoughts were quoted, and he concludes that these thoughts are not original to him because they have been stated before in the Gospel, John 1:1-2.

It became clear to me that man is through the word, what he is, i.e. a human being. That in the word is the key to his spiritual life. This basic thought is essentially a 'revolutionary' thought, it is the most revolutionary thought, humankind will ever think. But this thought is not from me, and from whom it is, it is not only a thought, but a life: 'The Life.'⁶⁶

While these words and Ebner's philosophy of the word, or dialogue, are directed towards this statement of the Bible, basically ending in theology, he based his philosophy on the principle of the word, the spoken word and its meaning. This genuine philosophical origin of his thinking was stated in his basic thoughts, which will be presented here:⁶⁷

1. Human existence basically has spiritual meaning, i.e., Man is spiritual because he is fundamentally designed towards something spiritual outside of him, through which, and in which, he actually exists: The "I" is constituted by the relation to the "Thou."
2. How does this become apparent? The expression of the spiritual existence of man is the fact that man is a speaking being. This is objectively demonstrable.

3. Therefore, the thought must be contemplated that this “I – Thou” relationship is given
 - a) Through the Word,
 - b) In the Word, and
 - c) As Word
4. That means, this relationship exists in the actuality of the spoken word, in the situation of being spoken to, which is in Talk – in Dialogue.

Without knowing of the Bahá’í Revelation, Ferdinand Ebner has developed an understanding of spirituality based on the spoken word that is genuinely related to the Bahá’í Writings, as will be shown here. And, he has connected it definitely with the statement of the Scripture in the Prologue of the Gospel of John.

It should be noted here that Ebner clearly developed his dialogical thinking from an analysis of the spoken word and of the relationship between the “I” and the “Thou.” Only after he also recognized that this relationship is expressed in the Scripture did he referred to the Gospel. This is important to note. Ebner did not start with the Scripture, he did not develop a theological thesis; to the contrary, he started from a philosophical basis, from the actually spoken word.

This is expressed in the above quoted basic thought of Ebner, where he stated that in contemplating the relationship between the “I” and the “Thou” it is evident that this relationship creates the spiritual existence of man through the word. This is the cultural realm, or the place where we live, indicated by Winnicott as mentioned above, and the Bipersonal Field as Langs has explored in every true verbal interaction, like therapy.

So said Ebner:

That is the essence of language – of the word – in its spirituality, that it is something that happens between the “I” and the “Thou,” between the first and the second person, as it is said in the grammatical analysis, it is, therefore, something that presupposes the

relationship between the “I” and the “Thou” but also creates this relationship.⁶⁸

The word, while constituting the “I” and the “Thou,” creates the spirituality between them or, to speak with Winnicott, creates the place where we live. Ebner expresses the fact that the word creates spirituality, when he said:

The “word” makes life (in the human person) to spirit — spirit makes the word come alive. The secret of the word is the secret of spirit.⁶⁹

In different ways Ebner has expressed his thoughts that the word opens man to the other, and in that process man becomes himself a spiritual being, as expressed in the following:

It became clear to me what the meaning of the fact is that man is a speaking being. That, in the middle of a voiceless world he is the only being that ‘has the word.’ It became clear to me, that man is through the word, what he is, ‘a human being’; that in the word is the key to his spiritual life. The key not only to “objective knowledge” but foremost the key to a “subjective” (one could say existential) opening of his spiritual life. And it became clear to me that the Word is from God.

Because, as God created man through the Word by speaking to him: I AM and through me you are. Therefore, all knowledge of God is given to him through the Word. This word is the basis of man’s consciousness and enlightens it into “self-consciousness.”⁷⁰

The road from the relationship between the “I” and the “Thou” to the Divine Word follows logically. Since the “I” and the “Thou” is created in their spirituality through the word, and since this spirituality is essential to man, the question arises: wherefrom does it come? Neither I nor you have it originally to give it to the other, since we are constituted by the word in our spirituality. Therefore, the origin of the word and of spirituality must come from elsewhere. This was clear even in Winnicott’s description of “the place where we live,” but he did not go further in his thinking about the relationship of the

child and the mother; he only introduced the common culture of mankind as the source and place where we live.

Ebner asks further and comes to a remarkable conclusion that the origin of the word is the Word of God. He said:

The “Word” is born from Spirit. Therefore, this is the proper origin of language, that God’s Spirit speaks to man – and so man becomes conscious of his “I” – and so man speaks to God – finding the true “Thou” to his “I.”⁷¹

Following this brief introduction into the thinking of Ferdinand Ebner about the human and the spirit, another crucial distinction must be mentioned. Ebner clearly distinguishes between the personal and the substantial understanding when he states:

Nothing else can be expressed in the sentences “I am” and “Thou (you) are” without contradiction, than the difference between the “personal” being and the spiritual realities – and the being in the sense of “substantial” existence, which expression cannot find any other grammatical form than the one in the “third person.” Personality and Substance – these are the two forms of understanding human beings and reality, between those two there can be no mediation.⁷²

Ferdinand Ebner makes an important distinction between the personal and dialogical existence on the one hand – which is expressed in the “I” and the “Thou” relationship and in the statements of the first and second grammatical person – and the substantial existence, on the other – which is expressed in the third grammatical expression, such as “it is.” And, he explores this difference in its ultimate meaning when he said:

The being for itself of the “I” in his solitude is no original fact of the spiritual life of man ... but the result of his separation from the “Thou.” This separation is nothing else than the apostasy from God; ... the first abuse and perverted use of the ‘freedom’ of the ‘personality’ of existing, which was placed into man by God.⁷³

This concept of the “I-solitude,” i.e., the solitude of the “I” (Icheinsamkeit) is crucial for Ebner, and it is the consequence of modern man’s “substantial” thinking. Ebner clearly accepts the fact that science must use substantial thinking for its endeavor; he only states that this thinking is different from personal and dialogical thinking, which alone can open the way to the other and to God and God’s Word. In another statement he indicates the historical source of this confusion.

That cave in Plato’s famous Example is the prison of the “I,” which is confined in itself and does not find the “Thou.”

At the Chinese Wall of our “I” the imaginations of the proper Reality of the Spiritual are floating by — as non existing shadows.⁷⁴

Here he identifies this I-solitude with Plato’s cave and the shadow of the “ideas” on the cave wall and indicates that this substantial thinking is like a Chinese Wall keeping the proper Reality of the Spirit out of our thinking, delegating it to the area of shadows and fantasy, just like some materialists refer today to all spiritual talk as talk about Santa Claus.

Ebner was aware of the necessity of science to talk in the third person about things that are, and of the danger of making an ontological statement of this methodological necessity, when he explained that the word is in diametric opposition of a scientific understanding of the external world to the personal and internal world of man:

The “I” solitude of all scientific-mathematical thinking results in the fact that the word is in diametrical opposition to mathematical formulas. As is well-known, the goal of all natural science and all knowledge about the external world is to become mathematics....

The knowledge about the ‘happenings of the inner world’ must become word, must prove itself in the word and it is impossible to express it in a mathematical formula....

Substance, consequently thought to the end, is the absolute “I-less” reality, which subjective expression

would be the madness of the final mathematical theory.⁷⁵

In order to demonstrate how new and original this kind of thinking is, some statements of Descartes are quoted here, which will indicate the traditional way of thinking in Western Philosophy. Descartes has stated the following principles of his thinking, which then became the basis of all scientific development.

My intention did never go farther than to attempt reforming my own thoughts and building a foundation that is totally my own.

The thinking I (cogito) is an immaterial substance which has nothing corporeal.⁷⁶

These statements can be seen as a clear way of substantial thinking in the sense of Ebner, excluding any relation of the "I" to something spiritual outside of itself, any relation to the human or Divine "Thou," which relation constitutes the spirituality of man according to Ebner. From the point of view of developmental psychology, Descartes misses the crucial question, how did he learn to think, how does this cogito start in the human being? The fundament that Descartes laid for all future philosophy is therefore the basis of modern substantial and materialistic thinking; does not Descartes himself call his thinking, (cogito) an immaterial substance, which could best be described as spiritual materialism?⁷⁷

The distinction between substantial thinking and dialogical thinking is crucial, when it comes to the knowledge of God. God cannot be known, so declares Ebner, in the way of substantial thinking, in the third person, as someone who is, who can be described and objectively known. The only way to know God is to answer Him, to respond to Him, to speak and pray to Him.

We have to clearly distinguish the way of knowing, of understanding. What is personal cannot be known substantially. Furthermore, it is essential to this understanding that the personal knowing is primary; it constitutes man in his spirituality through the word spoken between persons. This idea is expressed in the following statement of Ebner.

What exists as personality, can never and in no way be really understood as existing in the sense of a substance.

If we make the concept of substance the only basis of our understanding of reality, then the access to understand what exists in the sense of personality, is totally closed.

Towards the existence of a personality there can be no other relation than a "personal" relation, in the final analysis there can be no other relation than the relation from the "I" to the "Thou."

To a substance we can in no way have a personal relation — and consequently in his relation to a substance the "I" disappears.⁷⁸

The personality is expressed through the word, which is spoken from the "I" to the "Thou." This dialogue creates personality, creates a person with an inner being, which can only be understood in dialogue. In other words, if you speak to me you can open your inner being to me, and I can know you and speak back to you. What is crucial in this relationship is the fact that this dialogue is neither controlled by me, as it is between you and me, and it is not controlled by you either, as you need me to speak. And in this dialogue the inner reality of you and me is established, which is the reality of the person, the reality of the spirit.

Western traditional thinking, as with Descartes, is based on the ability to totally control one's own thoughts, but these thoughts are only, in the words of Ebner, a dream of the spirit, because they do not become real in the sense of one person really establishing herself to the other person through the word. This way of thinking is the thinking of the I-solitude, which is an attempt to take the power in one's own hand, leaving out the other, the "Thou." Ebner calls this thinking the "apostasy from God" and the origin of all sin. Consequently this way of thinking about God leads to the declamation of the death of God by Nietzsche.

When Ebner says, "If we make the concept of substance the only basis of our understanding, then the access to understand

what exists in the sense of personality, is totally closed,” he indicates the situation of modern materialistic and atheistic science, which not only has no access, but furthermore denies any possibility of access to the spiritual realm, to what makes man a human being, i.e., the spirituality that is in the word from the “I” and the “Thou.”

Ferdinand Ebner’s new understanding of spirituality, which has the inner being of the person established through the word spoken from the “I” to the “Thou,” seems to correspond with the Bahá’í concept of the inner, the hidden or the unseen aspect of the human personality. In the Bahá’í Writings these concepts are based on the Qur’án where it is said about God: “*He is the first and the last, the Seen and the Hidden.*” In the *Seven Valleys* Bahá’u’lláh made the following statement which became the center of an article of this writer:⁷⁹

And thus firstness and lastness, outwardness and inwardness are, in the sense referred to, true of thyself, that in these four states conferred upon thee thou shouldst comprehend the four divine states, and that the nightingale of thine heart on all the branches of the rosetree of existence, whether visible or concealed, should cry out: “He is the first and the last, the Seen and the Hidden....” (Qur’án 57:3)⁸⁰

Note that in this passage the human condition is described as *true of thyself* and those four states are *conferred upon thee* in order to comprehend the four divine states as expressed in the Qur’án. This understanding of the human condition by Bahá’u’lláh has been expressed later by Ebner, who similarly made the word the key to spirituality, which is the hidden or inner state of man.

Another thought comes to mind here. The understanding of the two ways of being and of perceiving the spirituality of the world, presented by Ebner as the substantial and the personal way of knowing, explains an apparent contradiction in the Bahá’í Writings. In many places the following statement is affirmed in the Writings:

God in His Essence and in His own Self hath ever been unseen, inaccessible, and unknowable.⁸¹

And yet we are not only encouraged, but it is also made a central obligation, for all human persons to know God and to worship Him. So it is stated in the Short Obligatory Prayer:

*I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee.*⁸²

And in another place it is said that knowing God is the purpose of the creation of man:

*The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence.*⁸³

The fact that we cannot know and we have to know can only be explained if there are different ways of knowing. The distinction Ebner makes between the substantial knowing, which combines an understanding of the essence as well as of the existence of something, and the personal knowing, which is the knowing mediated by the word from the "I" to the "Thou," helps to explain these contradictory statements about the knowing of God.

And it is clear that we do not know God in the way we know things in this world. We know God, Who speaks to us and Who allows us to respond in prayer. Consequently, all metaphysical speculation about the difference of being as applied to God and to creation is an illusive problem, because we cannot know God as we know things. Consequently, our attribute of existence and being to things can in no way be attributed to God. In this sense God is not existent, or as the Buddhist say, He is nothing, not-a-thing. God can be mentioned as existing only in an emphatic way, as Bahá'í prayers say, "He is God," which again is personal and emphatic speech, not a factual statement.

The conclusion of modern philosophy, that God does not exist, is therefore, from this perspective, not totally wrong. A God we could know does not exist in the Bahá'í Writings either, as He is unknowable in this sense. God Who speaks to me and you, God to Whom we can speak in prayer, does exist, and He is present in every word that is spoken from the "I" to the "Thou." He is remembered and He is the remembrance in every truly human word spoken to the other.

That's why almost all Bahá'í prayers start with praise and are spoken directly to God, Who is addressed with "Thou." Ebner has expressed this situation in the following words.

Properly man cannot speak of God in the third person.

The one who prays does not speak about God, but to God.

As long as humans speak "to God," they still are seeking "God."

In speaking the "Word" the "I" is always on the way to "his Thou" –

Man only has found "God," whenever "God" speaks to him

Then man speaks not any more to God, but his "I," his self, becomes speechless and dissolves in its relationship to the eternal Thou, to God.⁸⁴

Ebner explains why this is so when he wrote:

In the word man has his knowledge of God: that means in the "Thou-ness" (Duhaftigkeit) of his consciousness, which makes "I-ness" (Ichhaftigkeit) possible – because the "I" exists only in the relation to the Thou" – ... especially because the relation to God is something fundamental and essential to man – which relation connects man personally with God.

Nothing else than the first and last meaning of the sentence "Thou art" in the "inwardness" of this statement, which is the fundament of all Internality and Inwardness of the human existence – all inwardness is the inner meaning of the word – in no other way can man have knowledge of God.⁸⁵

The Báb has expressed this situation, of not knowing and knowing God, when He wrote:

*I have known Thee by Thy making known unto me that Thou art unknowable to anyone save Thyself.*⁸⁶

Interestingly enough, a very similar statement was made by another dialogical thinker, Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929), whom we have not mentioned in this paper, but who has many thoughts similar to Ebner.

Of God we know nothing.

Yet, This Not-Knowing is Not-Knowing of God,

As such, this is the beginning of our Knowing of Him.⁸⁷

In this section, the work of Ferdinand Ebner was briefly presented, and some striking similarities between these thoughts and the Bahá'í Writings were pointed out. It is not possible to further explore this fact, because it would go beyond the topic of this paper. On the other hand, after having seen the emphasis the Bahá'í Writings give the word of man and the Word of God, it should have become clear why this writer has made the personal assumption that the statement written on behalf of the Guardian can be applied to thinkers like Ferdinand Ebner, who seems to have been led to the teachings and spirit of the Cause, as was demonstrated above. There are thinkers and believers, even in other religions, to whom these words on behalf of the Guardian can be applied.

The world has developed and been enlightened enough through the unseen Powers of the Almighty, to be led to the teachings and spirit of the Cause.⁸⁸

And when this statement is continued:

...it will be our shameful task to go round proclaiming such principles as we were taught so many years before and none of which we had lived up to.⁸⁹

Must we not conclude that not seeing the spirit of the Cause in these other writers and philosophers, would be a shameful omission of our understanding of the principles of the Bahá'í Revelation? In other words, it is quite possible that non-Bahá'ís have better understood the Writings and principles of Bahá'u'lláh, even though they did not hear of Him, through the *unseen Powers of the Almighty*, as the Guardian said. Must this thought not fill us with the fear of God, and make us more dedicated to study the Writings and teach the Cause?

Concluding, we can state for this section that the following has been found:

1. There are concepts in modern psychology that can assist in the understanding of the ontological question about spirituality.
2. The central position of the heart, as explored in the new science of neurocardiology in regards to positive emotion, to remembrance and decision making, allows us to take the Bahá'í statements about the centrality of the heart more seriously and understand them better.
3. Modern physics, especially quantum mechanics, allows us to better understand the possibility of how the word and the spirit can be the primary aspect of this world.
4. Ferdinand Ebner developed a philosophy of dialogical and personal thinking that fits, in most parts, into the Bahá'í Revelation.
5. The differentiation of Ebner between substantial and personal-dialogical knowing can assist in better understanding the question of Bahá'í Revelation about the knowing or not knowing of God.
6. The connection between the word and the understanding of the spiritual is facilitated, if we use Ebner's understanding of what constitutes man as a spiritual being, and it is related to the Biblical understanding of the "*Word in the Beginning*" and the Bahá'í Revelation about the Word as *Master key*.

Ontology of the Person and the Word

In this section the ontological question will be raised, what is being, what is existence. The expression "is" – "something is" or "is not" – is the widest category possible in metaphysics. Consequently, it is assumed that all that exists can be subsumed under this concept. The question of the existence, the being of God, will not be investigated here, even though the difference between created being, therefore dependent being, and the being of God as self-subsistent, has moved theology and philosophical debate since the classical Greek times and has

found its presentation in Islamic and Christian philosophy alike.

What interests us here is the being of this world and how the Word can be the master key to all worldly existence. Generally, being is understood substantially, what exists must have substance, must have something that makes it what it is. In the Aristotelian and Scholastic philosophy this substance is the coming together of matter and form. Ferdinand Ebner has called this approach substantial thinking, which is especially prevalent since Descartes' famous "Cogito ergo sum," in which the thinking subject becomes the substance on which the existence of man is based.

As a psychologist, I am inclined to see statements like that developmentally, i.e., how does the child come to the cogito, to think, and consequently to his "being," according to Descartes. At best, the child is born with the "Anlage," the potentiality to think, but not with thinking. And as it can be shown, thinking develops with speaking, with learning to speak, and much more so with being spoken to. Quite clearly, without being spoken to, a child does not start to speak or to think in the human way. It cannot participate in the verbal culture of his surroundings, and it takes a lot of teaching and learning, if this ability needs to be developed later, as the case of Helen Keller has shown.

To claim that there is another approach to the ontological question, other than the traditional about substance and thinking, seems to be audacious; nevertheless, it appears that the Writings of the Faith do require this new and unusual reasoning. Bahá'u'lláh did state in the above mentioned word "*The Word is the master key for the whole world.*" He did not talk about ideas, principles such as form and matter, archetypes, or any other philosophical concepts. He mentions the Word, and it is clearly the spoken Word. It is the same Word that is mentioned in the Prolog of the Gospel of John, 1:1-3:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

It is the “word” of the Qur’án 6:73, expressing the same truth in the following statement:

It was He who created the heavens and the earth in all truth.

On the day when He says: ‘Be’ it shall be.

His word is the truth. All sovereignty shall be His on the day when the trumpet is sounded. He has knowledge of the seen and the unseen. He alone is wise and all-knowing.

And it is the Word of Genesis, where this truth about God creating the world through the spoken Word was first expressed in the Judeo-Christian tradition,

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

There is undoubtedly, a scriptural tradition in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions of the Word being the origin of all that is, which is a theological as well as an ontological statement if it is taken seriously. One could say that the Word is the substance of all that is and nothing else, and it is the Word of God that has created and continues to create and sustain the existence of this world.

Unfortunately, the interpretation of the word *logos* in John’s Gospel was made according to the Greek understanding, and it became everything else than the spoken Word as it is stated in the Scriptures. This philosophical tradition of the Neo-Platonic school of thinking has influenced Christian and Islamic theology until this day, which can be described as an error, which was explained in a letter written by or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice:

...the believers must recognize the importance of intellectual honesty and humility. In past dispensations many errors arose because the believers in God’s Revelation were overanxious to encompass the Divine Message within the framework of their limited understanding, to define doctrines where

definition was beyond their power, to explain mysteries which only the wisdom and experience of a later age would make comprehensible, to argue that something was true because it appeared desirable and necessary.⁹⁰

In another letter the Universal House of Justice indicates the process by which this better understanding of the Scriptures of the past can be achieved over time, hopefully encouraging studies like the one presented in this paper.

It has become customary in the West to think of science and religion as occupying two distinct – and even opposed – areas of human thought and activity. This dichotomy can be characterized in the pairs of antitheses: faith and reason; value and fact. It is a dichotomy which is foreign to Bahá'í thought and should, we feel, be regarded with suspicion by Bahá'í scholars in every field. The principle of the harmony of science and religion means not only that religious teachings should be studied with the light of reason and evidence as well as of faith and inspiration, but also that everything in this creation, all aspects of human life and knowledge, should be studied in the light of revelation as well as in that of purely rational investigation. In other words, a Bahá'í scholar, when studying a subject, should not lock out of his mind any aspect of truth that is known to him.⁹¹

In our quest to study the underlying ontology to the biblical and Bahá'í Scriptures, we need to consider the original text of the Gospel and not its later philosophical interpretation. It is difficult, therefore, to present the vision of the Scriptures about the Word; the Logos, in the Prologue to the Gospel of John, as the meaning of this word was mostly lost or changed in interpretation and translation.

The Greek original text reads (without diacritical signs):

παντα δῑαυτου εγενετο, και χωρις
αυτου εγενετο ουδε εν ο γεγονεν..

This can be translated word for word in the following way:

All, through Him, was created, and without Him was created nothing that was created. (John 1:3)

It has to be considered that the Logos, the Word, is of masculine gender in Greek, and therefore the personalization of the Word, the Logos, describing the Word as Him, is made easier than in the English Language.

The text clearly states that all that was made was made by the Word, which is personalized in the expression "made by Him" who is the Word. As it is said later in the prologue, the Word of God is Christ, "*who was made flesh and dwelt among us.*" (John 1:14)

Here it is clearly stated that the Christ, the Manifestation of God, is the Word of God, and through this Word, through Christ, all was created, i.e., the whole world was created through the Word, and nothing exists that was not created through the Word.

And as Bahá'ís, we would say, through Christ and through all other Manifestations of God, all that is was created, since we see all Manifestations of God as one soul and the same person, as was clearly stated by Bahá'u'lláh:

*Inasmuch as these Birds of the Celestial Throne [these Manifestations] are all sent down from the heaven of the Will of God, and as they all arise to proclaim His irresistible Faith, they therefore are regarded as one soul and the same person.*⁹²

While in this passage Bahá'u'lláh states that these Manifestations are *sent down from the heaven of the Will of God*, this is the same as stating they are the Word of God, as was previously demonstrated.⁹³ This Word of God, out of the Primal Will of God, is the first creation, the Manifestation of God in this world, which is created through this Word, which is all the historical Manifestations as one soul and one person, in perfect unity.

The human differences and the historical tasks they fulfilled should never distract us from their unity, which is, as can be said, a Unity in Diversity, a Divine Oneness in an historical, human plurality. That this is difficult to understand is an

understatement, and it is demonstrated in the two thousand year old speculation about the Trinity in Christian theology and its absolute rejection in Islamic thinking. It was impossible to be understood in the past, as Bahá'u'lláh has stated in a prayer.

*The contemplation of the highest minds that have recognized Thy unity failed to attain unto the comprehension of the One Thou hast created through the word of Thy commandment, how much more must it be powerless to soar into the atmosphere of the knowledge of Thine own Being.*⁹⁴

Bahá'u'lláh, in this prayer, affirms that even the highest human minds failed to comprehend the Manifestations (*the One Thou hast created through the word*), which are created through a Word of God. To conclude this line of thinking it needs to be stated that it is nearly impossible to understand the Manifestation through the human mind, or through human speculation about the essence of God, His Unity, His Trinity or Plurality etc.

Only the Manifestations Themselves can give us an understanding of these Divine Creations, these unique and united Beings, who are as one in their historical and multiple expressions, who are the creation of God and the origin of all creation of the world of being, the origin of all there is, from the last particle or element of the atom to the highest development of nature in the human being.

This again projects a different ontological picture of this world than the traditional one, which is based on the concept of being and has historically created a number of problems in regard to the concept of the world as created by God. The elimination of God and of creation in the last centuries was only logical and made it easier to cling to this concept of substantial thinking, as Ebner would say, but does ignore the reality of the personal and dialogical aspect of the human being and of the whole world of being.

The traditional ontological picture has no place for the existence of the spirit, and with this point of view, it denies or reduces spirit to substance or matter and then makes the

human life meaningless, and reduces the word of man to simply a means of communication of facts. The inner being of man, the internality of world, is ignored, and the very thinking has renounced itself and performed this magic trick to eliminate itself at the point where it created the greatest successes of its ability in modern science and technology. The same has been expressed by a reviewer of a book on quantum mechanics: *Physics of Consciousness, The Quantum Mind and the Meaning of Life* by Evan Harris Walker:⁹⁵

Although philosophically laughable, the notion that the deepest aspects of physical reality can be described without ever speaking about the entity doing the description has dominated science and acted as a straitjacket that confined scientific thought for far too long. Instead, the book shows that reality cannot be understood without consciousness, or indeed, that reality and consciousness are ultimately the same thing.

Ferdinand Ebner has clearly connected the consciousness with the word, when he said:

What is a thought? Reflected being; not consciousness as such, but being in consciousness, being, in the reflection of consciousness, in other words, conscious being. But is not the 'word' the inner and spiritual condition of the 'cogito' ('I think') in general?⁹⁶

Human consciousness, the human mind, has declared itself in these representatives of materialistic science as non-existing or as being only a superstructure to be reduced to matter, nothing more than a thing among other things of this world and the sociological consequences of this worldview has devastated the last century.

If the Word is the beginning and the cause of the world, if it is the *master key for the whole world*, what does that really mean? What worldview would this ontological principle create?

We are accustomed to seeing the world through our senses, seeing the materiality of all beings, and we generally have this kind of approach to the world. The spiritual is usually ignored or neglected. Often it is seen as if it was something material. Think about a simple thing that is not material, for example,

your nationality. There is no thing in your body that would give you citizenship, it is a piece of paper, it might be an accident of your birth to your parents, or the resolution of a government contract that makes you a citizen. It is a spiritual quality that rests in the agreement of the society in which you live. And yet, it can crucially influence your life.

And this is only a very superficial spiritual quality. What about concepts of love, friendship, understanding between people, etc.; what about the spiritual ties that bind people together; what about the many groups and communities to which we belong? All of this is spiritual, but usually regarded as something sensual or material. We are used to seeing the spiritual properties as material ones and do not need to make this distinction most of the time.

In the proposed new worldview we need to categorically change our thinking and give spiritual reality the primate over all material and sensual phenomena of this world. This view requires a total new understanding of the world, as the book of Revelation says, of a “*new heaven and a new earth*.” It is not necessary to prove that this was the message of all previous religions as well. Nevertheless, it is no longer a thought that is even considered today.

Even the material life of the senses is not more important than the spiritual truth of our existence, as Bahá'u'lláh has expressed in the above quoted prayer when He said:

*Mine eyes are cheered, O my God, when I contemplate the tribulations that descend upon me from the heaven of Thy decree, and which have encompassed me on every side according to what Thy pen hath irrevocably established. I swear by Thy Self! Whatsoever is of Thee is well pleasing unto me, though it involve the bitterness of mine own death.*⁹⁷

Nothing else than a wholly different view of this world could have made Bahá'u'lláh say these astonishing words. Whatever is of God, whatever is spiritual, makes His eyes cheered, and He calls it pleasing even if it means death of the material body. As we have seen before, this worldview was given to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in His word when He said:

*Thou art He Who, through a word of Thy mouth, hath so enravished the hearts of Thy chosen ones that they have, in their love for Thee, detached themselves from all except Thyself, and laid down their lives and sacrificed their souls in Thy path, and borne, for Thy sake, what none of Thy creatures hath borne.*⁹⁸

It is again the Word of the Manifestation, the Word of God, that enravishes the heart of the believers; in other words, they love God, Who is identified with the world of the spirit, so they sacrifice their material life in this new view. So every martyr becomes a witness to this new reality, this new spiritual worldview.

The change of this worldview in the spirit of man who has recognized this new vision cannot be easily anticipated in its universality. Bahá'u'lláh gives us a glimpse what it would mean to take the spiritual reality of this world seriously and to be truly detached from the material world.

Say: He is not to be numbered with the people of Bahá who followeth his mundane desires, or fixeth his heart on things of the earth. He is My true follower who, if he come to a valley of pure gold, will pass straight through it aloof as a cloud, and will neither turn back, nor pause. Such a man is, assuredly, of Me. From his garment the Concurrence on high can inhale the fragrance of sanctity...

*And if he met the fairest and most comely of women, he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty. Such an one, indeed, is the creation of spotless chastity. Thus instructeth you the Pen of the Ancient of Days, as bidden by your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful.*⁹⁹

Christ already has made a similar statement (Matthew 5:27-28), and we see the progression in the formulation.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Jesus goes from the Mosaic law "thou shalt not" to the inner, spiritual aspect of man, to his heart. Bahá'u'lláh goes even farther, describing a spiritual attitude, which is not even to be tempted to break the law.

Let's be honest; after 2,000 years of Christianity, how many people come even close to this change of heart? And how many Christians, Muslims and Bahá'ís can state fully that they have not only understood this sentence, that they follow the moral rule of chastity implied in this statement, but that their heart and their thinking has fully achieved this pinnacle of detachment; and how many of them would be so detached and have no difficulty to *"not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty?"*

There are in the Bahá'í Faith some unique souls who have come close to this state of a *true follower* according to Bahá'u'lláh: it is the Master and Example, Bahá'u'lláh's son 'Abdu'l-Bahá and, in a somewhat lesser degree among others, several women whose exemplarity for the Faith was described by Bahíyyih Nakhjavání.¹⁰⁰

From this consideration the admonition of the Guardian needs to be understood, that the high moral life and example of the faithful is the precondition to the final victory of the Faith, and true chastity and detachment from all worldly goods are the criteria of this belief. Shoghi Effendi clearly states that moral rectitude is a prerequisite of success for all activities of Bahá'ís and describes these requirements in many places with the following words:

*These requirements are none other than a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color.*¹⁰¹

It is clear that Bahá'u'lláh speaks of a state of the human heart and mind that will take time to be fully achieved, especially when it comes to the most powerful drives in human nature, i.e., gold and sex. On the other hand, Bahá'u'lláh has promised that this time will come, and He has given us the

power to reach this state through His Word. It is the Word of God alone that can achieve such a change in the world, that can create this New World Order through a change of heart.

In the following section we will demonstrate that this new worldview is expressed in all the principles of the Bahá'í Faith, and some of these principles will be explained in this light.

Bahá'í Principles and the Word

In the following section some of the Bahá'í principles will be presented in this Unity of Revelation.

Having made the ontological change from idea and substance to the word as the origin and essence of being, we will here in this section try to explore Bahá'í principles and understand them on the basis of this new ontological principle of the word. This could shed some new light on these principles, and if it does, it will verify the assumption under which these principles are understood.

The final criteria of this process are the Bahá'í Writings, and if the new understanding of these principles are better suited to understand the Writings, then the circle is closed and the thesis of this investigation could be regarded as being proven, at least in the sense that they give more meaning to the Revelation and harmonize with them. Thus the harmony between religion and science could be established as well.

There are several principles that have been mentioned before, such as progressive revelation, harmony between science and religion, and the importance and meaning of remembrance of the Word.

The principle of Consultation

What seems to be another application of the importance of the Word is to be found in the principle of consultation. The importance of this principle is accentuated by Bahá'u'lláh:

The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as

*consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.*¹⁰²

And is further explained in the commentary to the Most Holy Book:

Bahá'u'lláh has established consultation as one of the fundamental principles of His Faith and has exhorted the believers to "take counsel together in all matters." He describes consultation as "the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way" and as "the bestower of understanding." Shoghi Effendi states that the "principle of consultation ... constitutes one of the basic laws" of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.¹⁰³

In order to understand why this principle of consultation is congenial to the ontology of the Word as presented in this paper, we need to briefly describe what happens in consultation. First, the facts need to be researched and presented to the administrative or any other group dedicated to consult about them. This first section or preparation will certainly be executed in a factual and substantial manner, so consultation does include substantial thinking in its preparation.

The proper consulting process starts with every member of the group presenting his personal opinion and leaving this opinion open to all in the group. This is real group dialogue, as all of the members are not only allowed to state their opinion, but they are encouraged and have the duty to do so. In this dialogue then truth is revealed and accepted by the whole group.

On the assumption that the word is the ontological basis of being, we must also conclude that it is the ontological basis of truth. That's where consultation gets its ontological grounding, in the sentence of Bahá'u'lláh where He stated;

*The Word of God ... is an ocean inexhaustible in riches, comprehending all things. Every thing which can be perceived is but an emanation therefrom.*¹⁰⁴

Consequently, when attempting to find the truth we have to rely on the Word of God, but we also have to make the spiritual

leap into the words of all those that are present, and try to find the truth in the here and now. As much as the members are imbued with the Word of God and the Love of God, this will result in an ontological effort towards the truth of the situation at hand.

This is a dimension of truth and consultation that has not been much explored, and it needs further consideration. It is mentioned here as one of the conclusions of our endeavor to find the truth of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh Who has brought us the Word of God in the Ocean of His *Most Great Announcement*.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion: Revelation of Unity and Unity of Revelation

There are two considerations that are mutually inclusive and describe the Bahá'í Revelation as a new and comprehensive vision of this world: the Bahá'í Faith is (1) Revelation of Unity and (2) Unity of Revelation. The Bahá'í Faith can be described in both ways, which are intertwined and mutually supportive. In other words, one is the cause of the other, one explains the other, and one could not truly exist without the other.

This statement needs some explanation. The first statement is clear and a common topic of teaching the Faith. The Unity of God, the Unity of the world of mankind, and the Unity of all religions is rightfully presented as the core principle of the Faith.

The second statement is not as obvious and is experienced only through deepening in the Writings and through meditation. It is the recognition that the Bahá'í Revelation, in its whole and in all its parts, is of a surprising and unexpected unity. This Unity of the Revelation is the most convincing element and is best expressed in the way Bahá'u'lláh has revealed His Verses.

They were not compiled and slowly elaborated; they were dictated and written as one, probably with a certain style and with the signature of perfect unity from one period to the other, from one dictation to the other. Bahá'u'lláh frequently

compares His Revelation with an Ocean, which is a good example of this unity in diversity, of abundance and fullness.

Much is said about this style of Revelation, but the most important aspect of this unity is not only its presentation, but also its content and the development of this unique Temple of God's Word. Bahá'u'lláh said:

*Thus have We built the Temple with the hands of power and might, could ye but know it. This is the Temple promised unto you in the Book. Draw ye nigh unto it. This is that which profiteth you, could ye but comprehend it.*¹⁰⁶

In the Persian Hidden Word 61 He describes His Revelation: "A dewdrop out of the fathomless ocean of My mercy I have shed upon the peoples of the world." This unity is really a mystical concept, and it is described in the *Seven Valleys* in two beautiful pictures, short and in-depth, where Bahá'u'lláh said in the Valley of Knowledge:

In the ocean he findeth a drop, in a drop he beholdeth the secrets of the sea.

*Split the atom's heart, and lo! Within it thou wilt find a sun.*¹⁰⁷

Both the revelation of unity and the unity of this revelation are pervading this world, and we can find vestiges of them everywhere. The unity of this world is increasing in many ways; politically, economically, in communication and cooperation. The unity of this revelation is not only present in the Holy Writings of the Faith but also in the thinking and philosophizing throughout this world, and it goes back into a better understanding of previous Revelations, explaining how all Revelations are presenting a unity that can be understood better as the Revelation of God progresses throughout time.

This unity also emerges everywhere in this world, according to the Guardian, demonstrating

such simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos,

*with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other.*¹⁰⁸

This paper attempted, admittedly in a very tentative and subjective fashion, to follow the development of *integration*, of *rise* and of *order* and many structures, visions and thoughts have been found in this process to prove the verse of Bahá'u'lláh: *"The Word is the Master Key for the Whole World."*

Therefore, the new world order is primarily and fundamentally a spiritual order. That this spirituality is the 'actual and real' reality of this world is only understandable in the context of the ontological meaning of the Word.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, it could be said, if the Word was in the beginning, then the Word and the Spirit was in the beginning, and the spiritual reality is the quintessential reality of being.

Ferdinand Ebner understood this truth, when he said "Man thinks, because he has the word." Reason (or intellect, we could say) is equally related to the word, so Ebner says, reason "is essentially formed from the word and through the word and given to humanity as a 'sense for the word.'" And further:

The word is the primary spiritual reality, it is the 'establishment' of spiritual being — it is the establishment 'of the relation between the "I" and the "Thou" — that is the establishment of being itself.¹¹⁰

Long before that, Bahá'u'lláh has clearly and fundamentally said the same, and much more:

*It is clear and evident, therefore, that the first bestowal of God is the Word, and its discoverer and recipient is the power of understanding. This Word is the foremost instructor in the school of existence and the revealer of Him Who is the Almighty.*¹¹¹

Bahá'u'lláh even gives us a clear understanding of how the Word created man. In a new interpretation of the story of Genesis, of the creation of man, He combines again in this sentence the Islamic idea of the Primal Will of God with the Biblical understanding of the Word in the Beginning:

*The entire creation hath been called into being through the Will of God, magnified be His glory, and peerless Adam hath been fashioned through the agency of His all-compelling Word, a Word which is the source, the wellspring, the repository, and the dawning-place of the intellect. From it all creation hath proceeded, and it is the channel of God's primal grace.*¹¹²

In interpreting the Bible, Bahá'u'lláh introduces a new thought, stating that the Biblical Adam became the first human being and was a Manifestation of God¹¹³, by being created through the Word and given the word which made him a 'living soul' as Genesis describes:

*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*¹¹⁴

To conclude this essay, it can be understood that the meaning of the Word of God, and consequently of all words spoken by man in remembrance of God, is "*the source, the wellspring, the repository, and the dawning-place of the intellect,*" of the human capacity of 'having the word' and being an intellectual and reasonable being. It is further the cause of all creation, as it is said about the Word that "*from it all creation hath proceeded, and it is the channel of God's primal grace.*"

The Word of God was and always is the unifying cause of this multiple word, and it is creating the human intellect and his soul, which is the channel of God speaking to man, of the ability of man speaking to man¹¹⁵ and answering God in speech, in prayer. Additionally, it is the source of all understanding of this world in science and reason and of knowing God in love and praise.

NOTES

¹ Special thanks needs to be expressed to Gwyn Magaditsch, for her corrections and suggestions.

² Kluge has made similar connections with the philosophies of Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, Teilhard De Chardin, and Whitehead in several of his papers published in "*Lights of 'Irfán*" volume 4, 2003: *The Aristotelian*

Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings, vol. 5, 2004: *Process Philosophy and the Bahá'í Writings*, *An Initial Exploration*, vol. 6, 2005: *Bahá'í Ontology*, *An Initial Reconnaissance*, vol. 7, 2006: *Further Exploration in Bahá'í Ontology*. Another seminal work is *The Call into Being: An Introduction to a Bahá'í Existentialism*, available by request: iankluge@netbistro.com

This writer has attempted similar comparisons in his papers published in the “*Lights of 'Irfán*” Wolfgang Klebel: book 5, 2004: *Unity and Progress Revelation: Comparing Bahá'í Principles with the Basic Concepts of Teilhard de Chardin*; Book 6, 2005: *True to Thyself: the Mystical Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Ken Wilber's System of Integral Psychology*; Book 7, 2006 *Lawh-i-Hikmat, Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom: Towards a Progressive Bahá'í Theology*.

- ³ Terry Culhane, *I Beheld a Maiden, The Bahá'í Faith and the Life of the Spirit*; Kalimat Press, Los Angeles, 2001, especially in his last chapter, (pp. 111-138) *Redeeming Modernity: Bahá'u'lláh and the Integral Philosophy of Ken Wilber*.
- ⁴ Wolfgang Klebel, in “*Lights of 'Irfán*,” book 7, 2006, *Lawh-i-Hikmat, Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom*. pages where the concept of “Spiritual Materialism” is closer described.
- ⁵ Ken Wilber; *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality, The Spirit of Evolution*, Shambhala, Boston & London, 2000, “The Unpacking of God,” p. 550.
- ⁶ Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig are from Jewish background and present similar ideas.
- ⁷ The quotes of Ferdinand Ebner are, if not otherwise noted, taken from the Book of Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld *Ursprüngliche Erfahrung und personales Sein* (Original Experience and Personal Existence) Böhlau Verlag, Wien, Köln, Weimar, 1997, quoted henceforth as Wucherer/Ebner and Page. The quote here is Wucherer/Ebner, p. 31.
- ⁸ Ebner, Ferdinand, *Schriften*, (Writings) 3 Volumes, published by F. Seyer, Munic, 1963-1965. Only at the closure of this paper, this writer has been able to get access to a small book with selected essays of Ferdinand Ebner: *Das Wunder des Wortes* (the miracle of the word), Stiasney Verlag, Munic 1965
- ⁹ The authors mentioned here are Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld (see reference 15) and in “Zur neuern Geschichte des integralen Gegensatzes von Einheit und Vielheit” (About the new history of the integral Opposition of Unity and Plurality) in and Bernhard Casper, *Das dialogische Denken. Eine Untersuchung der religionsphilosophischen Bedeutung Franz Rosenzweigs, Ferdinand Ebners und Martin Bubers* (The dialogical thinking, an investigation of the meaning of Franz Rosenzweig, Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber in the study of a philosophy of religion), Freiburg, Germany, 1967

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- ¹⁰ It is interesting to note that the usage of the word 'Logos' in English is today restricted to the idealized concept and the original meaning of 'word' is not even mentioned in Webster's Third New International Dictionary, where only three meanings are reported: 1. reason, 2. principle of the universe and 3. the creative thought (sic!) and will of God, according to John 1. The original meaning of 'word' is only mentioned in the etymological explanation of the origin of this word, but not in the present definition of this word as used in today's English. This is a good example of philosophical preconception that is pervasive but usually not even conscious to the writer.
- ¹¹ Compare this statement of Bahá'u'lláh, (*Gleanings*, p. 141: LXXIV) "*Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth.*" Here and in many similar statements about the Word of God reference is clearly made to an actually spoken word and not to the mind, reason or ideas of God.
- ¹² *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 173
- ¹³ In short, the thought could be ventured that the Judeo-Christian monotheism in a Platonic understanding of God as the origin of all Emanations separated the spiritual realm of God from the now secularized and demystified world, and therefore became the condition of the possibility of the development of modern sciences. Before, the pagan world itself was populated by spirits and gods, preventing this development.
- ¹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh explains that the Maid of Heaven is revealed to speak the Words of God: "*I have summoned the Maids of Heaven to emerge from behind the veil of concealment, and have clothed them with these words of Mine — words of consummate power and wisdom.*" (GWB 327)
- ¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 17
- ¹⁶ The differences of the description indicate that what is spoken to the inner ear cannot be translated straightforward to the outer ear, a fact that would be interesting to explore in another study. For example, Shoghi Effendi quotes Bahá'u'lláh describing the same event: He dreamed His dream and heard, "on every side," "exalted words," and His "tongue recited" words that "no man could bear to hear." (CF 101)
- ¹⁷ *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 61
- ¹⁸ *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 126
- ¹⁹ Wolfgang Klebel, *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat, Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom, towards a progressive Bahá'í Theology*, presented at the 'Irfán Colloquium at Bosch, May 2005, to be printed in the *Lights of 'Irfán*
- ²⁰ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 1871, last paragraph:
 "But we are not here concerned with hopes or fears, only with the truth as far as our reason permits us to discover it; and I have given the evidence to the best of my ability. We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities, with sympathy

which feels for the most debased, with benevolence extends not only to other men but to the humblest living creature, with his god-like intellect which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system — with all these exalted powers — Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.”

- ²¹ Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, Harcourt Brace & Company, New York, 1969, p. 105
- ²² Teilhard de Cardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Harper & Row, NY, 1975
- ²³ To call the scientific worldview an abstraction follows strictly the definition of the word abstraction in Webster's Third New International Dictionary, where it is defined as “the act or process of leaving out one or more qualities of a complex object so as to attend to others.” Any worldview that not only abstracts of these qualities of being methodologically, but denies their existence must be called scientific, rather than scientific, and is based on improvable assumption.
- ²⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 204
- ²⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 164: “Among these ‘veils of glory’ are the divines and doctors living in the days of the Manifestation of God, who, because of their want of discernment and their love and eagerness for leadership, have failed to submit to the Cause of God, nay, have even refused to incline their ears unto the divine Melody. “They have thrust their fingers into their ears.” [Qur’án 2:19.]
- ²⁶ Ian Kluge, *Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance*, 2004, p. 29
- ²⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 238
- ²⁸ Published in “*Lights of ‘Irfán*,” book 5.
- ²⁹ David H. Lane: *The Phenomenon of Teilhard, Prophet for a New Age*, Mercer, University Press, Macon Georgia. 1996
- ³⁰ “How I believe,” in *Christianity and Evolution*, Hartcourt, Brace & Company, San Diego, 1996, pp. 107-108
- ³¹ *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 119
- ³² Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 160
- ³³ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 160
- ³⁴ *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 163
- ³⁵ *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 188
- ³⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 56
- ³⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 72
- ³⁸ See above page 3-4; *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 150
- ³⁹ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Basic Books, Inc, New York, 1971
- ⁴⁰ Robert Langs, *The Bipersonal Field*, Jason Aronson, Inc. New York 1976
- ⁴¹ Wolfgang Klebel; *Transference and Culture, Towards a New Understanding of this Concept of Depth-Psychology*; A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Psychology, Fuller

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- Theological Seminary; Pasadena California, 1976; especially the Chapter Corollary on Therapy and Religion, Pages 205-224
- ⁴² D. W. Winnicott: *ibid.*, especially in ch. 7, "The Location of Cultural Experience," pp. 95-103, and ch. 8, "The Place where we Live," pp. 104-110
- ⁴³ Darwin himself clearly distinguished between the material development of "men's bones" and man's spiritual abilities. See footnote 31
- ⁴⁴ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 145
- ⁴⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 375
- ⁴⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 42
- ⁴⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 69
- ⁴⁸ Robert Langs, *The Bipersonal Field* (and throughout his other books); Jason Aronson, Inc, New York.
- ⁴⁹ This writer has applied the approach of Robert Langs in therapy and was teaching this approach to interns. This personal experience has certainly reinforced what was learned from books and the few seminars of Langs he could attend.
- ⁵⁰ Communicative Psychoanalytic Theory of Human Development – Part One: Introduction, Methodology and Theorems By V. A. Bonac (*Reprinted from IJCPP, 1994, Vol. 9, No.4*)
- ⁵¹ Robert Langs, *The Listening Process*, Jason Aronson, New York, London 1978 page 4, 59 and passim in this and most of his other books about therapy, where he refers this insight to W. Bion, an English Psychoanalyst.
- ⁵² *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 264
- ⁵³ It may be noted here as an aside that this writer has the same background in the Vienna school of integral philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis.
- ⁵⁴ Rollin McCraty, HeartMath Research Center, *Science of the Heart, Part I, Institute of HeartMath*. <http://www.heartmath.org>, Institute of HeartMath 14700 West Park Avenue, Bolder Creek, California 95006 especially the sections "The Electricity of Touch: Detection and Measurement of Cardiac Energy Exchange between People" p. 24 and "The role of Physiological Coherence in the Detection and Measurement of Cardiac Energy Exchange between People" pp. 24-25.
- ⁵⁵ Alastair I.M. Rae, *Quantum Mechanics*, 4th Edition, Taylor & Francis, New York, London, 2002, P. 288
- ⁵⁶ Evan Harris Walker, Ph.D.; *The physics of consciousness, Quantum Minds and the Meaning of Life*; Basic Books, Perseus Books, NY, 2000
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 329
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 330
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 332
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 335

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 336

⁶² Ibid., p. 337

⁶³ Ibid., p. 329

⁶⁴ Wucherer/Ebner, p. 31

⁶⁵ Ferdinand Ebner, a teacher, lived in Austria 1882-1931, and was marked by his experiences in the ditches of World I and is one of the most outstanding representatives of the dialogical thinking.

⁶⁶ Wucherer/Ebner 31 (see footnote 15). It has to be noted here again, that all the translations of Ebner's texts are translated by this writer, since no other translation is available.

⁶⁷ The brief explanation follows the introductory work to Ferdinand Ebner's thinking by Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld: *Personales Sein und Word, Einführung in den Grundgedanken Ferdinand Ebners* (Personal Being and Word, Introduction into the basic principle of the thinking of Ferdinand Ebner); Böhlau, Vienna, Graz 1985; pp. 23-32.

This principle of Ebner's thinking was previously developed by this writer in the paper *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat, Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom, Towards a Progressive Bahá'í Theology*, presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia in Bosch, 2005, and to be published in the upcoming "*Lights of 'Irfán*."

⁶⁸ Wucherer/Ebner, p. 57

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 78

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 31

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 79. According to Ebner, God is the true "Thou" to the human "I." In similar fashion Bahá'u'lláh uses the concept of the True One in relation to the creatures, in the Seven Valleys (p. 25): "*The journeys in the pathway of love are reckoned as four: From the creatures to the True One; from the True One to the creatures; from the creatures to the creatures; from the True One to the True One.*"

⁷² Ibid., p. 223

⁷³ Ibid., p. 87

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 86

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 223

⁷⁶ "réformer mes propres pensées et bâtir dans un fonds qui est tout à moi" quoted and translated from Herman Glockner, *Die Europäische Philosophie von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (the European philosophy from its beginning to the present) p, 412. Herman Glockner noted further that the "pure objectivity of Descartes philosophy satisfies the pre-Christian ideal of classical Platonism."

⁷⁷ This concept of spiritual materialism was coined by Johannes Toegel, *Eine Theologie des Zeitgeistes, Darstellung und Kritik am Beispiel der Transzendenten Psychologie* (A theology of the spirit of the time, a presentation and critique using the example of transcendental

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- psychology), Dissertation (#28,684) University of Vienna, 1991, p. 170, and is described by this writer in his paper presented in Bosch, California, 'Irfán Colloquium, in the year 2005 under the title: "Lawḥ-i-Hikmat, Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom, Towards a Progressive Bahá'í Theology," which will be printed in *Lights of 'Irfán*, Book Seven.
- ⁷⁸ Wucherer/Ebner, p. 233
- ⁷⁹ Wolfgang A. Klebel, True of Thyself, The Mystical Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Ken Wilber's system of integral philosophy, *Lights of 'Irfán*, Bahá'í National Center 1233 Central Street, Evanston IL 60201, book six, pp. 87-120
- ⁸⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, SVFV p. 27. While we here are mostly interested in the inwardness and outwardness of the human condition, i.e., the body and the spirit, in the section about the Word by Bahá'u'lláh the other aspect, the first and last, has to do with the historicity of the human condition in the ontological cycle as pointed out by Nader Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization*, University Press of Maryland, 2000, page 65 and passim, while not referring to this passage but quoting many others.
- ⁸¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 118
- ⁸² Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 313
- ⁸³ *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXIX., p. 70
- ⁸⁴ Wucherer/Ebner, p. 267
- ⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 265
- ⁸⁶ *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 196
- ⁸⁷ Franz Rosenzweig, quoted in the book of Bernhard Casper, p. 92 note 17
- ⁸⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 56
- ⁸⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 56
- ⁹⁰ *Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968*, pp. 87-88
- ⁹¹ The Universal House of Justice, *Messages 1963 to 1986*, pp. 388-389
- ⁹² Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 152
- ⁹³ *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* was addressed to a believer in Muḥammad, consequently in this book Bahá'u'lláh uses the Islamic expression the Will of God, which is equivalent to the Word of God as demonstrated above through this statement of Bahá'u'lláh from the same book, the Kitáb-i-Íqán p 98: "***inasmuch as by a word of His command all that are in heaven and on earth have come to exist, and by His wish, which is the Primal Will itself, all have stepped out of utter nothingness into the realm of being, the world of the visible.***"
- ⁹⁴ *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 193
- ⁹⁵ ISBN: 0738204366, Pub. Date: January 2001
- ⁹⁶ Wucherer/Ebner, p. 205
- ⁹⁷ *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 192
- ⁹⁸ *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 163

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- ⁹⁹ *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 118
- ¹⁰⁰ *Response*; George Ronald, Oxford, 1981
- ¹⁰¹ Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 22
- ¹⁰² *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 168
- ¹⁰³ The Universal House of Justice, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Note #52 in re paragraph #30, p. 190
- ¹⁰⁴ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 173
- ¹⁰⁵ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 25
- ¹⁰⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 141
- ¹⁰⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 12
- ¹⁰⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 72
- ¹⁰⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, (*Gleanings*, XCVI, p. 196) calls this “*A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive.*”
- ¹¹⁰ All these quotes can be found in Wucherer/Ebner, p. 208
- ¹¹¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity*, #1.2, p. 3
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, #2.48, p. 47
- ¹¹³ This fact is well established in the Writings based on the verse from the Qur’án: “Thus hath Muḥammad, the Point of the Qur’án, revealed: ‘I am all the Prophets.’ Likewise, He saith: ‘I am the first Adam, Noah, Moses, and Jesus.’ (KI 152) This issue raises some questions that cannot be dealt with in this paper. The Adamic Cycle of Manifestations started with Adam and ended with Bahá'u'lláh, who speaks about Manifestations before Adam as well, but they are unknown to us. One explanation to be mentioned in this context could be the fact that the book of Genesis, to be understood by their original readers, had to condense and compress the Adamic and Pre-Adamic history into one story of the beginning of the world, which story needs to be unfolded in the future.
- ¹¹⁴ Genesis 2:7
- ¹¹⁵ This fact of man speaking to man was expounded by Martin Buber, another personal-dialogical thinker in his book *Between Man and Man*, Routledge Classics, London and New York, 2002. Martin Buber is the only thinker of this group translated at least partially into English.

Buddhism and the Bahá'í Writings

An Ontological Rapprochement*

Ian Kluge

Buddhism is one of the revelations recognised by the Bahá'í Faith as being divine in origin and, therefore, part of humankind's heritage of guidance from God. This religion, which has approximately 379 million followers¹ is now making significant inroads into North America and Europe where Buddhist Centres are springing up in record numbers. Especially because of the charismatic leader of Tibetan Prasangika Buddhism, the Dalai Lama, Buddhism has achieved global prominence both for its spiritual wisdom as well as for its part in the struggle for an independent Tibet. Thus, for Bahá'ís there are four reasons to seek a deeper knowledge of Buddhism. In the first place, it is one of the former divine revelations and therefore, inherently interesting, and second, it is one of the 'religions of our neighbours' whom we seek to understand better. Third, a study of Buddhism also allows us to better understand Bahá'u'lláh's teaching that all religions are essentially one. (PUP 175) Moreover, if we wish to engage in intelligent dialogue with them, we must have a solid understanding of their beliefs and how they relate to our own.

We shall begin our study of Buddhism and the Bahá'í Writings at the ontological level because that is the most fundamental level at which it is possible to study anything. Ontology, which is a branch of metaphysics,² concerns itself with the subject of being and what it means 'to be,' and the way in which things are. For example, it is readily apparent that a physical object such as a hockey puck, an idea like Einstein's relativity theory and attribute of redness are three different

* Dedicated to the memory of Rad Gajic (1948 – 2006).

kinds of realities, have different ways of existing and are related to the world in different ways. We do not treat them alike because as a result of experience though often unconsciously, we perform an ontological analysis that says although we can throw another physical object such as a ball or a chair at the goalie, we cannot throw Einstein's theory or redness at him. This is an example of practical, every-day, conventional ontology. At a deeper level, ontology concerns itself with questions such as 'What is being?' or "Why is there something rather than nothing?" or 'What do we mean when we talk about a 'thing'?'

Abstruse as questions like these might appear, they are dealt with directly or indirectly by all philosophical systems, religions and even by science. For example, if we ask, 'What is a thing – in this case a flower?' we will get various, ontologically based answers. A scientist will answer that it is ultimately a self-organising aggregation of atoms whose materials inter-act among themselves in certain ways and it is a product of evolution, a Madhyamaka Buddhist will say that it is a conventionally existing aggregate produced by dependent origination and ultimately empty, whereas a Bahá'í, a Christian and a Muslim might reply that ultimately it is a creation of God. In all cases we have fundamentally different ontologies in regards to the kind of things that exist – physical beings and a God – and their ways of acting. In other words, both answers contain an implicit ontology.

The ontology explicitly or implicitly present in every idea-system functions like a constitution: it is the philosophical frame of reference in which ideas take on meaning and against which they must not offend. It determines whether or not an idea is viable in its particular context. If an idea offends against its ontological frame of reference, then problems of logical consistency arise and create all kinds of problems in the idea-system. For example, if we introduce the concept of an actively participating God into the reigning physicalist and positivist ontology of science, then we could start formulating answers to scientific questions in terms of God's will – something that is hardly repeatable, measurable, predictable and testable as required by science. The introduction of a participant God into the ontology of science would create all

kinds of consistency problems because that concept contradicts the goal of explanation strictly by physically measurable means. The ontological constitution of science does not allow such a concept.

Like science, every religion has an ontology which is the basis of its identity and, of course, the basis for its differences from other religions. From this it also follows that if we seriously intend to study how two religions are alike, then we must compare their respective ontologies. Without that, no philosophical understanding of a religion is possible.

However, before we plunge into our exploration, we must draw attention to the fact that contrary to the impression given by many popular books, Buddhism does not speak with 'one voice' even on some fundamental, ontological issues. For example, the often cited concept of emptiness is interpreted in at least three logically incompatible ways. Even the famous *anatman* or no-self doctrine is subject to various interpretations and at least one major Mahayana sutra, *The Mahaparinirvana Sutra* specifically asserts the existence of a self. Of course, it is not up to this paper to decide which doctrine represents 'true Buddhism'; that is best left to Buddhists to settle amongst themselves. All this paper can do is point out and explore the ontological similarities wherever they exist in the spectrum of Buddhist ontology. Doing so, will cover the following topics: *anicca* (impermanence); momentariness; dependent origination; God; nirvana; the *trikaya* and the concept of Manifestations; emptiness; *anatman* (no-self) and re-incarnation.

Anicca

Logically speaking, the fundamental ontological principle of Buddhism is the concept of *anicca*, universal impermanence or the transitoriness of all things. In the words of the Buddha,

Impermanent are all component things,
They arise and cease, that is their nature,
They come into being and pass away,
Release for them is bliss supreme.³

Impermanence is also ensured by the phenomenon of dependent origination, according to which everything that is influenced or conditioned by other beings — which is everything that exists — inevitably comes into and passes out of existence, a process that is a constitutive feature of their being. *Anicca* includes absolutely everything that exists and is not confined to material things. It includes us personally, the mind, thoughts, emotions, ideas, consciousness, all possible human and non-human conditions and states. In other words, nothing is eternal, and this avoidance of ‘eternalism,’ (as well as the opposite extreme of ‘annihilationism’) that is, avoidance of the belief that anything can be unconditioned and permanent is a foundational theme in Buddhist philosophy.⁴ According to Mangala R Chinchore, *anicca* or impermanence is the bedrock concept of Buddhist ontology.⁵ In her view, “Buddhists seek to uphold as uncompromisingly as possible primacy of becoming over being”⁶ to which she adds: “Further, the contention that becoming alone is what really is, is strong enough ... to satisfactorily account for the nature of the real and/or human.”⁷ In other words, a thorough understanding of becoming will help us account for the natural world as well as our own identity.

The reason for accepting the foundational status of *anicca* lies in the first of the Four Noble Truths according to which all existence is *dukkha*, variously translated as suffering or unsatisfactoriness. This is what impels us to ‘seek refuge in the Buddha’ in order to attain ultimate salvation from change. Things are unsatisfactory and cause suffering precisely because we precisely because we fail to recognise and accept that they do not endure and this in turn leads to all the difficulties associated with ‘grasping’ or trying to prevent change. From this we can see why the doctrine of *anicca* lies not only at the foundation of Buddhist ontology but also at the basis of its moral teachings. Meditating on impermanence is an essential part of Buddhist contemplative practice.

Anicca in the Bahá'í Writings

The Bahá'í Writings readily accommodate the doctrine of *anicca* or universal impermanence. Abdu'l-Bahá advises us that

nothing which exists remains in a state of repose – that is to say, all things are in motion. Everything is either growing or declining; all things are either coming from nonexistence into being, or going from existence into nonexistence. So this flower, this hyacinth, during a certain period of time was coming from the world of nonexistence into being, and now it is going from being into nonexistence. This state of motion is said to be essential – that is, natural; it cannot be separated from beings because it is their essential requirement, as it is the essential requirement of fire to burn.

*Thus it is established that this movement is necessary to existence, which is either growing or declining.*⁸

When we examine this statement, we note, first of all, its categorical nature, as indicated by the words “nothing,” “all things,” “everything,” “necessary” and “essential.” In other words, the phenomena described is applicable to all things without exception regardless of whether they are natural or man-made. Next, we notice the flat assertion not only that all things are in motion but that “movement is necessary to existence.” (SAQ 233) Moreover, the concept of ‘movement’ and ‘motion’ is not restricted to a change of physical place as indicated by the reference to growth and decline which involve changes of augmentation, complexification, actualisation, transformation, reception, causal action, synthesis, catalysis, decay and perishing. More significantly, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares, “*all things are either coming from nonexistence into being, or going from existence into nonexistence.*” (SAQ 233) This change is an “*essential requirement,*” (SAQ 233) that is, an essential attribute for the thing to exist as the *kind* of thing it is, for example, fire. Consequently, there is no doubt that the Bahá’í Writings agree with Buddhist ontology on the issue of *anicca* or transitoriness as the essential, that is, constitutive feature of all existence. As Bahá’u’lláh says, we

should regard all else beside God as transient, and count all things save Him, Who is the Object of all adoration, as utter nothingness. (GWB 266)

Each of us as a “*fleeting shadow*” (HW AR. 9) and our time here as a “*dust heap of a fleeting moment.*” (SWAB 36)

The Doctrine of Momentariness

Having recognised that Buddhism and the Bahá'í Faith agree on universal impermanence in the phenomenal world, it is important to explore the extent of the similarity. For example, does it extend to the doctrine of momentariness in any of its early or later developments?⁹ In other words, can the Bahá'í Writings accommodate the idea that in the phenomenal world what appears as an 'entity' is really a sequence of momentary states and not an enduring substance of some kind? Setting aside for now the interpretations of differing schools – for the Madhyamika, this series was unified by a similarity between moments, while in the earlier Abhidharma philosophy, each moment was a completely discrete entity¹⁰ – can the Bahá'í Writings accommodate the concept of perpetual perishing and creation as described, for example, by Stcherbatsky: "The elements of existence are momentary appearances, momentary flashings into the phenomenal world out of an unknown source."¹¹ Such is, indeed, the case. Bahá'u'lláh says,

Verily, the Word of God is the Cause which hath preceded the contingent world – a world which is adorned with the splendours of the Ancient of Days, yet is being renewed and regenerated at all times. Immeasurably exalted is the God of Wisdom Who hath raised this sublime structure. (TB 141)

The categorical nature of this statement is evident, asserting that at *all* times, without exception, creation is being "renewed and regenerated." (TB 141) This re-enforces the notion that change is an essential or constitutive not accidental attribute of existing things, that simple existence unavoidably involves coming into and passing out of existence on a continuous basis. 'Abdu'l-Bahá expresses a similar idea when He says, "Note thou carefully that in this world of being, all things must ever be made new" (SWAB 52) We must keep in mind that the "world of being" refers to all created existence, even though, in this particular case 'Abdu'l-Bahá focuses on the specific ways in which the human spiritual and cultural world has been renewed under the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh. What is especially noteworthy in this quotation is the use of the categorical "ever" which may be read as functioning like the phrase "at all times"

(TB 141) in the statement by Bahá'u'lláh. We also note that one of the names of God is the “Resuscitator,”¹² which does not necessarily imply resuscitation only at the transition from one age to the next but may also imply ‘resuscitation’ on a continuous basis as suggested by the other divine name, the “Sustainer.”¹³

We may, therefore, conclude that on the issue of momentariness, the Bahá'í Writings and Buddhist ontology are in agreement, though the Bahá'í Writings do not elaborate and develop this theme as much as Buddhism does. Why this should be the case may be explained by the fact that the two dispensations have different missions to accomplish or, it may only appear to be the case because not all of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings have been published at this point. What is germane to our study is that the doctrine of momentariness can be accommodated by the Bahá'í Writings.

Dependent Origination

Dependent origination is another fundamental ontological tent of Buddhism, so much so that the Buddha says, “Whoso understands dependent origination, understands the Law [*Dhamma* or *Dharma*], and whose understands the Law understands dependent origination.”¹⁴ The “Law” in this case is the order of the universe, namely, that fact that everything arises as a result of causes or conditions and that everything declines as a result of causes and conditions. As noted above, the usual Buddhist formula for causality is

When there is this, that is.

With the arising of this, that arises.

When this is not, neither is that.

With the cessation of this, that ceases.¹⁵

In other words, everything arises or falls in dependence on previous conditions or causes, and nothing arises without such conditions of causes. In the words of the renowned scholar Theo. Stcherbatsky, “every point instant of reality arises in dependence upon a combination of point-instants to which it necessarily succeeds, it arises in functional dependence upon a

'totality of causes and conditions' which are its immediate antecedents."¹⁶ In other words, nothing is fully independent from or uncaused by or unconditioned by anything else and we exist as long as the appropriate causes are present. Things do not exist in and of themselves which in effect is to say that their being is relative and not absolute.

Before further exploration of dependent origination, let us see to what extent the Bahá'í Writings can accommodate these ideas. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

*There is no doubt that this perfection which is in all beings is caused by the creation of God from the composing elements, by their appropriate mingling and proportionate quantities, the mode of their composition, and the influence of other beings. For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings. It is confirmed through evidences and proofs that every being universally acts upon other beings, either absolutely or through association. Finally, the perfection of each individual being – is due to the composition of the elements, to their measure, to their balance, to the mode of their combination, and to mutual influence. When all these are gathered together, then man exists.*¹⁷

Ultimately, of course, all beings depend on God, Who is the Absolute, uncaused and unconditioned ground of being, that makes everything else possible. This belief in an ultimate cause is, as we have seen, compatible with most Mahayana schools. The similarity is even more striking if we recall that according to the Bahá'í Writings the eternal creator requires an eternal creation.¹⁸ The essential theme of this passage is that all phenomena also come into existence as a result of proximate causes, that is, the inter-action and influence of other elements, and that all phenomena are connected "like a chain" of mutual influences and effects. There is no phenomenon that is not dependent on the action of others for its "existence, development and growth."¹⁹ Similarly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says "*all the*

members and parts of the universe are very strongly linked together in that limitless space, and this connection produceth a reciprocity of material effects."²⁰ Here, too, we discern the idea that mutual influences lead to the phenomenal or "material effects" we observe in nature. In other words, all phenomena exist dependently on other phenomena (and ultimately on God as the ground of being) and relatively, which is to say, their existence is not absolute, and is part of an on-going universal process. There can be no doubt that the Bahá'í Writings recognise the principle of dependent origination. This is reinforced by the following elaboration by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

*As the perfection of man is entirely due to the composition of the atoms of the elements, to their measure, to the method of their combination, and to the mutual influence and action of the different beings – then, since man was produced ten or a hundred thousand years ago from these earthly elements with the same measure and balance, the same method of combination and mingling, and the same influence of the other beings, exactly the same man existed then as now. This is evident and not worth debating. A thousand million years hence, if these elements of man are gathered together and arranged in this special proportion, and if the elements are combined according to the same method, and if they are affected by the same influence of other beings, exactly the same man will exist. For example, if after a hundred thousand years there is oil, fire, a wick, a lamp and the lighter of the lamp – briefly, if there are all the necessities which now exist, exactly the same lamp will be obtained.*²¹

In this statement 'Abdu'l-Bahá applies the concept of dependent origination to human evolution, asserting that the same combination of elements and influences would lead to the same result in "the same man." He then provides a simpler illustration with a lamp and a wick. Anthony Tribe and Paul Williams make the same assertion and draw out one of its logical implications when they state that "In particular, our own existence as embodied individuals is the result of the coming together of appropriate causes, and we exist just as

long as the appropriate causes keep us in existence.”²² When the influencing causes and conditions change, so do we — which is the logical converse of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that if the same conditions arise, so will the identical object.

It seems clear, therefore, that the Bahá'í Writings and Buddhism agree on the ontological principle that all parts of phenomenal reality are ruled by dependent origination.

The Absolute

The universality of dependent origination inevitably leads to the question of whether or not there are any exceptions to this principle, a crucial issue, since the answer determines whether or not Buddhism is or could be seen as a theistic religion. At this point it is necessary to point out that theism does not necessarily refer to a personal, Judeo-Christian or Islamic God Who is personally involved with His creation. Classical deism, for example, rejects any notion of a God with any personal interest in creation. If we examine the Bahá'í concept of God, then we see that His most fundamental ontological characteristic is complete independence, the fact that in Himself, God does not depend on anything but Himself, which is precisely why He is frequently called “the Self-Subsistent.”²³ To emphasise this point, Bahá'u'lláh states, “*No tie of direct intercourse can ever bind Him to the things He hath created, nor can the most abstruse and most remote allusions of His creatures do justice to His being.*”²⁴ In Buddhist terms, God is not subject to dependent origination, is not a phenomenon and for that reason is absolute. Ontologically speaking, such independence or absoluteness is an absolutely essential requirement in the Bahá'í concept of God.

There is no question that Buddhist philosophy recognises exceptions to dependent origination. Sometimes, this exception to dependent origination is referred to as nirvana, which according to *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion*, is

...the departure from the cycle of rebirths ... and entry into an entirely different mode of existence. It requires the overcoming of the three unwholesome roots —

desire, hatred and delusion — and the coming to an end of active volition.... Nirvana is unconditioned.”²⁵

If nirvana is “unconditioned” then it is not affected or shaped by anything else — but being affected by others is precisely the key requirement of being subject to dependent origination. In other words, Buddhism admits that there is at least one exception to dependent origination, that there is at least one ‘thing’ that is not describable as a phenomenon like the others. This is plainly evident in the Buddha’s description of nirvana in the following terms:

There is, monks, an unborn, a not-become, a not-made, a not-compounded. If, monks, there were not this unborn, not-become, not-made, not-compounded, there would not here be an escape from the born, the become, the made, the compounded....²⁶

Here we see a description of nirvana as a state that is completely unconditioned by anything external and completely unchanging from within. It has no origin, no process of becoming and no dissolution because it is not compounded. Ontologically speaking, it is the opposite of the phenomenal world, indeed, something that transcends it — and, therefore, qualifies as a true refuge. The Buddha also describes nirvana as

the far shore, the subtle, the very difficult to see, the unaging, the stable, the undisintegrating, the unmanifest, the unproliferated, the peaceful, the deathless, the sublime, the auspicious, the secure, the destruction of craving, the wonderful, the amazing, the unailing, the unailing state, the unafflicted, dispassion, purity, freedom, the unadhesive, the island, the shelter, the asylum, the refuge...²⁷

Here, too, we observe how nirvana is free of all the troubles and vicissitudes of phenomenal existence as shaped by dependent origination. It is also noteworthy that in contrast to the previous description, we see nirvana described in largely positive, even poetic, terms and even the negatives such as “unailing” are descriptions of the positive. This should not surprise us too much since, contrary to popular impressions, there was “within Buddhism a long tradition of positive

language about *nirvana*.”²⁸ In keeping with this positive characterization of nirvana, *The Lankavatara Sutra* says “Nirvana does not consist of mere annihilation”²⁹ for if it did, the Buddha would have fallen into the extreme of nihilism when it is His mission to have “all beings free from the notion of being [realism or eternalism] and of non-being [nihilism or annihilationism].”³⁰

The significance of *nirvana* being an exception to dependent origination is that in ontological terms, it shows that there is some kind of absolute, i.e. something not subject to influence and change. This at least provides a foundation of similarity with Bahá'í concepts of the ontology of God as provided by His Manifestations. Thus, from a Bahá'í ontological perspective, it is not quite accurate to say that Buddhism rejects all absolutes, most obviously in the case of the Theravada which rigorously distinguishes *nirvana* from the phenomenal world or *samsara*. In the Theravada Pali Sutras, “there is not the least insinuation that this reality [*nirvana*] is metaphysically indistinguishable at some profound level from its manifest opposite, *samsara*.”³¹ Indeed, for the Theravada the antithesis of *samsara* and *nirvana* is the basis of the quest for liberation. From a Theravada perspective, if there were no difference, there would be no point to the whole idea of liberation from the imperfect *samsaric* world.

The Ontology of Nirvana

It may be objected that seeking refuge in *nirvana* cannot be compared to seeking refuge in God or the “spiritual Kingdom” of the Bahá'í Writings. God, after all, is an ontological entity and the “spiritual Kingdom” may well be interpreted as such. However, with *nirvana* matters are not so clear since, as many renowned scholars have noted, Buddhism does not speak with one voice on this subject.³² This is because to understand the ontology of *nirvana* according to the Buddha's middle way, that it is, “between existence and non-existence, between annihilationism and eternalism.”³³ It is a difficult concept to grasp since it refers to nothing we know in ordinary experience; even the concepts of ‘being’ and non-being’ do not describe it accurately. Thus, it is not surprising to see a variety of views

among scholars. For example, according to David J. Kalupahana it is “untenable”³⁴ to

...refer to nirvana as a metaphysical reality, something absolute, eternal and uncompounded, and hence a noumenal behind the phenomenal.³⁵

He rejects those who see it as an “ultimate Reality”³⁶ yet among those doing so are the great scholars Walpola Rahula, Edward Conze and D.T. Suzuki. According to Rahula,

...human language is too poor to express the real nature of the Absolute Truth or Ultimate Reality which is Nirvana.³⁷

In making his point, Rahula refers extensively to the *Dhātuvibhanga-sutta* (#140) of the *Majjhima-nikaya* to support his claim. In his explication of chapter 5 of *The Diamond Sutra*, one of Mahayana Buddhism’s most important documents, Conze writes “In his true reality the Buddha is not produced by anything...”³⁸ This means that the true Buddha, the *Dharmakaya*, unlike all other phenomena, has a “special status of an Absolute which is in itself uncaused and unconditioned.”³⁹ The renowned scholar D.T. Suzuki has a similar view, telling us that *nirvana* “has acquired several shades of meaning, some psychological and ontological.”⁴⁰ He sees “Absolute Nirvana”⁴¹ as a “synonym of the *Dharmakaya*,”⁴² which, as *Dharmakaya* “is not only a subjective state of enlightenment but an *objective power* through whose operation this beatific state becomes attainable.”⁴³ The *Dharmakaya* is one of the names by which the Suchness, “the ultimate principle of existence,”⁴⁴ is known especially when it is considered “as the fountain-head of life and wisdom.”⁴⁵ In other words, the attainment of *nirvana* is the attainment of *Dharmakaya* and since *Dharmakaya* has an ontological aspect, (as a fountainhead, as an objective power) so perforce, does *nirvana*. Suzuki even claims that Nagarjuna’s *Mulamadhyamikakarika* “speaks of Nirvana as a synonym of *Dharmakaya*,”⁴⁶ that is as something that “is eternally immaculate in its essence and constitutes the truth and reality of all existences.”⁴⁷ For his part, Edward Conze writes, that among other things, *nirvana* is “power, bliss, and happiness, the secure refuge... that it is the real Truth and the supreme

Reality, that it is the *Good...*"⁴⁸ Here, too, we observe that nirvana has ontological aspects, being a "power," the "real Truth" and the "supreme Reality." More recently, Buddhologist Steven Collins also declares that nirvana "is a real external and timeless Existent, not merely a concept..."⁴⁹ a view reflected by Alfred Schieffelin, who writes that "Nirvana is a real existent, it is not a nought."⁵⁰ This view can also be reinforced by referring back to the quotations from *Udana* 80-81. In conclusion, if we accept the view of scholars like Suzuki, Rahula and Conze, it seems reasonable to claim that a comparison between seeking refuge with an unconditioned ontologically real entity, called in one case, God, and an unconditioned, ontologically real entity called *nirvana* (or *Dharmakaya*⁵¹) is a genuine similarity between Buddhism and the Bahá'í Writings.

However, not all Mahayana thinkers would agree that nirvana is different from the phenomenal world of dependent origination. For these, "the assumption of any kind of duality is considered as the basic error of logical thinking."⁵² According to Nagarjuna,

There is not the slightest difference
Between cyclic existence [samsara] and nirvana.
There is not the slightest difference
Between nirvana and cyclic existence [samsara]⁵³

This, of course, is the famous doctrine of the identity of *nirvana* and *samsara*, a doctrine that is also found in *The Heart Sutra*:

Form is emptiness and the every emptiness is form;
emptiness does not differ from form, form does not
differ from emptiness; whatever is form, that is
emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form.⁵⁴

According to this sutra, form, the *samsaric* world, and emptiness, that is, *nirvana* are equal and convertible terms, a claim that eliminates all dualities and transforms one into the other.⁵⁵ Moreover,

Samsara is Nirvana, because there is, when viewed from
the ultimate nature of the Dharmakaya, nothing going
out of nor coming into, existence [samsara being only

apparent]: Nirvana is samsara when it is coveted and adhered to.⁵⁶

This echoes *The Heart Sutra's* statement that "there is no origination, no stopping, no path ... no attainment and no nonattainment."⁵⁷ What all this means in effect, is that opposites do not really, that is, ultimately, clash; even "[a] affirmation and negation, existence and non-existence are not to be held apart as two."⁵⁸ Therefore, "Nirvana is not something transcendental or that it stands above this world of birth and death, joy and sorrow, love and hate, peace and struggle."⁵⁹

Here, in western terminology, perfection (*nirvana*) and reality (*samsara*) — correctly viewed — are one and the same. However, there is little doubt that the Bahá'í ontology favours the Theravada understanding that *nirvana* and *samsara* are ontologically distinct and not to be conflated as the Mahayana seems to do.

Notwithstanding the view that *nirvana* is identical with *samsara*, the Mahayana does not lack 'analogues of the absolute,' i.e. entities that are not subject to dependent origination. The first of these is the *Dharmakaya*.

Buddhism and the Dharmakaya

As Kalupahana points out, there was right from the beginnings of Buddhism a struggle against tendencies towards "absolutism,"⁶⁰ that is, a tendency to see the Buddha as absolute, unconditioned, non-relative and beyond dependent origination. There was an impulse to see the Buddha in transcendental and absolute terms, to turn him into an ontologically superior being with complete omniscience. As a result, "the conception of Buddha in the Mahayana caters to the psychological needs of ordinary people ... and, in a way, it is similar to the conception of God in many of the theistic religions..."⁶¹ This led to the development of the *trikaya* or three bodies doctrine of the Buddha. The Buddha has a transformation or ordinary earthly body (*nirmankaya*) which can be perceived by the senses; this is the historical Shakyamuni Who lived around 500 BCE. The second body is the *samboghakaya*, through which are apparent the various

appearances of the Buddha preaching the Dharma to the bodhisattvas and other inhabitants of the infinite pure Buddha-lands. All our images of the Buddha are also appearances of the *samboghakaya*. In his *samboghakaya* the Buddha manifests not only superhuman wisdom but also the thirty two major signs of perfection and the eighty lesser features of excellence.⁶² The third body is the *Dharmakaya*, the absolutely true nature or essence of the Buddha, which is unconditioned by dependent origination,⁶³ and which “universally responds to the spiritual needs of all sentient beings in all times and in all places...”⁶⁴ Lest it be thought that *Dharmakaya* is not ontologically real, Asvaghosa himself says that “suchness or Dharmakaya in its self-nature [*svabhava*] is not a nothing [*shunyata*]”⁶⁵ which is why Suzuki, in his notes to Asvaghosa, concludes that “Dharmakaya ... signifies that which constitutes the ultimate *foundation of existence*, one great whole in which all forms of individuation are obliterated, in a word, the Absolute.”⁶⁶ In his history of the concept of the Buddha, contemporary scholar Guang Xing notes that

the eternal and universal Dharmakaya became the basis of the infinite world as well as the pure nature of all phenomena ... Thus the dharmakaya ontologically became the principle of the universe since it is identified with the *tatha*, the true nature of all dharmas.⁶⁷

Later he adds, “First, the dharmakaya is the non-dual reality, the impersonal principle of the universe and ontologically the foundation and support of everything.”⁶⁸ From this it is clear that the Dharmakaya is or functions positively as a ground of being, as that which must necessarily exist in order for all other things to be. This, of course, is precisely the ontological function of God in the Bahá'í Writings, and, for that matter in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Moreover, in reference to Buddhist teachings about emptiness, Asvaghosa says, “Suchness or Dharmakaya is not empty but is endowed with numberless excellent qualities.”⁶⁹ Since emptiness and relativity are the attributes of all things subject to dependent origination, not being empty makes the Dharmakaya unlike any other kind of being. Not being subject

to dependent origination or the twelve causes, also means that it neither arises nor ceases, that is, it is eternal and hence not subject to *dukkha* or unsatisfactoriness, is free of ignorance, grasping and the body. As Guang Xing points out, it is “lacking movement, change, thought and even action”⁷⁰ in a manner reminiscent of the Bahá’í statement that God is beyond “ascent and descent, egress and regress.”⁷¹ Like God in the Bahá’í Writings, the Dharmakaya is also empty of all finite attributes.⁷² One of the major sutras, *The Lion’s Roar of Queen Srimala*, states:

The Dharmakaya of the Tathagata [Buddha] is named ‘cessation of suffering’ and it is beginningless, uncreate, unborn, undying, free from death, permanent, steadfast, calm, eternal, intrinsically pure, free from defilement-store...⁷³

Given the teachings about the *Dharmakaya* demonstrated above, it is reasonable to conclude that at least some branches of Buddhism developed a concept of an Absolute that strongly resembles ontological – not theological – descriptions of God as an ontologically real ground of being, unchanging and immutable, timeless, unaffected or unconditioned by anything other than Himself. In Tibetan Buddhism, for example, this view is represented by the Jo nang pa school which accepts the *gzhan stong*, or “other-empty” teaching according to which “emptiness” means a lack to extrinsically imposed qualities or defilements. (This view competes with the *rang stong* or “self-empty” tradition of the well known dGe lug school which sees “emptiness” as intrinsic emptiness, or a lack of qualities altogether.) Thus, for the Jo nang pa school, the *Dharmakaya* may still have attributes, but they are not dependent on or imposed by others. For this reason, the *Dharmakaya*

...is an ultimate reality, and Absolute, something which really, inherently exists. It is eternal, unchanging, an element which exists in all sentient beings and is the same, absolutely the same in obscuration and enlightenment.⁷⁴

Here, too, we observe a more than passing resemblance to the ontological attributes of God. The only question arises regarding the *Dharmakaya*’s presence in all beings, but even this

bears some similarity to the Writings' reference to the names of God being present in each created thing.⁷⁵ In both cases, the Absolute is universally present, albeit in different ways.

The various teachings about the *Dharmakaya* effectively undermine any description of Buddhism as atheistic in any straightforward and unqualified way. Such a description may be used rhetorically to emphasise differences with religions which portray Gods, Who interfere directly in history and have human personalities. But in that case the conflict is not so much about the existence of God, or the Absolute or universal ground of being as it is about the image of God or the Absolute. Ontologically speaking, calling Buddhism as a whole atheistic is an unjustifiable overgeneralization

Suchness

Another term for the Absolute in Buddhist literature is "Suchness" which in this case refers to the nature of things and in this case, to the nature of the reality as a whole. Rather than more explicit description, 'Suchness' is used to because when discussing the nature of things we are at the limit of verbalization. This term helps overcome this inherent limitation of the mind. According to the great Buddhist classic *The Awakening of Faith*,

The essence of Suchness is, from the beginningless beginning, endowed with the "perfect state of purity." It is provided with suprarational functions and the nature of manifesting itself (literally, the nature of making the world of object). Through the force of this permeation, it induces a man to loathe the suffering of samsara, to seek bliss in Nirvana and, believing that he has the principle of Suchness within him, to make up his mind to exert himself...⁷⁶

This passage makes it clear that Suchness is not subject to arising and ceasing — it is beginningless — it has special mental powers and it manifests itself in the creation of the world., a concept not far removed from the Bahá'í teaching of creation by emanation. It also shows that in some way Suchness is effective in calling upon humans to abandon the painfully

transitory world. Here, too, we see 'God-functions' in regards to being beyond time, having special epistemological capacities and a world creative function. This too suggests that judgments of Buddhism as atheistic are over-generalizations. All of these attributes are compatible with the Bahá'í concept of God. Asvaghosa also says,

From the beginning, Suchness in its nature is fully provided with all excellent qualities; namely, it is endowed with the light of great wisdom, the qualities of illuminating the entire universe, of true cognition and mind pure in its self-nature; of eternity, bliss, Self, and purity; of refreshing coolness, immutability, and freedom. It is endowed with these excellent qualities which outnumber the sands of the Ganges, which are not independent of, disjointed from, or different from the essence of Suchness, and which are suprarational attributes of Buddhahood. Since it is endowed completely with all these, and is not lacking anything, it is called the Tathagata-garbha when latent and also the Dharmakaya of the Tathagata.⁷⁷

Asvaghosa assures us that "Suchness or the Dharmakaya is not empty, but is endowed with "excellent qualities" which Bahá'ís might understand as the divinely revealed Names of God. Again we note that many of these qualities are those that other religions associate with God or at least an Absolute of some kind. They are also the attributes of all Buddhas.

The Lankavatara Sutra goes much further than this:

When appearances and names are put away and all discrimination ceases, that which remains is the true and essential nature of things and, as nothing can be predicated as to the nature of essence, it is called the "Suchness" of Reality. This universal, undifferentiated, inscrutable, "Suchness" is the only Reality but it is variously characterised by Truth, Mind-essence, Transcendental Intelligence, Noble Wisdom, etc. This Dharma of the imagelessness of the Essence-nature of Ultimate Reality is the Dharma which has been proclaimed by all the Buddhas, and when all things are understood in full agreement with it, one is in

possession of Perfect Knowledge, and is on his way to the attainment of the Transcendental Intelligence of the Tathagatas.⁷⁸

This passage clearly shows that Suchness is the Ultimate Reality, which is “inscrutable,” that is unknowable to humankind and has been known to all Buddhas, or, as Bahá'ís would say, to all Manifestations, Who have by implication, all taught essentially the same thing. Thus, we find in this passage hints of the Bahá'í doctrine of progressive revelation. There is nothing here that conflicts with Bahá'í teachings about God.

Tathagatagarbha

Yet another ‘entity’ that is invested with God-like or Absolute-like qualities is the Tathagatagarbha which is often referred to as the Buddha-nature. According to *The Tathagatagarbha Sutra*, every sentient being has within it the real potential to liberate itself from the conditioned world and from its own defilements and to attain its Buddha-nature in other words, attain *nirvana*.⁷⁹ The Buddha says,

Yet I also see that within
The dust of ignorance of all beings,
The Tathagata nature [Buddha nature] sits motionless,
Great and indestructible.⁸⁰

The Buddha then compares every sentient being to an “impoverished, vile, ugly [woman] hated by others who bears a noble son in her womb.”⁸¹ For our purposes what is important about the Tathagatagarbha is that it is equivalent to Suchness and the *Dharmakaya*: “Since it [Suchness] is endowed completely with all these, and is not lacking anything, it [Suchness] is called the Tathagata-garbha when latent and also the Dharmakaya of the Tathagata.”⁸² In other words, Suchness and *Tathagatagarbha* theory admit “the existence of something basic (dhatu) as the ground for all ephemeral phenomena.”⁸³ They refer to a ground of being, to some kind of noumenal reality all phenomena need in order to be whatever they are. As Queen Scrimala says, “Lord, samsara is based on the Tathagatagarbha.” And adds

Lord, the Tathagatagarbha is not born, does not die, does not pass away to become reborn. The Tathagatagarbha excludes the realm with the characteristic of the constructed. The Tathagatagarbha is permanent, steadfast, eternal. Therefore the Tathagatagarbha is the support, the holder, the base of constructed [Buddha natures] that are nondiscrete, not dissociated, and knowing as liberated from the stores [of defilement] ... the Tathagatagarbha has ultimate existence without beginning or end, has an unborn and undying nature, and experiences suffering; hence it is worthy of the Tathagatagarbha to have aversion towards suffering as well as longing, eagerness, and aspiration towards Nirvana.⁸⁴

Here it is evident that the *Tathagatagarbha* has been given a super-natural or transcendental personality, not to mention as function as the ground of being. As *The Ratnagotravibhaga* says of the *Tathagatagarbha*,

The Essence that exists since beginningless time
Is the foundation of all elements,
Owing to its existence, all Phenomenal Life (gati)
As well as the acquisition of Nirvana exists.⁸⁵

In addition to the attributes that other religions assign to God, the Tathagatagarbha is also portrayed as having an 'emotional life,' suffering, compassion, and longing like all other sentient beings. This is not at all unlike God as portrayed in Abrahamic religions and the Bahá'í Writings.

'Absolutist' Descriptions of the Buddha

The descriptions of the Buddha(s) is another way in which personal attributes of a supramundane or God-like being find their way into Buddhism. As we have already seen, "the Buddha in the Mahayana scriptures is not an ordinary human being walking in a sensuous world; he is altogether dissimilar."⁸⁶ According to Paul Williams, "The Buddha was never simply a human being, and is not seen that way by any Buddhist tradition."⁸⁷ The great Avatamsaka Sutra tells us that unlike all

other phenomenal beings, "The Buddha's body is formless, free from defilements [short-comings.]"⁸⁸ In a manner reminiscent of the God portrayed in the Abrahamic religions and the Bahá'í Faith, but unlike Theravada Buddhism, *The Lotus Sutra*, for example, portrays the Buddha as a supernatural being whose life span is limitless and whose supernatural powers "are immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable."⁸⁹ The Buddha then adds, "The Buddhas, *saviors* of the world abide in their great transcendental power."⁹⁰ The Buddha points out that He can appear in various places and preach to humankind under various names, an idea that bears remarkable affinities to the Bahá'í doctrine of progressive revelation. He also says

by an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana
but in truth I do not pass into extinction.
I am always here, preaching the Law [Dharma]
I am always here
through my transcendental power⁹¹

In other words his historical nirvana and historical death (*mahaparinirvana*) are simply appearances that lead us to salvation; moreover, like all other savior figures he is always present to help us. Indeed, later He says, "I am the father of this world,"⁹² and, indeed, "the father of all living beings."⁹³ Furthermore, other sutras⁹⁴ present the Buddha as a world-creating being whose worlds are variously called "Buddha fields," "paradise" or "Buddha lands" by projecting them from His mind and becoming the teacher to those beings living in that world. In this case, we have here a portrait of the Buddha acting like the creator God of the Bahá'í Faith and the other Abrahamic religions.

The Alaya-vijnana or Mind

Although some authors favour a strictly epistemological or phenomenological interpretation of the Yogacara doctrine of Mind or Consciousness or *Alaya-vijnana*, others, D.T. Suzuki foremost among them, recognise that strong ontological aspects of these terms impel us to understand them as real entities.⁹⁵ In his introduction to *The Lankavatara Sutra*, D.T. Suzuki writes,

Our ordinary experience takes this world for something that has its “self-nature,” i.e. existing by itself. [independently] But a higher intuition tells us that this is not so, that it is an illusion, and that what really exists is Mind, which being absolute knows no second. All that we see and hear and think of as objects of the vijñanas are what rise and disappear in and of the Mind-only. This absolute Mind is also called in *The Lankavatara* the Dharma of Solitude (vivikta-dharma), because it stands by itself. It also signifies the Dharma’s being absolutely quiescent.⁹⁶

The ontological language is unmistakable: the Mind “really exists,” is “absolute” and is the ground on which all objects of thought appear. For example, *The Lankavatara Sutra* says,

if you say that there is no tathagata-garbha known as alayavijñana, there will be neither the rising nor the disappearing [of an external world of multiplicities] in the absence of the tathagata-garbha known as alayavijñana.⁹⁷

Let us note in passing that the *alaya-vijñana* is here explicitly identified with the Tathagatagarbha which we have already seen is absolute. Here we see the *alaya-vijñana* functioning as a ground of being for the external world. The importance of the *alaya-vijñana* becomes apparent when we consider its other name: the store-house consciousness. As the deepest, most profound of the three levels of mind, the *Alaya-vijñana* or store-house consciousness gathers all the “seeds” of human actions (out of which still more seeds grow) which form the basis of karma. In other words, the world in which we find ourselves is conditioned by our own intentional karmic past. Furthermore, the *Alaya-vijñana* is often compared to an ocean and the phenomenal world of multiplicities are the waves tossed up by the winds of ignorance. (This is the ignorance of not knowing that the ocean and waves, all the multiplicities are one.) The Buddha says,

Like waves that rise on the ocean stirred by the wind,
dancing and without interruption,

The Alaya-ocean in a similar manner is constantly stirred by the winds of objectivity, and is seen dancing about with the *Vijnanas* which are the waves of multiplicity.⁹⁸

“The winds of objectivity” mentioned here are the winds of ignorance because, according to Yogacara philosophy, in objectivity we (mistakenly) think we are distinct from apparently other things; the *vijnanas* are the moments of consciousness. Each of them arises and then sinks back down into the sea, replenishing the *alaya-vijnana* with more karma ‘seeds.’ Here too we find a teaching that portrays the *alaya-vijnana*, like Consciousness or Mind, as the ground of being, as that from which everything arises and to which everything returns. Another image of this Universal Consciousness portrays it as an eternal, boundless ‘stream of dharmas’ or mind continuum call *citta-santana*. “It is the sole substratum of the transmigration in samsara.”⁹⁹ Here, too, the apparently objective things of the multifarious world are simply temporary ‘waves’ that will return to their source and become one with the Universal Mind. However, we must not think that the ‘stream of dharmas’ or the *alaya-vijnana* is somehow unreal. As Richard King says

...it must be stressed that for the Yogacarin there is ‘something there’ (viz. the paratantric flow) which constitutes the ‘raw material’ of our experience, although in the final analysis this is merely a fruition of seeds by past consciousness activity (karman).¹⁰⁰

In other words, a real — albeit changing — substrate, an Absolute or ground of being, underlies the appearance of dharmas in at least one major interpretation of the Mahayana Yogacara philosophy. Here, too, we observe that although Buddhism does not recognise a distinct, personal creator God on Whom the existence of the world (however it may be conceived) depends, it has so to speak assigned many of this God’s functions to other entities, such as the *Tathagatagarbha* or the Buddhas with supernatural powers of creation and compassion. Thus, it seems inaccurate to say that Buddhism is a non-theistic religion since the Mahayana at least recognises an unconditioned Absolute and a ground of being that

manifests Itself through the personality of the Buddha(s) as proclaimed by the Three Body (*trikaya*) doctrine.

The Trikaya and the Bahá'í Concept of Manifestations

One of the fundamental issues in the Bahá'í Writings is the ontology of the Manifestation Who have two stations:

One of these stations, the station of essential unity, We have already explained. "No distinction do We make between any of them." The other is the station of distinction, and pertaineth to the world of creation and to the limitations thereof. In this respect, each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined Revelation, and specially designated limitations.¹⁰¹

To what extent can this teaching accommodate the Buddhist *trikaya* doctrine? This doctrine, as we recall, says the Buddha has three 'bodies,' the Buddha's *nirmankaya* or historical, earthly body; his *sambhogakaya* in which the Buddha appears in the infinite Buddha-lands and in our conceptions of Him and the *Dharmakaya* or the transcendent ultimate truth, the "indestructible essence of Buddhahood."¹⁰² The fact that it is "indestructible" means that it is not subject to dependent origination, is unconditioned and is, therefore, absolutely real. "Dharmakaya ... signifies that which constitutes the ultimate *foundation of existence*, one great whole in which all forms of individuation are obliterated, in a word, the Absolute."¹⁰³

To what extent can the Bahá'í Writings accommodate the *trikaya* doctrine? In such a comparison, the Dharmakaya as the Absolute, the ground of all being or God in His ontological function, obviously functions as the counterpart of God on Whom everything else depends but Who depends on nothing else. As we have observed above, the Dharmakaya is the uncreated, pure, unconditioned unchanging foundation necessary to the existence of everything else. In other words, like God, the Dharmakaya is omnipresent, and by logical extension, omniscient though utterly transcendent. In the words of the Bahá'í Writings, "No thing have I perceived,

except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it.”¹⁰⁴ The *Dharmakaya* is also endowed with all good attributes¹⁰⁵ (it is not empty) and “universally responds to the spiritual needs of all sentient beings in all times and in all places...”¹⁰⁶ The *Dharmakaya*, like God, is also compassionate and fulfills our needs, though not always in the ways we expect our would like. Ultimately, “the dharmakaya is free from all intellectual constructs and is in fact inconceivable,”¹⁰⁷ a belief that corresponds perfectly with the Bahá'í belief in the essential unknowability of God. Although some scholars assert the absence of any transcendental or divine entity at all in Buddhism, no less a scholar than D.T. Suzuki speaks directly of “God or the religious object of Buddhism,”¹⁰⁸ and states that

Buddhism must not be judged as an atheism which endorses an agnostic, materialistic interpretation of the universe. Far from it. Buddhism outspokenly acknowledges the presence in the world of a reality which transcends the limitations of phenomenality but which is nevertheless immanent everywhere...¹⁰⁹

Suzuki's intellectual convictions about God in Buddhism is so strong that he sees even the Madhyamaka who claim to reject all positive statements about ontology as a form of “pantheism.”¹¹⁰

Moreover, there is a clear similarity between the Buddhist concept of *nirmankaya* (*rupakaya*), that is, the Buddha's body appearing in time and space and the Bahá'í concept of the second, human station of the Manifestation in which the Manifestation appears like any other human being and suffers the vicissitudes of existence. Bahá'u'lláh refers to this as “the station of distinction, [which] pertaineth to the world of creation, and to the limitations thereof.”¹¹¹ In this station, all the various Buddhas or Manifestations are different since they appear in various places and differing sociological, economic and cultural circumstances. According to Bahá'í teaching, when we speak of different Manifestations such as Buddha or Bahá'u'lláh, we are viewing Them in Their “station of distinction.”¹¹² It is through this station that beings of the phenomenal world come to know God.

However, we must be sure to dissociate Bahá'í concepts from any suggestion that the Manifestation is an incarnation of God as suggested by TRV Murti in his claim that the *nirmankaya* of the Buddha “is a deliberate descent of the Divinity, incarnating Itself as human being.”¹¹³ Under no circumstances do the Bahá'í Writings accept the notion that God Himself, in His Essence, appears as a phenomenal being. (That said, we hasten to add that it is not clear how literally Murti meant us to take the word “incarnation,” since he also describes the Buddha as an “emanation of the Absolute”¹¹⁴ — that being a concept incompatible with incarnation.) What is clear, however, is that both the Bahá'í Writings and Buddhism share a theology in which the Absolute, be it called God or the Dharmakaya, is revealed — to the limits allowed by human capacity — by a being that manifests Its powers in the various phenomenal worlds.

The king of the Dharma peacefully abides in the Dharma Mansion, the light of the *dharmakāya* illuminates all.... The *dharmakāya* of the Tathágata is equal to the *dharmadhātu* [cosmos] and manifests itself according to the inclinations of sentient beings for their specific needs. The Tathágata, the king of the Dharma, liberates sentient beings by taming them according to the law of righteousness.¹¹⁵

On the subject of the *samboghakaya*, the subject of congruencies between Buddhism and the Bahá'í Writings becomes more difficult because, among other things, the *samboghakaya* itself has been characterised so differently by various writers. For example, some characterise it as the ‘body’ or condition produced by the Buddha’s merit,¹¹⁶ others assert that “there must in the infinite universe, be buddhas now teaching in their pure lands and Buddha fields”¹¹⁷ each appearing in Their own *samboghakayas* in a way appropriate to that world. We can access these Buddhas through meditation and thus our images of the Buddha are also manifestations of His *samboghakaya* or His transcendental “Body of Enjoyment [bliss].”¹¹⁸ In this body, which possesses the thirty-two major marks of a Buddha, the Buddha also preaches to the infinite number of bodhisattvas in their Buddha-lands or ‘heavens.’

In the Bahá'í Writings, there is no formal concept that directly corresponds to the *samboghakaya*, although there is a concept that bears a certain resemblance to it. According to the Writings, all believers (and cultures) have their own image of God and the Manifestation, images to which they are entitled and which do no harm as long as they do not try to impose them on others and realise these are man-made images, valid for ourselves alone and mere devices to aid spiritual growth. They are not ontological realities. In other words, they are simply examples of what the Buddha calls "skilful means,"¹¹⁹ fictional heuristic devices that facilitate the discovery of truth. According to the Writings, if we confuse the image with the reality to which it refers, then we have fallen prey to "vain imaginings"¹²⁰ which will become like a "veil that interveneth between man and the recognition of the Lord, his God."¹²¹ Moreover, unlike the *samboghakaya* in Mahayana Buddhism, these personal and cultural images have no transcendental aspect or function; they do not exist or function in a separate ontological realm.

Buddhism does not seem to possess a formal notion of what the Bahá'í Writings call "the station of pure abstraction and essential unity"¹²² in which all the Manifestations are one. This is not to say that Buddhism does not recognise that all of the many Buddhas are essentially one; the *Avatamsaka Sutra* says, "The Buddhas of the past, present and future are but one dharmakaya."¹²³ The same sutra, one of the most important in Buddhism, also says, "It should be known that all Buddhas are but one dharmakaya."¹²⁴ Thus, it would seem that Buddhism recognises the concept of what the Bahá'í Writings call the station of "essential unity" without possessing a formal notion of that concept.

However, does the Buddha have an ontological station distinct from the *Dharmakaya*, from "the ultimate foundation of existence"¹²⁵ or "the impersonal principle of the universe and ontologically the foundation and support of everything"¹²⁶? Is He, like Bahá'í Manifestations, one of those "Primal Mirrors which reflect the light of unfading glory,"¹²⁷ Who is nevertheless distinct from God, or is He an incarnation of the transcendental *Dharmakaya*, 'descended' into phenomenal form? Both in the Bahá'í concept and in incarnationism, the

Transcendent is immanent albeit in different ways: with incarnation the transcendent *Dharmakaya* is immanent Itself, in Its own essence, whereas in the case of reflection the transcendent God is 'immanent' only as an image, that is, as an imitation of an original which is identical in form but distinct in essence. According to Kalupahana, "Siddattha Gotama was no other than the *representation* of Buddhahood."¹²⁸ Given this statement about the Buddha being a representation, an incarnationist view in which the Buddha and the *Dharmakaya* are ontologically one seems unlikely. As a "representation," He is not the *Dharmakaya* Itself in Its inmost nature but rather something different – though He is not merely a human being either. This description of the Buddha as a "representation" is reminiscent of the Bahá'í concept of the Manifestation as a "Primal Mirror" since both concepts suggest an ontological distinction between the Transcendent and the "representative" or "Primal Mirror."

However, this still leaves the question of whether or not the Buddha is ontologically distinct from ordinary human beings. Here is a fundamental difference between the Theravada and the Mahayana; the former tends to portray the Buddha as a human being like any other while the latter places emphasis on the Buddha's superhuman qualities.¹²⁹ Certainly in His *nirmankaya* aspect He was like all other human beings and subject to *anicca* or impermanence (although some schools say this is true in appearance only), but His eternal existence as described in the *Lotus Sutra* and His special powers – described in dramatic detail in many Mahayana sutras – leave no doubt that the Buddha was more than a simple, ordinary human being, ontologically identical to us. This idea is reinforced by the Buddha's statement that he is not a god, not a man, not a *gandharva* (low ranking *deva*) but rather a Buddha,¹³⁰ thereby indicating His ontologically distinct nature. For their part, the Bahá'í Writings make it clear that Manifestations are not simply ordinary human beings. Bahá'u'lláh states,

And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He

hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle, *this mysterious and ethereal Being* He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself.¹³¹

Manifestations are certainly not to be identified with God but neither are They like ordinary humanity, as the foregoing description makes clear. They are “born of the substance of God Himself,” which is to say, They somehow (we cannot say exactly how) reflect God’s substance or essence. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “*They are the “Universal Realities and the Divine Beings, Who are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God.”*”¹³² This why Bahá’u’lláh calls Them the “primal Mirrors.”¹³³ They also possess omniscience and “essential infallibility.”¹³⁴ Thus it would appear that at least in the Mahayana that Buddhism and the Bahá’í Writings agree that Buddhas or Manifestations are ontologically distinct from the rest of humanity.

Emptiness, Void, Sunyata

Another noteworthy consequence of dependent origination is the doctrine of emptiness, void, or *sunyata*. However, an important caveat is necessary: Buddhist schools do not all agree on the definition of emptiness. The Yogacara (mind or consciousness only) system “says that emptiness is the absence of a difference between an object and the mind apprehending it,”¹³⁵ that is, the subject. In a manner reminiscent of Hegel, Yogacaras believe enlightenment occurs when the subject realises that s/he is one with the object and his/her self disappears insofar as it is one with the universe. The Chinese *Ch’an* Buddhists (Zen in Japan), on the other hand, understands “emptiness as the radiant pure mind empty of all its conceptual accretions.”¹³⁶ This approach views all mental activities and the resulting concepts as obscurations of our natural inner radiance. The *Scrimala Sutra*, for its part, defines ‘emptiness’ as the cleansing from of “all the defilement-stores by inconceivable void-ness knowledge. The ultimate knowledge, which disintegrates the *entire defilement-store*, is entitled

'Right Knowledge.'"¹³⁷ The Buddha is also empty of defilement ("other-empty") but "is not void of the Buddha dharmas"¹³⁸ i.e. He has real, positive essential being and attributes, i.e. is not "self-empty." The *Ratnagotravibhaga Sutra* makes similar claims. Finally, in Tibet the Jo nang pas (*gzhan stong*) school, which is a rival to the dGe lugpa (*rang stong*) school to which the Dalai Lama belongs, also sees emptiness as the absence of defilements and the existence of an Absolute which "is not empty of its own inherent existence."¹³⁹ Indeed, "the self-empty teachings are said by the Jo nang pas to be correct as far as reasoning goes, as a lower teaching, clearing away erroneous views."¹⁴⁰ For them, emptiness is not the lack of real inherent existence but rather the lack of defilements by the real self.

As we have already noted, the Bahá'í Writings cannot agree we can abolish the subject-object distinction, and, therefore, cannot accept the Yogacara definition of emptiness. However, with the *Ch'an* definition, matters become more nuanced. The Bahá'í Writings, do, after all, suggest that if we become like a hollow reed, if we empty ourselves of all traces of our lower nature or defilements as well as our acquired learning, we shall attain a higher, less worldly condition and more pure. Bahá'u'lláh says,

*Blind thine eyes, that thou mayest behold My beauty; stop thine ears, that thou mayest hearken unto the sweet melody of My voice; empty thyself of all learning, that thou mayest partake of My knowledge; and sanctify thyself from riches, that thou mayest obtain a lasting share from the ocean of My eternal wealth. Blind thine eyes, that is, to all save My beauty; stop thine ears to all save My word; empty thyself of all learning save the knowledge of Me; that with a clear vision, a pure heart and an attentive ear thou mayest enter the court of My holiness.*¹⁴¹

In various ways, this whole section is about how to 'empty' ourselves of our lower nature defilements, in order to attain a "clear vision" and a "pure heart." This bears a remarkable similarity to the *Ch'an* notion of discovering "emptiness as the pure radiant mind"¹⁴² as well as to the *Tathagtagarbha* sutras such as *Queen Srimala* and the *Ratnagotravibhaga*.

However, the best known concept of emptiness — at least in the West — is that of the Madhyamika schools, such as *Prasangika* (Consequence) school which assert “that emptiness is the absence of inherent existence.”¹⁴³ They assert that because all things are dependently originated, they cannot exist by themselves and for that reason are ‘empty’ of real or true being. In the last analysis, “all things lack own-existence.”¹⁴⁴ Indeed, anything that results from a causal process is, for that very reason, dependent on others and has only relative existence, for which reason it is empty. “The Mahaayaana understands it [emptiness] to mean that dharmas are empty of own-being i.e. they are not ultimate facts in their own right, but merely imagined and falsely discriminated for each and every one of them is dependent on something other than itself.”¹⁴⁵ As the *Heart Sutra* says, the Bodhisattva Avalokita “looked down from on high ... and he saw that in their own being they [all things] were empty.”¹⁴⁶ Such a view effectively equates relative existence with dependent origination and emptiness. In the words of Nagarjuna,

Something that is not dependently arisen,

Such a thing does not exist.

Therefore a nonempty thing

Does not exist.¹⁴⁷

According to *The Lotus Sutra*,

All phenomena

are empty, without being,

without any constant abiding,

without arising or extinction

Look upon all phenomena

as having no existence,

like empty space

as without firmness or hardness,

not born, not emerging¹⁴⁸

The Bahá'í Writings are well able to accommodate the Madhyamaka view that all phenomena lack inherent existence, are contingent and in that sense, empty – though they do not refer to that fact as a lack of essence. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*In the same manner the existence of beings in comparison with the existence of God is but illusion and nothingness; it is an appearance, like the image reflected in a mirror.*¹⁴⁹

This means that, like the *Dharmakaya*, or the *Alaya-vijnana*, only God has absolute, which is to say, unconditioned existence and compared to that absolute existence all other existence is dependent, relative and, therefore, empty. They are not only dependent on God but, as we have shown above, also on the influence of other things in dependent origination.¹⁵⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasises this relativity by saying,

*Therefore, though the world of contingency exists, in relation to the existence of God it is nonexistent and nothingness. Man and dust both exist, but how great the difference between the existence of the mineral and that of man! The one in relation to the other is nonexistence. In the same way, the existence of creation in relation to the existence of God is nonexistence. Thus it is evident and clear that although the beings exist, in relation to God and to the Word of God they are nonexistent.*¹⁵¹

In other words, “existence and nonexistence are both relative.”¹⁵² All things are non-existent compared to the unconditioned Absolute, and, therefore, empty. (Unlike Buddhism, we also see how this principle applies to various levels of existence, insofar as a lower form of existence is non-existent to a higher form, a teaching which further emphasises the relativity of existence.)

One may, of course, ask whether ‘emptiness’ and ‘non-existence’ as used in the Bahá'í Writings are the same. The answer is positive, because both terms refer to the relativity of existence of all entities, and because in both cases relativity implies a conditioned, dependent, contingent existence that contrasts sharply with the unconditioned existence of an

Absolute. In other words, Buddhism as well as the Bahá'í Faith postulate that the relativity of existence is grounded not just in universal impermanence and contingency but also in the mutual inter-dependent influences of things on each other. The Bahá'í Faith and some Mahayana schools can agree as well that phenomenal reality is contingent, unlike the non-relative Absolute (such as the *Dharmakaya*, or *Tathagatagarbha*) that is not affected by dependent origination.

However, we are still left with the question of whether or not the Bahá'í Writings can agree that relativity and emptiness mean that there is no "arising or extinction" of things as asserted by *The Lotus Sutra*. This is not, of course, a conventional truth, but rather a statement from the ultimate point of view. In the Bahá'í Writings, the ultimate point of view is God's perspective, and according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*in the world of God there is no time.*"¹⁵³ If there is no time, there is neither "arising or extinction" which are temporal phenomena. This means that Bahá'í ontology agrees with the Mahayana that from the ultimate viewpoint, there are no temporal phenomena, but they disagree that human beings can attain that ultimate viewpoint.

No Self (*Anatman*)

In regards to human nature, emptiness usually refers to the doctrine of *anatman*, *anatta*) or 'no self,' a doctrine which is understood differently in different Buddhist schools. Complicating the issue is the fact that in the Pali Canon, the Buddha declines to answer whether He preaches self or no-self, and later He said that both views were mistaken extremes:

"Self" (*aatma*), Kaa'syapa. is one extreme. "No-self" (*nairaatmya*) is the second extreme. In between these two extremes is the middle position that is formless, nonindicative, supportless, noumenal, signless and nonconceptual. This, Kaa'syapa, is called the middle path, the correct perception of things.¹⁵⁴

Elsewhere, He provides a list of all the things the self is not and cannot be — without explicitly denying that the self exists perhaps in some other way.¹⁵⁵ According to one scholar, the no-

self doctrine is not an ontological doctrine about the existence or non-existence of a 'self' but rather a strategy for overcoming suffering by detaching ourselves from the '...self, which is a major cause of suffering.'¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, the important *Tathagatagarbha* sutras categorically assert that contrary to the most commonly presented view of the no-self doctrine, there is, in fact, a transcendent and enduring ground of being, i.e. the Buddha-nature, in every sentient being. However, the Theravada, Nagarjuna's Madhyamaka and the Prasangika school would deny this without qualification. In the aggregate of dharmas that make up a human being, there is no dharma corresponding to a 'self.' The 'self' is a delusion, an artifact of dependent origination and non-existent. A significant portion of Buddhist practice is to attain such realization of no self. As the Buddha says in one of the *suttas* [sutras] from the Pali Canon:

If one does not behold any self or anything of the nature of self in the five groups of grasping (material shape, feeling, perception, the impulses, consciousness), one is an Arahant [a worthy one, a pure one, free of mental defilements].¹⁵⁷

This theme has one of its best known and oft-repeated expressions in *The Questions of King Milinda* (the historical Bactrian Greek, Menander, 100 BCE). Nagasena, a travelling Buddhist monk, tells Milinda that he is called merely Nagasena, that "there is no permanent individuality [soul] in the matter!"¹⁵⁸ Our names are conventional, nominal designations, "mere empty sound"¹⁵⁹ and refer to nothing more than a current composition of parts. He then uses a chariot as an example, pointing out that no individual part is 'the chariot' and that when he has broken the chariot down, no thing called 'chariot' remains. The same is true of human beings because

...the existence of an ego-soul cannot be conceived apart from sensation, perception, imagination, intelligence, volition etc. and therefore it is absurd to think that there is an independent individual soul-agent which makes our consciousness its workshop.¹⁶⁰

There is no special independent being which 'composes' these elements according to a desired form or which uses them to

achieve its own ends. As Richard Taylor says, "The self whose existence the Buddha denied was an inner, enduring self, having an identity through time and presumably being, therefore, *capable of an existence independent of the body and the world even after death.*"¹⁶¹

Conceived in this unqualified manner, there is no common ground between Buddhism and the Bahá'í Writings on the issue of the self. The Bahá'í scriptures leave no doubt that the soul or self (we shall use the terms interchangeably here.) is more than just a name, or a sound but is an ontologically real being, "*in its essence one of the signs of God.*" (GWB 160) Indeed, the underlying essentialist philosophy of the Writings, illustrated by their insistence on essential nature of the mineral, vegetable, animal and human, (SAQ 129) on the essence of man (SAQ 220) and even on the "Essence of God," (SAQ 147) makes it clear that Bahá'í essentialism and a purely nominalist understandings of self are logically incompatible.

The purely nominalist understanding of self is not trouble free from the standpoint of Buddhist sutras and major philosophical works. For example, a whole class of sutras — that is, Buddha word — called the *Tathagarbha* sutras reject this explanation. For example, in the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra* itself the Buddha says, "Good sons, all beings, though they find themselves with all sorts of *klesas* [defilements], have a *tathagatagarbha* [Buddha nature or Buddha essence] that is eternally unsullied, and that is replete with virtues no different from my own"¹⁶² and adds, "the *tathagatagarbhas* of all beings are eternal and unchanging."¹⁶³ This concept of the *tathagatagarbha* is so close to a substantial self (see Kalupahana below) that the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* directly identifies it with self or atman.¹⁶⁴ In the twelfth chapter on Buddha-nature, we read, "The Buddha said: "O good man! 'Self' means '*tathagatagarbha.*' Every being has the Buddha Nature. This is self. Such a self is, since the very beginning, under cover of innumerable illusions."¹⁶⁵ According to the Buddha, "The true self of the Buddha Nature is like the diamond which cannot be crushed out," and "The shape of self that seeks to flee from the world is the Buddha Nature. It is the best way of conceiving self."¹⁶⁶ These words suggest that the doctrine of *anatman* in fact denies a superficial 'ego-self' that is absorbed in the affairs

of the world; it does not necessarily deny the existence of a deep Buddha-nature or *tathagatagarbha* within the individual. As Paul Williams says, "One thing anyway is clear: the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* teaches a really existing, permanent element ... in sentient beings."¹⁶⁷ The *Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala Sutra* supports this statement as does Asvaghosha's "*The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana*" which states that "The Mind as phenomena (*samsara*) is grounded on the Tathagatagarbha."¹⁶⁸ This means that the phenomenal mind of man is fundamentally the *Tathagatagarbha* or Buddha-essence. The importance of *tathagatagarbha* or Buddha essence theory in East Asian, i.e. Chinese, Japanese and Korean Buddhism cannot be underestimated according to Paul Williams.¹⁶⁹

The *Tathagatagarbha* doctrine is more easily reconciled with the Bahá'í Writings than the Theravada, Prasangika or Madhyamaka views. As already noted, the Bahá'í Writings teach that the soul or self is an ontologically existing entity although its existence is dependent upon God. Bahá'ís, too, believe that the soul is eternal once it has come into existence¹⁷⁰ and that in itself it is free from all bodily defects, defilements (*klesas*) and limitations.

Consider how the human intellect develops and weakens, and may at times come to naught, whereas the soul changeth not ... the soul dependeth not upon the body. It is through the power of the soul that the mind comprehendeth, imagineth and exerteth its influence, whilst the soul is a power that is free ...the soul [is] limitless ... The soul ... is in motion and ever active ... is ever endowed with full strength ... despite the loss of reason, the power of the soul would still continue to exist.¹⁷¹

Like the *Tathagatagarbha* Sutras, the Bahá'í Writings assert that the real self, i.e. the ontological foundation of our being, is originally pure: "Know thou that every soul is fashioned after the nature of God, each being pure and holy at his birth."¹⁷² The ontological foundation of the self, be it called Buddha-nature or Buddha-essence or 'soul,' is, in its nature pristine and perfect, and is only adventitiously covered by *klesas* or defilements. This 'second self,' or empirical ego of our own

making, which is attached to the world is precisely what must be overcome to attain our true nature again. "*Our greatest efforts must be directed towards detachment from the things of the world; we must strive to become more spiritual, more luminous...*"¹⁷³ Similarly, we must detach from our empirical, worldly self: "*The martyr's field is the place of detachment from self...*"¹⁷⁴ Only when we accomplish this will we once more be aware of the original and inherent nobility of our spiritual nature: "*Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself?*"¹⁷⁵

The *Bhavanga* and the *Alaya*

The Theravada Buddhists and the Yogacara (Cittamara) branch of the Madhyamaka realised that a strict interpretation of the no-self (*anatman*) doctrine leads to serious philosophical difficulties. This, is partly due to the fact that "what the Buddha says concerning the absence of self seems to conflict with other things he says and is not obviously a cogent account of our experience."¹⁷⁶ Several of these problems relate to the karmic sequence of cause and effect that is conventionally called a person. What makes any such sequence a particular sequence, identifiably different from others? What keeps the continuity of that particular sequence so that it does not simply fragment into a disorderly chaos? What is it that links the karmic results of one life with the next? Furthermore, how can there be continuous consciousness if the mind is only a series of moments without factors of continuity between moments? To answer these questions, Theravada Buddhism developed the concept of *bhavanga*, which is "usually translated as 'life-continuum' [which] keeps the continuity in a lifespan, so that what we call a 'being' goes on to live from moment to moment."¹⁷⁷ It is necessary for continued existence. According to Alfred Scheepers, "This background consciousness can be compared to a river"¹⁷⁸ whose flow is interrupted by moments of focused consciousness. For that reason, under normal waking circumstances, the mind is not aware of the *bhavanga* stream, although it may be during sleep. In the Yogacara (Cittamara) school of the Mahayana, the function of the *bhavanga* is fulfilled by the *Alaya-vijnana* from which conscious volition and karma arise and where the potential

karmic consequences are stored. Indeed, for this reason, the Yogacara tradition referred to the *Alaya-vijnana*, as the “storehouse consciousness”¹⁷⁹ which stores the individual seeds of one’s karmic sequence and thus provides continuity as they manifest in turn.

The alaya consists of a series of cittas [minds] accompanied by both karmic seeds and the ‘seeds’ of potential defilements and memories. These all reproduce themselves over time, thus accounting for the continuity of personality through and periods of unconsciousness...¹⁸⁰

According to Paul Williams,

The substratum consciousness [*alaya*], seen as a defiled form of consciousness ... is personal in a sense, individual, continually changing and yet serving to give a degree of personal identity...¹⁸¹

David Kalupahana informs us that the *alaya* is often portrayed as the ocean agitated by the “dispositional tendencies,”¹⁸² which is to say the karmic seeds of individual consciousness. However, whether it be the image of a river or an ocean, the images of the *bhavanga* and the *alaya* remains one of a substratum or ground of being that supports the existence of something else, be it ever so briefly, and ensures their continuity. Though in a different way, the *Tathagatgarbha* also “bears a close resemblance to the *bhavanga*”¹⁸³ insofar as it provides a ground of being for all individual existence. As such it provides for their continuity as well.

There is no question that, as Kalupahana says, the teaching of *alaya* – and even *bhavanga* and *Tathagatagarbha* – brings us “dangerously close to the theory of self ... advocated by the heretics.”¹⁸⁴ After all, a “life-continuum” acts very much like a continuously existing entity as the karmic seeds are stored and reproduce themselves through their consequences. Williams notes that although the *alaya* or substratum consciousness “performs some of the functions of a Self,”¹⁸⁵ the Yogacara struggled hard to deny this charge and to explain it away. Fully aware of this, Kalupahana presents ways of interpreting the relevant sutras to avoid this outcome, but the fact remains

that for Buddhism, there is no problem-free way of accepting the concept of underlying continuity — which resembles ‘substance’ precisely insofar as it provides continuity. Providing and explaining continuity is one of substance’s chief ontological functions and whenever we have continuity we do have, in fact, something that is at least substance-like. Thus, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that at least some forms of Buddhism harbour concepts that look and/or function suspiciously like a substantial self.

Insofar as the *bhavanga* and *alaya* function like substances by providing continuity, they are convergent with the Bahá'í concept of soul/self. This is because the Bahá'í Writings accept the continuous existence of the soul from birth right into our post-earthly existence. That continuity is, after all, the basis of our moral responsibility for the actions we commit, and their formative influence on our character. We cannot simply deny this continuity and slough off responsibility as if our deeds had been done by someone else at another time. The *bhavanga* ensures this will not happen because it provides continuity, that is, it allows the regular appearance of certain attributes that identify things through time.

Dependent Origination, Karma and Reincarnation

The issue of self in Buddhist thought brings us to the subject of dependent origination, karma, and re-incarnation. Applied to karma and re-incarnation, dependent origination explains the origin and causes of suffering and subsequent re-birth if these causes are not overcome during our lives. The twelve stage process of dependent origination and reincarnation starts with ignorance which leads to “volitional impulses”¹⁸⁶ (which the Buddha equates with action¹⁸⁷) from which we get consciousness, from which we get body and mind, from which the six senses, from which contact with other things, from which feeling, from which craving or desire, from which grasping or clinging, from which becoming from which birth from which aging, death, grief and despair.¹⁸⁸ The only way not to condemn oneself to the last, twelfth step of despair, and to avoid rebirth is not to begin in the first place because the

underlying principle is that when this arises, that arises and when this ceases, that ceases.¹⁸⁹ For the Buddhist, the whole purpose in studying reality is not an epistemological satisfaction of knowing but soteriological satisfaction of ending the ignorance that leads to a new karmic sequence and inevitable rebirth. The Buddha makes this plain in the parable of the man wounded by an arrow; no one would waste time speculating about the origin or construction of the tip instead of removing it from the flesh.

However, a problem remains: how can there be re-birth if there is no substantial soul or self to be re-born? According to Walpola Rahula, when the body perishes, the energies which constituted that body “have within themselves the power to grow a new form”¹⁹⁰ i.e. be re-born in a new particular aggregate of energies. No self or soul has moved from one life to another. As Rupert Gethin says, “there is a *causal connection* between the phenomenon that constitute a being at the time of death and the phenomenon that constitute a being at the start of a new life.”¹⁹¹ Lives are linked in a *causal series*. Keeping the causal connection in mind prevents what could become a serious misunderstanding for Bahá'ís who may confuse this concept of re-incarnation with the Bahá'í concept of the return of the qualities of a previously existing person.

Briefly, a return is indeed referred to in the Holy Scriptures, but by this is meant the return of the qualities, conditions, effects, perfections, and inner realities of the lights which recur in every dispensation. The reference is not to specific, individual souls and identities.¹⁹²

In other words, the qualities return but there is no causal connection between the first person in whom these qualities appear, and the next. The resemblance between the two is coincidental, and, therefore, the Bahá'í Writings cannot be interpreted as supporting re-incarnation on this basis. Nor do they accept re-incarnation in the form of a theory of transmigration in which a substantial soul or self re-appears in various guises in various places and times. Such a return to earth is vigorously rejected by 'Abdu'l-Bahá' in *Some Answered*

Questions in which He devotes an entire chapter to refuting this idea.¹⁹³

This brings us to the crucial question: of whether the Bahá'í Writings can accommodate this application of the law of dependent origination? On at least one important matter, they can, namely, both Buddhism and the Bahá'í Writings see ignorance as the root cause of our psychological and spiritual difficulties. That is why the Noonday Prayer is — in Buddhist terms — a statement about correct knowledge and correct action, the first two terms in the Law of Conditionality: “*I bear witness O my God that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee.*” In knowing God, we overcome the ignorance that prevents us from living correctly and in worshipping God, which is what the Buddha calls taking “right action.” Moreover, given the frequent admonitions about detachment the Bahá'í Writings also agree with Buddhism about the devastating consequences of craving, desire and grasping.

However, the Bahá'í Writings can only accept one particular interpretation of the 12-stage process of reincarnation, one which reinterprets reincarnation psychologically or spiritually but not ontologically as a process involving the actual end and re-appearance of a particular causal series. Thus, for the process of re-incarnation to be acceptable in a Bahá'í context, we must interpret it to mean that ignorance and grasping lead to a re-birth in the sense of a re-attachment to the phenomenal world or to the phenomenal body. By rekindling our attachments, we pass “from the world of freedom into the world of bondage.”¹⁹⁴ To put it another way, a psychological or spiritual interpretation of reincarnation refers to the on-going process of detaching ourselves from the world, falling back into attachment, which is to say, being ‘re-born,’ and struggling to detach ourselves again. Thus there appear to be no reasons why the Bahá'í Writings cannot accommodate such an understanding of reincarnation and its consequences.

According to P.A. Payutto, in the *Abhidharama Pitaka*, one of the “three baskets” of the Theravada, presents this very idea in which dependent origination

is shown occurring in its entirety in one mind moment ... It is not necessary to die before realizing the cessation of birth, aging, death and thus sorrow, lamentation, pain grief and despair. Those things can be overcome in this very life-time.¹⁹⁵

Walpola Rahula also leads us in this direction when he quotes the Buddha as saying, "O bhikku, every moment you are born, decay and die."¹⁹⁶ In other words, the process of karma (which is based on dependent origination) can happen within a single life as described above, and need not be a "life-time-to-lifetime process"¹⁹⁷ as is commonly assumed. With specific references to original texts and commentaries, Payutto shows how the 'one-life-time' understanding of reincarnation is based directly on the Pali Canon, although, as he points out, in modern times, this view has not been prevalent. This revived 'one-life-time' interpretation retains the usual 12-stage process that begins with ignorance and ends with despair but understands it as happening within our life-time and not between successive life-times. Viewed psychologically or spiritually rather than ontologically, the concept of reincarnation is compatible with the Bahá'í Writings which explicitly reject it on ontological grounds. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

*...reincarnation, which is the repeated appearance of the same spirit with its former essence and condition in this same world of appearance, is impossible and unrealizable. As the repetition of the same appearance is impossible and interdicted for each of the material beings, so for spiritual beings also, a return to the same condition, whether in the arc of descent or in the arc of ascent, is interdicted and impossible, for the material corresponds to the spiritual.*¹⁹⁸

There is no exact repetition in nature, and because 'Abdu'l-Bahá believes that "the material world corresponds to the spiritual world,"¹⁹⁹ He concludes that there is no such repetition in the spiritual world either. It may be objected that this statement applies to a Hindu, not Buddhist concept of reincarnation, one in which a substantial spiritual entity reappears in subsequent existences. However, given 'Abdu'l-

Bahá's rejection of repetition in the natural and spiritual worlds, it is logical to assume that He would also reject the repetition of particular causal chains or sequences in various successive existences.

Conclusion

On the basis of this survey of major issues in Buddhist ontology, we conclude that while genuine differences between Buddhist and Bahá'í ontology exist, on a significant number of the most fundamental issues, they agree and that on others where there is no outright agreement, there is convergence. Ontologically speaking, the two religions differ more in emphasis, on what they choose to elaborate, than in basic ontological doctrines per se. That is exactly what we would expect from the Bahá'í teaching that differences among religions arise not from their foundational principles but from the time and circumstances of their revelation.²⁰⁰ Our findings thus support Bahá'u'lláh's teaching on the "fundamental oneness of religion." (PUP 175)

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Why The Bahá'í Faith Is Not Pluralist

Grant S. Martin

Introduction

In his article “The Bahá'í Faith and Religious Pluralism,” Seena Fazel — a Bahá'í, and psychologist by professional — argues that the Bahá'í response to religious diversity is a form of *religious pluralism*.¹ In this article, I will argue that the Bahá'í Faith is *not* pluralist. My argument will take the form of (1) a review and critique of Fazel's argument, and (2) an independent evaluation of the Bahá'í response to religious diversity in light of a concept of religious pluralism developed by, philosopher of religion, Paul Griffiths.² Both arguments will lead to the conclusion that the Bahá'í Faith is not pluralist. However, before proceeding to my main arguments I will provide some historical context to the debate on religious pluralism/diversity that has been taking place amongst western academics — mostly Christians — for the past twenty years or so. This may help us to understand, on one hand, why Fazel characterizes the Bahá'í Faith pluralist and, on the other, why Griffiths reinterprets the concept of religious pluralism.

A Brief History of the Diversity/Pluralism Debate

The contemporary academic debate on religious diversity has largely revolved around the question of whether or not non-Christians can be saved — and if so how?³ Moreover, a dominant model, for organizing responses to this question, has emerged in the form of a threefold typology that includes exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist responses.⁴ This typology was initially conceived by Alan Race in 1983, but has since been popularized through the work of John Hick, Gavin D'Costa, Dianna Eck and others.⁵ From a Christian point of view

exclusivists maintain that being a Christian is necessary for salvation, inclusivists maintain that non-Christian religions *may* function as implicit channels for salvation that is, nonetheless, most adequately available in Christianity, and pluralists maintain that non-Christian religions can (like Christianity) lead their members to salvation. This typology, though developed within the Christian theology of religions, has been applied analogously to other traditions.⁶ Thus, for example, a Buddhist exclusivist will maintain that being a Buddhist is necessary for “salvation,” and so on.

Although the threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism has been used, primarily, to categorize responses to the question of salvation it has not been limited to this; indeed, it has also been used — less precisely — as a general typology for classifying responses to religious diversity altogether.⁷ Accordingly, exclusivists have been characterized not only as those who maintain that their religion alone leads to salvation, but also as those who maintain that their religion alone is true, as those who are zealously committed to the absoluteness of their religion, and as those who are primarily concerned with aggressively converting others.⁸ Most differently, pluralists have been characterized not only as those who maintain that many religions lead to salvation, but also as those who maintain that many religions are true, as those who are not fully committed to their religion (because they see truth in other religions), and as those who are tolerant of, and open to, other religions. Inclusivism is somewhere between these two positions, but pluralists and non-pluralists, alike, usually see inclusivism as a position that eventually collapses into exclusivism.⁹ Consequently, the debate has polarized into two camps — with the advocates of the “pluralist paradigm” on one side and the advocates of the “exclusivist/inclusivist paradigm” on the other.

In the West — again, predominantly among those who identify themselves as Christians — the pluralist paradigm has become increasingly influential.¹⁰ One plausible reason for this is that it is most compatible with the predominant world-view of western democracies, wherein religion is increasingly viewed as a private affair and tolerance is an unsurpassable value.¹¹ In this cultural circumstance, it is intolerable to identify with a

point of view that seems to support religious intolerance, and presumes that a particular religion has broad relevance for the generality of humankind; consequently, pluralism has become a more socially acceptable position than either exclusivism or inclusivism. And, of course, pluralists have contributed to this situation by frequently caricaturizing so-called exclusivists and inclusivists as closed-minded, proselytizing bigots who are convinced that everyone else is destined for eternal damnation.¹²

Arguably, Fazel's attempt to identify the Bahá'í Faith with pluralism has more to do with wanting to save it from the perception that it is religiously intolerant — since religious tolerance is a virtue in the Bahá'í Faith¹³ — than with any deep compatibility between religious pluralism and the Bahá'í response to religious diversity. And, no doubt, Griffiths' work on religious diversity is motivated by his desire to change the increasingly high profile of religious pluralism by showing what it really stands for (in his eyes). Nonetheless, I will now make my two arguments for why the Bahá'í Faith is not pluralist.

Fazel's Argument that the Bahá'í Faith is Pluralist

In his article, "Religious Pluralism and the Bahá'í Faith," Seena Fazel attempts to characterize the Bahá'í approach to religious diversity using the influential threefold typology discussed above.

According to Fazel's reading of this typology, *pluralism* affirms that all of the world's religious traditions constitute varying perceptions and conceptions of, and responses to, one ultimate and mysterious Divine reality. In sharpest contrast to this perspective, *exclusivism* affirms that one particular tradition alone teaches the truth and provides the way to salvation or liberation. Finally, *inclusivism* affirms that while *one* particular tradition does present the final truth, other traditions *may* be seen as reflecting aspects of this truth or constituting approaches to it. Fazel argues that even though there are statements in the Bahá'í writings suggestive of an exclusivist or inclusivist approach, the Bahá'í response to religious diversity is most characteristically pluralist.

To rebut the idea that the Bahá'í Faith is exclusivist Fazel introduces two quotations by Shoghi Effendi, one stating that peoples of whatever religion derive their inspiration from one heavenly source and the other stating that it is not possible to call one world faith superior to another.

To rebut the idea that Bahá'ís are inclusivists Fazel discusses Bahá'u'lláh's critique of the Shi'í position that Muḥammad delivered the final revelation, from God, in human history, and states that Bahá'ís do not claim finality for their own religion or revelation. He also deals with Shoghi Effendi's, seemingly inclusivist, claim that the Bahá'í social programme represents the "furthestmost limits in the organization of society"¹⁴ by qualifying this with a further statement by Shoghi Effendi's wherein he says that this superiority should not be attributed to the inherent superiority of the Bahá'í Faith but to the fact that it appears in a time when human beings are more advanced and more receptive to Divine guidance than in previous ages.

Having minimally disqualified the Bahá'í Faith as either exclusivist or inclusivist, Fazel then tries to identify it with the pluralist perspective, which involves some additional efforts to distance it from exclusivism and inclusivism. At this point, Fazel defines pluralism a little more fully by saying that it affirms that the different world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of "the Real" and that within each tradition salvation occurs. This position mirrors very closely the position of John Hick, a Christian and philosopher of religion, who has been one of the dominant leaders of the "pluralist movement" for over twenty years.¹⁵

Fazel begins his argument that the Bahá'í Faith is pluralist by trying to disassociate a number of statements made by both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá claiming that the world will eventually see one common faith from their exclusivist or inclusivist implications. He does this by saying that we must temper the face value of such statements with Shoghi Effendi's insight that from our present vantage point we can only get a glimpse of what the future religious landscape might look like. He adds to this that such statements about "one religion" might be better understood as symbolical affirmations of the belief that all religions come from God and, thus, there is only

one religion – the religion of God. Fazel is suggesting here that statements in the Bahá'í writings claiming that all the peoples of the world will embrace one common faith (i.e. the Bahá'í Faith) might simply be saying that in the future all the peoples of the world will realize that that there is, in a sense, one common faith since they all come from God.

Fazel continues his argument by claiming that the Bahá'í Faith will never become “imperialist” because it does not prejudice, or impose social sanctions, against non-Bahá'ís, and it encourages freedom of choice in religious matters. (Fazel is accepting, here, the conventional position that “imperialist” behaviour is characteristic of exclusivism and inclusivism.)

He then asks what unifies the various religious traditions and says that according to the Bahá'í view they are unified insofar as they are all “*centred on the spiritual transformation of human beings.*”¹⁶ (Again, Fazel is closely following Hick who defines religion as the transformation of human beings from self-centeredness to God centeredness.) In making this claim, Fazel is trying to root the commonality of religion in soteriology rather than theology – apparently because he thinks it is less prone to dispute. Fazel then tries to flesh out this common soteriology by claiming that the focus of spiritual transformation in all traditions is “*the adoption of spiritual and ethical values common to religious traditions, such as moderation, trustworthiness, justice, and compassion.*”¹⁷ And while he adds that there are other uniting features among religions – such as similarities in the lives of different religious founders, an apophatic (or negative) theology, and their “civilizing power” – he clearly stresses (as does John Hick) an ethics-based soteriology as the common feature of all religions.

At this point in his argument, Fazel moves in the direction of trying to construct a “Bahá'í theory of religious pluralism,” and he bases this theory on the Bahá'í principle that “religious truth is relative.” This theory is grounded in the claim that absolute knowledge of God by human beings is impossible, and Fazel draws on the following quotation from the founder of the Bahá'í Faith that clearly seems to support it: “*Exalted, immeasurably exalted, art thou above the strivings of mortal*

man to unravel Thy mystery, to describe Thy glory, or even hint at the nature of Thine Essence."¹⁸

Continuing to develop his Bahá'í theory of religious pluralism, Fazel discusses two (closely related) concepts in the Bahá'í writings that help to explain religious diversity, and are also based on "relativity." One concept accounts for religious differences in terms of social evolution: Different social laws and ordinances are revealed by God at different times in keeping with the needs of human beings in different ages. The second concept accounts for religious differences in terms of the spiritual maturity and receptivity of humanity: As humanity becomes more spiritually mature and receptive to Divine revelation it is able to receive a more "intense" revelation.

Finally, Fazel argues that cognitive relativism (i.e. the relativism stating that human beings cannot know the Absolute) resolves the problem of the "*seemingly contradictory ontological statement of monism and dualism.*"¹⁹ His basic argument here is that these conceptions, to the extent they are meaningful, are about human beings and not an "exterior Absolute."

I will now critique Fazel's characterization of the Bahá'í Faith as pluralist and, so, argue that it is not pluralist.

A Critique of Fazel's Argument

I will begin this critique by showing where I think Fazel has either selectively or wrongly read Bahá'í sources in order to make his point that the Bahá'í Faith is pluralist. Following this I will briefly present John Hick's concept of religious pluralism (which is, more or less, the concept of pluralism adopted by Fazel) in order to broaden the base for my general argument that the Bahá'í Faith is not pluralist. And, finally, I will present this general argument or critique against the idea that the Bahá'í Faith is pluralist.

In his initial efforts to distance the Bahá'í Faith from exclusivism, Fazel quotes Shoghi Effendi saying that "*One cannot call one World Faith superior to another, as they all come from God.*"²⁰ The rest of this sentence reads as follows:

*“they are progressive, each suited to certain needs of the time.”*²¹ The relevant point here is that the Bahá’í position never claims that the different religious traditions of the world are *without qualification* equal as Fazel’s selective quotation seems to suggest. The Bahá’í concept that religion is one is very strong but so is its correlated concept that religion or revelation is *progressive* meaning that more recent religions are more appropriate for humanity in the “present age.”

In discussing inclusivism Fazel focuses primarily on finality, and rightly claims that Bahá’ís reject the concept that religious revelation can come to an end; thus, Bahá’ís believe that there will be further revelation from God in the future that will supersede even Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation. What Fazel does not mention is that Bahá’ís also believe that there will be no further revelation from God for at least one thousand years from the start of Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation (dated from 1852).²² Thus, Bahá’ís do not claim that Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation represents the final revelation that humanity will ever see, but they *do* claim that it is the final revelation humanity will see for a relatively long period of time. Consequently, Bahá’ís reject *a priori* the religious legitimacy of any new religious movement such as Scientology or the Unification Church – in the Bahá’í view religious unity can only be seen concretely in the *past*.

Fazel quotes Shoghi Effendi in an effort to show that we can’t really know what the future holds and so Bahá’í forecasts that the entire world will eventually become Bahá’í needs to be taken with a “grain of salt”: “all we can reasonably venture to attempt is to strive to obtain a glimpse of the first streaks of the promised Dawn that must, in the fullness of time, chase away the gloom that has encircled humanity.”²³ Again, Fazel is being so selective here that I think he is distorting Shoghi Effendi’s point of view. Shoghi Effendi often expressed reservation about “our” capacity to envision the exact details of the Bahá’í commonwealth that, he believed, will emerge in the fullness of time, but he never expressed doubt that a Bahá’í world-commonwealth will, in fact, emerge when the masses of humanity embrace the Bahá’í Faith in the distant future.²⁴

As mentioned above, in support of the idea that human beings can never claim absolute knowledge about God, Fazel

quotes a passage from Bahá'u'lláh stating that God is beyond the grasp of mortals. There is, however, another very important part to the Bahá'í concept of God; namely, the concept of the *Manifestation of God*. Bahá'í doctrine *does* affirm that the *Essence* of God is entirely beyond the capacity of human beings to comprehend, but it also asserts that human beings have the capacity to know God by knowing God's Manifestation or the Manifestation of God's Names and Attributes. The Manifestation of God can be understood on two different levels – one pertaining to the Godhead and the other pertaining to the various worlds of created being. With respect to the Godhead, the Manifestation of God is the qualitative or manifest aspect of the Godhead which is also responsible for generating created being; with respect to the world of created being the Manifestation of God is a being who Manifests all of the Names and Attributes of God to the extent it is possible in any given realm of being. Thus, Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh is, on one level, a Manifestation of God who reveals all of the Names and Attributes of God that can possibly be manifested in human form and, most ultimately, He is identified with the Manifest aspect of the Godhead.²⁵ So, from the Bahá'í point of view one cannot ultimately know God, but one can know God by knowing God's Manifestation – and Bahá'ís believe that knowing and loving God by knowing and loving God's Manifestation is their primary purpose in life. In other words, the “ignorance” about the Absolute is not so complete, in the Bahá'í Faith, as Fazel makes it out to be.

The last point I will make before moving on to my brief presentation of Hick's pluralism and general argument against the view that the Bahá'í Faith is pluralist pertains to Fazel's reading that the statements in the Bahá'í writings, suggesting that the peoples of the world will embrace one common faith (i.e. the Bahá'í Faith), are better understood as symbolic ones “*denoting the religion of God*.” Fazel suggests that religious harmony will be achieved when the various religions of the world come to the realization that there is in fact only one religion, since all religions come from God. I think Fazel's position is incongruent because it ignores the progressive element in the Bahá'í concept of revelation which is always tied to its concept of religious unity.

According to Bahá'í doctrine, God has established a great covenant with *all of humanity*. In this covenant humanity has an obligation to recognize and obey God's Manifestation when He or She appears on earth, and to the extent that humanity fulfills its end of the bargain God will perpetually send guidance to humanity through further Manifestations of God. Implicit in this is an obligation for humanity to recognize and obey God's *most recent Manifestation*. In other words, Bahá'ís *do believe* that it is desirable for *all human beings* to recognize and obey God's most recent Manifestation. In fact, Bahá'í doctrine could probably be used to argue that it is not possible to recognize that there is "ultimately only one religion" without recognizing God's most recent Manifestation — unless from ignorance.²⁶ Let us now take a closer look at John Hick's pluralism.

John Hick was trained as a Presbyterian minister, but achieved prominence for his work in the philosophy of religion, particularly on the topic of religious diversity. Hick's theory of religious diversity is rooted in his philosophical theology. According to Hick, all of the world's great faiths distinguish between God as unknowable and God as knowable.²⁷ And, he concludes from this that God, or the Real, is single and unknowable in essence, but conditionally known in many different forms on account of many different human attempts to grasp It. Hick argues that in the course of human history two major, culturally determined, concepts of the Real have emerged: One that conceives of the Real theistically, as a personal God, and the other that conceives of the Real non-theistically, as an impersonal Absolute. Of course, neither of these concepts is equated with perfect knowledge of the Real, and both remain on the level of human effort to know that which is essentially unknowable. Nonetheless, Hick claims that all of the world's great faiths provide an equally effective context for achieving salvation regardless of which concept of God they adhere to. In other words, Hick reduces religion to an effective context for achieving salvation — which he defines substantively (rather than formally) as the capacity to turn individuals from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. Hick argues that we can judge religions to be contexts for salvation insofar as we can see in them "fruits of the spirit" — love, justice, happiness, and so forth — and his argument that

all of the world's great religions are on par, with respect to salvific efficacy, is based on his observation that "saintliness" or the "fruits of the spirit" seem to be, more or less, evenly distributed in all of these traditions.

I will now proceed to my general argument that the Bahá'í Faith is not pluralist, either by Fazel's standard or Hick's.

According to Fazel's definition of pluralism, pluralism affirms that the different world faiths are different perceptions and conceptions of, and different responses to, "the Real" and that salvation — understood as ethical development — occurs in all religions. And, on the basis of what Fazel has argued we might also include that his version of pluralism affirms that no one religion's conceptions and perceptions of "the Real" are ultimately true or universally valid.

Even with respect to this most generic aspect of pluralist theory — the affirmation that different religions represent different conceptions and perceptions of "the Real" — the Bahá'í Faith is not clearly pluralist. From the Bahá'í perspective, religion is most fundamentally *revelation from God* and religious differences can be accounted for in terms of the differing spiritual capacities and differing social requirements of the people that receive God's revelation. Moreover, if we compare the Bahá'í understanding of religion with the understanding of religion in Hick's pluralist theory — that religion is only a *human* response to the Divine — then it is even less pluralist.

As for the claim made by both Fazel and Hick that salvation or spiritual/moral growth occurs in all religions, the Bahá'í teachings would concur — but not without qualification. As discussed above, Bahá'ís believe that there is only one religion and that the purposes of the seemingly different religions are fundamentally the same:

...all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they

differ only in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.²⁸

Thus, we can say that “salvation” or moral development occurs in all religions. However, Bahá’ís *do* believe that it is better to recognize God’s most recent Manifestation and, therefore, would have to qualify, in some way, any claim that “salvation” or moral development is equally effective in all religions. Again, the idea of *progressive revelation* implies that it would be more advantageous to one’s spiritual development to align oneself with God’s most recent Manifestation opposed to, for example, a Manifestation of God whose teachings were more appropriate for human beings living 2000 years ago. This is quite different from what Hick’s (and, perhaps, Fazel’s) pluralist theory suggests.

Finally, Fazel’s pluralist theory implicitly claims that no one religion’s conceptions and perceptions of “the Real” are ultimately true. It is true that from the Bahá’í perspective it is impossible to know the Essence of God but, as discussed above, this does not mean that Bahá’ís accept the “relative” truth of all concepts of God. Again, Bahá’ís believe that God can be known through God’s Manifestation, and that God’s Manifestation reveals laws and ordinances that constitute normative behaviour for all human beings. Moreover, they believe that the teachings of each Manifestation of God are valid for a specific duration of time, or “dispensation,” during which time there can be no further revelation from God. The concept of relativity in pluralist theory is tied to the idea that religion is human and therefore not universally relevant, the way Divine revelation is typically supposed to be. The Bahá’í concept of relativity as articulated by Shoghi Effendi is very different from this; it does not claim that religious truth is not Divine or not absolutely binding on humanity for a specific period of time, only that it is eventually subject to change as a result of a further revelation from God. Once again, pluralist theory and Bahá’í theory are out of step.

In conclusion, the Bahá’í teachings are too incompatible with either Fazel’s or Hick’s concept of religion pluralism to characterize it as pluralist; in other words, it is not pluralist. I

will now try to make the same point, more positively, by arguing that when evaluated against the concept of religious pluralism developed by Paul Griffiths, the Bahá'í Faith is, again, not pluralist.

Paul Griffiths' Concept of Religious Pluralism

Paul Griffiths is a philosopher of religion or philosophical theologian, and Schmitt Chair of Catholic Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Griffiths' book *Problems of Religious Diversity* is, on one level, an attempt to introduce the dominant questions that arise in the face of religious diversity, along with the dominant answers to these questions. However, on another level, his book is an attempt to reinterpret the exclusivist/inclusivist paradigm and the pluralist paradigm and, indeed, to defend exclusivism and inclusivism against pluralism.

In *Problems of Religious Diversity*, Griffiths makes the uncommon move of addressing the various problems, or questions, that arise in the face of religious diversity separately. This allows him to address each question with a high degree of precision and, therefore, create a relatively realistic picture of the pluralist and exclusivist/inclusivist paradigms, insofar as these exist. Most generally, Griffiths addresses sets of questions related to the following four topics: (1) truth, (2) epistemic confidence, (3) the religious other, and (4) salvation — the last of which he sees (in part) as a combination of elements from the first three sets of questions. As said, Griffiths' work is somewhat apologetic, and this apology usually takes the form of him trying to show what he thinks the pluralist position on various issues really is, and what the exclusivist/inclusivist position on these same issues really is — in contrast to how they are conventionally understood within the popular threefold typology previously discussed.

On the issue of truth, it is conventionally understood that exclusivists maintain that truth is only found in their religion, inclusivists maintain that ultimate truth is found in their religion even though other religions may contain partial truth, and pluralists maintain that truth is to be found in all or many religions. In contrast, Griffiths begins his analysis of the

question of truth by distinguishing two types of response: (1) those that claim parity with respect to truth and (2) those that claim difference. As for making a parity response, Griffiths surveys three different perspectives: a Kantian, a Wittgensteinian, and a non-religious. Very basically, the Kantian view achieves parity with respect to truth by claiming that there is a single religious claim that defines religion as such, and that all religions make this same claim (even if they also make many false claims – and, amongst themselves, many contradictory claims). The Wittgensteinian view achieves parity by seeing that all religious claims are coherent within their own “form of life” and, so, all are true in this qualified sense. Finally, the non-religious view of parity, which is most commonly held by those involved with legislation in religiously neutral states, is achieved by limiting the scope of religious truth, for example, by saying that all religious claims are equally true insofar as they do not conflict with an overriding interest, or law, of the state.

As for responses that say religious claims are different with respect to truth, Griffiths identifies two: exclusivism and inclusivism. In discussing exclusivism Griffiths insightfully points out that no actual religious communities maintain this position because it amounts to saying that no religious community, except one's own, makes claims that are true. (Most religions are open to the possibility that their rivals may have gotten a few things right and, so, are inclusivist with respect to truth.) Griffiths goes further by identifying different forms of inclusivism: “necessary inclusivism” that says other religions must make at least some true claims; “possibilist inclusivism” that says other religions may make religious claims that are true; “closed inclusivism” that says all true claims made by other religions are already explicitly made by one's own religion; and, “open inclusivism” that says other religions may teach and understand truths not explicitly taught and understood by one's own religion. Griffiths own view is that possibilist, open inclusivism is the best response to the truth claims of other religions. (Necessary inclusivism and possibilist inclusivism can be held together with either open or closed inclusivism.) Nonetheless, Griffiths' main points here are (1) that exclusivism, with respect to truth, is a very uncommon view amongst religious people, and (2) that a parity

claim with respect to truth necessitates a circumscription (or limitation) of what truth means in one way of another.

Griffiths next question deals with what he calls "epistemic confidence" and here he asks whether one's epistemic confidence in their religious beliefs (or to use Griffiths' words "the religious assents they find themselves making"²⁹) is, or should be, reduced or removed as a result coming to know about religious diversity.

Conventionally, it is believed that knowledge of diversity has virtually no effect on exclusivists and inclusivists because they are so dogmatically convinced about the absolute validity of their own religion. In contrast, pluralists characteristically recognize the non-absoluteness of their own religion when they encounter religious others who strike them as being highly religious.

Griffiths discusses this issue in terms of how it is dealt with by the religious and the non-religious. With respect to the religious he says that there are three factors that come into play: (1) the original degree of certainty that one has in their religious beliefs or the confidence one has in the religious claims they assents to and accept – this is the most important point; (2) the perceived trustworthiness or authority of those making religious claims incompatible with one's own; and (3) the resources within one's one religion to explain the existence of others.

Griffiths argues that religious diversity does not, usually, present a significant problem for religious people because their assents and acceptances of religious claims are made with a very high degree of epistemic confidence. Indeed, this circumstance is built into the very fabric of religion which Griffiths defines as "a form of life that seems to those who belong to it to be comprehensive, incapable of abandonment, and of central importance."³⁰ Thus, the very level of commitment with which religious beliefs are held usually prevents religious people from losing confidence in them in the face of incompatible beliefs. However, Griffiths also argues that one's epistemic confidence may be weakened, or even completely destroyed, if one encounters others who are making incompatible claims and still seem to be highly religious,

and/or if one's one religion lacks resources for making sense of these claims. But, again, he maintains that this scenario is relatively anomalous for religious persons because they usually are able to find resources within their own tradition to explain the incompatible claims of other traditions or, possibly, to impugn the credibility of those teaching them.

As for the typical non-religious response to the question of whether an awareness of religious diversity should decrease the epistemic confidence that persons have in their religious claims, this is also a negative one – albeit of a *very* different kind. The non-religious view of religion maintains that religion belongs entirely to the private sphere, and that any religion admitted to this sphere is on par with any other religion admitted to it. Thus, on this account, religious differences are simply matters of personal preference of no particular consequence, similar to choosing a strawberry ice cream cone instead of a chocolate one.

Griffith's own view is that an awareness of religious diversity should not cause religious persons to lose confidence in the truth of their own religious claims; however, he also does not advocate a simple and arrogant dismissal of the incompatible claims of others – or, *of course*, the solution offered by a privatized understanding of religion. Instead, he suggests that an awareness of diversity should create an “epistemic uneasiness” that will serve as a launch pad for creative conceptual developments within one's own tradition. In other words, he believes that an awareness of diversity should lead to creative attempts to explain this diversity within the framework of one's specific tradition. And, although he does not explicitly say it, Griffiths must clearly see the loss of epistemic confidence that characterizes pluralism, as a *failure* to maintain an authentic religious perspective.

Griffiths' next question about the proper attitude towards, and the proper treatment of, the religious other (Griffiths uses the word “alien”) is a natural follow up to his discussion about epistemic confidence. This is because the maintenance or loss of epistemic confidence in one's religious assents and acceptances will certainly influence one's religious state of being and, therefore, one's relations with other beings –

religious or otherwise. Conventionally, it is understood that epistemic confidence in the claims of one's own religion – or belief in the truth of one's own religion – *necessarily* translates into an imperialistic and aggressive missionary impulse towards other religions. In contrast, it is believed that the weaker epistemic confidence of pluralists is conducive to a more open, tolerant, and dialogical approach to other religions.

Griffiths identifies three patterns of response to the religious other: (1) *toleration* or “enduring the religious alien”; (2) *separation* or “isolating the religious alien”; and (3) *conversion* or “domesticating the religious alien.”³¹

The principle idea of toleration is to simply let the religious alien be. In discussing toleration, Griffiths tries to make the point that toleration really means putting up with, or not interfering with, something that one does not really like or value – such as one's allergies (Griffiths' example). Presumably, he does this to undermine the idea that tolerance is a noble value. *However*, the more important point he makes is that pure tolerance is practically impossible to effect politically. In other words, as much as a state may claim that it is tolerant of all religions it will, *in reality*, always support and permit certain religious proposals and discourage and prevent others. For example, in Ontario, the United Church of Canada (like other Churches) is permitted to marry gay and lesbian couples, but neither Muslims nor Mormons are allowed to practice polygamy.

As for isolation, Griffiths sees this as an extreme form of toleration, wherein one tries to let religious others be by staying away from them. Griffith's main point, in connection with isolation, is that it is almost impossible to achieve in the modern world.

The principle idea of conversion is *not* to endure religious otherness, but to *remove it* by making the religious alien a religious kin. In his discussion of conversion Griffiths points out that attempts to make others more like ourselves is a not a unique religious phenomenon, but a phenomenon that is commonplace in all spheres of life – non-smokers try to convert smokers, liberals try to convert conservatives, and so

on. But, more importantly, he makes the point that a religion's teachings about the necessity of converting others is typically an integral part of a complex set of that religion's teachings, and that to reject the former would necessitate rejecting the latter. So, here again, Griffiths is suggesting that embracing the pluralist idea that missionary work should be abandoned is tantamount to rejecting one's religion. Griffiths, also makes another important point in this connection; namely, that one's treatment of others (be they religious or not) is *not* exclusively conditioned by attitudes developed in the face of religious diversity. In fact, it is normative for religions to inculcate an ethical and loving response to other human beings irrespective of their religious convictions. (The "golden rule" would be an example of this.) Moreover, it might even be argued that those with the highest degree of confidence in the truth of their religion would take these inculcations to treat others ethically most seriously.

Finally, Griffiths discusses the question of salvation. As already talked about, salvation has conventionally been discussed in terms of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. In his discussion of salvation Griffiths notes that there are two related, but separate, questions that can be addressed. The first asks *how one is saved* and the second asks *who is saved*, and it is this first question that he says can be coherently answered with the responses of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

Griffiths presents the exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist responses to the question of how one is saved with representatives of the three positions — Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, and John Hick respectively — but he is also very vigorous in distilling the *formal* responses. According to Griffiths, exclusivism boils down to claiming that belonging to the "home religion" is necessary for salvation (albeit not necessarily sufficient for it). In other words, if one wants to be saved one must belong to the home religion (even if belonging to the home religion won't necessarily guarantee one's salvation). Inclusivism is only a variation on this position because it is based on this same assumption that if one wants to be saved one must belong to the home religion; however, it is different from exclusivism in that it employs a *looser* sense of what it means to belong to the home religion. This view brings

into play the notion that one might be participating in the home religion while not aware of this fact, and seemingly participating in another religion. Pluralism, in marked contrast, rejects the basic premise of exclusivism and inclusivism – that one must belong to the home religion to be saved – in order to assert the basic truth of pluralism that all religions are able to deliver salvation in and of themselves. But in rejecting the basic premise of exclusivism and inclusivism, pluralism finds itself bound to a problematic position; *specifically*, that belonging to the home religion is not necessary for salvation. Griffiths calls this form of pluralism, which cuts the connection between salvation and membership in a religion, *negative* pluralism and notes that it is rare for religious persons to hold this position. Instead, religious persons are more likely to adopt a positive form of pluralism that claims a positive connection between religious membership and salvation, and maintains that this connection, whatever it is, is equally present in all religions – despite the fact that this usually undermines the diversity that pluralism seeks to honour. More, specifically, the positive form of pluralism must define what is meant by religion and therefore must necessarily exclude some things from the category of religion. Consequently, Griffiths says that the sort of pluralism advanced by Hick is only quasi-pluralistic.

The other question, related to salvation, that Griffiths addresses is that of who is saved, and he identifies two responses: “restrictivism” and “universalism.” Restrictivism says *all will not be saved* which can be expressed differently as *some will not be saved*. Universalism, on the other hand, says that *all will be saved* or, expressed differently, that *there is no one who will not be saved*. Griffiths also discusses these two positions in the mode of necessity and the mode of possibility (where they merge into the same position); nonetheless, what I think is most valuable in this discussion is his point that exclusivism is not necessarily tied to restrictivism. In other words, it is possible to hold that belonging to the home religion is necessary for salvation, without holding that this means some or all people will suffer eternal damnation. Or, it is coherent to be an exclusivist, who says that all must belong to the home religion to be saved, while being a universalist, who says that all will be saved. This is significant because

exclusivism (in its Christian form) is often rejected on the ethical grounds that a loving God could not consign to hell human beings who had no chance of becoming Christian.

I will now end this discussion of Griffiths' work by summarizing the main points in his critique of the pluralist paradigm, and then by summarizing the main points in his defence of the exclusivist/inclusivist paradigm.

Griffiths, makes four main points in his critique of the pluralism paradigm. First, he argues that parity claims with respect to religious truth require a circumscription of truth that denudes it of its usual meaning. Second, he argues that the loss of epistemic confidence, characteristic of pluralists who encounter religious diversity, entails abandonment of one's religion – or of the central claims of one's religion. Third, he argues that the broad religious tolerance advocated by pluralists, is largely idealistic, insofar as it is almost impossible to effect politically. Fourth, and finally, he argues that pluralism is usually only quasi-pluralistic because it necessarily circumscribes the category of religion.

Griffiths also makes four main points in his defence of the exclusivism/inclusivism paradigm. First, he argues that no religions are actually exclusivist with respect to truth. Second, he argues knowledge of religious diversity need not lead to epistemic arrogance or a loss of epistemic confidence, but can lead to epistemic uneasiness that can serve as a basis for creative tradition-specific thought about religious diversity. Third, he argues that mission or teaching is in integral part of religion, which can't be rejected with the hope that the rest of it can be accepted. Fourth, and finally, he argues that exclusivism with respect to salvation does not necessarily entail a commitment to restrictivism – or it is possible to hold the position that it is necessary to belong to a particular religion in order to be saved and the position that all human beings will be saved.

Why the Bahá'í Faith is Not Pluralist – Again

Now, if we understand the pluralist paradigm and exclusivist/inclusivist paradigm in Griffiths' terms, I think the

Bahá'í approach to religious diversity is clearly exclusivist/inclusivist.

On the question of truth the Bahá'í teachings seem to promote a Kantian parity in claiming that all religions teach the same essential truths. However, unlike the Kantian view, Bahá'ís don't dismiss non-essential truth claims (or those that are emendable to change) as irrelevant with respect to being true. For example, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (the Bahá'í equivalent of the Qur'án or Bible) contains a number of social laws that are seen as "non-essential" insofar as it is believed that these will be abrogated, in the future, on account of subsequent Divine revelation; however, Bahá'ís also believe that obedience to these laws is one of their highest religious duties,³² and so non-essential truths do not mean inconsequential truths as they do in the Kantian view.

Thus, I would classify the Bahá'í Faith as some form of inclusivism on the question of truth.

On the question of epistemic confidence, I would contend that Bahá'ís have a *very* high level of epistemic confidence in the religious claims they assent to and accept — because they believe these are grounded in Divine revelation. Moreover, this confidence is not significantly eroded by an awareness of religious diversity because Bahá'ís have excellent resources for explaining religious diversity within their religious tradition. Indeed, the Bahá'í explanation of religious diversity is one of the central doctrines of the Bahá'í Faith — and Bahá'ís have unparalleled confidence in this doctrine because (as above) they believe it has been Divinely revealed.³³ In this respect they are not similar to pluralists who, according to Griffiths, typically lose confidence in the truth of their own tradition when they encounter religious diversity.

On the question of how to deal with the religious other I would say that Bahá'ís follow the *conversion model*. Bahá'ís believe that teaching their faith to others is, on one hand, a prime requisite for their own spiritual growth and, on the other, the most vital activity for bringing about the collective or social salvation of humanity.³⁴ This obligation to teach is, however, accompanied by a prohibition on conversion by violence or even aggressive proselytizing,³⁵ and ethical

exhortations to relate to religious “aliens” in friendly and respectful ways.³⁶ The Bahá’í Faith, obviously, does not fit the isolation model but neither does it fit the toleration model; the Bahá’í Faith is not tolerant in the sense of holding what is, in Griffiths’ view, an unrealistic ideal that society ought to tolerate all socio-religious practices and behaviours because, in principle, there can be *no* socio-religious norms. Once again, the Bahá’í Faith is most in line with the exclusivist/inclusivist paradigm.

On the question of salvation, Bahá’ís certainly believe that being a Bahá’í is advantageous to one’s salvation, but they also believe that the soul’s progress does not stop with death, and that the potential for spiritual growth in the afterlife is infinite.³⁷ Bahá’u’lláh also says that one of the bounties of the Bahá’í “dispensation” is that the kin of Bahá’ís, even though they may outwardly be non-believers, will be granted divine forgiveness and mercy³⁸ – suggesting that they may be in as good a shape as believers with respect to salvation in the afterlife. On this basis I would classify the Bahá’í Faith as inclusivist *and* universalist, again placing it in the exclusivism/inclusivism paradigm. It might also be noted that the question of salvation is relatively moot from a Bahá’í perspective because Bahá’ís deny the possibility of knowing one’s own, or another’s, spiritual status and destiny.

Nonetheless, with respect to each of Griffiths’ four questions, the Bahá’í Faith belongs in the exclusivist/inclusivist paradigm and, so, it can once again be concluded that the Bahá’í Faith is not pluralist.

Conclusion

I have now argued in two different ways that the Bahá’í Faith is not pluralist, which is not to say that it is any of the things that have frequently been ascribed to non-pluralists – religiously intolerant, imperialistic, aggressively oriented to mission, and so on. And this fact, despite Griffiths’ attempts to defend exclusivism and inclusivism emphasizes the need for better theorizing about responses to religious diversity that are not pluralist, and even those that are.

NOTES

- ¹ Seena Fazel, "Religious Pluralism and the Bahá'í Faith" *Interreligious Insight* 1, no.3 (2003): 42-49. For an argument similar to Fazel's see Dann J. May, "The Bahá'í Principle of Religious Unity: A Dynamic Perspectivism," in *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Bahá'í Theology*, ed. Jack McLean (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1997), 1-36.
- ² Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).
- ³ S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 3.
- ⁴ Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000), 1.
- ⁵ Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1983); John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 28-45; Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Dianna Eck, *Encountering God* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 166-199.
- ⁶ Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 3; Eck, *Encountering God*, 169.
- ⁷ For a good account of how exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism have been constructed as paradigmatic, and somewhat "cartoonish," responses to religious diversity altogether, see Kate McCarthy, "Reckoning with Religious Difference: Models of Interreligious Moral Dialogue," in *Explorations in Global Ethics*, eds. Sumner B. Twiss and Bruce Grelle. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 73-117.
- ⁸ For one example of this, see John Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 16-36.
- ⁹ For a representative pluralist, see Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 28-45; for a representative non-pluralist, see Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, 138-169.
- ¹⁰ D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 1.
- ¹¹ Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, 101-11.
- ¹² It should also be noted that non-pluralized have been involved in caricaturizing pluralists — typically as non-committed "relativists." Again, see McCarthy, *Reckoning with Religious Difference*, 73-117.
- ¹³ Bahá'u'lláh. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 36.
- ¹⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 163.
- ¹⁵ For the fullest expression of Hick's philosophy of religious pluralism see, John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

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- ¹⁶ Fazel, "Religious Pluralism and the Bahá'í Faith," 3
- ¹⁷ Fazel, "Religious Pluralism and the Bahá'í Faith," 4
- ¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 3.
- ¹⁹ Fazel, "Religious Pluralism and the Bahá'í Faith," 5.
- ²⁰ *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, 494.
- ²¹ *Lights of Guidance*, 494.
- ²² Bahá'u'lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 195-196.
- ²³ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 35.
- ²⁴ See, Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 202-206.
- ²⁵ Juan Cole, "The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings." *Bahá'í Studies* 9 (1982): 1-38; Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 233-234.
- ²⁶ Bahá'u'lláh's primary doctrinal text, the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, arguably makes this point.
- ²⁷ Hick is reluctant on this point to recognize that many religions who distinguish God as Unknowable and God as knowable also claim that it is possible to become perfectly identified with the Unknowable aspect of God, and that others religions transfer absoluteness to the knowable aspect of God which, as far as I can tell, is never thought of as a limited human understanding of the Unknowable Essence.
- ²⁸ Shoghi Effendi, "The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh: A World Religion," 1947 http://bahai-library.com/?file=shoghieffendi_faith_bahaullah
- ²⁹ Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, 17.
- ³⁰ Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, XIV.
- ³¹ Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, 101; 111; 119.
- ³² Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 19.
- ³³ See Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*.
- ³⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, 88.
- ³⁵ Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice*, 66.
- ³⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 22.
- ³⁷ Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, "Memorandum: The Condition of Non-Bahá'ís After Death, 1991" on The Bahá'í Research Library (Downloaded from <http://www.bahai-education.org/ocean/>), 4
- ³⁸ Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, "Memorandum," 1

The Art of Rhetoric in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

Jack McLean

Introduction¹

Anyone who has read Shoghi Effendi's writings carefully recognizes their strong rhetorical effects. In essence, rhetoric is eloquent language or speech that aims to impress, to move or to persuade. At the outset, it is important to note that Shoghi Effendi's rhetoric was not used merely to embellish his epistolary; it fulfilled a practical purpose. As "suasive speech" is still used in teaching, law, politics and religion to instruct, to move and to convince, Shoghi Effendi exercised his rhetorical art for similar purposes. During his administration from 1922-1957,² writing *qua* head and Guardian of the Bahá'í community,³ his main tasks were, not only to interpret the Bahá'í writings, and to instruct in matters of faith, but just as importantly, to exhort the Bahá'ís "to arise"⁴ to execute the sequential Plans he had devised for developing 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan.⁵ In fulfilling this function, Shoghi Effendi demonstrated considerable rhetorical skill, a talent that was developed, not only by divine charisma, but also by formal study and practice. The Guardian was clearly cognizant of certain classical elements of rhetoric, but owing to its Bahá'í-specific, i.e. religious content, and the originality of his magisterial style, his discourse also exhibits certain atypical features.

This paper analyses Shoghi Effendi's rhetoric by explicating the following five points: (1) The historical background to the teaching and function of rhetoric. (2) The Guardian's interest in and formal study of rhetoric. (3) The connection between Shoghi Effendi's moral authority and his credibility as a rhetorician. (4) The rhetorical effect of the Guardian's epistolary (5) A paradigm of seven rhetorical modes used in his

writings will be proposed. In substantiating these points, I will correlate selected material from the history of rhetoric and rhetorical theory to the writings of the Guardian. While some of the material on rhetorical theory is capable of standing on its own, it has been selected and analysed because of its relevance to the topic. This paper situates our author's rhetoric within a long rhetorical tradition, which his writings perpetuate, and offers an understanding of the underpinnings of his rhetorical technique.

The Function of Rhetoric

The Teaching and Study of Rhetoric

The teaching and study of rhetoric was a central element in European, and later American education, from before the time of Plato until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶ Having waned in the Romantic era, the study of the ancient art was revived in the 1960's, and some forty-five years later (2006) is thriving again in a number of mainly American universities which offer courses in departments of Rhetoric, English Literature and Speech or Communication Studies, albeit following widely divergent theoretical schools and agendas.⁷ It seems likely that in the coming years of the Bahá'í Era, with the continuing systematic study of the sacred texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi, the study and practice of rhetoric will be revived along spiritual and ethical lines that will serve the search for truth and the teaching of the Bahá'í Faith.

The topic of rhetoric, like so many other potentially fruitful areas of Bahá'í Studies, is a virtual open field. Although no prior study of the Guardian's rhetoric has already been written, Bret Breneman's 1991 article "Socrates'/Plato's Use of Rhetoric: A Bahá'í Perspective" offers a revised understanding of rhetoric that would make it more consonant with Bahá'í aims and purposes. Breneman observes that in the twentieth century the art of rhetoric has fallen into disrepute, but he also notes its current revival and favors its rehabilitation along new lines. (This article takes the same stance). He critiques the eristic (polemical) and logocentric (mere speech-based) aspects of classical rhetoric to suggest a remaking of eloquent speech

along ethical and spiritual lines; viz. a more harmonious, less adversarial style that would further truth-seeking, create unity, and carry ethical weight. In short, he favors the development of new rhetorical styles that would resemble Bahá'í consultation. By these means, the speaker/writer would persuade by a more ethically engaged, collaborative process that diverges from rhetoric's questionable past.⁸

While we can readily agree with Breneman's recommendations of a rhetoric of civil exchange, based on the moral and spiritual norms that he advocates, his recommendations cannot be applied so conveniently to Shoghi Effendi's writings which show, in fact, a pervasive use of classical rhetoric's *logos* (word/speech/reason) and eristic techniques. However, unlike deliberative/political rhetoric, the Guardian's discourse served religious purposes, and his epistolary represents a renewed and expanded model of that genre. But like classical rhetoric, the Guardian's speech is highly persuasive. When he writes as the sole authorised interpreter and defender of the Bahá'í Faith in its Formative Age (1921-), he is, at times, unrestrainedly judgmental and defensive, particularly when he condemns the present age and its godless ways, the world's rejection of Bahá'u'lláh, the "enemies of the Faith," or when he defends it or its followers from attack and/or persecution. I should add, however, that the Guardian's gentler speech also praises, guides, informs, encourages and invokes Bahá'u'lláh's love and confirmations on his fellow-believers. On balance, however, discrete elements of classical rhetoric are clearly found in Shoghi Effendi's writings, particularly Aristotle's epideictic category, the rhetoric of praise or blame, and several well-established rhetorical techniques discussed below.

The Foundation: Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*

While rhetoric is not philosophy, for Aristotle, whose *On Rhetoric* (322-320 BCE) laid the foundation for all subsequent discussion, it was the counterpart of *Dialektik*,⁹ a conversational form of Plato's search for truth by question and answer, and could be treated systematically. Rhetoric should not be reduced, consequently, to one of the decorative arts. It merits further consideration as one of the long-

standing theoretical and practical arts that is an object of study in its own right. Aristotle's understanding of rhetoric included an ethical component which related it to Athenian "politics." For it was in the ideal city-state that human happiness was to be found.¹⁰ But more pertinent to this paper, and as we shall see below, Aristotle taught that the effectiveness of rhetoric depended on the ethical credibility of the orator.

As alluded to above, rhetoric has two functions that operate as one: the first is to persuade, a goal that is attained in traditional rhetoric by eristic speech rather than deductive logic; the second is to move; ideally, to action. Thus, rhetoric may be defined simply as speech that aims to persuade and to move the listener/reader to action, a definition that well suits our author's purposes. Aristotle was wary of eristic because disputation made good use of the semi-logical rhetorical syllogisms of emotional oratory. In Aristotle's view, these syllogisms were liable to mislead since they were less sure than the formal logical demonstration of first premises and conclusions [*On Rhetoric*, 1354a3-5].¹¹ While persuasion is clearly the main goal of rhetoric, Aristotle made the following fine distinction between rhetoric and dialectic. Rhetoric, he wrote, is a faculty or power [*dynamis*] whose goal "...is not to persuade but to see the available means of persuasion in each case" [1355a14].¹² In other words, the purpose of rhetoric is to support the logical argument. Logic and rhetoric were intended to work together. While they do not employ Plato's dialectics, the conversational logic that lead to propositional truth, Shoghi Effendi's writings show proof of sound arguments based on authoritative reason. (see "The Magisterial Mode" below)

Shoghi Effendi's Formal Study of Rhetoric

Aristotle points out in his *On Rhetoric* that, unlike the philosopher, no special training is required to become an effective orator. Individuals may learn to use rhetoric effectively by intuitive means. In addition to any innate ability he possessed, Shoghi Effendi did, in fact, study rhetoric over three semesters during a two year period (1915-17) at the Syrian Protestant College, later the American University of Beirut. During the first and second semesters of his junior year (1915-16), rhetoric was included on his syllabus and again during the

first semester of his senior year, 1916-17.¹³ His native ability coupled with the three semesters of courses helps to explain the Guardian's cognizance and effective use of some of rhetoric's classical techniques.

The recollections of the Guardian's boyhood school friend, 'Alí Yazdí, who visited Shoghi Effendi at Oxford between November 4-5, 1920 and who "...stayed in Shoghi Effendi's room for a couple of nights,"¹⁴ made note of the soon-to-be Guardian's lively interest in the debating societies at Balliol College during the Michaelmas term¹⁵ of that same year:

He was intensely interested in the outstanding speakers at Oxford and especially those in Oxford Union,¹⁶ where the great statesmen had received their training. He wanted me to attend the debates with him and to hear the address by [James] Bryce. He hoped we could discuss the talks together. After my visit I received a card from him dated 6 November 1920, which bore the crest of the Oxford Union Society.¹⁷

Shoghi Effendi's card to 'Alí Yazdí reflects, not only his disappointment at his missing the debate — Mr. Yazdí had to return to London en route to the United States — but also Shoghi Effendi's keen interest in the Oxford Union proceedings: "Dear 'Alí: I have received your card, and I knew well that it would be difficult for you to come here again. I did miss you profoundly last night and the night before, particularly as I firmly anticipated that we would both enjoy and comment upon the procedures of the debate and lecture."¹⁸ This passage also conveys something of the young Oxonian's spirit of enthusiasm and love of learning which have been mentioned by Madame Rúhiyyih Rabbaní (1910-2000), the Guardian's wife, companion, collaborator, secretary and biographer, in her seminal work, *The Priceless Pearl* (1969), qualities that were first manifested when he was still a boy living in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's home in Haifa. Shoghi Effendi's lamp would burn late into the night requiring 'Abdu'l-Bahá to go to his door with the order: "Enough! Enough! Go to sleep! But this serious-mindedness of Shoghi Effendi pleased Him greatly."¹⁹ Riaz Khadem, in his period-study *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford and Earlier* (1999), also quotes William Elliot, a fellow

Oxonian, that the Guardian presented a paper to The Lotus Club, which Elliot wrote "...was the outstanding club, I think, for intellectual discussions and dialogue... The Lotus Club appreciated the qualities of Rabbani."²⁰ Shoghi Effendi's rhetorical skill was grounded, consequently, not only in constant practice, but also in his formal studies and life experience at the Syrian Protestant College and later at Oxford.

Restoring Character and Credibility to Rhetoric

Outside the academy, the credibility of public speaking has been greatly eroded thanks mainly to politicians and the political process. Political rhetoric has now become synonymous with broken promises, evasion, verbal attacks, "spin," "smoke and mirrors," and other unsavoury practices. The now stock phrase "empty rhetoric" has served to discredit the spoken word. The negative effects of rhetoric were, of course, far more sinister in the twentieth century than all the tragi-comedies witnessed in adversarial party politics. Breneman observes: "After Hitler and Khomeini, after nearly a century of sloganeering and totalitarianism, people are suspicious of eloquence."²¹ Verbal rants and harangues induced the masses to follow Hitler and Mussolini. In December of 1978, in a quiet but menacing voice, the still exiled Ayatolláh Khomeini said in an interview with Professor James Cockroft of Rutgers University about the Bahá'ís: "They are a political faction. They are harmful. They will not be accepted." In the same interview, he pronounced that religious freedom would not be granted to the Bahá'ís in Iran.²² Since the Fall of 1978, a systematic series of openly repressive measures has followed which included the execution of some two hundred innocent souls.²³ More recently, in April of 1994, Hutu extremists unleashed a genocide in which some 800,000 Tutsis were slaughtered following radio appeals by Hutu leaders that incited Hutus to "cleanse" Rawandan villages of their Tutsi populations. (The genocide also created some two million refugees). In the 1990's and 2000's, the suave talk of Osama bin Laden called his followers to sow world-wide terror in the name of Islam. Other examples of perverse rhetoric are not lacking in today's hostile and dangerous world.

Although Breneman argues for the rehabilitation of Plato's pedagogical and philosophical rhetoric as an ideal type of rhetoric,²⁴ Plato's opinion of the rhetoric of his day was, as Breneman has pointed out, nonetheless decidedly negative. The philosopher's views of the ancient art can be found, *inter alia*, in his dialogues, the *Sophist*, *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*.²⁵ Plato charged that rhetoric had been widely abused by corrupt politicians in ancient Athens, the same politicians who had put Socrates to death by pandering to public fears, unfounded prejudices and raw emotion.²⁶ Both Plato and Aristotle believed that rhetoric had become a money-making technique in the hands of the rhetors and sophists who taught public-speaking, and who were the speech-writers for aspiring Athenian politicians and those who already governed the city-state. Aside from the philosophical differences that they had with rhetors and sophists,²⁷ and in what seems today like a lot of *déjà vu*, Plato and Aristotle believed that such men were insincere and dishonest; that they engaged in equivocation, quibbling and verbal tricks instead of truth-seeking. Only honest dialectic, Plato thought, could lead to truth.²⁸

However, Plato's and Aristotle's negative view of the rhetoric of their time was also remedied by one of the foundational principles of *On Rhetoric*: an ethical consistency between speaker and speech, between word and deed. Aristotle taught that the efficacy of the speech depended on the *ethos* (nature/disposition/moral character) of the speaker. The *rhetor*²⁹ had to be "worthy of credence" which is "...almost, so to speak, the controlling factor in persuasion" [*On Rhetoric*, 1356a4]. Thus, it was not in theory that rhetoric, the vehicle of power that Longinus, the Greek literary critic, had called a "great prince" in his noted treatise *On the Sublime* (*peri hypsous*),³⁰ had become discredited, but rather through corrupt practices. In our time, the never-ending corruption and scandal scenarios that feed the media indicate that the precept of the orator's ethical credibility has been wantonly disregarded.

"The Perfect Orator is the Perfect Man"

Before validating Shoghi Effendi's moral authority, it would be helpful to further examine the background to the above maxim. We have already noted that Aristotle advocated moral

integrity as the mainstay of effective speech. “The perfect orator is the perfect man” is one of the key ideas in Roman oratory that was inherited from the Greeks. It was advocated by the great Roman orator Cicero, and the famous teacher of rhetoric, Quintilian (35-95 CE).³¹ In his discussion of tropes and figures, Quintilian influenced St. Augustine, St. Jerome and Martin Luther.³² Although he is not generally known to the public, Quintilian is still anthologized today and continues to influence both rhetorical theory and the discussion of figurative language, including post-structuralist and formalist theorists.³³

In his twelve-volume masterpiece, *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian was preoccupied in Book I with the proper education of the orator, virtually from birth. To his credit, in advocating what is called today “child-centred education,” he stressed the moral education of the child as being the most crucial factor for the adult orator. The pedagogical questions he raised in the first century CE are as relevant today to the field of education as they are to oratory.³⁴ Although Quintilian stressed a thorough training in the literary arts and in grammar, he favored exposure to many branches of knowledge, and the widest culture possible, to produce a well-rounded human being.³⁵ Compared to modern approaches to education, classical rhetoric was a more holistic, as well as a practical art. Aristotle taught that it should convince by the triadic norms of *pathos* (emotion), *thos* (character) and *logos* (rational argument) [1356a3,5], thereby fostering a healthy integration of intellect, character and emotion.

Shoghi Effendi's Credibility as Rhetorician

It follows, then, that the efficacy of Shoghi Effendi's rhetoric would depend on his moral authority. We are fortunate that the Guardian's historical proximity (1897-1957) to our time renders it relatively easy to validate his ethical credibility. Chief among the sources attesting to Shoghi Effendi's character are the *Will and Testament* of his grandfather, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Madame Rúhiyyih Rabbaní's biography, *The Priceless Pearl*, which presents a vivid picture and analysis of the Guardian's personality. Several appreciations have also been recorded by those who were his

working-assistants in Haifa, or who made the pilgrimage to Akká and Haifa and met Shoghi Effendi on that occasion.³⁶ The most significant impressions of a non-Bahá'í are those recorded in *The Circle of Faith* (1956), by former professor of comparative religion and prolific author, Dr. Marcus Bach (d. 1995), through what John Barnabas (Barney) Leith accurately calls "a detached but sympathetic eye."³⁷

These accounts of the Guardian's life, character and contributions to the development of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Faith (1921-) indicate a monumental legacy that has only begun to be properly evaluated. While accounts written by Bahá'ís are naturally biased by the love, devotion and respect of the believer, Marcus Bach's incisive pen-portrait was based on a three-hour interview at Shoghi Effendi's home in Haifa, on the evening on February 12, 1953.³⁸ Among Dr. Bach's impressions were those of "indomitable strength," the sense that this man was "self-possessed, self-sufficient, purposeful." Among other comments we read: his "all-seeing eyes always read my thoughts in advance, whose sharp mind had a ready answer the moment my questions were asked." His words were "tinged with poetry and power. He spoke in melodious, faultless English, with a firm and staunch authority as if what he had to say was said by divine right." His words could be recorded, but his faith was "something to be felt and cherished. His awareness of God was paramount."³⁹

The Guardian's moral credibility was created by divine appointment through the *Will and Testament* of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but it does not rest in divine appointment alone. It was reflected in his every word and act, through the subtle fibre of his entire being. This moral authority creates confidence in the reader and reinforces an "interlocking relationship"⁴⁰ between author, text and reader, giving his writing weight. Shoghi Effendi was not, of course, a perfect man in the same sense that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Mystery of God, was a perfect human being.⁴¹ Shoghi Effendi's own understanding of the Guardian as being "essentially human" rules out any misconceived comparisons of this type. In clarifying the station of the Guardians, in contradistinction to that of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi wrote:

Though overshadowed by the unfailing, the unerring protection of Bahá'u'lláh and of the Báb, and however much he may share with 'Abdu'l-Bahá the right and obligation to interpret the Bahá'í teachings, he remains essentially human and cannot, if he wishes to remain faithful to his trust, arrogate to himself, under any pretense whatsoever, the rights, the privileges and prerogatives which Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to confer upon His Son.⁴²

Nonetheless, the reference to Shoghi Effendi's "absolute perfection" is from a statement by no less a figure than 'Abdu'l-Bahá. When His grandson was born on March 1, 1897, a Miss F. Drayton of New York wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, citing a verse from Isaiah 11:6 "...a little child shall lead them," and inquired whether or not this verse referred to a "...real living child who exists?"⁴³ His reply was unequivocal: *"Thou shalt behold him endowed with the most perfect appearance, supreme capacity, absolute perfection, consummate power and unsurpassed might. His face will shine with a radiance that illuminates all the horizons of the world..."*⁴⁴ That hidden identity was later fully revealed in the *Will and Testament*, and it clearly established the Guardian's preeminent station and divine authority:

*For he is, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian of the Cause of God. The Afnan, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause and the beloved of the Lord must obey him and turn unto him. He that obeyeth him not, hath not obeyed God; he that turneth away from him, hath turned away from God and he that denieth him, hath denied the True One.*⁴⁵

Among Shoghi Effendi's duties and privileges of office was to act as the sole authorized interpreter and expounder of Bahá'í Holy Writ: *"He is the Interpreter of the Word of God..."*⁴⁶ As I am using it in relation to Shoghi Effendi, the word perfect refers to an interaction of three distinct qualities: (1) divine endowment or capacity, i.e., attributes that are God-given. (2) striving, i.e., the sustained personal effort required to cultivate one's own innate abilities. (3) the lack of any deficiency or defect in the exercise of his powers and abilities.

In addition to naming him as His successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's first mention of Shoghi Effendi indicates that He is drawing the reader's attention to two important distinctions: (1) Shoghi Effendi's divine endowment as a direct descendant of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. (2) His youthfulness:

Salutation and praise, blessing and glory rest upon that primal branch of the Divine and Sacred Lote-Tree, grown out, blest, tender, verdant and flourishing from the Twin Holy Trees; the most wondrous, unique and priceless pearl that doth gleam from out the Twin surging seas...⁴⁷

(The poetic quality of this text is retained, even in translation, not only in its rich natural imagery, but also because of the internal rhyme of 'Trees' and 'seas.') A unique dynamic was created in the combining of Shoghi Effendi's kinship to the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, with the divine attributes mentioned in the text: "wondrous," "unique," "priceless." 'Abdu'l-Bahá expresses a special solicitude for Shoghi Effendi's well-being, thus making the community aware of the youthfulness and inexperience that would be in constant need of support and protection: "tender, verdant and flourishing" is this primal branch. Yet, Shoghi Effendi's destiny was to work largely alone, assisted by only a handful of trusted and capable co-workers, as he continued to face the relentless opposition of the members of his own family, who by all possible means attempted to misguide the Bahá'ís, defy his authority, and to obstruct his plans. Then, mixing His metaphors, and turning from the pastoral image of the tree and the bough to the gemstone, 'Abdu'l-Bahá declares the Guardian to be a "priceless pearl." This well-known phrase constitutes a revelation of Shoghi Effendi's true station.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements are supplemented by a more personal appreciation in *The Priceless Pearl* in which Madame Rabbání describes "Facets of Shoghi Effendi's Personality." In one of the indexes, "Personal Attributes," she has further summarized his character by delineating his qualities under three heads:⁴⁸ (1) Spiritual and Mental Qualities (2) Artistic and Cultural Tastes and Interests (3) Relations With Others. We read under (1): "catholicity of spirit, humility, mastery of

detail, orderliness, nobility, radiance, shrewdness” — this last attribute she defines as “sense of economy, honesty, realism, ingeniousness, practicality but lack of mechanical sense,” will-power, object of his existence.” This last reference refers to his complete consecration to the Bahá’í Faith. Under (2) are found: “interest in gardens, maps, photography, zoology, love of beauty in nature, zeal for knowledge.” Number (3) reads: “love for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Greatest Holy Leaf, Milly Collins, Sutherland Maxwell, “tribute to the support and comfort given by Martha Root.” (Details and anecdotes of the headings are provided through page references by the author).

Madame Rabbaní’s pen-portrait creates the impression of a highly sensitive and gifted man, whose multi-faceted nature entitled him to the label of genius; a man who laboured much and suffered much, whose life manifested a rare combination of exceptional ability, complete love and devotion to the religion he directed, zeal for knowledge, an unusual capacity for labor, an attitude of humility and self-effacement, an intuitive sense of divine guidance, and a complete consecration to the many tasks with which the *Will and Testament* of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had entrusted him. While he was not a prophet, Shoghi Effendi’s extraordinary humanity was such that he was able to execute the duties of sacred office with superhuman energy⁴⁹ and flawless skill. Madame Rabbaní’s comment gives a favorable and fair appraisal of the Guardian’s overall contribution:

It would be hard indeed to find a comparable figure in history who, in a little over a third of a century, set so many different operations in motion, who found the time to devote his attention to minute details on one hand and on the other to cover the range of an entire planet with his plans, his instructions, his guidance and his leadership.⁵⁰

The Rhetorical Function of Epistolary

I have written above that the practical aim of the Guardian’s letters was, not only to inform and to educate, but also to move the Bahá’ís to execute the various sequential plans that he had devised for the world-wide expansion of the Bahá’í Faith.

Rhetorical criticism sheds further light on Shoghi Effendi's use of rhetoric to fulfill this aim. Edward P. J. Corbett wrote that rhetorical criticism "...is interested in the *product*, the *process*, and the *effect* of linguistic activity, whether the imaginative kind or the utilitarian kind."⁵¹ Rhetorical criticism looks to the immediate effect of a work rather than to other literary considerations.⁵² Jane Tompkins, editor of an instructive work on Reader-Response Theory, of which rhetorical criticism is a major component, writes that the rhetorical mode looks upon literature as "...existing primarily in order to produce results and not as an end in itself."⁵³ In this sense, rhetorical prose creates a close bond between the author and the reader/audience, compared with the larger spaces created by more imaginative texts. The Guardian's letters were certainly performative since they anticipated an immediate response to his directives. They were not written primarily as esthetic products, as *Ars gratiae artis* (art for art's sake).

Aristotle viewed the rhetoric of persuasion (*pistis*) as one of the practical arts, more concerned with acting and doing than the rational and speculative arts and sciences, such as metaphysics and mathematics.⁵⁴ While the Guardian's writings clearly have their own literary, historical, spiritual and theological merits, they remain, nonetheless, an exercise in the practical and the functional. Shoghi Effendi's writings are always designed *to do* something: to deepen understanding, to define doctrine, to defend the Faith, to interpret history, to report, to comment on the significance of current events and developments in light of the Bahá'í Faith, to move the reader's heart or to exhort to action.

Except for his *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation/sacred history) of the first hundred years of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith, *God Passes By* (1944), and his thousands of cablegrams, his writings are largely epistolary. Dr. Ann Boyles, in her paper "The Epistolary Style of Shoghi Effendi," points out that the differences between the letter and the epistle have to do with both content and style. While an epistle is theoretically any letter, the epistle is "...a conscious literary form" which concerns itself with "...public matters and with philosophy as well as with religious problems."⁵⁵ Several judicious reasons validate the Guardian's chosen medium. The epistle creates a bond of intimacy and

sense of collaboration between reader and author that is not characteristic of other genres. Despite their elevated tone, and his preeminence as the head of a growing world religion, his letters create an intimate bond between Shoghi Effendi and his readers. His epistolary succeeds well at fostering a sense of fraternal collaboration. (see below, “Loving Greetings” under Particular Rhetorical Techniques)

William Decker has pointed out in his *Epistolary Practices* (1998) that letter writing “...assumes the existence of a certain confidentiality as its enabling condition.”⁵⁶ Letters, he writes, “...have long been read as primary sources of biography and history, as texts brimming with informational content. Yet the performative, fictive, and textual dimensions of letter writing, and the artifacticity of the personally inscribed holograph,⁵⁷ have only recently attracted serious notice.”⁵⁸ Regarding this sense of epistolary intimacy or confidentiality, it should be kept in mind that through his estimated 26,000 letters,⁵⁹ Shoghi Effendi was writing, not only to individuals but to a faith community that constitutes a people, “the people of Bahá” (Ar. *Ahl-i-Bahá*).⁶⁰ Any faith community is a live audience, and Decker’s “performative” mention of the epistle underscores the direct, transformational potential of the letter on the audience.

Seven Rhetorical Modes in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

In Chapter 3 of Book 1 of *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle gives three categories of suasive discourse: (1) the political (deliberative) which aimed at adopting or avoiding a policy or course of action. (2) the forensic (legal) which was used to accuse or defend someone in a court of law. (3) the epideictic, which was the ceremonial praise or blame of an individual. While the general features of Aristotle’s three types have been subsumed in Shoghi Effendi’s rhetoric, the philosopher’s categories cannot be applied holus-bolus to our author. This is because his Bahá’í-specific, religious discourse necessitates the assigning of other categories than the political and legal ones used by Aristotle. But, as is often the case in category assignments, distinctions are not always clear-cut. The

Guardian's voices, like his genres, are mixed.⁶¹ For example, proclamatory/kerygmatic rhetoric may be followed by the divine command; the imperative may show deliberation; defence may mingle with praise. However, to further elucidate the Guardian's oratorical style, the following seven modes are being proposed: (1) the proclamatory/kerygmatic (2) the imperative (3) the magisterial (4) the defensive (5) the rhetoric of praise and gratitude (6) the rhetoric of blame (7) the rhetoric of anxious concern. Aristotle's categories are recognizable in these seven modes, but they appear in a different language and context.

(1) The Kerygmatic/Proclamation Mode: Raising the Divine Call

Derived from the Greek verb *kerussein*, "to proclaim," kerygma is a specifically religious type of rhetoric that was originally associated with the preaching of the early church. In twentieth century Protestant theology, it became a technical term that established the foundations of Christian teaching on the coming, life, death and resurrection of Christ in fulfilment of the divinely appointed new age/time, the *kairos* of Mark 1:15, proclaimed by John the Baptist and promised by the prophets of Israel and Judah.⁶² For Bahá'í purposes, this mode is naturally devoid of its specific Judeo-Christian content, but it suits nonetheless the urgency and drama of the divine call, whether it summoned the Bahá'ís to fulfil the goals that Shoghi Effendi had set, made a historic announcement, or proclaimed a "victory" won. Here, for example, is the Guardian's cablegram of January 9, 1951 that announced the formation of the First International Bahá'í Council, the forerunner of the Universal House of Justice (1963-), a body that was to "forge links with the newly emerged State" (Israel), to assist the Guardian with the erection of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb, and "to conduct negotiations related to matters of personal status with civil authorities":

Proclaim National Assemblies of East and West
weighty epoch-making decision of formation of first
International Bahá'í Council, forerunner of supreme
administrative institution destined to emerge in
fullness of time within precincts beneath shadow of

World Spiritual Center of Faith already established in twin cities of Akká and Haifa. Fulfillment of prophecies uttered by Founder of Faith and Center of His Covenant culminating in establishment of Jewish State, signalizing birth after lapse of two thousand years of an independent nation in the Holy Land, the swift unfoldment of historic undertaking associated with construction of superstructure of the Báb's Sepulcher on Mount Carmel, the present adequate maturity of nine vigorously functioning national administrative institutions throughout Bahá'í World, combine to induce me to arrive at this historic decision marking most significant milestone in evolution of Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in course of last thirty years.⁶³

The call to action is intrinsic to kerygmatic rhetoric. The noted Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye (1912-1991) observed that "the rhetoric of non-literary prose," non-literary meaning not deriving primarily from the imagination, invokes the realm of "social action" and "...the appeal to action through the ear..."⁶⁴:

The most concentrated examples of this ["social or oratorical persuasion"] are to be found in the pamphlet or speech that catches the rhythm of history, that seizes on a crucial event or phase of action, interprets it, articulates the emotions concerned with it, or in some means employs a verbal structure to insulate and conduct the current of history.⁶⁵

Among others, Frye cites Churchill's 1940 war speeches, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Milton's *Areopagitica* as examples of this genre.⁶⁶ Although his writings belong to an expanded, higher order of religious epistolary, Shoghi Effendi's world order letters (1929-36), and his apocalypse of contemporary history, *The Promised Day Is Come* (1941), and *Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957* may be generally included, *mutatis mutandis*, within Frye's description. The call to action is found throughout the numerous appeals that accompanied the launching of every new stage of the Teaching Plan. That Shoghi Effendi hoped to arouse the Bahá'ís to action

was his stated purpose, emphatically expressed. The word “action” continually punctuated his messages:⁶⁷ “My heart yearns to learn of any speedy and effective action which the valiant members of that community may determine, whether collectively or severally, to undertake.”⁶⁸ His secretary wrote on his behalf: “He is convinced, that the friends will arise and translate their enthusiasm into Action, because the keynote of the Crusade, must be Action, Action, Action!”⁶⁹ In April 1957, not quite at midpoint in the “world-embracing Spiritual Crusade” (1953-63), which he conceived to establish Bahá'u'lláh's “spiritual dominion” throughout the world, Shoghi Effendi wrote the following appeal. It contained the historical reminder that the task at hand required the same dedication that fired the apostles of the Báb at the three week conference of Badasht, held between June and July of 1848:

I appeal, as I close this review of the superb feats already accomplished, in the course of so many campaigns, by the heroic band of the warriors of Bahá'u'lláh, battling in His Name and by His aid for the purification, the unification and the spiritualization of a morally and spiritually bankrupt society, now hovering on the brink of self-destruction, for a renewed dedication, at this critical hour in the fortunes of mankind, on the part of the entire company of my spiritual brethren in every continent of the globe, to the high ideals of the Cause they have espoused, as well as to the immediate accomplishment of the goals of the Crusade on which they have embarked, be they in active service or not, of either sex, young as well as old, rich or poor, whether veteran or newly enrolled — a dedication reminiscent of the pledges which the Dawn-breakers of an earlier Apostolic Age, assembled in conference at Badasht, and faced with issues of a different but equally challenging nature, willingly and solemnly made for the prosecution of the collective task with which they were confronted.⁷⁰

Northrop Frye also indicated that the rhetoric of persuasion, with its call to social action, “...must have either a rallying point or a point of attack, or both.”⁷¹ The rallying point in

Shoghi Effendi's stirring appeals was, just as it is now under the direction of the Universal House of Justice, the pressing need to fulfill the goals of the Teaching Plan. Here is one example among many of a rallying cry, one that is at the same time a "plea" that contains its own word of warning:

Once again — and this time more fervently than ever before — I direct my plea to every single member of this strenuously laboring, clear-visioned, stout-hearted, spiritually endowed community, every man and woman, on whose individual efforts, resolution, self-sacrifice and perseverance the immediate destinies of the Faith of God, now traversing so crucial a stage in its rise and establishment, primarily depends, not to allow, through apathy, timidity or complacency, this one remaining opportunity to be irretrievably lost. I would rather entreat each and every one of them to immortalize this approaching, fateful hour in the evolution of a World Spiritual Crusade, by a fresh consecration to their God-given mission, coupled with an instantaneous plan of action, at once so dynamic and decisive, as to wipe out, on the one hand, with one stroke, the deficiencies which have, to no small extent, bogged down the operations of the Crusade on the home front, and tremendously accelerate, on the other, the progress of the triple task, launched, in three continents, and constituting one of its preeminent objectives.⁷²

(2) The Imperative Mode: The Work of Consolidation

The imperative mode takes many forms but all of them speak the language of the unconditional. Kerygma demands an immediate response: the divine command must be executed. In the following message, Shoghi Effendi urged the Bahá'ís to consolidate the goals won during the first three years of the Ten Year Plan (1953-63). "The prizes so arduously won" could not be forfeited:

The glorious and stupendous work already accomplished, singly and collectively, in the course of three brief years, in five continents of the globe and the

islands of the seas, both at home and abroad, in the teaching as well as the administrative spheres of Bahá'í activity must, as the army of Bahá'u'lláh's crusaders marches forward into new and vaster fields to capture still greater heights, never be jeopardized or allowed to lag or suffer a setback. The prizes so arduously won should not only be jealously preserved but should be constantly enriched. Far from suffering the long and distinguished record of feats which have been achieved to be tarnished, assiduous efforts must be exerted to ennoble it with every passing day.

The newly opened territories of the globe must, under no circumstances, be allowed to relapse into the state of spiritual deprivation from which they have so recently and laboriously been rescued. Nay, the highly edifying evidences proclaiming the expansion and the consolidation of the superb historic work achieved in so many of these territories must be rapidly multiplied. The local assemblies that have been so diligently and patiently established must under no circumstances be allowed to dissolve, or their foundations be in any way endangered. The mighty and steady process involving the increase in the number of the avowed supporters of the Faith, and the multiplication of isolated centers, groups and local assemblies must, throughout this newly opened phase of the Plan, be markedly accelerated.⁷³

(3) The Magisterial Mode:

(a) The Unity of Religions

(b) The Administrative Order

As already mentioned, Shoghi Effendi's discourse is strongly performative. His letters are filled with exhortations, appeals, pleas, warnings, condemnations, caveats, directives, objectives, plans, and strategies for winning teaching goals. All these discourse acts are profoundly heart-felt, expressed with deep unction.⁷⁴ Another of the dominant voices in our author's writings is that of the great teacher, deriving from the Guardian role as the only appointed interpreter and expounder

of the Bahá'í sacred writings, its history and Administrative Order in its Formative Age (1921-). This voice uses a more formal, authoritative reason, and carries with it an apocalyptic certitude. Its closest philosophical equivalent is the Aristotlean apodictic proposition (*apodeiktikos*), meaning one that is self-evident, certain or necessarily true.⁷⁵ On his own terms, he referred to his doctrinal clarifications in *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (1934) as "the fundamental verities of the Faith."⁷⁶ However, the Guardian did not expound fine points of doctrine. Rather, in order to maintain doctrinal unity, he established fundamentals, basic orientations that are coherent with Bahá'í teaching that could be integrally preserved and handed down. Necessarily, this also meant excluding erroneous ideas that were not coherent with the religion's teachings.

Theologically, Shoghi Effendi's interpretations or expositions have the effect of dogma, meant here in its non-pejorative sense of a non-negotiable, normative teaching that is received on the basis of divine revelation and legitimate authority. The Bahá'í Faith has an unusual theological stance in that the Guardian's writings, as for those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, are not *ipso facto* divine revelation,⁷⁷ but they carry the same authority. The authorised interpretation, while it does not share the preeminent station of the Revealed Word, must be accorded an equal reception by the community. (This is similar to the standpoint of Shiah Islam by which the interpretations of the imams are believed to be infallible and are accorded virtual equality with the Qur'án). This does not mean, however, that our author's theological definitions must be accepted without question, i.e. silence. The Guardian was no technical philosopher, and according to Madame Rabbání, he loathed abstractions.⁷⁸ His interpretations and elucidations are generally not matter for abstract, speculative, theological discussions, but as positive theology,⁷⁹ they are liable to further analysis.

Two texts follow. The first is theological and uses a type of authoritative reason in the form of a caveat that advocates a qualified and guarded interpretation of the coming of Bahá'u'lláh as "the Promised One of all ages," and the inauguration of the Bahá'í cycle as "the culmination of a prophetic cycle":⁸⁰

Nor does the Bahá'í Revelation, claiming as it does to be the culmination of a prophetic cycle and the fulfilment of the promise of all ages, attempt, under any circumstances, to invalidate those first and everlasting principles that animate and underlie the religions that have preceded it. The God-given authority, vested in each one of them, it admits and establishes as its firmest and ultimate basis. It regards them in no other light except as different stages in the eternal history and constant evolution of one religion, Divine and indivisible, of which it itself forms but an integral part. It neither seeks to obscure their Divine origin, nor to dwarf the admitted magnitude of their colossal achievements. It can countenance no attempt that seeks to distort their features or to stultify the truths which they instill. Its teachings do not deviate a hairbreadth from the verities they enshrine, nor does the weight of its message detract one jot or one tittle from the influence they exert or the loyalty they inspire. Far from aiming at the overthrow of the spiritual foundation of the world's religious systems, its avowed, its unalterable purpose is to widen their basis, to restate their fundamentals, to reconcile their aims, to reinvigorate their life, to demonstrate their oneness, to restore the pristine purity of their teachings, to co-ordinate their functions and to assist in the realization of their highest aspirations. These divinely-revealed religions, as a close observer has graphically expressed it, "are doomed not to die, but to be reborn... 'Does not the child succumb in the youth and the youth in the man; yet neither child nor youth perishes?'"⁸¹

The second text outlines the political theory on which the Administrative Order as a system of government is based. This passage maintains that the Administrative Order is a unique salutary blend of the existing forms of government, both secular [democratic, autocratic, aristocratic] and theocratic [imamate, caliphate, Hebrew Commonwealth, papacy], while excluding their "objectionable features." Only the general argument is given here:

This new-born Administrative Order incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of them, and without introducing within its machinery any of the objectionable features which they inherently possess. It blends and harmonizes, as no government fashioned by mortal hands has as yet accomplished, the salutary truths which each of these systems undoubtedly contains without vitiating the integrity of those God-given verities on which it is ultimately founded.... Whereas this Administrative Order cannot be said to have been modeled after any of these recognized systems of government, it nevertheless embodies, reconciles and assimilates within its framework such wholesome elements as are to be found in each one of them. The hereditary authority which the Guardian is called upon to exercise, the vital and essential functions which the Universal House of Justice discharges, the specific provisions requiring its democratic election by the representatives of the faithful – these combine to demonstrate the truth that this divinely revealed Order, which can never be identified with any of the standard types of government referred to by Aristotle in his works, embodies and blends with the spiritual verities on which it is based the beneficent elements which are to be found in each one of them.⁸²

(4) The Defensive Mode:

(a) The Báb's Station

(b) Attacks on the Bahá'í Faith

The defensive mode originates in the law courts and political assemblies of fifth century Greece (BCE). Its model text is Plato's *Apology* of Socrates' defence before the Athenian assembly. Since then, defence with advocacy have become the twin functions of *apologia*. Although apologetics was for centuries one of the recognized disciplines in theology, with the progressive secularization of contemporary society, this engaged, faith-driven approach has fallen out of favour, except

for confessional colleges and universities, since it has been rejected for its polemical, dogmatic, and authoritarian motives, and has been replaced with so-called “objective,” value-neutral, historical/social-scientific treatments of religion. Despite its being contrary to academic fashion, the apologetic voice can be clearly heard in the writings of the Guardian. The defensive mode takes basically two forms: (1) theoretical: as the advocacy, defence or explanation of a doctrinal point. (2) actual: as “defender of the Faith,” Shoghi Effendi defended both the Bahá’ís and the Bahá’í Faith from attacks and advocated strategies for countering such assaults. The following passage from *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh* exemplifies point (1). Its main purpose is to uphold the station of the Báb and to protect it from erosion. He admonishes his readers not to reduce the Báb’s station merely to that of “an inspired Precursor of the Bahá’í Revelation.” He is to be understood, rather, as “the object of all the Prophets gone before Him.” Consequently, comparisons to John the Baptist should not be used without qualification:

That the Báb, the inaugurator of the Bábí Dispensation, is fully entitled to rank as one of the self-sufficient Manifestations of God, that He has been invested with sovereign power and authority, and exercises all the rights and prerogatives of independent Prophethood, is yet another fundamental verity which the Message of Bahá’u’lláh insistentlly proclaims and which its followers must uncompromisingly uphold. That He is not to be regarded merely as an inspired Precursor of the Bahá’í Revelation, that in His person, as He Himself bears witness in the Persian Bayán, the object of all the Prophets gone before Him has been fulfilled, is a truth which I feel it my duty to demonstrate and emphasize. We would assuredly be failing in our duty to the Faith we profess and would be violating one of its basic and sacred principles if in our words or by our conduct we hesitate to recognize the implications of this root principle of Bahá’í belief, or refuse to uphold unreservedly its integrity and demonstrate its truth.⁸³

(2) During the 1955 “premeditated campaign” of persecution of the Bahá’ís of Iran, Shoghi Effendi exposed the several crimes committed against the Bahá’í community,⁸⁴ and also directed measures whereby the Bahá’í International Community could assist its persecuted co-religionists. His announcement of the persecution and its historical significance was fully developed in a detailed letter of August 20, 1955. In announcing the crisis he wrote:

With dramatic suddenness, a situation, which had been slowly and secretly developing, came to a head, as the result of the ceaseless intrigue of the fanatical and determined ecclesiastical opponents of the Faith, ever ready to seize their chance, in times of confusion, and to strike mercilessly, at an opportune hour, at the very root of that Faith and of its swiftly developing, steadily consolidating administrative institutions.⁸⁵

He immediately devised a series of counter-measures to alleviate the suffering of the Iranian Bahá’ís, and called upon the American Bahá’í Community to compensate for the losses suffered by their middle-eastern co-religionists by widening their teaching efforts and rededicating themselves to the goals of the Ten Year Plan:

Faced with this organized and vicious onslaught on the followers, the fundamental verities, the shrines and administrative institutions of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh in the land of His birth, the American Bahá’í Community cannot at this hour relax for a moment in the discharge of the multiple and sacred responsibilities it has pledged itself to fulfill under the Ten-Year Plan and must indeed display a still greater degree of consecration and a nobler spirit of self-sacrifice in the pursuit of the goals it has set itself to achieve.⁸⁶

(5) Praise and Gratitude: North America’s World-Historical Identity

The rhetoric of praise and gratitude has three basic types in our author’s writings: (1) as prayer-like expressions of thanksgiving to God and to Bahá’u’lláh. (2) to praise individuals, either living or dead, for their services. (3) to laud

the historic achievements of national communities. Here are two examples of type (1) sent as cablegrams:

Acclaim with grateful heart, on twenty-first Anniversary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Ascension, the glorious emergence of the firmly-welded, incorruptible American Bahá'í community from severest crisis since His passing which the blindness of the breakers of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Covenants has, amidst His kindred, and in the City of the Covenant, recently tragically precipitated....

...Heart aglow with pride, love, gratitude for superb achievement of completion of exterior of the House of Worship, Mother Temple of the West. Bahá'u'lláh's high behest, enshrined in His Most Holy Book, has been brilliantly executed.⁸⁷

As for type (2), here is one of the Guardian's tributes to the peerless "Leading Ambassadors of His Faith and Pride of Bahá'í teachers," Miss Martha Root:

Nor can I dismiss this subject without singling out for special reference her who, not only through her preponderating share in initiating measures for the translation and dissemination of Bahá'í literature, but above all through her prodigious and indeed unique exertions in the international teaching field, has covered herself with a glory that has not only eclipsed the achievements of the teachers of the Faith among her contemporaries the globe around, but has outshone the feats accomplished by any of its propagators in the course of an entire century. To Martha Root, that archetype of Bahá'í itinerant teachers and the foremost Hand raised by Bahá'u'lláh since 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, must be awarded, if her manifold services and the supreme act of her life are to be correctly appraised, the title of Leading Ambassador of His Faith and Pride of Bahá'í teachers, whether men or women, in both the East and the West.⁸⁸

The best example of type (3) is Shoghi Effendi's multi-page epideictic of high praise to the North American Bahá'í

community in *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1939).⁸⁹ The Guardian's eulogy is not just praise for the sake of praise. A larger, creative process is at work: the creation of a world-historical identity, one that is based on the historical accomplishments of the North American Bahá'ís to 1939, and the conferring of their global mission by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The section "Chief Remaining Citadel" opens with a major statement on the mission and station of the North America believers. These are the main points: (1) North America "bids fair" to become the "cradle" and the "stronghold" of the "New World Order." (2) To reach his conclusions, Shoghi Effendi has relied, not only on the internal evidence of American Bahá'í history, but also on the principle of divine election based on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's prophecy:

The continent of America is, in the eyes of the one true God, the land wherein the splendors of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled, where the righteous will abide, and the free assemble.

(3) This prophecy has been already partially fulfilled, but will be fully disclosed only in "...the light of the glory of the Golden Age of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh." North America is the land that has been singled out and is "...preserved by the immutable decrees of the omnipotent Ordainer" and derives "...continual sustenance from the mandate which the Tablets of the Divine Plan have invested it." These believers are laying the groundwork for the future World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. (4) Shoghi Effendi links East and West by declaring that the North American Bahá'ís are "...the spiritual descendants of the dawn-breakers of an heroic Age," but unlike the martyrs of Persia they must become a "living sacrifice" whose fruit shall be "...that promised World Order, the shell ordained to enshrine that priceless jewel, the world civilization, of which the Faith itself is the sole begetter." A further link is made. The martyrs of Persia have begotten the Administrative Order: "Its seed is the blood of no less than twenty thousand martyrs who have offered up their lives that it may be born and flourish."⁹⁰ (In a former dispensation, this statement parallels Tertullian's saying that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"⁹¹). (5) In ¶5 of the section, the Guardian makes the

preamble to his eulogy. Along the lines of Arnold Tonybee's "challenge and response" factor in making history,⁹² the preamble records the accomplishments of the North American Bahá'ís, despite the several obstacles and handicaps that confronted them. Each clause addresses a particular handicap or obstacle that has been faced and successfully overcome:

A community, relatively negligible in its numerical strength; separated by vast distances from both the focal-center of its Faith and the land wherein the preponderating mass of its fellow-believers reside; bereft in the main of material resources and lacking in experience and in prominence; ignorant of the beliefs, concepts and habits of those peoples and races from which its spiritual Founders have sprung; wholly unfamiliar with the languages in which its sacred Books were originally revealed; constrained to place its sole reliance upon an inadequate rendering of only a fragmentary portion of the literature embodying its laws, its tenets, and its history; subjected from its infancy to tests of extreme severity, involving, at times, the defection of some of its most prominent members; having to contend, ever since its inception, and in an ever-increasing measure, with the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and ingrained prejudice — such a community, in less than half a century, and unaided by any of its sister communities, whether in the East or in the West, has, by virtue of the celestial potency with which an all-loving Master has abundantly endowed it, lent an impetus to the onward march of the Cause it has espoused which the combined achievements of its coreligionists in the West have failed to rival.⁹³

Then Shoghi Effendi enters into the heart of his eulogy, a text that is framed by no less than thirteen rhetorical questions without a single paragraph break:

What other community, it can confidently be asked, has been instrumental in fixing the pattern, and in imparting the original impulse, to those administrative institutions that constitute the vanguard of the World

Order of Bahá'u'lláh? What other community has been capable of demonstrating, with such consistency, the resourcefulness, the discipline, the iron determination, the zeal and perseverance, the devotion and fidelity, so indispensable to the erection and the continued extension of the framework within which those nascent institutions can alone multiply and mature? What other community has proved itself to be fired by so noble a vision, or willing to rise to such heights of self-sacrifice, or ready to achieve so great a measure of solidarity, as to be able to raise, in so short a time and in the course of such crucial years, an edifice that can well deserve to be regarded as the greatest contribution ever made by the West to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh? What other community can justifiably lay claim to have succeeded, through the unsupported efforts of one of its humble members, in securing the spontaneous allegiance of Royalty to its Cause, and in winning such marvelous and written testimonies to its truth? What other community has shown the foresight, the organizing ability, the enthusiastic eagerness, that have been responsible for the establishment and multiplication, throughout its territory, of those initial schools which, as time goes by, will, on the one hand, evolve into powerful centers of Bahá'í learning, and, on the other, provide a fertile recruiting ground for the enrichment and consolidation of its teaching force? What other community has produced pioneers combining to such a degree the essential qualities of audacity, of consecration, of tenacity, of self-renunciation, and unstinted devotion, that have prompted them to abandon their homes, and forsake their all, and scatter over the surface of the globe, and hoist in its uttermost corners the triumphant banner of Bahá'u'lláh? Who else but the members of this community have won the eternal distinction of being the first to raise the call of Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá in such highly important and widely scattered centers and territories as the hearts of both the British and French empires, Germany, the Far East, the Balkan States, the Scandinavian countries, Latin America, the Islands of

the Pacific, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, and now more recently the Baltic States? Who else but those same pioneers have shown themselves ready to undertake the labor, to exercise the patience, and to provide the funds, required for the translation and publication, in no less than forty languages, of their sacred literature, the dissemination of which is an essential prerequisite to any effectively organized campaign of teaching? What other community can lay claim to have had a decisive share in the worldwide efforts that have been exerted for the safeguarding and the extension of the immediate surroundings of its holy shrines, as well as for the preliminary acquisition of the future sites of its international institutions at its world center? What other community can to its eternal credit claim to have been the first to frame its national and local constitutions, thereby laying down the fundamental lines of the twin charters designed to regulate the activities, define the functions, and safeguard the rights, of its institutions? What other community can boast of having simultaneously acquired and legally secured the basis of its national endowments, thus paving the way for a similar action on the part of its local communities? What other community has achieved the supreme distinction of having obtained, long before any of its sister communities had envisaged such a possibility, the necessary documents assuring the recognition, by both the federal and state authorities, of its Spiritual Assemblies and national endowments? And finally what other community has had the privilege, and been granted the means, to succor the needy, to plead the cause of the downtrodden, and to intervene so energetically for the safeguarding of Bahá'í edifices and institutions in countries such as Persia, Egypt, Iraq, Russia, and Germany, where, at various times, its fellow-believers have had to suffer the rigors of both religious and racial persecution?⁹⁴

Each rhetorical question becomes, in fact, not a question, but a statement that identifies one particular facet of a distinguished history. Each question provides vital

information that invites further investigation by historians: "To appraise correctly their value ["these manifold services"], and dilate on their merits and immediate consequences, is a task which only a future Bahá'í historian can properly discharge."⁹⁵ (This atypical use of the rhetorical question will be considered below under "Particular Rhetorical Techniques").

(6) The Rhetoric of Blame: Denunciation of Covenant-Breakers

Although he was liberal in his praise, Shoghi Effendi sometimes found it necessary to blame. Although his denunciations were often aimed at "...the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age,"⁹⁶ the condemnations were occasionally personal. The rhetoric of blame accompanied the expulsion of a small group of ex-Bahá'ís known as covenant-breakers. Despite their few numbers, the covenant-breakers were a wily and desperate group who, first secretly, then openly, had defied Bahá'u'lláh's, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's or Shoghi Effendi's authority, had attempted to discredit, harm and/or injure them, to divide the community, and to create a following for themselves. Using a medical analogy, the Guardian referred to covenant-breaking as a "virus of violation,"⁹⁷ a phrase that indicates both its dangerous and contagious qualities. The metaphor is apt because covenant-breaking is a potentially fatal spiritual disease that strikes at the very heart of Bahá'í teaching, government, community life and the sanity of the mind and soul.

In the following passages, Shoghi Effendi denounces the Iranians Avarih, Fareed and Falah. His condemnation reminds us that divine punishment, even though it may disturb the modern reader, and makes for unpopular theology, is one manifestation of divine justice. To make an object lesson of such individuals, the Guardian recorded the devastating effects on those who had attempted to usurp the religion's leadership and destroy its unity. These attacks, although they failed, caused acute suffering to the Guardian, and to Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá before him, and set back or impeded the faith's progress:

Following the successive blows which fell with dramatic swiftness two years ago upon the ring-leaders of the

fast dwindling band of old Covenant-breakers at the World Center of the Faith, God's avenging hand struck down in the last two months, Avarih, Fareed and Falah, within the cradle of the Faith, North America and Turkey, who demonstrated varying degrees, in the course of over thirty years, of faithlessness to 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The first of the above named will be condemned by posterity as being the most shameless, vicious, relentless apostate in the annals of the Faith, who, through ceaseless vitriolic attacks in recorded voluminous writings and close alliance with its traditional enemies, assiduously schemed to blacken its name and subvert the foundations of its institutions.

The second, history will recognize as one of the most perfidious among the kinsmen of the interpreters of the Center of the Covenant, who, driven by ungovernable cupidity, committed acts causing agonies of grief and distress to the beloved Master and culminating in open association with breakers of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant in the Holy Land.

The third will be chiefly remembered by the pride, obstinacy and insatiable ambition impelling him to violate the spiritual and administrative precepts of the Faith.

All three, however blinded by perversity, could not have failed to perceive, as their infamous careers approached their end, the futility of their opposition and measure their own loss by the degree of progress and consolidation of the triumphant administrative order so magnificently celebrated in the course of the festivities of the recently concluded Holy Year.⁹⁸

Shoghi Effendi's entire letter of October 17, 1927 to the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the West presents 'Abdu'l-Husayn Avarih's futile attempt to undermine the Bahá'í Faith and records his downfall. Avarih is presented as a once respected historian and itinerant lecturer who became deluded by his own monstrous pride and ambition. Among his other crimes, Avarih attacked the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, denounced the originality of the Bahá'í teachings, questioned

the authenticity of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Will and Testament*, and sought to overthrow the Bahá'í Administration. He conspired with Christian missionaries in Persia, and a hostile Muslim clergy, and sought to discredit the Bahá'ís in the eyes of "...the highest dignitaries of the State"⁹⁹ with the old charge that they were rebellious enemies of the state and the wreckers of Islam. However, Avarih seriously underestimated the strength and solidarity of the Bahá'í institutions and the discernment of those who were able to see through the mask of this "sordid and treacherous mind."¹⁰⁰ He lived to see the utter collapse of his egomaniacal projects:

Shunned by the entire body of the believers, abandoned by his life-long and most intimate friends, deserted by his wife, separated from his only child, refused admittance into even his own home, denied of the profit he hoped to derive from the sale and circulation of his book, he found to his utter amazement and remorse his best hopes irretrievably shattered.¹⁰¹

The distinguished comparative religionist Ninian Smart (1925-2000), in a book that investigates the language of moral discourse in religion, makes the point that the use of praise and/or blame is not just to congratulate or condemn someone as being either "good" or "bad." Such value-judgments also reflect the norms of the religion. Applying Smart's logic to Shoghi Effendi epideictic, those who read the condemnation of Avarih had their identity as faithful believers reinforced. At the same time, the condemnation would have served as warning to the wavering and punishment to the faithless:

One main function of praise or blame is to get people to do the right things and to refrain from the wrong things: it is then a form (usually but not always the mildest form) of reward and punishment. As such its purposes are controlled by the rules and valuations held to be correct.¹⁰²

I alluded above to Northrop Frye's mention of the need for a "rallying point" and/or "point of attack" in the rhetoric of social action. As for the "point of attack," Shoghi Effendi excelled when thundering against the evils of the age. His denunciations are a modern revoicing of the ancient prophetic

protest. The following passage decries the senseless worship of the three “false gods,” “the triple gods,” “the chief idols” of the age, gods which have exacted the tragic deaths of millions of souls in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While this passage is noteworthy for its iconoclastic stigmatization of three forms of secularism as modern-day idol worship, it is no less remarkable for its rhetorical properties:

This vital force [religion] is dying out, this mighty agency has been scorned, this radiant light obscured, this impregnable stronghold abandoned, this beauteous robe discarded. God Himself has indeed been dethroned from the hearts of men, and an idolatrous world passionately and clamorously hails and worships the false gods which its own idle fancies have fatuously created, and its misguided hands so impiously exalted. The chief idols in the desecrated temple of mankind are none other than the triple gods of Nationalism, Racialism and Communism, at whose altars governments and peoples, whether democratic or totalitarian, at peace or at war, of the East or of the West, Christian or Islamic, are, in various forms and in different degrees, now worshipping. Their high priests are the politicians and the worldly-wise, the so-called sages of the age; their sacrifice, the flesh and blood of the slaughtered multitudes; their incantations outworn shibboleths and insidious and irreverent formulas; their incense, the smoke of anguish that ascends from the lacerated hearts of the bereaved, the maimed, and the homeless.¹⁰³

(7) The Rhetoric of Anxious Concern: Executing the Teaching Plan

The name of this rhetorical mode is taken from Bahá'u'lláh's admonition, “*Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.*”¹⁰⁴ To motivate the Bahá'ís to fulfill the objectives of the Divine Plan, Shoghi Effendi's letters contained earnest appeals, solemn entreaties and sober admonitions. The subtext to the following example is the

convenantal language of the renewed pledge, “the dual responsibility solemnly undertaken under the Seven Year Plan”:

I entreat the American Bahá’í Community, whatever the immediate or distant repercussions of the present turmoil on their own continent, however violent its impact upon the World Center of their Faith, to pledge themselves anew, before the Throne of Bahá’u’lláh, to discharge, with unswerving aim, unfailing courage, invincible vigor, exemplary fidelity and ever-deepening consecration, the dual responsibility solemnly undertaken under the Seven Year Plan. I implore them to accelerate their efforts, increase their vigilance, deepen their unity, multiply their heroic feats, maintain their distant outposts in the teaching field of Latin America and expedite the termination of the last stage in the ornamentation of the Temple. I am praying continually with redoubled fervor.¹⁰⁵

He wrote these words during the Ten Year Plan (1953-1963), less than six weeks before his passing in Knightsbridge, London:

Once again – and this time more fervently than ever before – I direct my plea to every single member of this strenuously laboring, clear-visioned, stout-hearted, spiritually endowed community, every man and woman, on whose individual efforts, resolution, self-sacrifice and perseverance the immediate destinies of the Faith of God, now traversing so crucial a stage in its rise and establishment, primarily depends, not to allow, through apathy, timidity or complacency, this one remaining opportunity to be irretrievably lost.¹⁰⁶

Particular Rhetorical Techniques

Divine charisma notwithstanding, the Guardian’s formal study of rhetoric at the Syrian Protestant College (1915-1917) familiarised him with the classical elements of speech-art which he learned to use effectively. Above we have examined seven rhetorical modes used by Shoghi Effendi that are associated with classical rhetoric, particularly the epideictic and deliberative modes. However, because they are Bahá’í-specific,

our author's writings exhibit certain atypical stylistic features which will be examined now.

(1) Loving Greetings

Shoghi Effendi's warm and loving greetings establish an immediate, personal contact with the reader. These greetings expressed, in solicitous terms, his sincere affection and open admiration of his fellow-believers. He wrote such endearing salutations as "Dearly-beloved friends!," "Fellow-believers in the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh," "To the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the Merciful," "My dearest brethren and sisters in 'Abdu'l-Bahá," "My dearly-beloved brethren and sisters in the love of God!," "Dearest brethren and sisters in Bahá'u'lláh!," "My dearest friends" and "Dearly-beloved co-workers." The lone greeting in *The Promised Day Is Come* is found, atypically, not at the beginning of that text, but in its concluding passages, and reads simply "Dear friends!" The salutation "Dearly-beloved co-workers" indicated that Shoghi Effendi saw himself as a close collaborator with his fellow believers. His closing signature indicated, not only his profound humility, but also his strong sense of fraternal collaboration. The weighty title "Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Cause of God" he did not deem appropriate. He signed humbly, "Your true brother, Shoghi" or simply "Shoghi." In Persian, he usually signed *Bandeh-yeh-Ástánesh, Shoghi*, "Servant of His Threshold, Shoghi."

(2) Persuasion By Authoritative Reason

We have already seen that at its origins in ancient Greece, rhetoric used both logic and emotion. In *The Promised Day Is Come*, *The Advent of Divine Justice* and *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Shoghi Effendi's judgments and strong appeals to participate in the Divine Plan were accompanied by sober arguments. We have noted that the Guardian was not inclined to abstraction and speculation, nor are his writings dialectical in the Socratic or Platonic sense. Aristotle's dialectic of "a rational inference based on probable premises"¹⁰⁷ comes perhaps closest to some of the arguments presented in *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (1934), but the apocalyptic certitude that accompanied his theological judgments excluded

probabilities. His writings employed an authoritative reason to elucidate truth, but this reason was based on flashes of insight that were grounded in divine authority, rather than the working of an elaborate logic. Authoritative reason is akin to the apodictic statement/proposition mentioned under the magisterial mode in (3) above (*apodeiktos*=demonstrable), viz. a philosophical truth that is beyond doubt or a binding, religious command.

The following passage from the *Dispensation* rejects one of the misconceptions about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá entertained by American Bahá’ís during the 1920’s and early 1930’s: that He shared a “mystic unity” with Bahá’u’lláh. Shoghi Effendi corrected this misapprehension partly on moral grounds. Those who over-estimated ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s station were “just as reprehensible and have done just as much harm as those who underestimate it.”¹⁰⁸ This overestimation lent credibility to the complaint of the covenant-breakers that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was laying claim to divinity “before the expiration of a full thousand years”: “...they are inadvertently justifying and continuously furnishing the enemy with proofs for his false accusations and misleading statements.”¹⁰⁹ But his argument was also rational and deductive with its economical mentions of “erroneous conception,” “unjustified inference” and “inescapable inference.” Regarding the so-called mystical unity between Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, he wrote:

This erroneous conception may, in part, be ascribed to an altogether extravagant interpretation of certain terms and passages in the Tablet of the Branch, to the introduction into its English translation of certain words that are either non-existent, misleading, or ambiguous in their connotation. It is, no doubt, chiefly based upon an altogether unjustified inference from the opening passages of a Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh, extracts of which, as reproduced in the Bahá’í Scriptures, immediately precede, but form no part of, the said Tablet of the Branch. It should be made clear to every one reading those extracts that by the phrase “the Tongue of the Ancient” no one else is meant but God, and that the term “the Greatest Name” is an obvious reference to Bahá’u’lláh, and that “the

Covenant” referred to is not the specific Covenant of which Bahá’u’lláh is the immediate Author and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the Center but that general Covenant which, as inculcated by the Bahá’í teaching, God Himself invariably establishes with mankind when He inaugurates a new Dispensation. “The Tongue” that “gives,” as stated in those extracts, the “glad-tidings” is none other than the Voice of God referring to Bahá’-u’lláh, and not Bahá’u’lláh referring to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Moreover, to maintain that the assertion “He is Myself,” instead of denoting the mystic unity of God and His Manifestations, as explained in the *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, establishes the identity of Bahá’u’lláh with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, would constitute a direct violation of the oft-repeated principle of the oneness of God’s Manifestations – a principle which the Author of these same extracts is seeking by implication to emphasize...

Furthermore, the inescapable inference from the belief in the identity of the Author of our Faith with Him Who is the Center of His Covenant would be to place ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in a position superior to that of the Báb, the reverse of which is the fundamental, though not as yet universally recognized, principle of this Revelation.¹¹⁰

(3) The Rhetorical Question

The Rhetoric of Praise that created the consciousness of the world-historical mission of the North American Bahá’is was elaborated through an atypical, long series of rhetorical questions. Normally, the rhetorical question does not seek to provide information, but rather to elicit an emotional response. But while Shoghi Effendi’s rhetorical list of praise was surely well-received, it also provided vital information. The historical synopsis that it provided can still be used by historians to further investigate American Bahá’í history. The rhetorical list also opened a lens through which the North America Bahá’is could see themselves in a new light, doubtless for the first time. The courageous “little band of followers,”¹¹¹ who formerly saw themselves as individual disciples of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, acting under His personal direction, were transformed

by Shoghi Effendi's historical vision into a self-standing, cohesive, vibrant religious community that had successfully overcome the major obstacles that once stood in the way of implanting the Bahá'í Faith on North American soil. The Guardian's Rhetoric of Praise was, moreover, intended to instill the confidence necessary to complete the future tasks with which he would entrust the North American Bahá'ís.

(4) Kinetic Emotion

Northrop Frye pointed out that with rhetorical prose, "...we are moving rapidly away from literature toward the direct verbal expression of kinetic emotion"¹¹² (Gk. κινεο = to move). Frye downgrades this genre as "tantrum prose," with its tendency to "express emotion apart from or without intellect."¹¹³ While the kinetic effect of Shoghi Effendi's writings remains strong, they qualify nonetheless as "conceptual rhetoric"¹¹⁴ or prose of thought. Kinetic emotion is generally considered to be out of place in intellectual discourse. As we have seen with Aristotle, the mixing of strong emotion with reason was seen to weaken the argument. Pure logic was deemed to be closer to truth. The distrust of emotion can be traced back to Plato's *Phaedrus* in which he depicted the soul as a charioteer who is drawn up to heaven by the white winged horse (Pegasus) of reason ("good") and back down to earth again by the black horse of the emotions/passion ("bad").¹¹⁵ Plato's figure regrettably succeeded in dichotomizing reason and emotion.

Rhetorical theory has only legitimized what has long been known — emotions have a legitimate and necessary place in discourse. Even within science, sociologists G. Nigel Gilbert and Michael Mulkay argue that emotion has a valid place. In their *Opening Pandora's Box: A Sociological Analysis of Scientists Discourse* (1984), Gilbert and Mulkay find that emotions are part and parcel of the process of the scientific method and are latently present in scientific statements, even if the emotional experience of the scientist is not explicitly acknowledged in scientific formulations.¹¹⁶ Professor Louis C. Charland, who studies the philosophy of emotion, has argued against Paul E. Griffith's radical stance that the category of emotion and the word itself should be eliminated from

psychology. In his critical review "In Defence of Emotion," Charland argued that emotions form a natural status category that simply cannot be eliminated.¹¹⁷ The conceptual-affective integration of cognition and emotion has been simply and beautifully stated by Wayne C. Booth in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (1974): "Every desire, every feeling, can become a good reason when called into the court of symbolic exchange."¹¹⁸

In *A Celestial Burning: The Writings of Shoghi Effendi*, I have identified the following predominant range of emotions in the Guardian's writings: (1) joy (2) exultation (3) justified pride (4) justified anger (5) righteous indignation (6) pathos (grief/pity) (7) shame and shamelessness.¹¹⁹ Due to the limitation of space, only one example is given here — pathos. The most outstanding example of pathos is Shoghi Effendi's ten page glowing tribute of July 17, 1932 marking the passing of his beloved great-aunt, Bahíyyih Khanum, the Greatest Holy Leaf. The Guardian's letter moves us, not only with his intense personal grief, but it also provides a sensitive appraisal of "...the towering grandeur of her spiritual life... the unique part she played throughout the tumultuous stages of Bahá'í history."¹²⁰ It begins:

Brethren and fellow-mourners in the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh:

A sorrow, reminiscent in its poignancy, of the devastating grief caused by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sudden removal from our midst, has stirred the Bahá'í world to its foundations. The Greatest Holy Leaf, the well-beloved and treasured Remnant of Bahá'u'lláh entrusted to our frail and unworthy hands by our departed Master, has passed to the Great Beyond, leaving a legacy that time can never dim.

The community of the Most Great Name, in its entirety and to its very core, feels the sting of this cruel loss. Inevitable though this calamitous event appeared to us all, however acute our apprehensions of its steady approach, the consciousness of its final consummation at this terrible hour leaves us, we whose

souls have been impregnated by the energizing influence of her love, prostrated and disconsolate.

How can my lonely pen, so utterly inadequate to glorify so exalted a station, so impotent to portray the experiences of so sublime a life, so disqualified to recount the blessings she showered upon me since my earliest childhood – how can such a pen repay the great debt of gratitude and love that I owe her whom I regarded as my chief sustainer, my most affectionate comforter, the joy and inspiration of my life? My grief is too immense, my remorse too profound, to be able to give full vent at this moment to the feelings that surge within me.¹²¹

His letter concludes with this poignant apostrophe:

Dearly-beloved Greatest Holy Leaf! Through the mist of tears that fill my eyes I can clearly see, as I pen these lines, thy noble figure before me, and can recognize the serenity of thy kindly face. I can still gaze, though the shadow of the grave separate us, into thy blue, love-deep eyes, and can feel, in its calm intensity, the immense love thou didst bear for the Cause of thine Almighty Father, the attachment that bound thee to the most lowly and insignificant among its followers, the warm affection thou didst cherish for me in thine heart. The memory of the ineffable beauty of thy smile shall ever continue to cheer and hearten me in the thorny path I am destined to pursue. The remembrance of the touch of thine hand shall spur me on to follow steadfastly in thy way. The sweet magic of thy voice shall remind me, when the hour of adversity is at its darkest, to hold fast to the rope thou didst seize so firmly all the days of thy life.¹²²

(5) Caveats, Conditions and Constructive Criticism

The caveat, a caution or warning, and the condition are characteristic of Shoghi Effendi's covenantal language. When our author uses the phrases "unless and until" or "Then and only then," he is stipulating that certain conditions must be observed to fulfil the goal he has in mind. Addressing the North

American Bahá'ís on April 11, 1949, during the Second Seven Year Plan, Shoghi Effendi laid down three conditions for the success of the Plan, whose chief goal was "the completion of the Mother Temple of the West." This project was "...of such a weighty character as to overshadow every enterprise embarked upon through the organized efforts of its members, in either the concluding years of the Heroic Age of the Faith or the first epoch of the Age which succeeded it."¹²³ The successful outcome of this enterprise depended on the realisation of three interdependent conditions: (1) universal participation (2) sacrifice (3) systematic effort:

Nor can this campaign yield its richest fruit unless and until the community, in its entirety, participates in this nation-wide sacrificial effort. Nor can this collective effort be blessed, to the fullest extent possible, unless the contributions made by its members involve acts of self-abnegation, not only on the part of those of modest means, but also by those endowed with substantial resources. Nor, indeed, can these self-denying acts, by both the rich and the poor, be productive of the fullest possible benefit unless this sacrificial effort is neither momentary nor haphazard, but rather systematic and continuous throughout the period of the present emergency.¹²⁴

He indicated that should these three conditions be met, unsuspected "regenerative power" would flow from that "holy edifice":

Then and only then will this holy edifice, symbol and harbinger of a world civilization as yet unborn, and the embodiment of the sacrifice of a multitude of the upholders of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, release the full measure of the regenerative power with which it has been endowed, shed in all its plenitude the glory of the Most Holy Spirit dwelling within it, and vindicate, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the truth of every single promise recorded by the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá pertaining to its destiny.¹²⁵

While Shoghi Effendi's Rhetoric of Praise extolled the "virtues and qualities"¹²⁶ of the North American Bahá'í

community, he also drew attention to its “faults, habits, and tendencies.”¹²⁷ Here is one such observation: “The American Bahá’í Community, the leaven destined to leaven the whole, cannot hope, at this critical juncture in the fortunes of a struggling, perilously situated, spiritually moribund nation, to either escape the trials with which this nation is confronted, nor claim to be wholly immune from the evils that stain its character.”¹²⁸ More pointed critiques were sometimes made. The weeding out of negative moral and cultural traits was necessary if the two North American nations were to fulfil their high destiny.

These criticisms were always tactful and constructive, but they were delivered nonetheless in clear language. Regarding racial prejudice in America, “...the most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá’í community at the present stage of its evolution...,” he wrote: “The ceaseless exertions which this issue of paramount importance calls for, the sacrifices it must impose, the care and vigilance it demands, the moral courage and fortitude it requires, the tact and sympathy it necessitates, invest this problem, which the American believers are still far from having satisfactorily resolved, with an urgency and importance that cannot be overestimated.”¹²⁹ However egalitarian were (are) the teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on racial equality and unity, promoted as early on as the second decade of the twentieth century, the above passage makes it clear that the Bahá’ís were still far from observing the ideal standard. The Guardian presented the racial unity of whites and African Americans as a social and spiritual challenge that demanded the immediate and urgent attention of every believer.

In his eulogy of the North American Bahá’ís, the Guardian felt impelled to utter “a word of warning”:

Dearly beloved friends! Great as is my love and admiration for you, convinced as I am of the paramount share which you can, and will, undoubtedly have in both the continental and international spheres of future Bahá’í activity and service, I feel it nevertheless incumbent upon me to utter, at this juncture, a word of warning.¹³⁰

The Guardian's word of warning draws a "sharp distinction" between the North American Bahá'ís and the larger non-Bahá'í society in which they live. This sharp distinction is made, not to indulge any sense of false pride or self-satisfaction, but rather to befittingly recognize "the transmuting power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh."¹³¹ The source of such distinction and achievements lay not in themselves, but rather in the powers dispensed by the Founder of their faith. While the source of this distinction between the Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í communities would seem to be clear enough, the point is nonetheless a subtle one. As we have seen above, the Guardian indicated that there could be no safe haven for the Bahá'í community from the trials experienced by their countrymen, nor could any immunity be claimed from the faults that stain the American character. Drawing a parallel between the sublime transformation of the apostolic heroes and martyrs of the Heroic Age (1844-1921), and "To a lesser degree..." with "...the country which has vindicated its right to be regarded as the cradle of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh," Shoghi Effendi issued this sobering reminder:

Let not, therefore, those who are to participate so predominantly in the birth of that world civilization, which is the direct offspring of their Faith, imagine for a moment that for some mysterious purpose or by any reason of inherent excellence or special merit Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to confer upon their country and people so great and lasting a distinction. It is precisely by reason of the patent evils which, notwithstanding its other admittedly great characteristics and achievements, an excessive and binding materialism has unfortunately engendered within it that the Author of their Faith and the Center of His Covenant have singled it out to become the standard-bearer of the New World Order envisaged in their writings.¹³²

Then our author proceeds to spell out the faults that need to be rooted out. As usual, he mentions the virtues and qualities that must replace them:

It is by such means as this that Bahá'u'lláh can best demonstrate to a heedless generation His almighty power to raise up from the very midst of a people, immersed in a sea of materialism, a prey to one of the most virulent and long-standing forms of racial prejudice, and notorious for its political corruption, lawlessness and laxity in moral standards, men and women who, as time goes by, will increasingly exemplify those essential virtues of self-renunciation, of moral rectitude, of chastity, of indiscriminating fellowship, of holy discipline, and of spiritual insight that will fit them for the preponderating share they will have in calling into being that World Order and that World Civilization of which their country, no less than the entire human race, stands in desperate need.¹³³

His observations are adjusted by this positive note:

Observations such as these, however distasteful and depressing they may be, should not, in the least, blind us to those virtues and qualities of high intelligence, of youthfulness, of unbounded initiative, and enterprise which the nation as a whole so conspicuously displays, and which are being increasingly reflected by the community of the believers within it. Upon these virtues and qualities, no less than upon the elimination of the evils referred to, must depend, to a very great extent, the ability of that community to lay a firm foundation for the country's future role in ushering in the Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.¹³⁴

Summary of Shoghi Effendi's Art of Rhetoric

1. The primary functions of Shoghi Effendi's rhetoric are to persuade and to move to action.
2. His rhetorical style is distinctive because it is Bahá'í-specific.
3. Seven modes of suasive speech may be identified in his discourse.

4. His rhetoric preserves some of the classical features identified by Aristotle.
5. The Guardian is credible and impressive, not only because he is an effective rhetorician, but also because he is an outstanding historical figure, of high moral repute, who executed the wide range of his accomplishments to perfection.
6. Persuasion is achieved by a judicious balance of authoritative reason and kinetic emotion.
7. His use of the rhetorical question is atypical.
8. His rhetorical language is covenantal, that is, conditional.
9. While Shoghi Effendi praises, he also judges and, when necessary, condemns.
10. As head of the Bahá'í Faith, he engages in constructive criticism of his co-religionists.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Shoghi Effendi's rhetorical skill was not the product of divine charisma alone, but also of formal study and practice. The strong rhetorical effects in the Guardian's writings may help to insure that this ancient speech-art will be revived in the Bahá'í dispensation, and become the object, not only of rhetorical theory, but also of practice. Shoghi Effendi's exemplary character, and the excellence that he showed in guiding the world-wide Bahá'í community during his administration, gives credibility to his rhetoric. His rhetoric shows that he was cognizant of, and used effectively, some of the classical elements of the ancient art which his writings preserve. However, his Bahá'í-specific discourse resulted in an original, magisterial style that speaks in distinct rhetorical modes and techniques.

NOTES

1. This paper is a modified version of chapter eight, "Rhetoric: The Language of Persuasion," of my forthcoming book *A Celestial Burning: The Writings of Shoghi Effendi* from George Ronald Publisher. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 'Irfán Colloquium held at the Bosch Bahá'í School, Santa Cruz, California, May 26-29, 2005. My thanks to Dr. Iraj Ayman, convenor of the 'Irfán Colloquia, for including the writings of the Guardian in the 'Irfán sessions, and to Dr. Stephen Lambden whose thoughtful questioning led to a major revision of this paper.
2. Bahá'í publications usually give the dates of the guardianship as 1921-1957, that is, thirty-six years. However, the *Will and Testament* of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not read officially until January 3, 1922 and the "provisions of the Will were not made known until it was first read to Shoghi Effendi...." By the Gregorian calendar, then, the Guardian was in office for thirty-five years, not thirty-six. But the thirty-six year period is correct if reckoned by the Jalalí solar calendar which is use in Iran. See Madame Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969) p. 45.
3. The qualification *Qua* indicates that the Guardian was writing in his official capacity as head of the Bahá'í Faith, in his own hand, and not through secretaries who wrote on his behalf.
4. The word "arise" frequently punctuated Shoghi Effendi's message. The Multiple Author Refer System gives 499 uses of the word.
5. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan was conceived for the world-wide expansion of the Bahá'í Faith. In its simplest form, it was outlined as a teaching plan in the fourteen Tablets of the Divine Plan which were written to the North American Bahá'ís during World War One between 1916-1917 and received after the war. In the Preface to these tablets, Horace Holley referred to the North American Bahá'ís as having been chosen by 'Abdu'l-Bahá "as a teaching agency chosen for an international mission." Beginning in 1937 with the First Seven Year Plan, Shoghi Effendi began to systematically execute this "charter" which he felt it was his obligation to establish. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan: Revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the North American Bahá'ís during 1916 and 1917* (Wilmette, Ill: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971).
6. David Macey, "Rhetoric," in *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books), p. 329.
7. For a good overview of the various schools and approaches in the history of rhetoric in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, see "Bedford St. Martin's-The Bedford Bibliography: History of Rhetoric," <http://www.bedfordbooks.com/bb/history.html>. Early on in the twenty-first century, this field, as for literary criticism, has become widely diverse with studies ranging from literacy and language learning, to composition theory and practice, traditional rhetorical theory,

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- postmodernism, and social issues of gender, race, media, culture, ethnicity and class.
8. Bret Breneman, "Socrates'/Plato's Use of Rhetoric: A Bahá'í Perspective," *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, March-June 1991, pp. 1-18.
 9. For Plato, dialectic meant forming conclusions reached by the debate of question and answer. For him, dialectic was the science of first principles since it dispensed with hypotheses and was viewed as the "coping-stone" of the sciences. Aristotle's more formal logic developed the syllogism as a type of demonstration. For Aristotle, dialectic was a process of criticism which was the means of refining all principles that were asserted to be true. For a fuller history of dialectic, see Roland Hall's "Dialectic" in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Paul Edward, Editor-in-Chief (New York and London: Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1967), vol. I, pp. 385-389.
 10. Aristotle's notion of politics differed from modern notions of adversarial party systems which are based on the acquisition of power. Just as the Nichomachean Ethics was concerned with the acquisition of individual happiness based on the practice of virtue, Aristotle's Politics "...treats of the state as one of the chief means through which the individual attains happiness. The object of [eight books of] the Politics is both practical and speculative; to explain the nature of the ideal city (polis) in which the end of happiness may be completely realised; to suggest some methods of making existent states more useful to the individual citizen than they were in Aristotle's time, or had been in the past." From the Introduction by H.W. C. Davis, *Aristotle's Politics* trans. by Benjamin Jowett (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2000), p. 3. An unabridged reprint of the 1885 translation.
 11. See Chapter 1 of Book 1 (of 3) of Aristotle's *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Newly translated with Introduction, Notes, and Appendixes by George A. Kennedy (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
In the *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle identified logic or discursive reason with the rhetorical syllogism known as the enthymeme which was a popular, not a properly logical demonstration.
 12. *ibid*.
 13. Riaz Khadem, *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford and Earlier* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1999), p. 13.
 14. *ibid*, p. 88.
 15. In British universities, Michaelmas corresponds to the North American Fall/ Autumn semester or term.
 16. The Oxford Union Society is a student society that arranges speaker meetings and social events, but debates were (and are) central to the functions of the Union. In the past, the Oxford Union Society and its

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- counterpart at Cambridge, and their respective presidencies, functioned as a training ground for Britain's aspiring prime ministers, politicians and statesmen. But with more recent egalitarian trends in British society, the Unions are not as influential as they once were.
17. 'Alí M. Yazdí, *Blessings Beyond Measure: Recollections of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 84.
 18. *ibid*, p. 85.
 19. *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 13.
 20. Shoghi Effendi in *Oxford and Earlier*, p. 110. Letter from William Elliot to Riaz Khadem, dated July 15, 1969.
 21. Breneman, *ibid*, p. 3.
 22. The interview was published originally in *Seven Days*, February 23, 1979, p. 20. Cited in William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion*, new edition (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing, 2002), n. 15, p. 222. Thanks to Dr. Susan Maneck for locating the above quotation.
 23. For an excellent survey of the repressive measures taken against the Bahá'í community by the Islamic Republic of Iran see Firuz Kazemzadeh, "The Bahá'ís in Iran: Twenty Years of Repression. (non-Muslim Religious Minority)," published originally in the magazine *Social Research*, June 22, 2000. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-63787342.html>
 24. Breneman "Socrates'/Plato's Use of Rhetoric: A Bahá'í Perspective," pp. 5-11.
 25. Gorgias was a Sicilian who came to Athens in 427 BCE who used a poetic style and paradoxical arguments. He delivered and wrote speeches for others. Kennedy, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, Appendix I, p. 283. Bret Breneman points out that Plato critiqued rhetoric in the Protagoras and the Euthydemus. See *ibid*, p. 7.
 26. "Rhetoric" in David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books), p. 330.
 27. The basic difference that Plato and Aristotle had with the Sophists was their denial of the ideal world of forms. For them, reality was confined to outward phenomena and they did not share the denial of the Platonist that the phenomenal world was not real. For Plato, the phenomenal world was merely a sham world and anybody who clung to it as being real was only deluding himself. See G.B. Kerferd's "Sophists" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Paul Edwards, Editor-in-Chief (New York and London: Macmillan and The Free Press, vol. 7, 1967), pp. 494-96.
 28. See Plato's *Sophist* and "Rhetoric" in David Macey, *ibid*, p. 330.
 29. It meant any public speaker. *Rhetor* today has a pejorative meaning.
 30. Jane P. Tompkins, "An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism," in *Reader-Response Criticism From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, Jane P. Tompkins, ed. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins

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- University Press, 1980), p. xxv. Tompkins is referring to Longinus's remarkable treatise "On the Sublime."
31. "Rhetoric" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1959).
 32. "Quintilian" (Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, c. 35-95 CE) at *All Experts Encyclopedia* <http://experts.about.com/e/q/qu/quintilian.htm>, p. 5.
 33. *ibid*, p. 6.
 34. Among other principles, Quintilian advocated that the father should have the highest hopes for his child, that the child's nurse should speak well and both parents and teachers should be well-educated. In a patriarchal society, he saw a well-educated mother as an asset to the growing orator. Childhood education should begin early and be enjoyable for the child; amusement should be built into the curriculum. See 1.1.1, 1.1.4, 1.1.6, 1.1.21 of the *Institutio Oratoria* in "Quintilian," the *All Experts Encyclopedia* <http://experts.about.com/e/q/qu/quintilian.htm>, p. 4.
 35. "Quintilian" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1959).
 36. In addition to Rúhíyyih Rabbani's, *The Priceless Pearl*, informative but brief pen portraits of Shoghi Effendi were recorded by Ugo Giachery, Mountfort Mills, Roy Wilhelm, May Bolles Maxwell, Elaine Locke, Keith Ransom-Kehler, Helen Bishop, O.Z. Whitehead and Leroy Ioas. See Appendix I of Ugo Giachery, *Shoghi Effendi: Recollections* (George Ronald: Oxford, 1973) and *A Tribute to Shoghi Effendi* by Amelia Collins (1958). There is also Leroy Ioas's tape-recorded talk made in Johannesburg in 1958 about the life and work of the Guardian.
 37. The chapter in Marcus Bach's book that treats the Guardian has been excerpted and published as *A Meeting With Shoghi Effendi* (Oxford: One World Publications, 1993). Barney Leith's comment is found on p. viii.
 38. Although the dust jacket says that Bach met Shoghi Effendi "one April evening in 1953," Barney Leith writes in his introduction that the meeting took place on February 12, 1953. Bach himself refers to the "February cold" that he experienced at the border crossing. The border guard instructed him to be back within a week since Israel was at war. *A Meeting With Shoghi Effendi* pp. vi, 3 and 5.
 39. *ibid*, pp. 30, 33, 35, 40-41.
 40. The phrase is that of Edward P.J. Corbett, *Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. xxiii.
 41. "He is, above and beyond these appellations, the "Mystery of God" — an expression by which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized." Shoghi Effendi, "The Dispensation of

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- Bahá'u'lláh" in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 134.
42. "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" in WOB p. 151.
43. *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 2. Miss Drayton is not named by Madame Rabbani, but her name appears in the salutation of the Arabic tablet. See Dr. Yunis Afrukhteh, *Khatirát-i-Nuh-Saleh-i-Akká*, p. 187. Thanks to Dr. Sima Quddusi for referring me to this text.
44. *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 2.
45. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Illinois, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944), p. 25.
46. *ibid*, p. 11.
47. *ibid*, p. 3.
48. *The Priceless Pearl*, pp. 459-61. See also chapter VI "Facets of Shoghi Effendi's Personality," pp. 125-43.
49. Hand of the Cause of God Leroy Ioas (1896-1965), who served as the Guardian's assistant-secretary and representative from March 1952 to Shoghi Effendi's passing on November 4, 1957, said in a tape-recorded talk made after the Guardian's passing in Johannesburg, South Africa on October 31, 1958 that in addition to his other duties, the Guardian received 700 pages of N.S.A. minutes in one day alone which he was required to read. The above dates of service and the date of her father's talk were indicated to me in a letter of Mr. Ioas's daughter, Anita Ioas Chapman, dated January 31, 2000. However, Mr. Ioas indicates in the same talk that his period of service was "six years" (tape recorded personal copy).
50. Rúhiyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 436.
51. Edward P.J. Corbett, *Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. xxii. Italics in original.
52. *ibid*, p.xxii.
53. Jane Tompkins, "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response" in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, Jane Tompkins ed. (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 204. It needs to be said, however, that one would have to be selective in applying the principles of reader-response theory to the writings of Shoghi Effendi. Reader-response theory gives a predominant role to the reader in the creation of meaning compared to the "objectivity" of the text. Any reading of the Guardian's writings would have to weigh heavily on the side of the objective meaning intended by him. It is not the reader who creates ultimate meaning in the reading process, but Shoghi Effendi.
54. From the Introduction, Corbett, *Rhetorical Analyses of Rhetorical Works*, p. xi.
55. Ann Boyles, "The Epistolary Style of Shoghi Effendi" in *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi: Proceedings of the Association for Bahá'í Studies Ninth*

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- Annual Conference*, November 2-4, 1984, Ottawa, Canada. (Ottawa: Bahá'í Studies Publications, 1993), p. 9. Dr. Boyles is quoting C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 3d ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), p. 199.
56. William Merrill Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America Before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 5.
 57. A document written entirely in the hand of its author.
 58. Decker, *Epistolary Practices*, p. 4.
 59. Helen, John and Amelia Danesh, "The Life of Shoghi Effendi" in *Studying the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*, ed. by Morten Bergsmo (Oxford: George Ronald, 1991), p. 25.
 60. An expression used frequently by Bahá'u'lláh in His tablets and in such works as the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and *The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.
 61. What is meant by mixed genres is that, under one cover, the Guardian's writings blend history with scripture, theological interpretation, moral judgments, commentary on social situations and world current events and administrative guidance. In other words, the Guardian was no respecter of the strictness of genre and created his own magisterial style that blended elements of several genres. See, for example, *The Promised Day Is Come*, *The Advent of Divine Justice* and *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.
 62. "Kerygma" in Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: MacMillan, 1964), pp. 138-140.
 63. *Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957*, p. 7.
 64. Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 326-327.
 65. *ibid*, p. 327.
 66. *ibid*. The other examples cited by Frye are: "...Johnson's letter to Chesterfield, some sermons in the period between Latimer and the Commonwealth, some of Burke's speeches..." and "...Vanzetti's death speech."
 67. The MARS program lists 269 instances of the use of the word "action" in the letters and communications of Shoghi Effendi.
 68. *U.S. Bahá'í News*, June 6, 1937, no. 108, p. 1.
 69. *Messages to the Antipodes: Communications from Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'í Communities of Australasia* (Mona Vale, NSW: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1997), p. 110.
 70. *Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957*, p. 120.
 71. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 327.
 72. *Citadel of Faith*, p. 157.
 73. *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, p. 99.

74. The meaning of unction intended here is “a fervent or sympathetic quality in words or tone caused by or causing deep emotion.” *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, 1998.
75. “Apodeictic” in Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994 and 2005), p. 19
76. “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” in WOB p. 147.
77. That the writings of a ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cannot be referred to as “divine revelation” has been clearly decided by a simple statement of Shoghi Effendi. Referring to the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh he wrote: “The setting of so effulgent an Orb brought to a definite termination the period of Divine Revelation – the initial and most vitalizing stage in the Bahá’í era” “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” in WOB p. 143.
78. “Temperamentally Shoghi Effendi is a doer, a builder, an organizer, and loathes abstractions!” Madame Rabbani is quoting from her own diary. *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 81.
79. The word “positive” has developed a number of meanings since its empirical definition by one of the founding fathers of sociology, August Comte, in his famous Law of Three Stages. Here it refers to the Guardian’s functional, constructive, non-speculative elucidations of Bahá’í sacred texts that are used for apologetic purposes.
80. These phrases are taken from *The Promised Day Is Come* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1996), p. 52 and “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 114, respectively.
81. “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” in WOB p. 114.
82. *ibid*, pp. 152-154.
83. *ibid*, p. 123.
84. In 1955 Shoghi Effendi wrote that the premeditated campaign of persecution was the most serious crisis the Bahá’í Faith had experienced since the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1921. He lists the various crimes committed against the Iranian Bahá’í community in *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957* (Wilmette, 1965), pp. 134-36.
85. *Citadel of Faith*, p. 134.
86. *ibid*, p. 136.
87. *Messages to America: Selected Letters and Cablegrams Addressed to the Bahá’ís of North America, 1932-1946* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1947), pp. 58-59.
88. GPB p. 386.
89. ADJ pp. 5-11. Subsequent quotations are taken from this section.
90. *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 156.
91. “Semen est sanguis Christianorum,” literally “The blood of Christians is seed.” From the Apologeticum, chapter 50: 13. <http://www.tertullian.org/quotes.htm>. Translation by the Rev. S. Thelwall, late scholar of Christ’s College, Canterbury.

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92. The challenge and response factor in making history belongs to Toynbee's theory of "the geneses of civilizations" in his monumental ten volume *A Study of History*. See II:V, "Challenge and Response," in vol. 1 of D.C. Somervell's abridgement (of II). (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 60-79.
 93. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 7-8.
 94. *ibid*, pp. 8-10.
 95. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 10.
 96. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 30.
 97. *Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957*, p. 25.
 98. *Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957*, pp. 53-4, from a cablegram of December 16, 1953.
 99. *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages, 1922-1932*, p. 138.
 100. *ibid*, p. 138.
 101. *ibid*, p. 138.
 102. Ninian Smart, *Reasons and Faiths: An Investigation of Religious Discourse, Christian and non-Christian* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958 (reprint 1965), p. 182. See especially chapter seven "Moral Discourse and Religion," pp. 179-96.
 103. PDC 113.
 104. GWB p. 213.
 105. Cablegram June 13, 1940. *Messages to America*, p. 42.
 106. *Citadel of Faith*, p. 157.
 107. Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994 and 2005), p. 99.
 108. "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" in WOB 45.
 109. *ibid*, p. 45.
 110. "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" in WOB, pp. 137-138.
 111. *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 67.
 112. Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 328.
 113. *ibid*, p. 328.
 114. *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 329.
 115. *The Works of Plato: The Jowett Translation*, selected and edited by Erwin Edman (New York: The Modern Library (Random House, 1956), p. 295. Jowett does not translate the colour of the "bad" horse as being black but rather as "of a dark colour."
 116. See Nigel C. Gilbert and Michael Mulkay, *Opening Pandora's Box: A Sociological Analysis of Scientists' Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Referred to by Doug Brent, *Reading as Rhetorical Invention: Knowledge, Persuasion, and the Teaching of*

Research-Based Writing (Urbana: Illinois, National Council of Teachers of English, 1992), pp. 61-62.

117. The basic thrust of Charland's arguments is that emotions form a natural status category that cannot be eliminated. See "In Defence of Emotion" in the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, #31, 2001, p. 133-54.
118. Quoted by Doug Brent in *Reading as Rhetorical Invention: Knowledge, Persuasion, and the Teaching of Research-Based Writing* (Urbana Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1992), p. 73. See Wayne C. Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).
119. In Ch. 8, "Rhetoric: The Language of Persuasion," pp. 351-359 in my manuscript copy. Forthcoming in the Studies Series by George Ronald.
120. *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 187.
121. *ibid*, p. 187.
122. *ibid*, p. 195.
123. *Citadel of Faith*, p. 68.
124. *ibid*, p. 68.
125. *ibid*, p. 68.
126. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 20.
127. *ibid*, p. 20.
128. *Citadel of Faith*, p. 127
129. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 34.
130. *ibid*, p.16
131. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 16.
132. *ibid*, p. 19.
133. *ibid*, pp. 19-20.
134. *ibid*, p. 20.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet on the Functioning of the Universal House of Justice*

A Provisional Translation and Commentary

Moojan Momen

I. Some translation issues

Early last year, a translation was posted by Dr Juan Cole of a tablet by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that dealt with the functioning and authority of the Universal House of Justice: “On the House of Justice and Bahá’í Jurisprudence.” The translation, which has now been posted to the H-Bahai web-site, has a number of places where the translation is infelicitous and appears to be due to a misapprehension and, in one place, to a mis-reading of the text.

In the first part of this presentation, I discuss in detail those points of translation where I differ from Dr Cole; in the second part, I present an alternative translation of the whole tablet; while in the third part, I discuss a number of issues arising out of these points of translation.

The first point at which there is an inappropriate translation is the following sentence:

*It should not be thought that the house of justice will
make decisions out of self-interest. I take refuge in*

* In the summer of 2001, Dr Juan Cole posted a translation of a tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on an e-mail list that he runs, called H-Baháí. I then wrote a response to this in 2002, pointing out a number of problems with this translation. This paper is the response that I made, slightly altered to make is more easily readable. Dr Cole responded on the H-Baháí list to what I written and I append to this paper an e-mail that I wrote replying to this.

God! The greatest house of justice makes decisions and laws by virtue of the inspiration and confirmation of the holy spirit.

The transliteration and word-for-word translation of this is as follows:

hamchih muláhizih nashavad kih bayt al-`adl

Thus it should not be considered that the House of Justice

bih fikr va ra'y-i khísh qarárí dihand.

by/through its own thought and opinion shall give a decree/ruling.

Istaghfar Alláh!

I take refuge with God [from such a thought]!

Bayt al-`adl-i a`zam bi ilhám va ta'yid-i

The most mighty House of Justice by/through inspiration and the confirmation

rúh al-quds qarár va ahkám jarí nimáyad

of the holy spirit decrees/rulings and laws shall give (or execute)

There is nothing in the sentence that could be translated as “self-interest.” The two sentences are set against one another and this is made clear by the use of “*qarár*” in both sentences and by the exclamation between them. The first sentence states that the House of Justice will not base its rulings on the arbitrary opinions of its members and the second sentence goes on to explain why that should be so — because its ruling will be inspired and confirmed by the Holy Spirit.

In the next sentence there is a minor point: this next sentence is somewhat stronger than is suggested by Cole’s translation. There are three words which Cole has rendered as just one word “protection”: *vaqáyat va himáyat va siyánat*. It is true that they all have much the same meaning, but to translate them all with one word does not convey the full force of the original.

The previous point is a fairly minor one compared to the problem in the next paragraph. The sentence in question is given by Cole as: "This is the wisdom of giving the house of justice the purview over personal status ordinances (*ahkám-i madaniyyih*)." The word *madaniyyih* comes from the root *m-d-n* meaning to "stay" or "dwell." The word *madína* which means "city" or "town" comes from the same root. It is the exact cognate in Islamic philosophical writing of the Latin "*civis*" and the Greek "*polis*" (see S. Afnan, *Philosophical Lexicon in Persian and Arabic*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1262/1983, p. 278). Thus the adjective "*madani*" and its feminine form "*madaniyyih*" can be rendered "urban," "civil," "civilizational," or "social." Its meaning is therefore the exact opposite of Cole's rendering of "personal status." "*Madaniyyih*" refers not to the personal and private aspects of human life but to the social and civil.

In the next paragraph, the main problem appeared to be that of extraneous material which does not appear in the original text. There are some 30 words or more for which there is no basis in the text as published on H-Bahai and Cole has not indicated that he has used any other text. There is nothing in the text that corresponds to his passage: "that the jurisprudential reasoning or adoption of such by the institution of the house of justice, whose members are elected and seen as legitimate by the generality of the community, will not provoke discord." The text reads: "*wa farq hamín ast kih as istinbát-i `ulama hukman ikhtiláf hásil shavad va ba `ith-i tafriq ...*" In other words, the text runs directly on from the sentence that Cole has translated as: "...unless it is adopted by the house of justice. The difference is this..." to the passage that he has translated as: "...the jurisprudential rulings of individual scholars can provoke disputes and cause division..." There is nothing in between that could allow for the extensive passage that Cole has inserted here. I was somewhat surprised by this. However, I noticed that Cole's added text breaks off and resumes at exactly the same word *istinbát*. This is a good clue to the fact that the copyist of the text on H-Bahai (taken from INBA 59, pp. 275-80) has skipped from one occurrence of a word to another when copying. I therefore looked around for other texts of the same tablet and eventually found an alternative text for the bulk of this tablet in 'Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Khávarí, *Rahíq Makhtúm*, vol. 1, Tehran: Mu'assisih

Millí Matbú'át Amrí, 130 B.E., pp. 370-3. This text does have the missing passage in it. Since there is good evidence as I have indicated that this is a passage that the copyist of the INBA text skipped over, I have therefore inserted this passage into the translation below in square parentheses.

In the next paragraph, we again have Cole translating "*madaniyyat*" as "personal status": "As for the command to marry, this is entirely a personal status law." The same comments as above apply here. However one translates "*madaniyyat*," it means the exact opposite of the personal and private. Indeed Cole acknowledges as much when, two and three sentences later, the phrase "*qawá'id-i madaniyyat*" occurs twice in successive sentences and is both times translated by Cole as "the principles of civilization." If "*madaniyyat*" here should be translated as "civilization," then two sentences before "*madaniyyih*" should be translated the same way (*madaniyyat* and *madaniyyih* being two different ways in which the same Arabic word has been taken over into Persian — the first as a noun and the second as an adjective): "As for the command to marry, this is entirely a civil law (or a law of civilization)."

Despite acknowledging that "*madaniyyat*" in the phrase "*qawá'id-i madaniyyat*" means "civilisation," three sentences later, Cole is back to translating "*madani*" and, in the next sentence, "*madaniyyih*" (*madani* is the masculine form of *madaniyyih*) as "personal status" ("But this ruling is implemented in all the Christian denominations, since this matter is purely one of personal status" and "If you consider, it will be apparent that this matter — that is, putting personal status law under the purview of the house of justice — is remarkably consistent with wisdom"). As before, an adjective deriving from a root meaning the "*polis*" or "*civis*" should be translated as "civil" or "societal" or "political" but not "personal status."

One can also point to the evidence of the next paragraph for proof that the intention of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is that the House of Justice has purview over social laws rather than just laws of personal status. In this next paragraph, 'Abdu'l-Bahá turns His attention to the matter of criminal law and makes the point

that, in Islam, the matter of those punishments not specified in the Qur'án was according to the whim of the ruler. However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá goes on to make the same point again that He made earlier with respect to marriage law: "*this most great cycle has been so arranged that its laws can remain appropriate to and in accord with all ages and eras in a way that past systems of religious law could not*" and "*this holy, divine, law of God is appropriate to all times and ages.*" This is a clear reference to the point that He has made in the preceding paragraph, the ability of the House of Justice to alter its own rulings. Thus, on a matter that is clearly a social question, the question of criminal punishments, and not a matter of personal status, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is again indicating that this is a matter for reference to the House of Justice. Clearly the punishment for crimes such as theft and assault, for which there is no provision in the Kitáb Aqdas, is a social matter and not "personal status laws." (I will deal in Part III with Cole's contention that this paragraph should be taken to mean that the Universal House is restricted to rulings on matters of religious law. I am here dealing only with the translation issue and am seeking to establish that *ahkám-i madaniyyih* should be translated as "social laws" and not as "personal status laws.")

There is also the sentence that Cole has translated as: "This was, for the most part, the pivot of the administration of justice (*siyásat*) in the Muslim community." Since 'Abdu'l-Bahá has immediately before this referred to the "ruler" or "those in power," it would seem that a better translation, given this context would be: "This was what leadership among the people of Islam mostly revolved around" or "This is what government of the people of Islam mostly revolved around."

Finally a word on a later alteration that Cole has made. In his first version, he had the words: "Nevertheless, this blessed cycle is the greatest of divine dispensations, and for this reason, it encompasses spiritual and physical aspects." Later he changed the translation of "*jismán*" from "physical" to "of the spiritual body." Now the dictionary definition of "*jism*" is "body," "substance" or "flesh" and *jismání* is the adjective deriving from this. Thus the alteration that Cole has made has the effect of changing the meaning of the word from referring to the physical to referring to the spiritual (i.e. its antonym).

Cole justifies reversing the universally understood meaning of this word “*jismání*” by referring to the writings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá’i: “That is, *jasad* I has a connotation of primarily the physical body made up of physical elements. *Jasad* II has some superlunary elements from the intermediary plane between the physical world and the imaginal world of Forms. *Jasad* I will perish entirely, and only parts of *Jasad* II will survive. The post-death, post-resurrectionary body would be made up of the more ethereal *Jism* I and *Jism* II.”

Now there are a number of points to be made in respect to this alteration which brings in a metaphorical meaning that is the exact opposite of the plain meaning:

1. While one cannot deny that Shaykh Ahmad did develop these arcane theories, this fact alone cannot justify the change of translation here. There are many Shaykhí ideas and terminologies that did not transfer over to the Bahá’í scriptures — the word *húrqalyá* is an example that readily comes to mind as an example of Shaykhí terminology that did not transfer to the Bahá’í writings. Before one could accept Cole’s translation, one would have to see evidence that this particular usage was adopted in the Bahá’í scriptures. I can find no such evidence. Indeed one can find evidence of both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá frequently using the word *jism* in its ordinary usage meaning the physical body, for example: “*Man, however, though in body (jism) the captive of nature is yet free in his mind and soul, and hath the mastery over nature.*” (Tablet to Dr Forel, *Bahá’í World*, vol. 15, Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1976, p. 38).

2. That the word *jismání* refers to physical reality rather than spiritual reality is confirmed by the context within which the word appears in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s text. The first sentence states that “As for the rest of the commandments, they are derivatives of certitude, faith, assurance and mystical insight” — i.e. they are of a spiritual nature. He then says “*bá vujúd-i ín*” — which means “nevertheless” or “despite this” and, as anyone familiar with Persian will confirm, sets up the next sentence to be in some degree of contradiction to the first. Thus the next sentence cannot mean “it encompasses spiritual aspects and aspects of the spiritual body” since that would be of similar meaning to the first sentence and would not give the required degree of contradiction. Only the plain meaning “physical and

spiritual aspects (or stages)” — the way that Cole had originally translated this — would make sense here. In order to make this more clear, I give here a word-for-word analysis:

Va amá ahkám sá'irih, far`-i Íqán

And as for the laws remaining, derivatives of certitude
va imán va itminám va `irfán ast.

and faith and assurance and mystical insight they are.

Bá vujúd ín chún dawr-i mubáarak

Nevertheless/despite this because the blessed cycle
a `zam-i advár-i ilahí ast,

the greatest of divine cycles is,

lihadhá jámi` jamí`-yi

therefore/on account of this, the entirety of all of the
marátib-i rawhaní va jismání

stages spiritual and physical

va dar kamál quvvat va saltanat ast.

and in perfect power and sovereignty it is.

3. Furthermore, the phrase which follows immediately on from this one that Cole wishes to re-translate so that it only refers to the spiritual is also evidence against his alteration since it again focusses the attention on the worldly. This “blessed cycle” is said to be “perfect in its power and sovereignty (*quvvat va saltanat*).” The word *saltanat* refers to kingship and thus refers to earthly authority. Even when the word is being used of God, it is referring to his temporal authority over the world.

4. Much more significant than even these points is the fact that this whole issue has arisen out of a misreading of the text. Cole states that the reason that he has made this change is an apparent contradiction:

For one reason or another I've had a little time to think, lately, and I continued to ponder the apparent

contradiction in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s circa 1899 letter on jurisprudence ... At the beginning of the letter, he reassures his correspondent: ‘First of all, this divine cycle is solely spiritual, full of godly compassion, and is a matter of conscience. It has no connection at all to physical (*jasadî*), material (*mulkî*), or worldly (*nasutî*) matters. In the same way, the Christian dispensation was purely spiritual.’ Then later he says, ‘Nevertheless, this blessed cycle is the greatest of divine dispensations, and for this reason, it encompasses spiritual and physical (*jismánî*) aspects and is perfect in its power and authority.’ These two statements appear to be in contradiction.

In fact if one studies the text carefully, one finds that the whole case that Cole has constructed (in his e-mail dated 28 January 2001) is based on his misreading of the text. The whole of the dichotomy that Cole has set up between *jasad* and *jism* and which he resolves by appeal to Shaykh Ahmad, is based on an incorrect reading of *jismánî* as *jasadî* in the first of the two sentences cited. This sentence should read: “It has no connection at all to physical (*jismánî*), material (*mulkî*), or worldly (*nasutî*) matters.” Cole’s transliteration here (*jasadî*) is incorrect – the word in the text is *jismánî*. The alternative text in Ishráq-Khávarí, *Rahíq Makhtúm*, also reads *jismánî*. Of course it would be nonsense to translate *jismánî* in Shaykh Ahmad’s sense of “spiritual” in this first sentence, where its meaning, as Cole has acknowledged, is clearly physical and intended in an opposite sense to *rawhanî* (spiritual) just before (“this divine cycle is solely spiritual, full of godly compassion, and is a matter of conscience. It has no connection at all to physical, material, or worldly matters”). Therefore, unless we are going to suggest that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has used the same word (*jismánî*) with two diametrically opposite meanings in the same sort of context in the same tablet, it is difficult to see how Cole’s argument can be sustained.

5. Incidentally, in the first of these two sentences under consideration, the translation “It has no connection at all to the physical...” is too strong; the Persian “*chandán nadárad*” would be better translated as: “It is not so much concerned [with the physical]...” – it is an expression of relative and not

absolute negation — thus allowing for some worldly concerns. In other words, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's intention is not to negate any connection at all with worldly matters, but to state that Bahá'u'lláh's revelation is primarily spiritual and only secondarily concerned with worldly affairs. Once this correction is made, then it can be seen that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's later statement that "this blessed cycle encompasses all spiritual and physical aspects" — the sentence that has troubled Cole ("These two statements appear to be in contradiction") and caused him to reinterpret *jismání* — is longer contradictory and no change of meaning need be postulated.

6. There is also the interesting phrase: *fa saltanatuhá malakútiyyah rahmáníyyah wa ahkámuhá ilhámíyyah rawháníyyah* (and so its sovereignty is heavenly and divine and its laws are inspired and spiritual). I may be over-interpreting here but it seems to me that having just stated that the Universal House of Justice is under the guidance and protection of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is here going on to say that, as a consequence of this, the authority of the House of Justice is not based on any worldly mandate (i.e. its mandate is not from those who elect it or any other worldly source), but rather a Divine one. The second phrase here states that the laws and ordinances that the Universal House of Justice enacts, although they appear to be concerning worldly matters (such as marriage regulations and criminal punishment), are in reality spiritual in nature, because they are inspired (*ilhám*) from a heavenly source. This then explains why 'Abdu'l-Bahá is able to say in the first part of this tablet that "The first [point to be made] is this that this divine cycle is purely spiritual, divine and moral." What 'Abdu'l-Bahá is saying is that even where the Universal House of Justice is legislating in areas of civil laws (*ahkám-i madaniyyih*) that are necessary for human social life, these should not be seen as temporal and secular matters that can be judged in accordance with the standards and values of the world, but rather they should be seen as issuing from a divine source and are thus to be regarded as being part of the sacred and spiritual sphere. They should thus be regarded in the same way as the laws given by Bahá'u'lláh.

One can see from all this that this tablet was not generated by an individual having concerns about "the possible

theocratic implications of the legislative role of the house of justice.” Rather this was a simple and straightforward question asking ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the obvious point that: if the Manifestation of God is all-knowing, what then is the wisdom behind the fact that Bahá’u’lláh did not reveal many social laws, but rather referred most social ordinances (*ahkám-i madaniyyiyih*) to the House of Justice? The questioner presumably asked whether it would not have been better if these laws were revealed by an all-knowing Manifestation of God, rather than being left to a group of fallible human beings to decide. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reassures the questioner that, firstly, this arrangement by Bahá’u’lláh is in accordance with Divine wisdom in that it allows for the social ordinances of the religion to alter as human social conditions change over the centuries rather than being fixed by a once-and-for-all revelation; and secondly, the House of Justice, is in any case inspired and under the guidance and protection of Bahá’u’lláh and therefore any ruling it makes will have this guidance and protection and will be the result of this inspiration. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also goes on to demonstrate how this is a much superior arrangement to what has occurred in previous dispensations.

A summary of the contents of this tablet:

In this tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá starts by laying down the principle that the Bahá’í Faith is similar to Christianity in that its central concern is with spiritual matters and that all legal matters (*ahkám*) are derived from this spiritual core. However, he goes on to state that, since this dispensation is “the most mighty of Divine dispensations,” it encompasses both the spiritual and physical concerns of humanity, and has “perfect power and authority (*quvvat va saltanat*),” therefore provisions have also been made for social and political matters: some foundational core matters are determined in the scripture while subsidiary matters which may vary with time and circumstance are referred to the House of Justice.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then goes on to lay down the principle that since the House of Justice will give its rulings based on the Divine inspiration (*ilhám*) that it receives and not on the opinions of its individual members, it is therefore obligatory upon all to obey it. In other words that it is not permissible to

argue that a particular decision of the House of Justice is due to the biases of one or all of its members and is therefore not incumbent upon all. It is because of this Divine inspiration that social and civil ordinances (*ahkám madaniyyih*) have been placed under its aegis.

'Abdu'l-Bahá then turns His attention to Islam and states that because only a little of Islamic law was revealed in the Qur'án, it became necessary for legal rulings to be derived. As a consequence the different schools of law arose and there were disputes between scholars. This in turn led to factions and schism. Abdu'l-Bahá then states that in the Bahá'í Faith all such *ahkám-i madaniyyih* (social or civil ordinances) must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. Individual legal opinions have no force unless they are adopted by the Universal House of Justice.

'Abdu'l-Bahá then moves on to two examples of the point that he is making. He takes the case of marriage, which He calls an *ahkám-i madaniyyih* — a social or civil ordinance. He says that the main stipulations of this have been laid down in the revealed law, but the question of marriage of near relatives is left to the House of Justice. He then goes on to give the example of Christianity, where, although there was no scriptural sanction against the marriage of near relatives, the Christian Councils ruled against it. The second example that 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives is that of *ta'zír* — those punishments for crimes that are not specified in the scripture. He states that in Islam this became subject to the whim of the ruler — and was therefore very variable. He states that in this dispensation, the *ta'zír* — those punishments for crimes that are not specified in the Bahá'í scripture should be referred to the House of Justice. He extols this as a better method of dealing with this issue since, otherwise, the same situation as in Islam would arise where the punishments laid down in the Shari'ah are no longer acceptable in the modern world. The enactment of such social regulations and ordinances in the Bahá'í dispensation will be "compatible with all ages and cycles," He states, because it will be referred to the House of Justice, and each successive House of Justice can abrogate the rulings of its predecessors.

II. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet on the Functioning of the Universal House of Justice – a provisional translation

In this part, I present a translation of this tablet. This translation is more literal than Cole’s, and some may therefore find it more difficult to read, but I thought a more literal translation was appropriate. I have kept to the text from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Majmú’ih-yi Makátib-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Collected Letters of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá). Copied 1318/1900. Iran National Bahá’í Archives, Volume 59, pp. 275-280, published on H-Bahai at: <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/bahai/abtext.htm>, except where, for reasons that I have indicated in Part I, I have included a passage of almost 30 words (“from the derivations and endorsements of the House of Justice ... no differences will arise, whereas”) in square parentheses translated from an alternative text at Ishraq-Khavari, *Rahiq Makhtum*, vol. 1, pp. 370-3.

He is the All-Glorious!

O you who are clinging fast to the hem of Covenant, your letter was read and your detailed questions were noted. Although calamities, like deadly poison, have affected my limbs, my members and my joints, such that my pen is prevented from writing and my tongue from speaking, and my tasks are so many that it is not possible to describe them, yet nevertheless, out of the great love that this servant has for that gentleman, a spiritual answer will be given, which will be compatible with Divine wisdom, concise and illuminating, perfectly explaining the matter. It will be a comprehensive explanation concerning this question and will contain acceptable and sought-after insights such that by this explanation, clarification, analysis, allusion, commentary and spiritual interpretation, one hundred doors will be opened up by each of its doors. Otherwise, were the horizons to become pages, it would not be enough to encompass [this theme].

You have asked about the wisdom of assigning some of the important legislation (ahkám) to the House of

Justice. The first [point to be made] is this that this divine cycle is purely spiritual (rawhání), divine (rahmání) and moral (vujdání). It is not so much concerned with the physical (jismání), the worldly (mulkí) or with the stages of material existence (shu'ún-i násutí). Similarly, the Christian cycle was purely spiritual and in the entirety of the Gospels, there is nothing except the prohibition of divorce and an allusion to the lifting of the [law of the] Sabbath. All of the laws (ahkám) are spiritual and the morals divine. Just as it is said: "The Son of Man did not come to judge the world but to give it life." [cf. Jn 3:17; 12:47] Now this great cycle is also purely spiritual and is the giver of eternal life, for the fundamental basis of the religion of God is to adorn [people] with good character, to improve them with virtuous conduct and to regulate their interactions. The intention is this that beings who were veiled [from the light] might attain to the vision [of His Beauty] and that darksome reality might become filled with light.

As for the other commandments, they are derivatives of certitude, faith, assurance and mystical insight. Nevertheless, because this blessed cycle is the most mighty of divine dispensations, it encompasses all of the spiritual and physical aspects [of human life] (marátib-i rawhaní va jismání) and is perfect in its power and sovereignty (quvvat va saltanat). Therefore those universal (all-encompassing) matters which are the foundations of the holy law (sharí'at) of God are revealed (mansús) [in the scriptures] and all secondary (subsidiary) matters (mutafarri'át) are to be referred to the House of Justice.

The wisdom of this is that time does not stand still. Change and alteration are among the specific and necessary conditions of contingent existence and of time and space. Therefore the House of Justice is able to act in accordance with the needs of the time (exigencies). It should not be thought that the House of Justice acts on the basis of its own thoughts and opinions. God forbid! The Universal (Most Mighty)

House of Justice (bayt al-`adl-i a`zam) will make its decisions and enact its laws through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (rúh al-quds), for it is under the guard, protection, and succour of the Ancient Beauty. Whatsoever it decides is obligatory, indisputable, necessary, and definitive for all. There is no recourse for anyone.

Say: O people! The Universal House of Justice is [sheltered] beneath the wing of your Lord, the Merciful, the Compassionate – that is to say, under His protection, His defence, His safe-keeping, and His guard. For He has ordered the believers and the assured ones to obey this goodly and pure group, this holy and victorious assemblage. Therefore its sovereignty is heavenly and divine and its laws (ahkám, ordinances) are inspired and spiritual.

Thus, this is the intention and the wisdom of referring social ordinances (ahkám-i madaniyyih) to the Universal House of Justice. In the holy law (sharí`at) of Islam (Furqán), also, all of the laws were not revealed (mansús) [in the Qur`án]. Indeed, not one thousandth were revealed. Although all important matters were mentioned, yet one hundred thousand laws were not mentioned. Later the `ulama derived (istinbát) them according to the rules (qavá'id) of the [science of] the Principles [of Jurisprudence] (úsúl). In those early [schools] of law (shará`i), the individual members of the `ulama would derive (istinbát) these [laws] differently and they were implemented. Now, the [process of] deriving [the law] is to be referred to the House of Justice and the derivation (istinbát) and elicitation (istikhráj) of individual learned persons (ulamá) has no authority, unless the House of Justice endorses it. The difference is just this that [from the derivations and endorsements of the House of Justice, whose members are elected and have the confidence of the generality of the community, no differences will arise, whereas] from the derivations (istinbát) of the members of the learned and wise comes about differences and this leads to sectarian splitting,

separation and division. The unity of discourse and the oneness of the religion of God would disappear and the foundations of the law (sharí'at) of God would be shaken.

As for the command to marry, this is entirely a social law (ahkám-i madanniyat). Despite this, its conditions are stipulated and its fundamentals are made clear in the law (sharí'at) of God. However, the marriage of near relatives is not revealed [in the scripture] (ghayr-i mansús). It is referred to the House of Justice, who will make decisions based on the principles of civilisation (qavá'id-i madaniyyat), the exigencies of medicine, wisdom, and the tendencies of human nature. There is no doubt that (marriage with) distant stock is closer to the principles of civilization, medicine, and nature, than with closely related peoples. And consider this observation: in Christian holy law (sharí'at), although marriage to near relatives (aqárib) was in fact permitted, in that its prohibition was not revealed [in scripture] (mansús), nevertheless, the early Christian councils prohibited the marriage of near relatives to seven degrees of separation (literally "seven generations" – i.e. those who have a common ancestor seven generations back). Moreover this is implemented in all of the sects of Christianity because this is purely a social (madaní) matter. Now anything the House of Justice decides in this matter, that is the definitive and decisive divine law. No-one may infringe it.

If you consider it, you will see how much this referral of social laws (ahkám-i madaniyyih) to the House of Justice is consistent with wisdom. For whenever a difficulty arises because a compelling circumstance has arisen, at that time, because the House of Justice has decided the previous ruling (qarár), a particular House of Justice can again, because of specific compelling circumstances, issue a new specific ruling for this particular case and circumstance, and thus the danger may be completely averted. For whatsoever the House of Justice has decreed, that it can also abrogate.

In Islam, there was also the matter of punishments that were not decreed in the holy law (ta'zír). These were referred to those in authority. Since there was no revealed law (nasúsi) about the extent of such punishments (ta'zír), it was determined by and dependant upon the whim (ra'y) of the person in power. And these punishments ranged from verbal censure to the death penalty. This is what government (siyásat) of the people of Islam mostly revolved around. In any case, the foundation of this mighty dispensation has been arranged in such a manner that its laws will be in accordance with and suitable for every age and time, unlike the holy laws (shará'í) of the past, the implementation of which are now suspended or impossible. For example, observe that the laws of the Torah are in no way capable of being implemented today, since there are ten capital offenses in it. Similarly, according to the holy law (shari'at) of Islam (Furqán), the hand is to be cut off for stealing ten dirhams. Now, is the implementation of such a law possible? No! By God! But this holy and divine law is compatible with all ages and centuries and the passing of time. "Thus have we made you a middle people, that you may be a witness unto the people and the Messenger may be a witness to you." (Qur'án 2:137)

The eloquent poetry and the consummate verses that have been composed with delectable contents should be recited and sung. Truly they are worthy of being chanted in the assemblies of divine unity. Upon you be glory. 'A[bdu'l-Bahá] 'A[bbás]

III. On the Functioning of the Universal House of Justice – some further comments

Having considered the translation of this important tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and demonstrated that far from limiting the Universal House of Justice to merely legislating on matters of "personal status laws," it in fact gives the House the authority to enact laws and decisions affecting social or "civilizational" matters (*ahkám madaniyyih*), we need now to consider the

effect that this has on the rest of Cole's argument. Cole has used his translation of this tablet as evidence for his assertion made frequently elsewhere that the phrase "*umúr siyásiyyih*" in the Tablet of Ishráqát does not mean "matters of state" as Shoghi Effendi has translated it, but in fact means "the administration of religious law."

Cole has argued that, in this tablet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that the jurisdiction of the Universal House of Justice extends to the "*ahkám madaniyyih*" and, translating this phrase as "personal status laws," contends that this supports his interpretation of the phrase "*umúr siyásiyyih*" as referring only to the administration of religious law. Having demonstrated above that Cole is incorrect in his interpretation of "*ahkám madaniyyih*," this not only cancels out Cole's argument in relation to the "*umúr siyásiyyih*," it also provides evidence against Cole's interpretation and supporting Shoghi Effendi's interpretation. If 'Abdu'l-Bahá regards the functions of the Universal House of Justice as including "*ahkám madaniyyih*" and this phrase should be interpreted as referring to social and civilisational laws, then this is evidence that "*umúr siyásiyyih*" in Ishráqát also refers to social and governmental matters and not just the administration of religious law, as Cole has argued.

Cole has argued that the words *siyásat* and *siyásiyyih* when used by Bahá'u'lláh do not have their modern meanings of politics and political. He states that these are a later meaning inappropriately imposed. He maintains that the real meaning of these words as used by Bahá'u'lláh relates to their medieval and early modern usage which comprises of two main sets of meaning: first, "the Greco-Islamic concept of leadership a la Aristotle"; second, "the Islamic juridical concept of *as-siyasah ash-shar'iyyah* (post-scriptural ordinances enacted by the community's authorities)." Of these two, Cole favours the second in this context because he holds that the reference by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to marriage laws (which are considered as part of *mu'ámalát* — religious law governing the relations between believers) and *ta'zír* (punishments that have not been defined in the scriptures) in this tablet that we are discussing means that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was using this term in the context of religious jurisprudence and therefore this second meaning in the correct

one. He then also argues that similarly because, in *Ishráqát*, Bahá'u'lláh introduces the term "*umúr siyásiyyih*" in the context of the words "*ibádát*" which is a technical term in religious jurisprudence that relates to "acts of worship," therefore the term "*umúr siyásiyyih*" should also be restricted to the sphere of religious jurisprudence. Thus he claims that this means that the Houses of Justice should only be permitted to "administer religious law not specified in scripture" and not enter into "matters of state" as implied by Shoghi Effendi's translation.

There are a number of comments that can be made about Cole's position. Among them are the following:

1. In this tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that we are considering, we can see a progressive unfoldment by 'Abdu'l-Bahá of His concept of the area that the Bahá'í Faith covers and the division of this area between the revealed text and the functions of the House of Justice. At the beginning of this tablet there is a mere hint when He declares that although the Bahá'í message is primarily a spiritual one, nevertheless this "greatest of all divine cycles" encompasses "the entirety of all (*jámi` jamí`-yi*) spiritual and physical (*rawhaní va jismání*) stages (or aspects or stations, *marátib*). He does not make any exceptions here — *jámi`-yi jamí`-yi* could be called a doubled emphatic — two words with the same meaning used to emphasise a point. He then later spells out that whatever matter arises that is not specifically revealed in the text should be referred to the Universal House of Justice. And finally He is quite explicit and completely clear that what He is referring to as being under the jurisdiction of the Universal House of Justice are the *ahkám-i madaniyyih* — laws and ordinances relating to social, civil or governmental matters.

2. As Cole has correctly stated in his commentary on this tablet, the Qur'án has relatively little law in it. In the matter of criminal law, only six offences are specified. Thus, again as Cole correctly points out: "In Islam, the authority to enact extra-scriptural 'ordinances' (*ahkám*) based on scriptural principle tended to be invested in the ruler in early centuries." However, he then seems to imply that these ordinances are limited to just "the ethical and spiritual life or personal

status.” In fact, the ordinances (*ahkám*) of rulers in Islam cover all aspects of social and political life. Thus in this tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is decrying the situation in the Islamic world where ordinances and rulings covering social and political matters are subject to the individual interpretations of the ruling class. He states that in the Bahá’í Faith all such *ahkám-i madaniyyih* (social laws or ordinances) must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. Thus, according to this tablet, the *ahkám* that are referred to the House of Justice are not just matters relating to personal status or inter-personal relationships (i.e. the area of *mu’ámalát*), but rather all matters relating to civil and social issues (*madaniyyat*) – in other words the area normally regulated by the state. Thus ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words in this tablet support Shoghi Effendi’s translation of *umúr-i siyásiyyih* as “matters of state.”

3. In his argument, Cole states that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has defined what He means by *siyásat* when He says that “This was, for the most part, the pivot of the administration of justice (*siyasat*) in the Muslim community.” As can be seen from the preceding translation, I have considered it better, given the context, to translate this as: “This is what government of the people of Islam mostly revolved around.” In any case, I do not see this sentence as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá defining what *siyásat* is, rather He is making an observation that much of the time of the rulers in the Islamic world was taken up with ruling on such matters.

Even if we do allow Cole’s interpretation of this sentence to stand, this statement by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá only defines *siyásat* in relation to the “people of Islam.” This must be seen in the context of the following sentence that starts “*bárf*” which means “in any event,” “in any case” or “anyhow” – in other words this following sentence is being set up in opposition to the previous sentence: “In any case, the foundation of this mighty dispensation has been arranged in such a manner that its laws will be in accordance with and suitable for every age and time...” Thus even if we allow Cole’s limiting *siyása* to the administration of the religious law in Islam, the following sentence is saying that that situation does not hold in this, the Bahá’í dispensation. It is saying that, in the Bahá’í dispensation, *siyása* is different to *siyása* in Islam. So that however we define the word *siyása* for the Islamic world, it

does not necessarily follow that the same definition holds in the Bahá'í dispensation. The limits of *siyása* in the Bahá'í dispensation is mapped out by 'Abdu'l-Bahá through His use of the term *ahkám-i madaniyya* – laws relating to social or civil matters – a term clearly encompassing all aspects of human social life. In other words, regardless of what the limits of the term *siyása* were in the Islamic dispensation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is here extending the limits of *siyása* in the Bahá'í dispensation to include all aspects of human social life. This wide meaning of the term *siyása* can then be transferred to the Ishráqát. Here Bahá'u'lláh is saying that matters of worship (*'ibádát* – prayer, fasting, etc.) should be performed in accordance with the Scripture (i.e. the laws of the Aqdas), but *umúr-i siyásiyyih* (which we know from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's gloss to be equivalent to *ahkám-i madaniyyih* – laws and ordinances pertaining to social and civil matters) should be referred to the House of Justice. And we can be sure that Bahá'u'lláh in this passage is intending the same range of meaning that 'Abdu'l-Bahá intended in this tablet because Bahá'u'lláh uses precisely the same argument that 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses – that this is in order that these social ordinances should remain in accordance with changing human requirements.

Thus Bahá'u'lláh's usage, *umúr -i siyásiyyih*, here is perfectly in alignment with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's term *ahkám-i madaniyyih* and refers to those areas of human life that require social regulation. Now Shoghi Effendi's translation of Bahá'u'lláh's *umúr -i siyásiyyih* as "affairs of state" seems to me to fit well within this semantic range. In any civilised society ("civilised" being here used as meaning an urbanised society), there is need for communal regulation and therefore human beings have set up a state structure to regulate their affairs. At the head of this state structure is either an individual or a body of people whose function is to enact such communal and social regulations as may be required in order to allow human social life to continue in peace and prosperity, in order to allow civilization to develop and prosper. Thus those areas of human communal life that require regulation can be described in English as "affairs of state" and in Persian as *umúr-i siyásiyyih*; and for this regulation, they require the enactment of social ordinances – *ahkám-i madaniyyih*. Thus Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi's usages are all consistently within the

same range of meaning: that which should be referred to the House of Justice for their enactment of ordinances are those areas of human social life that require regulation in order for human civilization to continue; since it is the function of the state to regulate such areas of human life, these areas of human social life can be called “affairs of state.”

4. It is also of interest to look at the context in which the phrase “*umúr-i siyásiyyih*” occurs in the *Ishráqát*. In the very next passage, the ninth *Ishráq*, the following statement is made: “The purpose of religion as revealed from the heaven of God’s holy Will is to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world ... The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God.” Then a couple of sentences later, Bahá’u’lláh lists “the Trustees of the House of Justice” among the chiefs and rulers of the world — again this sounds very much as though Bahá’u’lláh envisages a political and governmental role for the House of Justice (provided the word “political” is understood in its sense of social administration and not in the sense of party politics).

On can also look at other statements that Bahá’u’lláh makes about Universal House of Justice. For example, in the *Lawḥ-i Dunyá* which dates to about the same period as the *Ishráqát*, it is made incumbent upon the “ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures.” This sounds very much like a governmental role for the House of Justice.

5. Of course in considering this matter, it is useful to survey what exactly the words *siyása* and *siyásiyyih* have meant over a period of time, and specially in Islamic religious literature.

In the *Qur’án*, the words *siyása* and *siyásiyyih* do not occur. In the hadith literature, which is some of the earliest post-*Qur’ánic* literature that we have, the word *siyásat* does occur in a tradition that is widely reported in the early and authoritative collections of al-Bukhárí, Muslim and Ibn Hanbal (c. 9th century). In this Tradition the evident meaning of the word is “looking after.” A woman, the daughter of Abu Bakr, is

speaking about her household duties and her tending of a horse and at the end of the Tradition, she says:

(I continued serving in this way) till Abu Bakr sent me a servant to look after the horse (*siyásat al-faras*), whereupon I felt as if he had set me free. (Hadith in *Sahíh Bukhárí* – chapter of al-Nikah, hadith number 151 – 107 in some editions, 4823 in al-‘Alamiyyih CD; also in *Sahíh Muslim*, Kitáb as-Salám and *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal, no 25700, 25733).

This meaning of “looking after” can still be found in books from a much later period. In *Sharh Sahíh Muslim* (in explanation of hadith 3429) by an-Nawawi (13th century AD), “*siyása*” is defined thus: “arising to do for a thing what is beneficial to it” (*al-qiyám ‘ala ‘sh-shay’ bi-má yuslihu*). This same explanation can also be found in *Sharh Sunan Ibn Majah* by al-Sindí (d. 1138; in explanation of hadith 2862).

However, this function of “looking after” people is so closely connected with the function of leadership that, in many passages, it is difficult to tell whether “looking after” or “leadership over” is the more appropriate translation. Thus in the *Fath al-Barí bi-Sharh Sahíh al-Bukharí* by Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalání (d. 1449), the following occurs: “knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) here is knowledge of *siyása* (leadership of / looking after) of the people according to the Book of God and the Sunna of the Messenger of God.” (Hadith 3405) In the same work, in discussing the two words *Rabb* and *Sayyid* as names of God, the author cites al-Khattábi as defining *sayáda* as “leadership (*riyása*) over anyone who is beneath him and *siyása lahu* (authority has been given to him over them?), and looking after their affairs well (*husnu tadbír li amrihi*).” (Hadith 2366)

In the *Tuhfat al-Ahwadhi bi Sharh Jami’ at-Tirmidhi* by al-Mubarakfuri (d.1935) also, *siyasa* is used in contexts where it could equally well mean “looking after” or “leadership” as attested by the following quotation (in explanation of hadith 2100): “The tyranny of the Sultan spread over all who are *tahta siyasatihi* (beneath his authority/under his care).”

However, I am sure that Cole would agree that the best was of determining what *siyása* and *siyásiyyih* meant in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is to examine further examples of how They use the word in different places in Their

writings. After all, it really does not matter much how other people at other times used these words. If we can discern from a close examination of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and His close circle, which would include of course 'Abdu'l-Bahá (especially His writings from as close to the time of Bahá'u'lláh as possible), how They used these words, then that would be the best way of determining what "*umúr-i siyásiyyih*" means in the Ishráqát.

Firstly, this same phrase *umúr-i siyásiyyih*, set within the same sentence occurs also in the Bishárát (the 13th glad tidings), but since the context is exactly the same, this occurrence does not assist us.

Both in the Bishárát and the Ishráqát, these passage start with the statement that: *umúr-i millat mu'allaq ast bi rijál-i bayt-i 'adl-i iláhi*, which is translated in the official translation as: "*The men of God's House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people.*" Cole has argued that here Bahá'u'lláh uses *millat* in its technical Ottoman sense of a religious community (in line with his contention that *siyási* refers to the administration of religious law). However, even if Cole does argue along these lines for this particular passage, he cannot deny other passages where *siyásah* and *siyási* are relative to *'alam* (the world) and *nás* (people) rather than *millat*. For example, in the Lawḥ-i Hikmat (Tablet of Wisdom), which dates to the same period as the Ishráqát, there is the following passage, in which I have inserted transliteration into the official translation:

Say: The beginning of Wisdom and the origin thereof is to acknowledge whatsoever God hath clearly set forth, for through its potency the foundation of statesmanship (*bunyán as-siyásah*), which is a shield for the preservation of the body of mankind (*badan al-'alam*), hath been firmly established. Ponder a while that ye may perceive what My most exalted Pen hath proclaimed in this wondrous Tablet. Say, every matter related to state affairs (*kullu amrin siyásiyyin*) which ye raise for discussion falls under the shadow of one of the words sent down from the heaven of His glorious and exalted utterance (TB 151)

Here the foundation of *siyásah* is stated to be a shield for the protection of the whole world — not just that of a specific religious community — the Bahá'í community.

In another passage in the *Lawḥ-i Maqṣúd* (which again dates from the late 'Akka period), *siyásat* occurs several times, once linked to *nufús-i álam* (souls of the world) and once to *nás* (people) but not to *millat*. In this passage, it is again clear that *siyásat* refers to temporal, governmental affairs, and not to the administration of religion law, because the *ámir* (temporal ruler) is addressed. This word *ámir* refers to the secular authority and it would be unusual to find it designating a religious leader. Perhaps even more significant is the use of the phrase *siyásat-i 'álam* — indicating that what is being spoken of is “the government of the whole world” and not that of a specific religious community. Again I have inserted transliteration into the official translation:

God grant that the people of the world (nufús-i 'álam) may be graciously aided to preserve the light of His loving counsels within the globe of wisdom. We cherish the hope that everyone (kull) may be adorned with the vesture of true wisdom, the basis of the government of the world (ass-i asás-i siyásat-i 'álam).

The Great Being saith: The heaven of statesmanship (ásmán-i siyásat) is made luminous and resplendent by the brightness of the light of these blessed words which hath dawned from the dayspring of the Will of God: It behoveth every ruler (li-kulli ámirin) to weigh his own being every day in the balance of equity and justice and then to judge between men and counsel them to do that which would direct their steps unto the path of wisdom and understanding. This is the cornerstone of statesmanship and the essence thereof (ass-i siyásat va asl-i án) ... The secrets of statesmanship (asrár-i siyásat) and that of which the people (nás) are in need lie enfolded within these words. (TB 166-67)

Not surprisingly, the main place to which we should look for the meaning of *siyása* and *siyásiyyih* in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings is in the *Risálh-yi Siyásiyyih* (Treatise on Leadership or Politics). This is not only because these words figure in the title

and frequently in the text of this work, but also because the work itself is dated to about the same period of time as the *Ishtáqát* and thus accurately reflects the usage of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá at this time. The *Ishtáqát* dates from the late 'Akká period of Bahá'u'lláh's life, while the *Risalih-yi Siyásiyyih* can be dated to about 1892 because of the historical references in it.

The following are some passages in which Cole himself has translated *umúr siyásí* as "political affairs" — I am here citing Cole's own translation (<http://www.h-net.org/bahai/trans/vol2/absiyasi.htm>) and merely inserting some transliteration of the text:

Toward the end of the dynasty of the Safavid kings [1501-1722], may they rest in peace, the religious leaders (*'ulamá*) sought influence over the political affairs (*umúr-i siyásí*) of Iran.

This was the fruit of the interference in political affairs (*umúr-i siyásí*) of religious leaders and of those accomplished in the unassailable revealed law.

On another occasion, at the beginning of the reign of Aqa Muḥammad Khan [Qajar, r. 1785-1797], the religious leaders of the people once again interjected themselves into political affairs (*umúr siyásí*), and thereby covered Iran's peoples with the dust of abasement.

Praise be to God! Shall persons who are unable to manage or train up their own households, who are wholly uninformed both with regard to domestic and foreign affairs, interfere in the proceedings of the kingdom and its subjects, or intervene in the intricacies of political matters (*umúr siyásí*)?

Were you to refer to history, you would find innumerable, and, indeed, infinite numbers of such occurrences, the cause of which in every instance was the interference of religious leaders (*ru'asá-yi dín*) in political affairs (*umúr siyásiyyih*).

Otherwise, what expertise do they have in political matters (*umúr siyásí*), the protection of the subjects, the managing of serious affairs, the welfare and prosperity of the country, the implementation of the civil regulations and secular laws of a realm, or foreign affairs and domestic policy?

If Cole were to object that the *Risálíh-yi Siyásiyyih* dates from after the *Ishráqát* (and this would be an unfair objection since this tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that he is citing as support for his position is from long after even the *Siyásiyyih*), then we can look at the *Risálíh-yi Madaniyyih* (Secret of Divine Civilization). This book was written in about 1875 and thus preceded the *Ishráqát*. Here we find *siyásiyyih* or *siyásí* being used consistently as an adjective to denote “political” or “governmental” (I have given the Marzieh Gail translation, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990, below with added transliteration and notes as to possible alternative translations):

The greatest of the world’s philosophers marveled at the wisdom of her government, and her political system (*qavánín siyásiyyih-ash*) became the model for all the kings of the four continents then known.” *Qavánín siyásiyyih-ash* would perhaps be more accurately rendered as “governmental laws,” but it is difficult to see how *siyásiyyih* could mean anything other than “political,” “state” or “governmental” here.

Another maintains that only such measures should be adopted as the Persians themselves devise, that they themselves should reform their political administration (*isláhát lázimih siyásiyyih*) and their educational system and the state of their culture and that there is no need to borrow improvements from other nations.” *Isláhát lázimih siyásiyyih* would be more literally translated as “the necessary political reforms.”

The state (*‘álam-i siyásí*) is, moreover, based upon two potent forces, the legislative and the executive.” *‘Álam-i siyásí* could be translated “the state” or “the political sphere” or the “the body politic.” Clearly it is not referring to the religious sphere.

The world of politics (*'álam-i siyásí*) is like the world of man; he is seed at first, and then passes by degrees to the condition of embryo and foetus ... Just as this is a requirement of creation and is based on the universal Wisdom, the political world (*'álam-i siyásí*) in the same way cannot instantaneously evolve from the nadir of defectiveness to the zenith of rightness and perfection. Rather, qualified individuals must strive by day and by night, using all those means which will conduce to progress, until the government and the people (*dawlat va millat*) develop along every line from day to day and even from moment to moment.

Another work of 'Abdu'l-Bahá dates from the same period as the writing of the *Ishtaráqát*. This is the *Traveller's Narrative* (written 1886). So we can expect it to reflect accurately the same range of meaning that words in the *Ishtaráqát* have. Interestingly the phrase *umúr siyásiyyih* appears in this text and E.G. Browne has translated the relevant passage thus: "It is right to exercise caution and care with regard to political factions (*ahzáb-i siyásí*), and to be fearful and apprehensive of materialist sects; for the subjects occupying the thoughts of the former are [designs of] interference in political matters (*umúr-i siyásiyyih*)..." It can clearly be seen from the context that the translation "political" is correct here and any translation related to "ordinances by a post-revelational authority" would be nonsense.

In numerous tablets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements regarding the principle of Bahá'ís not meddling in political affairs is phrased using exactly the same phrase of *umúr-i siyásí* or *umúr-i siyásiyyih*; for example, in the *Traveller's Narrative* which as we have seen is more or less contemporaneous with the *Ishtaráqát*, we find two successive sentences in which *umúr siyásiyí* is made the cognate of *umúr-i hukúmat* (governmental affairs). I give here E.G. Browne's translation:

If so be that His Majesty the King will investigate matters in his own noble person, it is believed that it will become clear before his presence that this sect have no worldly object nor any concern with political matters (*umúr-i siyásí*). The fulcrum of their motion and rest and the pivot of their cast and conduct is

restricted to spiritual things and confined to matters of conscience; it has nothing to do with the affairs of government (*umúr-i hukúmat*) nor any concern with the powers of the throne. (*Traveller's Narrative*, vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891, p. 156)

Clearly then E.G. Browne, a man who was intimately familiar with word usages in late 19th century Iran, in translating a work of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that is almost exactly contemporaneous with the *Ishráqát*, thought the correct translation of *umúr-i siyásiyyih* was "political matters."

In a tablet dating probably to the period of the Young Turk Revolution:

... [My] intention is this that you should make the officials of the everlasting Ottoman government understand to the extent that they ought that the party of God (*hizb Alláh*) does not meddle at all in political affairs (*umúr-i siyásiyyih*). They are forbidden to do his according to the irrefutable text [of their scripture]. And if any person from among this people does meddle in political affairs (*umúr-i siyasî*), the others should keep their distance from him that haply he may repent ... meddling in political affairs (*umúr siyasî*) ends in regret; it is of no benefit or help; it is necessary to keep away from all parties (*ahzáb*). (*Makátib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 8 vols., vols. 1-3 Cairo, 1910-22, vols. 4-8 Tihiran: Mu'assisih Millî Mabú'ât Amrí, 121-34 B.E./1964-1977, vol. 4, pp. 71-2)

... Obey those in authority (*awliyá-yi umúr*) and do not meddle in political affairs (*umúr-i siyasî*) (*Makátib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 3, p. 254)

... That spiritual assembly must not raise opposition in political matters (*umúr-i siyasî*) which are under the jurisdiction of the local government (*hukúmat-i mahallí*). They should not even breathe one word of political matters (*umúr-i siyasî*). (*Makátib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 3, p. 507)

In a letter, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá probably wrote in about 1902-3 to Mírzá 'Alí Akbar Nakhjavání that with regard to Count Tolstoy, Nakhjavání should write to him and send him some suitable translated tablets, "but not in such a way that

the Russian Government would think that you are in league and co-operating with him, even in meddling in political affairs (*umúr-i siyásat*), for the afore-mentioned Count is very much involved in political affairs (*umúr-i siyásí*). (*Ma'idih Asmání*, 9 vols., Tehran: Mu'assisih Millí Matbú'át Amrí, 121-29 B.E./1964-1972, vol. 9, p. 40). Of course, no-one would try to maintain that Tolstoy's activities could be described as "ordinances by a post-revelational authority."

And concerning an individual who was very much involved in Persian politics, Mírzá Malkum Khan, 'Abdu'l-Bahá starts a tablet written shortly after Mírzá Malkum Khan's death in 1908: "In this world, a thousand politicians (*siyásiyyún*) have come and gone and have spread abroad upon the earth many important publications (*nashriyyát*), but now we do not find any mention or trace of them. Mírzá Malkam Khan (upon him be mercy and contentment) brought out political publications (*nashriyyát siyásí*) for fifty years ... (*Ma'idih Asmání*, vol. 9, pp. 143-4). Now anyone who knows anything about Persian history and Malkam Khan will know that his activities were purely political and had nothing to do with "ordinances by a post-revelational authority," thus there can be no reasonable doubt about the intended sense of the word *siyásí* here.

Thus we can find plenty of evidence that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá were using these terms to relate to what we could call "affairs of state" or "governmental affairs." Cole quite rightly points out that to translate *siyása* and *siyásiyyih* as referring to "politics" and "political" would probably not convey the correct intention of the word in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. These words are for us at the beginning of the 21st century inextricably bound up with party politics and the manoeuvrings of politicians. The words *siyása* and *siyásiyyih* derived however, as we have seen above, from the sense of looking after others and hence leadership. It thus came to mean, in the autocratic states of the Middle East, the ruler's function of leadership and looking after his subjects and his state. "*Umúr-i siyásiyyih*" can thus be translated as "governmental affairs" or "political affairs" (provided this latter is understood in its sense of the administration of a state and not in the sense of party politics) or indeed as Shoghi Effendi has translated it "affairs of state."

6. Cole brings forward, in his discussion of the contents of this tablet (e-mail of 12 January 2001), an argument from Abdu'l-Bahá's *Risáliyyih-yi Siyásiyyih* (the Treatise on Leadership or Politics) to support his contention that the House of Justice should restrict itself to "personal status regulations and ethics within the Bahá'í community." He maintains that in this treatise 'Abdu'l-Bahá "made it clear that the civil sphere and the religious sphere would always remain completely separate; and that religious leaders were not to intervene in civil government except when they were actively asked for their views by politicians." I do not want to get into the "separation of church and state" argument which has been rehearsed at length previously in several places. It would be sufficient for the purpose of this discussion to say that I think that to try to superimpose American ideas of the separation of church and state upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ideas as put forward in the *Risáliyyih-yi Siyásiyyih* is a mistake. In this treatise 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives an account of several historical occasions in which religious leaders in Iran have intervened in political affairs with disastrous consequences. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's conclusion from this is that the clerical class should not intervene in politics. It would be a misrepresentation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to map this conclusion of His directly and in an un-nuanced way onto the situation in the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'í Faith does not have a clerical class. It has no religious professionals who are trained in religious colleges. Therefore it does not have that class of people whose participation in politics 'Abdu'l-Bahá was decrying in the *Risáliyyih-yi Siyásiyyih*. Leadership in the Bahá'í Faith is given to councils of people elected from among the ordinary believers for limited terms of office and does not therefore represent the sort of professional religious leadership to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá is referring. Thus it is not appropriate to bring that position of 'Abdu'l-Bahá into this discussion.

I would also take issue with the characterisation of this view of the functioning of the Universal House of Justice as a "theocratic reading" (e-mail of 12 Jan 2001). This word is generally used very loosely. Its strict meaning, "rule by God," can only be a faith-based theological assertion, which would be quite unverifiable objectively and which would have no place in an academic historical or sociological work. However, the

word “theocracy” is usually loosely used to refer to rule by a priesthood or clerical class – a meaning that would be more accurately rendered by the word “hierocracy” – rule by a priesthood or sacred class. In any case, as I have stated above, the Bahá’í Faith does not have a clerical class. Its leadership by institutions elected from among the ordinary rank-and-file of the members of the religion with no specialised religious training cannot be classed as a hierocracy or theocracy.

Moreover, theocracies/hierocracies have a number of features that are not shared by the Bahá’í institutions:

1. Hierocratic/theocratic governments tend to be unelected and answerable to no-one. Bahá’í institutions are elected and hence must seek, at present every year (or every five years in the case of the Universal House of Justice), a further mandate from their electorate.
2. Hierocratic/theocratic governments tend to give a higher rank or status to those who are members of the clerical class, and hence members of the ruling class. They, as individuals, have rights and privileges over the ordinary believers and members of society. Bahá’u’lláh has clearly stated in several places, but most specifically in the Tablet of Unity (*Lawḥ-i Ittihád*) that all of the Bahá’ís are to consider themselves as being of one rank. No-one has individual leadership. Leadership belongs to the institutions of the Bahá’í Faith, acting as institutions (i.e. not their individual members). Thus members of the Bahá’í institutions should not be regarded as members of a ruling class that has any rights or privileges over the ordinary believers.
3. Moreover the functioning of these Bahá’í institutions does not replicate that typical of theocratic/hierocratic institutions. It is true that Bahá’í institutions like theocratic/hierocratic ones base their decisions on their scriptures. However, the Bahá’í scriptures contain mainly general ethical principles rather than detailed laws and are thus in practice rarely prescriptive in any given situation. In their decision-making, therefore, members of Bahá’í institutions are acting on their own sense of right and wrong (as guided by general ethical principles)

rather than applying a prescriptive Holy Law. Thus they are functioning more like the members of a modern democratic institution than a theocracy/hierocracy.

4. Furthermore, in practice, most theocracies/hierocracies are very much wedded to the respective cumulative tradition of their religion for a basis on which to make rulings and ordinances. In Islam for example, the concept of *ijma'* (which refers to the consensus of what Muslims have generally accepted in the past) acts as a powerful conservative restraint on the introduction of new ideas. Seldom can a new interpretation make its way past the deadening effect of this cumulative tradition into general acceptance by Muslims. Bahá'í institutions are not at all bound by the decisions of previous Bahá'í institutions, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes clear in this very tablet that we are considering.

Thus on theoretical and sociological grounds, it is incorrect to characterize the functioning of Bahá'í institutions as theocratic or hierocratic.

E-mail correspondence after posting of the paper

Following the publication of this paper on H-Bahai, Cole wrote an e-mail replying to the point that I had made. The following is an e-mail that I wrote in response. Excerpts from his prior email are interspersed with my responses.

In a message dated 25 Aug 2002, Dr Juan Cole writes:

This issue has nothing to do with Moojan himself, but I would like to point out that the full text of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's letter on the House of Justice and jurisprudence, as well as the full text of the Treatise on Leadership, has never after his death been published by any Bahá'í authority and both remain largely unknown, except for snippets, in the Iranian Bahá'í community. I suspect that these texts by 'Abdu'l-Bahá have been deliberately suppressed by a faction of Iranian Bahá'í theocrats, because they are strongly anti-theocratic in tenor and represent challenges to that faction's entrenched ideology. Had it not been for my publication and translation activities at

H-Bahai, perhaps even Moojan would not have had access to the complete text.

Dr Cole is quite right when he says that he drew my attention to this tablet, but it is not correct to imply that the Bahá'í institutions were somehow trying to conceal it. Did I not give references to two places where the original text of all of the substantive part of the tablet is published — in *Rahiq Makhtum* and *Amr va Khalq*? Furthermore an English translation of a substantial part of this has been published several times, once in *Wellsprings of Guidance*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969, pp. 84-6, once in *Bahá'í News* no. 426 (Sep. 1966), p. 2, and once in the compilation "The Establishment of the Universal House of Justice" which was printed by the British Bahá'í Publishing Trust in 1984 (pp. 11-12) and reprinted in *Compilation of Compilations*, 2 vols. [Sydney]: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 323-4. This is hardly a case of "never after his death been published by any Bahá'í authority." Nor does not this seem to me to be the actions of "Iranian Bahá'í theocrats" trying to suppress a text or of Bahá'í institutions frightened by the challenge it represents. Could the explanation be that no-one else sees any "anti-theocratic" tenor in the tablet?

I continue to think that something like "personal status laws" best translates what 'Abdu'l-Bahá has in mind by *ahkam-i madaniyyih*. "Social laws" is incorrect because it is too broad. For instance, a law about whether young persons must spend two years in the armed forces of a state would be a "social law" and yet it is *clearly* not the sort of thing about which 'Abdu'l-Bahá is talking here. When he gives examples of the *ahkam-i madaniyyih*, they are things like whether someone can marry a first cousin or the *hudúd*/ limitations on behavior, which in Islam treat illicit sex, slander about the latter, theft, wine bibbing, armed robbery and apostasy. Marriage, adultery, slander, drinking and apostasy are not broadly speaking "social" laws, but rather concern morality and personal status. Only theft and armed robbery have wider implications, but in early Islamic society concerned civil obligations among tribesmen and even in the US these can be the basis of private civil suits as well as of state criminal prosecution.

That is, the concrete examples 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives in this Tablet should take precedence over philological concerns with the ultimate origins of the word *madani*, and almost all of those concrete examples pertain to personal status law.

What Dr Cole appears to be saying is that in this tablet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gives two examples of what he is talking about: one of these is marriage law which can be contained within the term “personal-status laws,” the other relates to the punishment for crimes which is clearly not “personal-status laws” but we will lump both in under the rubric of “personal-status laws” anyway. This seems illogical to me, especially when the actual meaning (i.e. the dictionary definition) of the words *ahkam-i madaniyyih* is “social law” which would fit both of these examples perfectly well.

In fact if one looks carefully at the tablet one will see that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá claims that the Bahá’í Faith encompasses “the entirety of all (*jámi’ jamí’-yi*) spiritual and physical (*rawhání va jismání*) stages (or aspects or stations, *marátib*).” And this broad comprehensive sweep of every spiritual and physical matter is broken down into two areas: there are those areas that are dealt with in the revealed text and then everything else which must be referred to the House of Justice. So Cole is quite right in saying that “social laws” is broad, but then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is making a broad sweep here.

Incidentally, there is nothing in the text to indicate that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was intending to limit His definition of *ahkám-i madaniyyih* by the two examples He gives. He is giving these examples to show what has happened in the past because the range of revealed legislation in previous religions has been too narrow and the followers of these religions had to interpret for themselves. His intention in giving these examples is to demonstrate the comprehensiveness of this revelation because everything that is not covered in the revealed text can be referred to the Universal House of Justice — even whether “young persons must spend two years in the armed forces of a state” (if, for example, this was a matter of an appeal on the grounds of human rights and the government of the state concerned accepted the rulings of the House of Justice).

Let’s talk about what the word “*madaniyyih*.” meant to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as that seems the pertinent question to be resolved here. The most obvious place to look first is the *Risálih-yi Madaniyyih* (*The Secret of Divine Civilization*). What is this book about? It is certainly not about “laws of personal status.” It is precisely as the title is translated — about the causes and impulses that bring about true civilisation. *Risálih-yi Madaniyyih* must incidentally have been either given or approved by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the title of the book since He refers to the book by that title in other tablets. From this and the following quotations it will be clear that “*madaniyyih*” meant “civilization” for

'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the book itself, the word *madaniyyih* and its derivatives occur numerous times. Just a couple will be cited here as I do not think that anyone can seriously doubt that throughout this book 'Abdu'l-Bahá is speaking about "civilization" and not "personal status laws" (I have altered the translation to make it more literal):

Did not these new systems and procedures and enterprises of civilization (*madaniyyih*), contribute to the advancement of those countries? Were the people of Europe harmed by the adoption of such measures? Or did they rather by these means reach the highest degree of material development? (Text, 4th ed., Hofheim: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1984, p. 17; trans. p. 13)

It has now been clearly and irrefutably shown that the importation from foreign countries of the principles and procedures of civilization (*usúl va qavánín-i madaniyyat*), and the acquisition from them of sciences and techniques — in brief, of whatsoever will contribute to the general good — is entirely permissible. (Text pp. 38-9, trans. pp. 31-32)

Thus we have evidence that from long before this 1899 tablet, in *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (dated 1875), *madaniyyih* had a meaning related to "civilization." We can also point to a lengthy tablet that is addressed to the Bahá'ís of both the East and the West and must therefore date from after the 1899 tablet. This a tablet by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which he recaps many of the themes of *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. I found it first in *Ma'adih Asmani* vol. 5, p. 109-10 and began translating it and then realised that it had already been translated in *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978, no. 225, p. 283. So below I have based the translation on that in *Selections* but in places have replaced this translation with a more literal one:

Two calls to success and prosperity are being raised from the heights of the happiness of mankind ... The one is the call of civilization (*nidá-yi madaniyyat*), of the progress of the material world (*taraqí-yi `álam-i tabí`at*). This pertains to the nether world (*jahán-i násút*), promotes the principles of material progress (*taraqiyát-i jismáníyyih*), and is the trainer for the physical accomplishments of mankind. It comprises the laws, regulations, arts and sciences through which the world of humanity has developed ... The propagator and executive power of this call is just government (*hukúmat-i `ádilih*).

The other is the soul-stirring call of God, Whose spiritual teachings are safeguards of the everlasting glory ... Its penetrative power is the Word of God.

However, until the progress of civilisation (*taraqiyát-i madaní*), physical accomplishments (*kamálát-i jismání*) and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained. For however much happiness may be obtained on the one hand from the progress of civilization (*taraqiyát-i madaniyyih*) and the adornment of this physical world (*`álam-i jismání*) ... on the other hand it also brings dangers, severe calamities and violent afflictions.

Consequently, when you look at the orderly pattern of kingdoms, cities and villages, with the attractiveness of their adornments, the freshness of their natural resources, the refinement of their appliances, the ease of their means of travel, the extent of knowledge available about the world of nature, the great inventions, the colossal enterprises, the noble discoveries and scientific researches, you would conclude that civilization (*madaniyyat*) is conducive to the happiness and the progress of the human world. But if you should look to the invention of destructive and infernal machines, to the development of forces of demolition and the invention of fiery implements, which uproot the tree of life, it would become evident and manifest to you that civilization (*madaniyyat*) is conjoined with barbarism. Progress and barbarism go hand in hand, unless material civilization (*madaniyyat-i jismániyyih*) be confirmed by Divine Guidance, by the revelations of the All-Merciful and by godly virtues, and be reinforced by spiritual conduct, by the ideals of the Kingdom and by the outpourings of the Realm of Might.

Consider now, that the most advanced and civilized (*mutamaddin*) countries of the world have been turned into arsenals of explosives ... (there are several more occurrence of the word *madaniyyih* but this extract is already long enough)

As can be seen from this quotation, *madaniyyih* is clearly linked here to the progress of the material world and its promotion is considered

to be the function of the government. Humanity is warned however that unless this physical civilisation goes hand-in-hand with spiritual values, destruction will be the consequence. *Madaniyyat* is here linked to “the invention of destructive and infernal machines, to the development of forces of demolition and the invention of fiery implements, which uproot the tree of life.” Clearly nothing here would induce one to think that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is referring to “laws of personal status.” (There are also significant references here to *jismání* which is contrasted to the spiritual — a subject to which we will return anon.)

In a talk given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London in September 1911 (text in *Khatabat*, 3 vols. Cairo, 1340 A.H., vol. 1, p. 51 — I was unable to find a published translation), He speaks about the effects of the coming of Moses upon the Israelites. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says: “He made them masters of the sciences and arts and prepared for them a comprehensive civilisation (*madaniyyih-yi tám*). He spread among them the treasure-houses of the world of humanity” — clearly not a reference to “personal status laws.”

Similarly, when in a tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is referring to the progress made by the Arabs under the influence of Muhammad, He writes: “All of them united and in harmony strove for the advancement of civilization (*taraqiyyát-yi madaniyyih*). They escaped from the utmost abasement and achieved eternal glory. Can any social causation more powerful than this exist in the world?” (*Makátib* vol. 3, p. 62)

In fact I can find no occurrence of *madaniyyih* or *madaniyyat* where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is imposing on this word the narrow definition that Cole would like here.

In this Tablet, in my view ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is speaking entirely about the former situation, millet law, which is why I give it as personal status law. He is saying that in the Bahá’í faith millet law — which applies only to Bahá’ís — derives from the Bahá’í scriptures but is codified, expanded and administered by the houses of justice. There was also a move in the Ottoman empire to put the administration of millet law and affairs in the hands of elected councils from the new middle class instead of in those of the clergy, and there were riots about this sort of issue among members of the Armenian and Eastern Orthodox millets, of which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was well aware. His and Bahá’u’lláh’s displacement of clerics or religious jurisprudents by elected houses of justice was in accord with the most progressive legal ideas of the late Ottoman empire.

Again Cole appears to be intent on narrowing the range of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s terminology when in fact, the text of the tablet gives a broad range to what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is saying.

If one looks at the tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the word *millat* occurs most frequently in association with *dawlat* — i.e. the government and the people. Here people does not mean the members of one particular religious community, but rather all of the people who are the subjects of that government.

Among the main linguistic bases of contemporary Bahá’í theocratic thought in Persian is a misreading of the word “*siyasat*” to mean “politics” in the modern sense, and shunting aside its earlier or more technical meanings, which are the ones usually assigned it by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. I have admitted that it can mean leadership in the Aristotelian sense, but not in a jurisprudential context. It is true that at some point Arabs and Iranians did begin using the word *siyasat* (*al-siyasah*) as a neologism for “politics.” But in the 1890s when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s contemporaries wanted to talk about politics in the European sense, they said “*pulitik*,” transliterating from French.

But the fact is that Abdu’l-Bahá and Bahá’u’lláh never use the word “*pulitik*.” And when Abdu’l-Bahá wants to speak about what we would now call politics (e.g. when He is prohibiting interference in political affairs), He uses the term *umúr siyásiyyih*.

Actually, Persians and Arabs in the 1890s were already using *siyása* in the sense of the government and social administration which is what the word means when Bahá’u’lláh and Abdu’l-Bahá use it. Thus for example there is the following from Butrus Bustani’s *Muḥit al-Muḥit* which was published in 1870. This is a very literal translation of the entry for *as-siyása al-madaniyya*: (I am grateful to Will McCants for this reference):

“*as-siyása al-madaniyya* is the management [*tadbír*] of the way of living [*ma`ásh*] with [*ma`*] the public [*al-`umúm*] according to the norms [*`ala sunan*] of justice [*al-`adl*] and righteousness [*al-istiḳáma*]. It is one of the divisions of practical wisdom [*al-hikma al-`amaliyya*] and is called “*al-hikma as-siyásiyya*,” “*`ilm as-siyása*,” “*siyásat al-mulk*,” and “*al-hikma al-madaniyya*.” The *Kitáb as-Siyása* which Aristotle wrote for Alexander contains the important aspects of this science.”

The entry draws on a long history of the word in Muslim political philosophy, starting with al-Farabi’s *as-Siyása al-Madaniyya*,

translated as “On political government” (see entry on al-Farabi in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., EI2). Also see “Hikma” in EI2 on the division between theoretical and practical wisdom. But the main point is that these words *siyása* and *madaniyya* clearly had connotations of more than just leadership — they had connotations of government, which is exactly how Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá are using them.

Moojan has made a basic error of translation here. Words have meanings according to their context. In this context, *siyasat* simply cannot mean “government.” The entire phrase is this: “In Islam, as well, administrative punishments (*ta'zir*) were the purview of the ruling authority. There were no scriptural texts specifying the levels of punishment. It depended on the ruler. Such punishments ranged from verbal censure to death. This was, for the most part, the pivot of the administration of justice (*siyasat*) in the Muslim community.” The question is, what is the referent of the pronoun “this”? We have here a copula. on one side is *siyasat* in the Muslim community. What is it being equated to? It is obvious. “The dependence of the level of punishment on the will of the ruler.” That isn't government in general. It is the administration of justice in particular.

Actually I think the entry in Bustani's dictionary is pertinent here. I gave in my paper examples of the evolution of the term *siyasa* in Islamic history and showed that it initially meant mainly looking after people — or *tadbir* as Bustani has. This is the meaning that would make most sense here: “This is what looking after the people of Islam involved.”

The apparent contradiction between the following two passages —

[1] “You asked about the wisdom of putting the house of justice in charge of important ordinances. First of all, this divine cycle is solely spiritual, full of godly compassion, and is a matter of conscience. It has no connection at all to physical, material, or worldly matters. In the same way, the Christian dispensation was purely spiritual. “

and

[2] “Nevertheless, this blessed cycle is the greatest of divine dispensations, and for this reason, it encompasses spiritual aspects and aspects of the spiritual body, and is perfect in its power and authority. Therefore, the universal precepts that

form the foundation of the religious law are expressly stated in the text. “

— remains the same whether the first “physical” was *jasadi* or *jismani*. I continue to think that my solution, which is that “physical” has two distinct connotations in Shaykhi-Bábí-Bahá’í thought, helps resolve the apparent problem. By the way, there are passages in which Bahá’u’lláh refers to Shaykh Ahmad’s distinctions among the various sorts of body, the physical body and the spiritual body.

It would certainly strengthen Cole’s argument if he could cite some instances of this but I have not found any. The lengthy extract from *Má’adih Asmání* vol. 5, p. 109-10 I have cited above also points to a very physical meaning of *jismání* — which Abdu’l-Bahá there uses as a contrast to the spiritual.

What Cole appears to be saying then is that Abdu’l-Bahá uses this word *jismání* in two diametrically opposite meanings in the same tablet — without signalling at all that he is doing this.

Now I am sure that when Shaykh Ahmad uses the word *jism* to mean something opposite to what is the usual meaning of this word, he clearly signals that that is what he is doing. And I am sure that Abdu’l-Bahá, if He had meant *jismání* in the opposite to its usual sense would have clearly signalled this within that sentence. Otherwise, if the same word can be ascribed meanings which are the opposite of each other and there is no signalling of this, the result is cognitive anarchy. Now sometimes poor writers are guilty of this but Abdu’l-Bahá is an exceptionally clear and good writer and would never inflict such a thing on His readers.

I fear this interpretation turns the text on its head. What ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is saying is that the houses of justice have *only* spiritual authority (*saltanatuha malakutiyyah*), *not* temporal or worldly authority, which is the purview of the civil State. Otherwise, the modifier “*malakutiyyah*” or ‘other-worldly’ would not be necessary, and he would just have spoken of their ‘sovereignty’ pure and simple. He doesn’t say the *origin* of the authority of Bahá’í institutions is spiritual, he says its *nature* is.

I think not. The reason is the connecting word “*fa*” which means “and so.” Therefore what follows is a consequence of what has gone before. What has gone before are statements that the House of Justice is under the wing of the protection of God and that its

decisions are inspired by the Holy Spirit. What follows then must be a consequence of these statements. This would only be the case if we interpret what follows thus: And so its sovereignty is heavenly and divine (because the House of Justice is under the wing of the protection of God) and its laws are inspired and spiritual (because the laws are inspired by the Holy Spirit).

He uses the same words (*ruh*, *vujdan*) here as are invoked at the beginning of the Tablet on the Universal House of Justice and Jurisprudence, and underlines that “the leaders of religions must not intervene in political affairs” whereas it is praiseworthy of individual members of religions to become involved in public service. The common Bahá'í theocratic dodge, of saying that houses of justice/ spiritual assemblies are not “leaders of religion” and may therefore intervene in politics and even take over the civil State, is illogical and is put out of bounds by these texts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

This is not a dodge, it is based on what Abdu'l-Bahá Himself says. He defines in the *Risálih Siyásiyyih* why He does not think it advisable for religious leaders to intervene in politics. The following is from Cole's own translation:

These souls [religious leaders] are the authorities in establishing the purport of divine laws, not with regard to their implementation ... what expertise do they have in political matters, the protection of the subjects, the managing of serious affairs, the welfare and prosperity of the country, the implementation of the civil regulations and secular laws of a realm, or foreign affairs and domestic policy?

In other words, Abdu'l-Bahá wants them to remove themselves from the political sphere because their training is in other areas. This clearly does not apply to the Bahá'í institutions whose members have no training in religious law but who are elected from among the generality of people and thus resemble much more democratically elected local and national governments — people whom Abdu'l-Bahá obviously does think are suited to the task of government.

[end of email]

The Bahá'í Covenant

Ali Nakhjavani

Shoghi Effendi has given us a penetrating observation about the development of Bahá'í history. More than once in his writings he explained that the pattern of growth in the Faith is one of crises followed by victory. Such victory leads to greater crises resulting in a still mightier victory. He referred to this pattern of growth as part of the process of integration. The crises always consist of attacks against the Faith both from within and from without. Indeed, at times the external and the internal elements of opposition work hand in hand with each other. He also drew our attention to a simultaneous process of disintegration in human affairs. While this second process is destined, alas, to lead humanity to the depths of deterioration and misery, the integrative process will lead to the triumph and ascendancy of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world.

Christianity and Islam are two major religions whose followers, based on the statements found in their scriptures, have always aspired to conquer spiritually the population of the entire planet. They have failed ever since the inception of their faiths to achieve their goals. What guarantee do we Bahá'ís have that the Bahá'í Faith will not follow the same path? Shoghi Effendi has dealt with this question in his World Order Letters. That which safeguards the realization of the promises of Bahá'u'lláh is the Lesser Covenant. This is incorporated in clear terms in the Law of Succession revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and confirmed in the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, Bahá'u'lláh's Will and Testament.

Such Lesser Covenants have existed in all past religions, but were not laid out in explicit texts. It is in this Lesser Bahá'í Covenant that is the guarantee against schism and sectarianism. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives us this assurance: "*So firm and mighty is this Covenant that from the beginning of time*

until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like." (GPB 238) He also states: "*It is indubitably clear that the pivot of the Oneness of Mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant...*" (GPB 238) "*The power of the Covenant is as the heat of the sun which quickeneth and promoteth the development of all created things on earth.*" (GPB 239) After referring to the "invincible strength" (GPB 295) and "energizing power" (GPB 295) of the Covenant, Shoghi Effendi highlights two specific functions the Covenant is designed to discharge:

- "To direct and canalize" the forces released by two successive Manifestations in order to "ensure their harmonious and continuous operation." (GPB 237)
- To safeguard the "unity and integrity" of the Faith. (GPB 295)

Two misconceptions about the Covenant exist. These misconceptions are fomented by non-Bahá'í scholars who wish to weaken the loyalty of the friends towards the covenant. These need to be clarified. I will deal briefly with each one in the light of the texts of our Faith.

- The first is that as long as one believes in the divinity of Bahá'u'lláh, the Covenant is of secondary importance, and can be set aside as a non-essential part of the Bahá'í Revelation.
- The second is that the epoch of the Covenant was the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and therefore after the passing of the Center of the Covenant this chapter in the history of the Faith is closed.

First Misconception

In *God Passes By* Shoghi Effendi has explained that "the excellent and priceless heritage" (GP 314) referred to in the first sentence of the Kitáb-i-'Ahd is a reference to the Bahá'í Covenant. The full text of the sentence reads as follows: "*Within the treasury of trust and resignation We have bequeathed to Our heirs an excellent and priceless heritage.*" (TB 219) Shoghi Effendi assures us that this heritage is the Covenant, and that therefore we are all in one sense Bahá'u'lláh's heirs. A moment's reflection will make it clear

that if we accept the source legacy to be a Divine Source, we cannot but accept the legacy itself. To do otherwise, would be inconceivable. When one rejects a legacy, does it not indicate a denial of one's love towards the Bequeather?

The "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf" was the last outstanding Tablet revealed by the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh. In this epistle, Bahá'u'lláh states that in His Crimson Book He has recorded a "word" which *"is capable of fully disclosing that force which is hid in men, nay, of redoubling its potency."* (ESW 32) In a letter written on his behalf by his secretary, Shoghi Effendi has pointed out that what Bahá'u'lláh meant by the "word" recorded in the Crimson Book was the power of the Covenant. The Crimson Book is a reference to the book of His Covenant, the passage above means that the power for unity which the "Covenant possesses and radiates." (LG 181) The passage in the Kitáb-i-'Ahd confirming the potency of this power is as follows: *"A mighty force, a consummate power lieth concealed in the world of being. Fix your gaze upon it and upon its unifying influence and not upon the differences which appear from it."* (TB 221) In these two brief sentences Bahá'u'lláh is in effect telling us that the power of the covenant is "concealed." To me it means that one has to reflect on the importance of this theme to uncover and grasp its importance. Bahá'u'lláh is also telling us that the Covenant is like a double-edged sword: it leads to unity, and it causes differences. We must focus our minds and hearts on its unifying influence. The Covenant is our legacy from Bahá'u'lláh Himself, and, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated, is the Pivot of the Oneness of Mankind. How is it possible for us to regard it as a matter of secondary importance?

Second Misconception

The second misconception has to do with the assumption that the Covenant is outdated and obsolete. We must remember that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, when commenting on His own ministry, has written that this period was only the "morning of the Covenant." Thus if His Ministry was only the morning of the Covenant, we still have a whole blissful day ahead of us, till the end of the Dispensation. Two Tablets to this effect are

included in compilations of the Persian Tablets of the Master (*Muntakhabátí az Makátib-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 5, pp. 165, 213)

Thus we see that the Covenant was not only for the twenty-nine years of the Master's Ministry, but was bequeathed by Bahá'u'lláh to "posterity." (GPB 239) It is in this light that we could understand Bahá'u'lláh's statement when He described His Dispensation as "*a Day which shall not be followed by night.*" (GPB 245)

Who is a Covenant-Breaker?

We should now have a quick look at Covenant-breaking to see what our texts say on this subject, to understand what are the reasons and motives that lead people to break the Covenant, and why we must shun them. The law of Succession is one of the most important ordinances revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas by Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh says that in connection with the subject of endowments, the Supreme Authority in the Cause is the Manifestation of God. After Him and in accordance with His written covenant, specifically appointed "Aghsans" or Branches of the sacred Lote Tree will be the Centres of the Cause. After them, the focal point of the Covenant will be the Universal House of Justice. (KA 42)

In this same Most Holy Book and in the very first sentences, Bahá'u'lláh clearly stipulates that the acceptance of the manifestation and adherence to the laws revealed by Him are twin inseparable duties. One is not accepted without the other. (KA 1) Thus any person who denies and disregards the links in the chain of succession is regarded as a Covenant-breaker. The decision as to who is considered a Covenant-breaker rests always with the Authority or Central institution of the Cause which acts as Head of the Faith, at any given time. As stated earlier the Covenant leads to unity, as well as to differences. Bahá'u'lláh advised us to ignore the differences and to fix our gaze on the unifying power of the Covenant. The main body of the Faith of God, we should be well assured, will remain united, as has been designed by Almighty God to unify the world. The Hand of the Cause, A.Q. Faizi, used to say that in past Dispensations, when broken branches of the Tree of the Cause were planted, they grew and thrived; but in this Cause, such

broken branches, even if planted with care, are destined not to grow, but to wither away, leaving the Tree of the Cause, a single, matchless, and impregnable Entity. Thus we must be certain that Covenant-breaking cannot and will not create a breach or schism in the Cause.

Why do we shun Covenant-breakers?

As to why we should shun Covenant-breakers 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives the example of contagious diseases such as leprosy and consumption. It is as simple as a scientific fact. Shoghi Effendi has given this matter further clarification. Shoghi Effendi described such crises as "blessings in disguise" and says "when viewed in their proper perspective, each of them is an agency for the purification and revitalization of the life of the community" and "is a compelling evidence of the indestructibility of its cohesive strength." (GPB 61)

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes Covenant-breakers as "*mischief-makers*" who "*seek leadership*" (SWAB 214) and "*promote discord*." (WT 9) Other motives mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá include "*ambition*," "*envy*," and "*hate*." (SWAB 163) He advises us that such people are "*sweet in words*" and "*appear as sheep*" yet inwardly they are "*ravening wolves*." (SWAB 315) In His Will and Testament He warns us "*no doubt every vain glorious one that purposes dissension and discord will not openly declare his evil purposes*." (WT 12) Shoghi Effendi amplifies this subject by adding other motives for Covenant-breaking. He describes such persons as "self-seeking adventurers" driven by such whims and inclinations as "unbounded presumption," "abject perfidy," "delusion," "malice," and, ironically enough, "incredible folly." (TDH 65-66) "If a man cuts a cancer out of his body to preserve his health and very life, no one would suggest that for the sake of unity it would be reintroduced into the healthy organism. On the contrary, what was once a part of him has so radically changed as to have become a poison." (LG 184) This does not mean that Covenant-breakers cannot be reinstated. Indeed we are told to pray for them, because such souls are not lost forever. They should be left, however, on their own. If they repent and the Head of the Faith is convinced that their repentance is sincere, they are joyously reinstated.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Shoghi Effendi's Passing

The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (KA 42) does not seem to envisage that an appointed Branch, that is, the Guardian of the Cause, would co-exist with the Universal House of Justice. This would seem to contradict with the first part of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. However, Shoghi Effendi has stated that the Master's Will was a "supplement" (WOB 19) to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and therefore could not "contradict" (WOB 4) the Most Holy Book. When we study 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, we see that it is in three parts. Part one provides for the Guardian's participation in the Universal House of Justice as its member, and indeed, as its "sacred Head." Part two, however, envisages a divinely guided House of Justice without the presence and participation of the Guardian. Part three is relatively brief and does not deal with this issue.

The question before us is this: How can the Will of the Master be a "supplement" to, and in fact, "confirm" (WOB 19) the Most Holy Book, and yet in of its parts appear to contradict the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*? This is both an obscure matter and a mystery. This may well be why Shoghi Effendi kept telling the friends in the East and the West, in several letters, that the Will of the Master contained mysteries which they presently could not understand. In His Will and Testament, the Master has added that "obscure" (WT 20) matters in the Cause will arise, and it devolves upon the Universal House of Justice to elucidate them. In confirmation of this clause in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will, Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1924: "We must trust to time and the guidance of the God's Universal House of Justice to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its ['Abdu'l-Bahá's will's] provisions and implications." (BA 62) The manner in which the events unfolded in 1957 onwards, left certain facts on the ground, which created a situation that was clearly in full harmony with the text of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. As Shoghi Effendi had not appointed a successor, as Guardian and Authorized Interpreter, there was automatically no co-existence between any Appointed Branch and the Universal House of Justice.

After its election in 1963, the Universal House of Justice gradually lifted the veil on some of the mysteries. In three letters available to the friends in the compilation entitled

Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986 (Letters numbers 5, 23, and 35), the Supreme Institution gave its elucidations of this “obscure question.” (WT 20)

These three letters clearly demonstrate that the provisions of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* are supreme, and obviously will remain inviolable and immutable, that the Universal House of Justice is independently and divinely guided by the Twin Manifestations of this Revelation, and that the beloved Guardian had even anticipated that the Universal House of Justice be formed in 1963. Three secondary questions arise which we need to address. They are:

1. Why did Shoghi Effendi refer to future Guardians?
2. Was he conscious of his imminent death and aware that he would not live to see the formation of the Universal House of Justice?
3. Why did the Guardian not write a Will and Testament?

Future Guardians?

Regarding the first question and the reference of Shoghi Effendi to future Guardians, we must remember that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had incorporated this possibility in the first part of His Will. During Shoghi Effendi’s lifetime, there were living Aghsans who could have been chosen by him, if, as stipulated in the Will, he had decided that they were qualified for such a high office. And even then, his appointment had to be ratified by nine hands elected from the Body of the Hands of the Cause worldwide. Only the Guardian was authorized to set this process in motion. We could well conclude that by referring to future Guardians, he was doing so in the context of the first part of the Master’s Will.

Shoghi Effendi has given us a key to the resolution of this quandary. He wrote that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was following the same pattern adopted by Bahá’u’lláh in His own *Kitáb-i-Ahd*. He indicated that Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had used an “identity of method” in the manner of succession. (WOB 4)

Bahá’u’lláh certainly knew that Muḥammad-‘Alí would be disloyal to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Rúhiyyih Khánum, in her *Priceless*

Pearl (pp. 11-12), tells us of an experience which a German woman doctor had one day in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Her name was Dr. Fallscheer who was serving as a medical doctor in the Master's household and was present when a young teenager entered the room and approached 'Abdu'l-Bahá very reverently. After the Master told him something quietly, the teenager backed out with the same degree of respect and reverence. 'Abdu'l-Bahá then told Dr. Fallscheer that this young boy was His Elisha. He then added that Bahá'u'lláh had told Him that in the future He ['Abdu'l-Bahá] would have to appoint one of His own sons or grandsons to succeed Him. Yet Bahá'u'lláh ostensibly appointed Muḥammad-'Alí, in His Will, as the one to succeed 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Is this not a mystery? Was this designed by Bahá'u'lláh to protect 'Abdu'l-Bahá? Could He have done this to test the believers and at the same time to put Muḥammad-'Alí to test?

Shoghi Effendi has clearly stated in his "Dispensation" that 'Abdu'l-Bahá possessed "superhuman knowledge and perfection." (WOB 134) We must be sure, therefore, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá must have known that the two brothers and five male cousins of Shoghi Effendi, who were all Aghsans, would not be faithful to Shoghi Effendi. Could He have included this option in HIS Will possibly to keep these potential appointees within the pale of the Faith? Did He have other purposes, as Bahá'u'lláh might have? As we know, these seven Aghsans disobeyed Shoghi Effendi through their own pride and folly and disqualified themselves, by dropping out of the Faith just as Muḥammad-'Alí had done before.

How the texts on succession prove to be a major test?

In the *Kitáb-i-Iqán* Bahá'u'lláh states: "*From time immemorial, even until eternity, the All-Mighty hath tried, and will continue to try, His Servants, so that light may be distinguished from darkness, truth from falsehood, right from wrong, guidance from error, happiness from misery, and roses from thorns.*" (KI 8) In the same book Bahá'u'lláh says that such tests appear in "*every season*" (KI 53) or stage in the evolution of each Dispensation. It is reasonable therefore to assume that there are undoubtedly mysteries deposited in God's Grand Scheme of World Order. We might also draw a conclusion as

stated earlier that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had included the possibility of future Guardians, in order to encourage His grandsons to remain loyal and not break the Covenant.

Was Shoghi Effendi aware of his imminent passing?

Some light is shed on this issue in Violette's "Tribute to Amatu'l-Bahá." Two incidents are recorded which help us to understand this matter more clearly. In one case, towards the end of his life, the Guardian asked Rúhíyyih Khánum what would become of her, once he had gone. Of course, Rúhíyyih Khánum was disturbed and shocked by the question. He then proceeded to answer his own question, by saying that he assumed that she would travel and encourage the friends. As we all know, this is precisely what Amatu'l-Bahá did after the election of the Universal House of Justice.

The second incident is when, during his last few days, in the hotel in London, he told Amatu'l-Bahá that he did not want to go back to Haifa and that she should go alone. As Shoghi Effendi had just had a bad flu, Rúhíyyih Khánum thought that it was because of his physical condition that he had said what he did. Furthermore, on June 4, 1957 Shoghi Effendi wrote some five months before his own passing that the "destiny" and "security" of the Faith and the "spiritual health" of the Bahá'í community have now to depend on close collaboration between the Hands of the Cause and National Spiritual Assemblies. (MBW 123) In his last message to the Bahá'í world, Shoghi Effendi called for the appointment of a new Auxiliary Board whose specific function would be the protection of the Faith. In the same last general message he conferred upon the Hands of the Cause the title of "Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's Embryonic World Commonwealth." (MBW 126) It was on that account that the Hands of the Cause were able to rally the friends to complete faithfully the objectives of the Ten Year Crusade. It is highly significant in this connection to recall that in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh seems to have foreseen the possibility of the termination of the line of the Appointed Branches at a time when the Universal House of Justice was not yet formed. During such an interregnum "*the people of Bahá*" according to the Most Holy Book, who "*speak not except by his leave*," (KA 42) would temporarily conduct the affairs of the

Cause, pending the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. It is truly significant that Bahá'u'lláh so clearly foreshadowed the future.

Why did Shoghi Effendi not write a Will and Testament?

This very question was put to the House of Justice. Here is its response: "That Shoghi Effendi did not leave a Will cannot be adduced as evidence of his failure to obey Bahá'u'lláh. Rather should we acknowledge that in his very silence there is wisdom and a sign of his infallible guidance?"

This statement clearly implies that not leaving a will in a traditional way was a conscious act on the part of Shoghi Effendi. As indicated above, Shoghi Effendi gave advice to Rúhíyyih Khánúm regarding her activities after his passing. Is it conceivable that he who was the Guardian and Protector of the Cause of God would think about the future of his wife, but not consider the security of the Faith after his own passing? The Hand of the Cause Tarázu'lláh Samandari, after the passing of the Guardian, used to say that if Shoghi Effendi was not sure about the security of the Cause of God after his death, he would not have passed away at that time. How very perceptive was this Hand of the Cause? Indeed Shoghi Effendi had written that His "Dispensation" was to be considered as a "supplement" (LDG 65) to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament. He had actually told several Hands of the Cause and pilgrims that his "Dispensation" should be considered by the friends as his Will and testament. Furthermore, in his "Dispensation" he has written that the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a "link" (WOB 143-144) joining the Heroic Age to the Formative Age and similarly the link that will connect the Formative Age to the Golden Age. In this light we can understand why Shoghi Effendi described the Will and Testament of the Master as the "Charter of a future world civilization." (GPB 328)

Our minds should be assured that the Blessed Beauty is watching over the fortunes of His precious Faith, and that the Supreme Body that He has ordained for us is under His loving care and protection. We are living in a day which, because of the power of the Covenant, is a Day "which shall not be followed by night." (GPB 245)

Minimalism from a Bahá'í Perspective *

Mahyad Zaerpoor Rahnamaie

A Brief Historical Background

There is a general consensus that the foundations of what is called “modern philosophy” were laid in the middle of the 17th Century by Rene Descartes, the famed French philosopher/mathematician. He emphasized the authority of human rational power as the basic tool used to discover truth. The much repeated motto of “I think therefore I am” sums up his stance on the instrumentality of the human consciousness in any ontological paradigm. Contrary to the Platonic approach that starts from “reality as an abstract ideal trans-human, inaccessible phenomenon whose shadows we just resemble,” Descartes’ approach was from the bottom up. He starts with the fundamental reality of human intellect as a priori and logically deduces the possibility of an abstract ideal reality beyond the human realm.

Following in Descartes’ footsteps, Newton and Leibniz radically transformed the Platonic paradigm of a world full of allegories and mystical meanings to a cold, logical, scientific world, functioning solely on immutable cause-and-effect relations. The natural laws underlying such a precise system require the human intellect to discover the mysteries of this world by painstaking examination of the evidences at hand. The ensuing unrivaled successes of physical sciences and technology proved the validity of rationalism as a dominant school of philosophy for almost two centuries. This revolution

* When dealing with “minimalism” and “maximalism,” this article has liberally used the main ideas expounded by William Hatcher in *Minimalism: A Bridge between Classical Philosophy and the Bahá'í Revelation*.

in the prevailing philosophical mind-set had enormous consequences throughout the world within one generation. Rationalism along with its offshoots such as Logical Positivism, scientific positivism, materialism, and reductionism gained a total ascendancy in many areas of human intellectual, political, social, and academic endeavor. There was a shift in the previously held romantic view of the world. The entire cosmos was not circumambulating our planet in reverential adoration anymore; the earth was reduced to a speck of dust in the much larger, utterly predictable scheme of things. The nightingale did not warble as a token of its love for the beauty of the rose, but only to obey a preset reproductive urge. The universe lost its poetry and a mechanistic coldness settled in.

The new scientific picture of the world upheld the following, seemingly indisputable axioms:

1. This world is based on an elegant intelligible design that behaves according to unchangeable laws.
2. These laws can be discovered by human mind/rational ability.
3. The chain of cause and effect is at the heart of the reality of all phenomena
4. Scientific methodology and modern logic are the only valid tools of discovery.
5. Reducing complex phenomena to its simpler parts and analyzing the simpler parts will yield the knowledge of the more complex supersets (reductionism).
6. Objectification is the only way to obtain any valid knowledge of reality (positive objectivism).
7. The ultimate cause of anything material is necessarily material (materialism).
8. Whatever is not rational (explained in the language of mathematics, logic, objectivism) is necessarily irrational (emotions, human creativity, mysticism, religion, spirituality) and tacitly of lesser value.

9. The proper language to describe reality is linear very exact in nature, avoiding double or multi meanings, and totally communicable.
10. Verification through a constant process of fine-tuning the theory against the evidences obtained from empirical analysis is the only way to gain a more exact knowledge of reality.

For the first time in the history of revealed religions, the Bahá'í sacred writings explicitly discussed the singular role of human rationality in discovering the mysteries of the world. In the words of Abdu'l-Bahá, "*God's greatest gift to man is that of intellect, or understanding. The understanding is the power by which man acquires his knowledge of the several kingdoms of creation, and of various stages of existence, as well as much which is invisible.*"¹ Or, again in another statement: "*God has endowed man with intelligence and reason whereby he is required to determine the verity of questions and propositions.*"² In addition to such explicit praise for humanity's rational faculties, both Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá also pointed out the inadequacy of human rational ability as the only reliable means through which to discover all the possible facets of the relationships within and amongst phenomena. In the late 19th century they called for a reconsideration of some of the basic axioms tacit in rationalistic/mechanistic systems. As an alternative, they offered other possible epistemological tools for revealing the mysteries of this world.

For example, in *Some Answered Questions* Abdu'l-Bahá expounds on at least four different modes of knowledge: knowledge through sense perception³, reason and logic, tradition or scriptural authority, and the medium of inspiration. Each of these modes may be applied to a greater or lesser degree. It is only when they act in a complementary fashion and act in harmony that one has hopes to approach a more reliable version of knowledge. However, as was expected, many multitudes remained oblivious to such an invitation. It took science itself to point out its own inadequacies.

In the beginning of the 20th century the first jolt to the previously unchallenged authority of scientific method came

from Heisenberg, the most prominent German physicist of the time. His “indeterminacy” or “uncertainty” principle wreaked havoc not only in scientific circles but also in wider philosophical domains. Heisenberg’s principle states that, “no complete and exact description of physical reality is logically possible within the framework of the Hilbert Space of quantum mechanics.”⁴ In particular, this principle showed that it is impossible to simultaneously determine the position and the momentum of an electron.

The next and even stronger blow to conventional scientific processes was landed by the famed logician of the early 20th century, Kurt Gödel. In his famous Incompleteness Theorem, he proved, without a doubt, “that any system by necessity will contain true propositions that cannot be proven within the system.”⁵ In another words, there cannot exist any complete (meaning dealing with the totality of a system) and at the same time exact (being able to prove all its propositions) description of reality.

This jolt to the rationalistic view of the world caused a whole host of new philosophical systems to gain strength forming a united front to oppose what they called the “tyranny of science.” Armed with the weapon provided for them by science itself, schools such as relativism, total relativism, subjectivism, solipsism, existentialism, post modernism, deconstructionism, and the like announced the end of the supremacy of human rational faculties as the dominant force for gaining knowledge. Although covering a vast arena of human enterprises, proponents of such schools generally agree with the following underlying premises:⁶

1. There is a general sense of mistrust towards the use of rational/logical/scientific methods to gain knowledge. Science is just another (white man’s) cultural bias on par with magic, shamanism, or voodooism.
2. The individual’s perception of reality is the only and the ultimate source of authority (solipsism).
3. All cultures and cultural products should enjoy the status of equal validity, with no inherent merit accorded to any of them.

4. All moral values and codes of conduct are basically products of human culture and, therefore, equally justifiable.
5. All epistemological approaches, including intuition, revelation, mysticism, and the like are equally valid in forming a perception of reality.
6. Objectivity is a myth and only trivial matters can be objectified. Whatever is significant remains forever subjective.
7. There is no absolute authority save the authority of the self.
8. There is nothing meritorious about using logical and or mathematical languages. Using a poetic/non-linear language with multiple meanings is encouraged.
9. Inter-subjective communication is not probable. Therefore, one's perception of reality remains forever inaccessible to others and inherently resistant to reliable communication.

Throughout the past several decades, constant clashes between the two camps were not only limited to the academic and philosophical circles, but the impacts were reverberating in all of human endeavor from art and music to theatre and cinema; from child-rearing practices to interpersonal relationships; from policy making at the local level to the practices of international relations. Most of the absolute values had lost their meaning and the individual's interpretations turned into the ultimate authority. Nothing was a question of merit any longer, but was reduced to the question of mere difference.

What is Minimalism?

In such chaotic circumstances, foreseen by Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá a century earlier, a newly emerging school of philosophy is gaining ground. Minimalism is a new alternative based on the supremacy of the human rational mind but at the same time relying on pragmatic approaches. While it tries to

avoid the dogmatism of positivism/objectivism, it is mindful of the pitfalls of subjectivism and the authority of the self. Dr. William Hatcher terms his method “minimalism” because it “results from consistently making the most plausible and rational choice in the light of current knowledge”⁷ but goes no farther than is necessary.

Minimalism takes the stance that the fundamental goal of any philosophical system must be truth-seeking and not persuasion and/or continual debates amongst competing schools of thought. It is unproductive and unnecessary to put much emphasis on constant arguments between and amongst extreme points of view. Instead, the main objective must be to find the tools and tirelessly refine them to approach the truth. In many respects, minimalism offers an epistemological system congruent with the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. The following will be an attempt to draw a parallel view comparing the basic epistemological principles of minimalism and the Bahá'í Faith.

Metaphysics

In its metaphysical stance, facing the question of “existence” versus “non-existence,” minimalism is based on the axiom that “something does exist.” Therefore, existence itself is not an illusion but a reality independent of the observer. Therefore, the “out-there-ness” of reality is not under dispute. However, the observer’s perception of reality may very well be illusory. Also, it takes “being as basic and sees process as a succession of *states*, a state being defined as a (time-bound) existent at a given instant of time.”⁸

The stance of the Bahá'í Faith also testifies to the reality of existence.

Epistemology

The main axiom explicitly clarified in minimalism is the law of “cause-and-effect” as a universal umbrella encompassing the emergence of all phenomena. Similarly, in the words of Bahá'u'lláh: “*All that is created, however, is preceded by a cause.*”⁹ What distinguishes it from materialism, however, is that minimalism does not adhere to the axiom that the root cause of all material phenomena is necessarily material. It leaves

the possibility for non-material causes open and subject to investigation. In general agreement with this position Abdu'l-Bahá confirms: *"Thus such a chain of causation must of necessity lead eventually to him who is the ever-living, the All-powerful, who is self-dependent and the Ultimate Cause."*¹⁰

Methodologically, minimalism relies heavily both on the traditional syllogistic system of Aristotle and, even more so, on the modern relational logic developed over the past two centuries. Without going much into the details of the relational logic, it may suffice it to say that this new system is closely connected to the mathematical set theory (dealing with the concepts of supersets, sets, subsets, and their boundaries). Relational logic is key to developing new techniques to expand our ability to derive new logical conclusions (both inductive and deductive) from a given statement. In this regard, minimalism is closely associated with the bases underlying new mathematics/logic and artificial intelligence experiments.

In fact Abdu'l-Bahá constructed numerous arguments using relational logic as a tool to prove His point. A prominent example of such an argument can be found in His Tablet to Dr. Forel. In this Tablet Abdu'l-Bahá shows that a subset (human being) cannot possibly possess a quality whose superset (the nature) is bereft of.

*Should any one suppose that man is but a part of the world of nature, and he being endowed with these perfections, these being but manifestations of the world of nature, and thus nature is the originator of these perfections and is not deprived therefrom, to him we make reply and say: the part dependeth upon the whole; the part cannot possess perfections whereof the whole is deprived.*¹¹

He uses a similar set of arguments to also prove the reality of divinity, spiritual realms, and other unobservable phenomena.

Scope

Minimalism considers Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem as its guiding light and accepts the fact that no system is possibly able to cover the whole of reality and at the same time be exact

enough to verify all of its true propositions. In fact, exactness and completeness will occur at the expense of one another. A desire to increase exactness will necessarily yield a decrease in the scope of our knowledge of reality. Therefore, it acknowledges the fact that, at any given time, the system is only involved with a part, and not the entirety of reality.

The limit of the comprehensive ability of the human mind is at the core of the Bahá'í epistemology as well. Bahá'u'lláh, time and again, warns humanity against “*vain imaginings*,” a constant battle between reality and perception. This inherent limitation in the scope of human knowledge is also confirmed by Abdu'l-Bahá when He states “*For whatsoever can be conceived by man is reality that hath limitations and is not unlimited; it is circumscribed, not all-embracing. It can be comprehended by man, and is controlled.*”¹²

Objectification of Reality

To avoid the reductionist nature of absolute objectivism, “minimalism accepts the objective existence of only those non-observable phenomena that are strictly necessary” in order to give a satisfactory explanation for observable phenomena. One should notice that “strict necessity” is of utmost importance in such an explanation. It is only as a last resort if and only if the assumptions of such non-observables conform in accordance with, and not contrary to, the other logical components of the argument at hand, that their objective existence will be assumed. Therefore, whatever can be objectified must be objectified. This objectification of a large segment of the human quest for knowledge is both desirable and helpful. At the same time, minimalism is mindful of the restrictions of total objectivism and acknowledges the fact that the totality of human knowledge cannot be objectified. Objectification in minimalism is a very strong tool for truth-seeking but never the only one, or worse, an end in itself.

Similarly in the world of being there exist forces unseen of the eye, such as the force of ether previously mentioned, that cannot be sensed, that cannot be seen. However, from the effects it produceth, that is from heat, electricity appear and are made evident. In like

*manner is the power of growth, of feeling, of understanding, of thought, of memory, of imagination and of discernment; all these inner faculties are unseen of the eye and cannot be sensed, yet all are evident by the effects they produce.*¹³

Object/Subject relationship

Minimalism pays special attention to the continual battle between the object-based epistemology of positivism (holding the stance that reliable knowledge can only be obtained if the objectivity/neutrality of the observer/subject is guaranteed) on one hand, and the subject-based paradigm of the subjectivist school (which cries out that neutrality/objectivism is only a myth and there is no reality but what the subject/observer perceives) on the other hand. Abdu'l-Bahá is also well aware of the philosophical dichotomy between the object and subject. He clarifies His stance when He says: "... *It is certain that all human conceptions are contingent, not absolute; that they have a mental existence, not a material one.*"¹⁴ Minimalism explicitly acknowledges the fact that total neutrality of the observer is not an achievable goal. It is the "viewpoint explicitness" and not the "viewpoint neutrality" that leads to a more reliable path to approaching reality. Therefore, what it stresses is a system in which there is a constant and a sincere effort to explicitly spell out all the assumptions, axioms, and viewpoints in advance, for the sake of both the reader and potential critics.

The knowledge obtained in this way will be examined and re-examined against newly confronted evidences. When the current evidences at hand imply a host of possible theories/explanations, only the most plausible ones will be selected. As we can see, the truth-seeking methodology of minimalism is a dynamic, pragmatic and ever fine-tuning dialogue between the observer and reality. It allows itself to constantly revise and modify what it has achieved. It is through conscious and careful effort that there will emerge an ever increasing hope of closing the gap between perception and reality. So, whoever is on the path of a truth-seeking endeavor must try to remain open-minded in an open-ended process. Although an absolute level of viewpoint explicitness is not

possible, minimalism hopes to achieve gradual and exceedingly refined versions of human knowledge. Therefore, although the end result is not known (the truth is not a priori) such refinement is similar to the concept of finding the limit of series or sequences in mathematics. The limit (if it exists) can be obtained by rigorously applying refining techniques.

Going one step further however, minimalism considers a rather larger domain of applicability for rigorous and formal methods and language not only in their traditional roles in mathematical/computers/scientific investigations but also in seldom explored spheres of philosophy, religion, and humanities. By appropriately using the tools of modern logic and considering the most probable alternative, it introduces an approach within which one can search for the validity of both material and trans-material knowledge. In like manner, on numerous occasions in the Bahá'í writings there is a constant invitation to apply one's rational ability to explore various meanings of sacred text. In fact a good portion of treatise, tablets, and talks (including *Some Answered Questions*) given by Abdu'l-Bahá are excellent examples of implementing formal logic to prove a point.

Rationalism vs. other modes of knowledge

Minimalism greatly values the rational faculty as the key to unraveling encountered mysteries, both material and trans-material. In fact, its reliance on the usage of formal logic, relational logic, and the process of verification as a means to refine human knowledge, and consequently modifying our views based on examining the newly emerged evidences, all testify to how crucial a role human's rational mind plays in achieving a better understanding of what reality is. However, it tries to avoid the dichotomy of the hard-line rationalistic view between rationality and irrationality.

It opens up a window to a third alternative, namely, "trans-rationality." According to minimalism, some levels of knowledge that are gained through other modes of exploration may not necessarily be irrational but trans-rational. Of course, one condition remains intact, that is, the knowledge gathered in such a way ought not to contradict reason, but may

complement it. In this fashion, minimalism leaves room for modes such as intuition, mystical experience, divine inspiration, prayers and meditations complementing the rational faculty where rigorous, formal, investigative methods may remain inadequate. Abdu'l-Bahá in *Some Answered Questions*, offers a thorough discussion of the validity of all these different modes of knowledge including sense perception, reason and logic, tradition or scriptural authority, and the medium of inspiration. He also emphasizes that all these modes must be in harmony and act in a complementary fashion.

Minimalism vs. Maximalism

Maximalism refers to an ensemble of schools of thought on the opposite side of the spectrum from minimalism. In comparing the two systems, some of the major distinctive tenets of both will emerge even more pronouncedly:¹⁵

1. Contrary to minimalism, maximalism starts with a text in which the Truth itself is a priori and the meaning of the text a posteriori (i.e., the meaning of the statements may not be immediately accessible or even unique).
2. The language of maximalism is non-linear, poetic, multi-layered, allegorical, and ultimately contains multi-meanings, welcoming a variety of interpretations.
3. Maximalism gives free rein to refer to trans-material, non-observable, and imaginary phenomena.
4. The scope of maximalism is the totality of reality with little or no attention paid to the issue of exactness. It offers an all-encompassing paradigm (a mega-narrative) in which "completeness" is favored at the expense of exactness.
5. To unravel the meanings veiled in the poetry of language, the tools of scientific verification will seldom be sufficient, or necessary. Here all modes of knowledge may have to band together in order to explore fresh meaning for each statement.

6. Divine revelations are perfect examples of maximalism in which there is an abundant use of metaphor, non-linear language and unobservable phenomena.

In summary, what makes minimalism singularly useful is its fresh look at new applications of the language of modern logic and mathematics as a key to open so far unproven or unexplored realities. For example, Dr. Hatcher utilizes the very same tool to demonstrate how the existence of God/Divinity may be proved in a totally logical way.¹⁶ It is true that to be able to follow his lines of argument there is a need for a prior knowledge of basic levels of modern logic, but by exerting some mental effort it is quite possible to trace the gist of his argument. This fine example makes us understand how modern logic combined with the “most plausible scenario” may lead one to more solid ground for exploration of non-observable realities that had previously kept their distance from such verifications. In this regard, in addition to stressing the value of logic/rationality, minimalism welcomes the contribution of other modes of knowledge in exploring different aspects of reality (provided they do not contradict logic).

When comparing the two, there is a natural affinity between the epistemological stance of the Bahá'í Faith and minimalism. Even so, one has to bear in mind that Bahá'u'lláh reveals a “complete” paradigm, a mega-narrative, while minimalism, by nature, tries to take the side of “exactness,” accepting the limitations it imposes on the system. The Faith, however, not only does not preclude, but actively encourages a rational investigation of the tenets of one's belief system. There are abundant references to “deliberation,” “reflection,” “thought,” “contemplation,” “reasoning,” and the like, when one wrestles with layers of meanings in a sacred passage. The “pearls of wisdom” preserved in the “depth of the Ocean of His Revelation” summon the seekers to “delve deep” to reach the “hidden treasures” therein. Therefore, on the one hand, the truth of a divine revelation is a priori, given in a top-down fashion in language rich in allegory, poetry, layers, metaphors and maximalist in nature. The “Creative Word” is an ever-generating source of hidden meanings that invite the soul and the mind to a feast of discovery by utilizing different

(including trans-rational) modes of knowledge, that are not contradictory to logical/rational conclusions.

Dr. Hatcher gives a parallel view of the essential elements underlying the two systems:

The study of science consists in confronting or experience of the phenomena of reality, formulating certain propositions whose meaning is a priori clear and applying appropriate verification procedures to determine the truth or falsity of these propositions. We call this whole process verification. Studying the revelation consists in confronting various portions of the text of revelation, focusing on certain statements whose truth is known a priori and then striving to determine various linear meanings of these statements. We will give the name explication to this process. Thus, for science, clarity of meaning is given a priori but truth is determined a posteriori. For revealed religion, truth is given a priori, but meaning is determined a posteriori.¹⁷

What is at the heart of his argument is that the two paradigms need not stay in adversarial positions, but can cooperate in a wholly complementary fashion. The process of “verification” can be applied in exploring, clarifying, refining, and improving our understanding of the divine revelation. Also, the creative word of the divine revelation may set the tone for the formulation of original perspectives, hypotheses, and theories. Such a continuous dialogue between the two complementary systems will assure an ever-improving experience when confronting the puzzling mysteries of both the observable and the non-observable.

NOTES

¹ Abdu'l-Bahá. *Paris Talks*. U.K. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972, 41

² *Bahá'í World Faith*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976, 240

³ Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990, 297-299

⁴ Hatcher, William S. *Minimalism*. Juxta Publishing Ltd. Hong Kong, 2002, 11

⁵ Ibid., 11

⁶ Ibid., 15

⁷ Ibid., 12

⁸ Ibid., 124

⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990, 162

¹⁰ Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*. George Ronald Publishers, 1978, 19

¹¹ Ibid., 12

¹² Ibid., 15

¹³ Ibid., 20

¹⁴ Ibid., 15

¹⁵ Hatcher, William S. *Minimalism*. Juxta Publishing Ltd. Hong Kong, 2002

¹⁶ Ibid., 99-107

¹⁷ Ibid., 115

Lawḥ-i-Maryam (Tablet to Maryam) Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh

A provisional translation and a Commentary

Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani Mazzoli

Revealed “soon after ... (Bahá'u'lláh's) return from Sulaymáníyyih” (Balyuzi 117),¹ this Tablet to Maryam, a few of whose passages are known to Western readers through their translation by Shoghi Effendi, the Hand of the Cause of God Hasan M. Balyuzi (1908-1980), and the British orientalist Edward G. Browne (1862-1926), is interesting not only as a source of historical information and of doctrinal and ethical hints, but also as an example of Bahá'u'lláh's refined literary style.

Historical information

The “*drop of the story*” (§ 32) which Bahá'u'lláh narrated in this Epistle refers to the wrongs He suffered immediately after the attempt on the life of the Shah, perpetrated on 15 August 1852, by two obscure Bábí youth, Šádiq-i-Tabrizí and Faṭḥu'lláh-i-Qumí, driven mad by the recent martyrdom of their beloved Master, The Báb (cf. GPB 62). Bahá'u'lláh indirectly assures His addressee that He had nothing to do with that attempt, saying that He was first imprisoned and then banished from His country only for His “*love for the Beloved*” and His “*willing submission to the Goal of all desire*” (§ 2), His steadfastness “*in the time of heavenly trials*” (§ 3), His generosity “*in the revelations of grace*” and His determination “*in restraining the enemies of the King of Oneness*” (§ 4). And thus His expulsion was an act of sheer tyranny on the part of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh (1835-1896), whom Bahá'u'lláh stigmatizes

here as the “*Tyrant of Persia (ẓálim-i-’ajam)*” (¶ 9).² Maryam (1826-1868), the recipient of the Tablet, certainly remembered in what condition He was during December 1852 when He was released from His four month imprisonment in the Sýyáh-Chál of Teheran, because she had assisted His consort, Ásíyih Kháum (1820c.-1886) in nursing Him for a whole month in the house of her husband, a gesture that won her His enduring gratitude.

Maryam was the daughter of Mírzá Karím Namadsáb and Malik Nisá’ Khánum, a sister of Mírzá ‘Abbas, better known as Mírzá Buzurg (d. 1839), Bahá’u’lláh’s father. Thus she was a cousin of Bahá’u’lláh (cf. “Genealogy” and Malik Khusraví 138-9). She was also His sister-in-law, both because she had married Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí, a half-brother of Bahá’u’lláh, and because her younger sister Fāṭimih Khánum (1828-1904) had become Bahá’u’lláh’s second wife in 1849 (cf. Mazandarání 5:511), after she had become the widow of the famous Shaykh Muḥammad-Taqí ‘Allámih Núrí (1787-1843-4; cf. Nabil 111). Fāṭimih Khánum is better known as Mahd-i-’Ulyá, the Most Exalted Cradle, and the mother of the treacherous Muḥammad-‘Alí (1852 c.-1937).

Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí was the son of the third wife of Mírzá Buzurg, Kulthúm Khánum-i-Núrí, none of whose four surviving children was a supporter of Bahá’u’lláh. He was a physician, and therefore he was known as “Ḥakím.” When Bahá’u’lláh was released from the Sýyáh-Chál, Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí hosted Him and His family in his house “close to the entrance of Masjid-i-Sháh” (ESW 170). He had moved into that house together with his mother, who had inherited it from her father, when, in the last years of his life Mírzá Buzurg was obliged to sell his complex of houses where he lived with his whole family in Tehran to pay the expenses for the divorce from his latest wife, princess Sháh Begum, Dīyá’u’s-Salṭanih (cf. Balyuzi 16-7). At the same time Bahá’u’lláh moved with a number of the family members to a rented house “near the gate of Shimírán” (ESW 170). In later years Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí kept his distance from Bahá’u’lláh, tried to conceal the fact of their relationship and opposed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s marriage to his niece Shahr-Banú,³ “because he was afraid that Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh and his ministers would frown on this marriage and take him to task” (Balyuzi 343-4). In the 1870s, although he was held in high esteem in Tehran (cf. Taherzadeh 3:218) and had never supported the new Faith, he “was arrested,

conducted to the capital and thrown into the Siyáh-Chál, where he remained for a month” (GPB 198). Bahá'u'lláh maintained communication with Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí, exhorted him to recognize the new Revelation and wrote a beautiful message seemingly referring to him in His “Lawḥ-i-Pisar-'Amm (Tablet to the Cousin),” written around 1870 and addressed to His faithful cousin Mírzá Ḥasan-i-Mázindarání.

Maryam, who had been converted by Bahá'u'lláh Himself in the early days of the Bábí Dispensation, always remained a staunch believer. She longed to meet her illustrious Cousin, but her family prevented her from realizing her longing. In her poems she sings of her love for the Blessed Beauty:

Were I to drink one or two cups of wine from Bahá's jar, I would continue roaring and blazing even after my extinction and death.⁴ (Dhuká'í Bayḍá'í 3:334-40)

She tells of the joy of His presence:

Should I put on the robe of nearness from the hands of the Friend, I would illumine the heaven and the earth even as the sun. (Dhuká'í Bayḍá'í 3:334-40)

Obliged as she was to stay far from Him, she used her poetry to give “vent to the gnawing grief she bore for her separation from Him” (Ishrāq-Khávárí, *Writings* 628). In this vein she wrote:

The bird of my love was entrapped in the snare of separation, and all the birds of the air and beasts of the field bewail my story. (Dhuká'í Bayḍá'í 3:334-40)

A whole poem is devoted to describe her sadness:

O joy for my rare, bewildered and bleeding heart!
Euphrates and Tigris stream forth from its sea.

Time was when Majnún's tale sounded peculiar to me;
now I have two hundred Laylís and Majnúns in my heart.

The Ravisher of my heart withdrew His tent from the town to the desert; now, even as Qays,⁵ I turn my face to the desert.

The doleful Zulaykhá⁶ might have a moon in captivity;
what I have in bondage is two hundred shining suns.

Should I tell what the Wheel of Destiny has allotted to my heart, I would burn up the nine heavens to naught.

For long years I prayerfully sat in the Ka'bih of the Beloved; now a journey of more than a hundred years divides me from Him.

O Thou Who dwellest beyond the oceans, see how the vessel of my heart is filled with Thee.

I am so grieved by the pain of remoteness and separation that I make saddened the hearts of angels and houris.

The page is finished and the secret of my heart remains untold; alas, what a blazing fire I hold burning in my hearth! (Dhuká'í Baydá'í 3:334-40)

Maryam passed away in Teheran in 1868, at 42 years of age, and is buried in the precincts of the Shrine of Sháh 'Abdu'l-'Aẓím, in the outskirts of the capital (cf. Ishrâq-Khávarí, *Writings* 628), where Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh is buried. Bahá'u'lláh revealed several Tablets addressed to her. In a very poetical letter, that begins with "*O Maryam, The Spirit of life ascended to the domain of placelessness (maryama, isiy-i-ján bi la makan),*"⁷ He consoles her grief at His remoteness: "*Shed thee not tears from thine eyes and be not of the anxious ones. Put on the robe of submission and quaff from the wine of acquiescence; and sell the entire world for a mere derham. Give thy heart to God's irrevocable decree and submit to that which He has ordained for thee*" (courtesy of Ms. Gloria Shahzadeh). The most celebrated of these Tablets is "Hurúfát-i-'Állín (The Exalted Letters),"⁸ a Tablet dedicated to the memory of Maryam's only brother, Mírzá Muḥammad-i-Vazír, "reputed to be the very first among the family of Bahá'u'lláh to have been converted by Him to the Bábí Faith in the province of Núr in 1844" (Taherzadeh 1:122). Bahá'u'lláh also revealed for her a "Ziyárát-Námiy-i-Maryam (Tablet of Visitation for Maryam)," in which He honored her with the title "*Crimson Leaf (al-Waraqatu'l-ḥamrá')*" (cf. Ishrâq-Khávarí, *Ganj* 205; Taherzadeh 1:13).

As to the title "leaf," in the days of the Bábí Dispensation the sister of Mullá Ḥusayn-i-Buṣhrú'í (1813-1849), the first disciple of the Báb, was known as the "Leaf of Paradise (*varaqatu'l-*

firdaws)” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials* 177, *Tadhkirat* 273; cf. Nabíl 383n1). Bahá’u’lláh bestowed the title “leaf (*varaqiḥ*)” to the women of His family. Specifically the title *Varaqiy-i-’Ulyá* was bestowed on both His consort, Ásíyyih *Khánum*, and His daughter Bahíyyih *Khánum* (1846-1932). Shoghi Effendi translated *Varaqiy-i-’Ulyá* as the “Most Exalted Leaf” (GPB 108) in the case of Navváb and as the “Greatest Holy Leaf” in the case of Bahíyyih *Khánum* (BA 25). “*She is a leaf that hath sprung from this preexistent Root,*” Bahá’u’lláh Himself wrote in a Tablet addressed to His daughter (qtd. in *Bahíyyih Khánum* 2). Occasionally He also bestowed this title upon other persons not related to Him. We have a few examples of Tablets addressed to women referred to as “O My leaf” by Bahá’u’lláh. Four such examples are in TB 251, 254 and 256 and in GWB # LXVIII (132). He Himself explains why He has bestowed this title on one of those pious women: “*We have designated thee ‘a leaf,’*” He writes, “*that thou mayest, like unto leaves, be stirred by the gentle wind of the Will of God – exalted be His glory – even as the leaves of the trees are stirred by onrushing winds. Yield thou thanks unto thy Lord by virtue of this brilliant utterance*” (TB 254, *Majmú’ih-i* 161). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred to the women of His household as “the holy leaves (*awráq al-muqaddasa*)” (WT 18, *Alváḥ* 19; TB 3:724), “the brilliant Leaves” (TB 2:291, 425, 3:652) and “the Illumined Leaves, the maid-servants of God in this most great prison” (TB 2:300). He clarified that “*submissiveness is the good quality of the maid-servants of God, and humility is the character of the God-fearing leaves who have sprung forth from the Tree of Mercifulness*” and invites a correspondent to strive “*to be characterized with these, that ... [she might] be an example for the maid-servants of the Merciful and a leader of the leaves who are moved by the winds of the love of God*” (TB 1:77).

After having addressed one of His correspondents as “*O leaf upon the Tree of Life (varaqiḥ-i-shaḥriy-i-ḥáyat),*” Abdu’l-Bahá explained that “*the Tree of Life ... is Bahá’u’lláh, and the daughters of the Kingdom are the leaves upon that blessed Tree*” (SWAB 57, *Muntakhabátí* 54). He wrote to other correspondents: “*I beg of Him to bestow upon thee a spiritual soul, and the life of the Kingdom, and to make thee a leaf verdant and flourishing on the Tree of Life (varaḥat-i-rayyánat-i-naḍrat-i-’alá shaḥarati’l-ḥáyát), that thou mayest serve the handmaids of the*

Merciful with spirituality and good cheer" (SWAB 164, *Muntakhabátí* 161; cf. TB 1:88); and also: "*Be rejoiced for God hath made thee a believing maid-servant in His Holy Threshold and a leaf of the leaves of the Tree of Life*" (TB 1:140). He described Fáṭimih Begum, the widow of Mírzá Muḥammad-Ḥasan (d. 1879), the King of Martyrs, as "*a holy leaf of the Tree of God (varaḳiy-i-muqaddasiy-i-iláḥi)*" (MF 173, *Tadhkirat* 234) and her mother, Khurshíd Begum, known as *Shams-i-Ḍuḥá*, the Morning Sun, as "*a leaf of Thy green Tree of Heaven (varaḳati shajaratí raḥmáníyatika al-khaḍráʾ)*" (MF 186, *Tadhkirat* 285). He called several Western ladies "*enlightened leaf*" (TB 1:158), "*brilliant leaf*" (TB 3:708), "*confident leaf*" (TB 3:510), "*assured leaf*" (TB 1:173, 214), "*blessed leaf*" (TB 3:625), "*spiritual leaf*" (TB 1:164, 172), "*spiritual leaf who art verdant and well-watered by the outpouring from the Kingdom of God*" (TB 3:671), "*green leaf of the Tree of Life*";⁹ "*wonderful leaf of the Tree of the Love of God*" (TB 1:185), "*leaf who art moved by the Breeze of God*" (TB 3:685); "*pure leaf of the Blessed Tree,*"¹⁰ "*leaf of the Tree of Life.*"¹¹ Sometimes He addressed collectively several women as "leaves": "*O ye leaves of the Paradise of El-Abhá*" (TB 1:27); "*O ye verdant and flourishing leaves of the Blessed Tree*" (TB 1:28, 29); "*O ye maid-servants of the Merciful! Leaves of the Tree of Life [to the ladies of the Kenosha assembly]*" (TB 1:143); "*O ye friends and daughters of the Kingdom and leaves of the Blessed Tree*" (TB 2:353); "*O ye maid-servants of God and leaves of the Tree of Eternal Life [to the California maid-servants]*" (TB 3:661); and He beseeched "*God to strengthen the assured leaves (or women) ... under all grades, aspects and circumstances*" (TB 1:228-9). And thus it seems He used this title for referring both to especially dedicated believers and to any lady who believed in Bahá'u'lláh.

In a Tablet whose original is in the Bahá'í National Archives of the United States, Abdu'l-Bahá ascribes the "conditions of unconscious obedience" to the "leaves":

The contingent beings are the branches of the tree of life while the Messenger of God is the root of that tree. The branches, leaves and fruit are dependent for their existence upon the root of the tree of life. This condition of unconscious obedience constitutes subjective faith. But the discerning faith that consists of true knowledge of God and the comprehension of

*divine words, of such faith there is very little in any age.
That is why His Holiness Christ said to His followers,
“Many are called but few are chosen.”* (BWF 364)

As to the adjective “crimson (*ḥamrá*’),” in Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings it is used in at least three allegorical and symbolic ways. First, it is associated with the Manifestation of God, sometimes depicted as the “Crimson Pillar (*rukni’l-ḥamrá*’)” (*Gems* 72, ¶105, “*Jawáhir*” 82; “Four Valleys” 58, “*Chihár*” 150; K1 70, *Kitáb-i-Mustaṭáb* 54). Bahá’u’lláh describes Himself as “*the Promised One ... seated upon the crimson cloud (ghamámi’l-ḥamrá*’) with the hosts of revelation on His right, and the angels of inspiration on His left” (“*Súriy-i-Vafá*” 182, in *Majmú’ihí* 113); as the “*crimson Tree (sidrata’l-ḥamrá*’)” (“*Lawḥ-i-Siyyid Mihdíy-i-Dahjí*” 196, in *Majmú’ihí* 121) and as the “*fruit-laden Tree, that hath sprung out of the Crimson Hill (arḍi kathíbi’l-ḥamrá*’)” (“*Súriy-i-Mulúk*” 186, *Súratu’l-Mulúk* 2).¹² He refers to His Revelation as a “Sinai” enveloped by a “*Crimson Light (núra’l-ḥamrá*’)” (“*Súriy-i-Bayán*” 282, in *Muntaḥabátí* 180).¹³ He also mentions the “*Crimson Ark (as-safínatu’l-ḥamrá*’)”¹⁴ to describe His Cause;¹⁵ the “*crimson Spot (al-buq’atu’l-mubáarakatu’l-ḥamrá*’)” (KA 57, ¶ 100; Epistle 84) to refer to the prison-city of ‘Akká;¹⁶ the “*Crimson Book (ṣaḥífiy-i-ḥamrá*’)”¹⁷ to allude to the Book of His Covenant; a “*fathomless crimson sea (al-baḥri’l-lujjyi’l-ḥamrá*’)” (*Gems* 60, ¶ 83; *Jawáhir* 69) and a “*crimson wine (khamri’l-ḥamrá*’)” (“*Súriy-i-Haykal*” 13, in *Áthár* 1:8) to denote His own words. Second, the word “crimson” implies tests and sacrifice, as for example in the Hidden Words:

Write all that We have revealed unto thee with the ink of light upon the tablet of thy spirit. Should this not be in thy power, then make thine ink of the essence of thy heart. If this thou canst not do, then write with that crimson ink (al-aḥmari) that hath been shed in My path. Sweeter indeed is this to Me than all else, that its light may endure for ever.” (HW Arabic # 71)

He also mentions “*the crimson land (arḍi’l-ḥamrá*’), above the horizon of tribulation” (“*Lawḥ-i-Fu’ád*” 177, in *Áthár* 1:167) and, describing the sufferings of the Báb, He writes: “*the joy of the world was changed into sorrow in the crimson land (arḍi’l-ḥamrá*’)” (*Gems* 22, ¶ 26, *Jawáhir* 26). Third, “crimson” is referred also to advanced stages of spiritual development. In this sense

Bahá'u'lláh describes the “city of knowledge (*madínatu'l-'ilm*)” as “a city whose foundations rest upon mountains of crimson-coloured ruby (*jabála'l-yáqúti'l-ḥamrat*)” (Gems 17, ¶ 20; *Jáváhir* 20) and mentions “the shore of the crimson seas (*baḥri'l-ḥamrá*)” as an “ethereal invisible station” attained by “the dwellers” of “the ark of eternity” (“Tablet of the Holy Mariner” 222, 221, “Lawḥ-i-Malláhu'l-Quds” 4:335).

At the end of the aforementioned Tablet Bahá'u'lláh mentions three other members of His family. First He refers to Jináb-i-Bábá (¶ 39). This title, that means “his eminence, the father,” was given by the Bábís to Mírzá Zaynu'l-'Ábidín, one of Bahá'u'lláh's four paternal uncles. He had been converted to the Bábí Faith by Bahá'u'lláh Himself in the early days of the Dispensation. He was very devoted to his Nephew. In December 1848 he accompanied Bahá'u'lláh, when He intended to reach Fort Ṭabarsí, tried to protect Him from the bastinado to which He was exposed in that circumstance in Ámul, and as a consequence was so severely beaten that he fainted (cf. Taherzadeh 3:68 and Ruhe 106). He was Bahá'u'lláh's guest in Baghdad before He retired to Kurdistan (cf. Balyuzi 112-3). Having seen part of Bahá'u'lláh's vicissitudes with his own eyes, He is called to bear witness to His words. Second He mentions Ḥusnī Khánum (¶ 39). A Ḥusníyyih is recorded in the “Genealogy of Bahá'u'lláh” (204/205) as one of Bahá'u'lláh's half-sisters and by Balyuzi as the daughter of Mírzá Buzurg's second concubine, a Georgian lady, Nabát Khánum (14), also called Kúchik (Ruhe 23). Finally He mentions Şughrá Khánum (¶ 39). She may be the daughter that Mírzá Buzurg's second wife, Khadíjih Khánum, the mother of Bahá'u'lláh, had from a previous marriage from which she had been widowed. Not much is known of these two half-sisters.

In this Tablet to Maryam, Bahá'u'lláh explains how “*after the fetters of ... [His] foes,*” He was “*afflicted with the perfidy of ... [His] friends*” (¶ 9). Elsewhere He specifies that His sufferings came mostly from the machinations of His half-brother Mírzá Yaḥyá (1831-1912), “*surreptitiously duped*” (ESW 168) by a certain Siyyid Muḥammad-i-Işfahání (d. 1872c.), described by Shoghi Effendi as “a native of Işfahán, notorious for his inordinate ambition, his blind obstinacy and uncontrollable jealousy” (GPB 112). So great was their disloyalty that at last He decided to “*go into retirement*” (¶ 10).¹⁸ He alludes to those

lonely days, spent in the wilderness, when His only companions were “*the birds of the air*” and “*the beasts of the field*” (¶ 11) and refers to His retirement in the mountains of Kurdistan as “*the mightiest testimony and the most perfect and conclusive evidence*” (¶ 16) of His station. He mentions the circumstances of His return to Baghdad, which He ascribes to “*God’s decree*” (¶ 19).¹⁹ He remembers the rebirth of the grievously declined Bábí community after His return as a “*new Resurrection*” (¶ 23); describes the “*envy of the foes*” (¶ 24), kindled by His courage in facing “*enemies of all sects and tribe*” (¶ 24); and refers to His willingness to face “*the people of sedition (yá’júj, literally the people of Gog)*”²⁰ (¶ 32) and their constant oppression. The same events are also narrated in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (250-2).

Doctrinal Aspects

The mystic oneness of the Manifestations of God

The core of the narration of this epistle is Bahá’u’lláh’s sufferings that are repeatedly described as the sufferings of other holy personages of sacred history, comprising previous Manifestations of God such as the Báb and Abraham. In the very beginning of His letter He writes: “*The wrongs which I suffer have blotted out the wrongs suffered by My First Name [the Báb] from the Tablet of creation*” (¶ 1), a sentence that underlines His oneness with the Báb. Later on He compares His sufferings to those of Imám Husayn, of Abraham and again of the Báb: “*This head at one time was raised on a spear-point, at another was delivered into the hands of Shimr,²¹ again I was cast into fire, and again I was suspended. And this is what the infidels have wrought against Us*” (¶ 37). In another passage He describes these holy personages as sharing His grief: “*Husayn wept for the wrongs I have suffered and the Friend (Abraham) cast himself into the fire for My grief*” (¶ 7). He writes moreover: “*Were thou to examine carefully the matter, the eyes of might are weeping behind the Tabernacle of sinlessness (surádiq-i-’iṣmat) and the people of glory are moaning in the precincts of loftiness*” (¶ 8). Since the attribute of sinlessness (’iṣmat) is typical of the Manifestations of God, this sentence may describe the Manifestations of God sharing Bahá’u’lláh’s grief in the spiritual worlds. And thus all these sentences may

be an allusion to the concept of the mystical oneness of the Manifestations of God.

This theme is recurrent in Bahá'u'lláh's writings. The historical figures with whom Bahá'u'lláh identifies Himself are many. Shoghi Effendi lists "Abraham, Moses, Joseph, John the Baptist, Jesus, Imám Ḥusayn, on whom Bahá'u'lláh has conferred an exceptionally exalted station (and) the Báb" (on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, qtd. in LG 475). In this vein Bahá'u'lláh writes in a prayer from Kurdistan:

At one time Thou didst deliver Me into the hands of Nimrod; at another Thou hast allowed Pharaoh's rod to persecute Me ... Again I was crucified for having unveiled to men's eyes the hidden gems of Thy glorious unity, for having revealed to them the wondrous signs of Thy sovereign and everlasting power ... In a later age, I was suspended, and My breast was made a target to the darts of the malicious cruelty of My foes. My limbs were riddled with bullets, and My body was torn asunder. ("Súriy-i-Damm [Tablet of the Blood]," in Gleanings 88-9, XXXIX; cf. Call 96-8)

He also writes: "O Jews! If ye be intent on crucifying once again Jesus, the Spirit of God, put Me to death, for He hath once more, in My person, been made manifest unto you" (GWB 100, XLVII); and again: "Noah's flood is but the measure of the tears I have shed, and Abraham's fire an ebullition of My soul. Jacob's grief is but a reflection of My sorrows, and Job's afflictions a fraction of My calamity" (Ibn-i-Fárid qtd. in Bahá'u'lláh, *Gems* 68, ¶ 95).

Imám Ḥusayn occupies a special position among the personages with whom Bahá'u'lláh identifies Himself. He writes:

That which hath befallen Us hath been witnessed before. Ours is not the first goblet dashed to the ground in the lands of Islám, nor is this the first time that such schemers have intrigued against the beloved of the Lord. The tribulations We have sustained are like unto the trials endured aforetime by Imám Ḥusayn. ("Súriy-i-Mulúk" 204)

and also:

And again Thou didst decree that I be beheaded by the sword of the infidel How bitter the humiliations heaped upon Me, in a subsequent age, on the plain of Karbilá! How lonely did I feel amidst Thy people! To what a state of helplessness I was reduced in that land! Unsatisfied with such indignities, My persecutors decapitated Me, and, carrying aloft My head from land to land paraded it before the gaze of the unbelieving multitude, and deposited it on the seats of the perverse and faithless. (Súriy-i-Damm, "Tablet of the Blood," 88-9)

Shoghi Effendi explains that "Imám Ḥusayn has, as attested by the Íqán, been endowed with special grace and power among the Imams, hence the mystical reference to Bahá'u'lláh as the return of Imám Ḥusayn, meaning the Revelation in Bahá'u'lláh of those attributes with which Imám Ḥusayn had been specifically endowed" (on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, qtd. in LG 496). He adds in another letter that this fact "does not make him [Imám Ḥusayn] a Prophet," Bahá'u'lláh simply "identifies His Spirit with these Holy Souls gone before, that does not, of course, make Him in anyway their reincarnation. Nor does it mean all of them were Prophets" (on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, LG 498). One of the meanings of this mystic oneness between the Blessed Beauty and Imám Ḥusayn is explained by Bahá'u'lláh Himself:

Behold then, O heedless ones, how brightly the fire of the love of God blazed aforetime in the heart of Ḥusayn ... Say: That same fire now blazeth in Mine own breast, and My wish is that this Ḥusayn may lay down His life in like manner, in the hope of attaining unto so august and sublime a station, that station wherein the servant dieth to himself and liveth in God, the Almighty, the Exalted, the Great. ("Súriy-i-Mulúk" 205)

One of the central aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's Manifestation is His readiness to give His life for humankind. He writes for instance:

From the very day Thou didst reveal Thyself unto me, I have accepted for myself every manner of tribulation. Every moment of my life my head crieth out to Thee and saith: "Would, O my Lord, that I could be raised on the spear-point in Thy path!" while my blood entreateth Thee saying: "Dye the earth with me, O my

God, for the sake of Thy love and Thy pleasure!" Thou knowest that I have, at no time, sought to guard my body against any affliction, nay rather I have continually anticipated the things Thou didst ordain for me in the Tablet of Thy decree. (PM 108-9, LXVI, 7)

The Sufferings of the Manifestation of God as Atonement

The Christian idea of the sufferings of the Manifestation of God as an atonement for the salvation of humankind is thus seemingly confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh: "*We, verily, have come for your sakes, and have borne the misfortunes of the world for your salvation,*" He writes in His "Lawḥ-i-Aqdas," a Tablet addressed to the Christians (10). The climax of Christ's sufferings was His Passion, characterized by the extreme physical pains caused by the horrible treatment He was exposed to in those forty hours. Bahá'u'lláh was also exposed to physical tortures, first when He was bastinadoed at Ámul in 1848 and then in the terrible months between 16 August and the half of December 1852, the days spent in the Síyáh-Chál under the weight of the notorious chain "Qará-Guhar" (ESW 77), weighing about 50 kilos. In later days He was exposed to imprisonment, isolation and deprivation, but most of all, like all the Manifestations of God, He had to face the stubbornness and iniquity of all the people who rejected His healing message, in the full awareness of the consequences their refusal would bring upon all humankind in centuries yet to come. All the horrors of the twentieth century, and others still unaccomplished, were very clear in His all-knowing and all-loving eyes. Is there any greater pain conceivable for a loving Father? However, Bahá'u'lláh is certainly not teaching a new dolorism, that is, salvation wrought by the sheer suffering of the Manifestation of God. In this Tablet to Maryam, as in many others, He describes His pains as an example for humankind to follow: acceptance of whatever may come from God's decree in an attitude of love of God, willing submission to His decree, resignation, steadfastness, detachment, fortitude, spirit of sacrifice, becoming nothing, even physically if required, in His holy Presence. Bahá'u'lláh wants Maryam, in this case a human prototype, to know about His grief, to share it with Him, and to moan for Him. And this

concept is perfectly in line with the paramount idea that salvation also comes through His teachings, “*the true remedy which will heal man from all sickness and will give him the health of the divine kingdom*” (SWAB 152), and through the power of the spirit of Faith that He inspires in whoever observes His “*commandments, for the love of ... [His] beauty*” (KA 22, ¶ 4).

The uniqueness of His Day and His Cause

Another doctrinal aspect of this Tablet is the uniqueness of His Day and His Cause, a Cause that “*is greater than the creation of the earth and of the heavens*” (¶ 15), and whose recognition Bahá'u'lláh identifies with “the Realm of eternal reunion (*bisát-i-uns*, literally carpet of reunion; cf. *Kitáb-i-Mustaṭáb* 197, KI 255)” (¶ 25), the highest goal of the Sufi path, achieved only by the greatest spiritual Masters. Therefore, Maryam is exhorted to “*appreciate the value of these days, for soon ... [she will] not see the celestial Youth in the pavilion of the created world*” and she will “*behold the signs of despondency in every thing,*” and “*the people biting their fingers' ends in their longing for this Youth, and ... how all of them will search after Him throughout the heavens and the earth and will not attain unto His presence*” (¶ 31). Words extolling the greatness of His Day and of His Cause recur frequently in His writings. For example He writes:

Had Muḥammad, the Apostle of God, attained this Day, He would have exclaimed: “I have truly recognized Thee, O Thou the Desire of the Divine Messengers!” Had Abraham attained it, He too, falling prostrate upon the ground, and in the utmost lowliness before the Lord thy God, would have cried: “Mine heart is filled with peace, O Thou Lord of all that is in heaven and on earth! I testify that Thou hast unveiled before mine eyes all the glory of Thy power and the full majesty of Thy law! I bear witness, moreover, that through Thy Revelation the hearts of the faithful are well assured and contented.” Had Moses Himself attained it, He, likewise, would have raised His voice saying: “All praise be to Thee for having lifted upon me the light of Thy countenance and enrolled me among them that have been privileged to behold Thy face!” (“Súriy-i-Ra’is” 148-9)

He describes His Day as “the Day of God.” He writes for example:

Great indeed is this Day! The allusions made to it in all the sacred Scriptures as the Day of God attest its greatness. The soul of every Prophet of God, of every Divine Messenger, hath thirsted for this wondrous Day. All the divers kindreds of the earth have, likewise, yearned to attain it. (“Súriy-i-Qamîş” 11)

And in the “Súriy-i-Haykal” He explains that “*the Day of God is none other but His own Self, Who hath appeared with the power of truth. This is the Day that shall not be followed by night, nor shall it be bounded by any praise, would that ye might understand!*” (29). In *Gems of Divine Mysteries* He describes His Day as “*the Day of Resurrection,*” when God “*promised all men that they shall attain unto His own presence*”:

Know then that the paradise that appeareth in the day of God surpasseth every other paradise and excelleth the realities of Heaven. For when God – blessed and glorified is He – sealed the station of prophethood in the person of Him Who was His Friend, His Chosen One, and His Treasure amongst His creatures, as hath been revealed from the Kingdom of glory: “but He is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets,” He promised all men that they shall attain unto His own presence in the Day of Resurrection. In this He meant to emphasize the greatness of the Revelation to come, as it hath indeed been manifested through the power of truth. And there is of a certainty no paradise greater than this, nor station higher, should ye reflect upon the verses of the Qur’án. Blessed be he who knoweth of a certainty that he shall attain unto the presence of God on that day when His Beauty shall be made manifest. (42-3, ¶ 58)

Passages such as these pose a challenge to His followers. Do they imply that this Manifestation is greater than any previous one? Do they justify an exclusivist interpretation?

In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* Bahá’u’lláh writes that “*it hath been demonstrated and definitely established, through clear evidences, that by ‘Resurrection’ is meant the rise of the Manifestation of God to proclaim His Cause, and by ‘attainment*

unto the divine Presence' is meant attainment unto the presence of His Beauty in the person of His Manifestation" (169) and explains that the Day of Resurrection is "*the Day of the rise of God Himself through His all-embracing Revelation*" (142). In the same book He suggests the idea that the term "Seal of the Prophet," which the Muslims interpret as the proof of the finality of Muḥammad's revelation, or any other attribute ascribed to their Prophet, can be ascribed to any other Manifestation of God, so that "*were they all to proclaim: I am the Seal of the Prophets, they verily utter but the truth, beyond the faintest shadow of doubt.*" (178)

In the light of these explanations, it seems that the emphasized greatness of this specific Day of God should be read in the context of progressive Revelation. In its essential reality each Day of God is the greatest, it is the day of the "attainment unto the divine Presence." In its phenomenal reality each Day of God is greater than the previous ones, because humankind has in the meantime advanced in its unending journey towards its Creator, and thus the Sun of Truth can reveal a fuller measure "of the potencies which the providence of the Almighty hath bestowed upon it" (Bahá'u'lláh, "Lawḥ-i-Ibráhím" 87). And since the hand of God will never be chained up (cf. *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 136), an increasingly fuller measure of the potencies of the Sun of Truth will be revealed in future Days of God. And, although in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words "*centuries, nay, countless ages, must pass away ere the Day-Star of Truth shineth again in its mid-summer splendor, or appeareth once more in the radiance of its vernal glory*" (qtd. in *World Order* 167), in a remote future day "the Day-Star of Truth" will shine again "in its mid-summer splendor."

Progressive Revelation

The concept of progressive revelation is another Bahá'í doctrine mentioned in this Tablet. This doctrine applies to two different contexts. On the one hand, it applies to "*the chain of successive Revelations that hath linked the Manifestation of Adam with that of the Báb*" described by Bahá'u'lláh in His "Lawḥ-i-Riḍá (Tablet of Radiant Acquiescence)" (74). On the other, it applies "*even within the ministry of each Prophet*" (The Universal House of Justice, "Introduction" 5). In line with this

principle Bahá'u'lláh did not disclose His station immediately after the first Intimation of His mission which He received in the Síyáh-Chál of Teheran in October 1852. And thus He wrote to His cousin Maryam: *“The celestial mysteries should not be unraveled and it is not pleasing that the heavenly secrets be divulged, that is the mysteries of the inner treasures of My soul, this I mean, and nothing else”* (¶ 13). In this Tablet, as in other Writings revealed before 21 April 1863, He simply alluded to this high Station with such words as

Therefore this evanescent Servant arose for the protection and the exaltation of the Cause of God, in such wise that one would say that a new Resurrection (qiyámat mujaddad^{an}) had come to pass, and the greatness of the Cause was manifested in every city, and witnessed in every land, so that all the authorities showed courtesy and good manners. (¶ 23)

Only in later years, He openly described His Revelation as “a new resurrection”: *“The heaven of religions is split and the moon cleft asunder and the peoples of the earth are brought together in a new resurrection (ḥashri badí’)*” (Bahá'u'lláh, TB 247-8, *Majmú'ih* 154), He wrote in a Tablet revealed after the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.²²

The importance of being aware of spiritual reality

Finally in this Tablet to Maryam Bahá'u'lláh also alludes to the importance of being aware of spiritual reality.

Yea, a man of insight (ṣāḥib-i-baṣar) is needed to behold the Most Great Beauty (manẓar-i-akbar, cf. “Tablet of Aḥmad” ¶ 2) and whosoever has no inner eye (baṣar) is deprived of perceiving the grace of his own beauty, how much more of the Sacred and Divine Beauty. (¶ 17)

The “inner eye (baṣar)” is described by Bahá'u'lláh as both a prerequisite for and a fruit of the recognition of His station. He writes in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* that

when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart ... the mystic Herald, bearing the joyful tidings of

the Spirit, [will] shine forth from the City of God resplendent as the morn ... [and will] confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye (chishm-i-jadíd), a new ear (gush-i-badí'), a new heart (qalb), and a new mind (fu'ád tázih). (Kitáb-i-Mustaţáb 151, Kitáb-i-Iqán 196)

These words can be easily read in their intellectual, “secular” I would say, meaning, that is, as describing the condition of any person who has understood the idea that Bahá'u'lláh is the Founder of the new World Order. But that may also have a “mystical” meaning, that is, they may describe a person who has bent her utmost effort to achieve that communion with the Soul of the Manifestation, that, in Shoghi Effendi's words “the Martyrs seemed to have” achieved “and that “brought them such ecstasy of joy that life became nothing” (on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in UD 406). The importance of achieving this spiritual awareness is emphasized in the following paragraph of our Tablet to Maryam:

Look how the sea is calm and peaceful in its bed in majestic dignity and composure. But by reason of the gales of the Will of the Eternal Beloved, unnumbered forms and shapes become visible on its surface and all these billows seem contrary and adverse. And thus all people busy themselves with the waves and are shut out as by a veil from the might of the Sea of Seas, from whose movement the signs of the Unconstrained become manifest. (¶ 28)

And thus His invitation to open our inner eye merges with the central teaching of His Faith, the theme of unity and oneness. In this case it is the highest Oneness we as human beings are able to understand. It is neither the oneness of humankind, nor the oneness of the Manifestations. It is nothing less than our inner awareness of the fact that

The existence of all shadows endures or moves away by reason of the existence of the sun. Should the sun withhold its grace for but a moment, everything would end in the Pavilion of nothingness. O the pity and the regret that people should busy themselves with

perishing appearances and be deprived of the Dayspring of eternal holiness. (¶ 30)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained the same concept thus: “*the phenomena of the universe find realization through the one power animating and dominating all things, and all things are but manifestations of its energy and bounty. The virtue of being and existence is through no other agency*” (PUP 285). Only this awareness will assist us to understand the deeper meaning of the paramount “*oneness of the world of humanity*” (PUP 285). This is the essential difference between a Bahá’í, who should be turned towards “*the Day Star of unfading glory*” (¶ 30) and the best modern secular intellectuals, who are interested in “*fleeting shadows*” (¶ 30). In other words, the latter are satisfied with their intellectual understanding of reality and firmly believe that this is all they can achieve. The former knows that her intellectual understanding of the oneness of humankind is just a stepping stone of a deeper awareness of reality. Any intellectual understanding, as important as it is as a stepping stone towards the new world order, is not of great use if it is not assisted by the power created by the spiritual awareness of this doctrine, that is, by the power of the “*Spirit of Faith (al-rúḥu’l-ímání)*” which is of the Kingdom (of God) (*al-malakúti*)” and which in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words,

consists of the all-comprehending Grace (al-fayḍu’l-shámil) and the perfect attainment (al-fawzu’l-kámil, literally perfect salvation, fruition, achievement) and the power of sanctity (al-quwwatu’l-qudsiyyat) and the divine effulgence (al-tajallíyu’l-raḥmání) from the Sun of Truth (shamsu’l-ḥaqíqat) on luminous light-seeking essences (al-ḥaqá’iqu’l-núráníyyatu’l-mustafíḍat) from the presence of the divine Unity (al-fardáníyyat). And by this Spirit is the life (ḥayát) of the spirit of man (al-rúḥu’l-insání), when it is fortified thereby, as Christ saith: “That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.” (TB 1:116; Makátib 1:129)

Without the assistance of this “Spirit of Faith,” anyone will remain “shut out as by a veil from the might of the Sea of Seas, from whose movement the signs of the Unconstrained become manifest” (¶ 26). This inner change, this “mystic, all-pervasive ... change, which we associate with the stage of maturity

inevitable in the life of the individual” is “indefinable” (WOB 163-4), and yet it is the practical result of straying “not the breadth of a hair from the ‘Law,’ for this is indeed the secret of the ‘Path’ and the fruit of the Tree of ‘Truth’” (SVFV 39), that is, is the result of service. In ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words:

Whensoever ye behold a person whose entire attention is directed toward the Cause of God; whose only aim is this, to make the Word of God to take effect; who, day and night, with pure intent, is rendering service to the Cause; from whose behaviour not the slightest trace of egotism or private motives is discerned – who, rather, wandereth distracted in the wilderness of the love of God, and drinketh only from the cup of the knowledge of God, and is utterly engrossed in spreading the sweet savours of God, and is enamoured of the holy verses of the Kingdom of God – know ye for a certainty that this individual will be supported and reinforced by heaven; that like unto the morning star, he will forever gleam brightly out of the skies of eternal grace. (SWAB 71-2)

Ethical Aspects

The ethical aspects of this Tablet are strictly connected with the spiritual aspect of the importance of the inner eye. The theomorphic character of Bahá’í ethics may draw us to understanding spirituality as mere orthopraxis, or a way of being and living that is consistent with the ethical teachings of the Faith. One of the reasons why Bahá’u’lláh narrates in this Tablet to Maryam, as in other Tablets, some of the episodes of His life may be that He wants His behavior to become an example for His followers. In this vein He writes:

My expulsion from My country was for no other reason except My love for the Beloved, and my removal from My land was for no other motive but My willing submission to the Goal of all desire. (¶ 2)

And with these words He seemingly recommends to accept whatever may come in the path of His service. He also writes:

In the summons of God's decree I was even as a kindled and shining lamp and in the time of heavenly trials I was as steadfast as a mountain. (§ 3)

And with these words He seems to recommend fortitude and steadfastness, as important virtues in our daily lives, if we want to comply with His words: “*Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty*” (KA 20, § 4). He writes moreover:

In the revelations of grace I was even as a raining cloud and in restraining the enemies of the King of Oneness as a blazing fire. (§ 4)

And we may understand from these words that we should be able to reflect in our daily lives both the divine attributes of beauty and of majesty. This advice should warn us against the Italian “Buon-ismo,” that is “an excessive and moralistic benevolent attitude in social relation ... an excessive, and sometimes mawkish or pathetic sentimentalism” (Battaglia 174), translated by Gigi Padovani, an Italian journalist of the well-known newspaper of Turin *La Stampa*, as “Good-ism”²³ and reminiscent of the “terminal niceness” sometimes ascribed to the Bahá’ís (cf. Martin). All these statements of ethical importance are poignantly summarized thus:

This Youth departed in such a state that My succor were the drops of My tears, My confidants the sighs of My heart, and My friend My pen, and My companion My Beauty, and my army My reliance, and my people (hizb) My trust. (§ 33)

Whatever may come, a lover of the Blessed Beauty should be ready to do whatever is required from him so that he may become fully aware of both “*the grace of his own beauty*” and “*the Sacred and Divine Beauty*” (§ 17).

Orthopraxis is not Tantamount to Spirituality

However, good ethical behavior does not seem to be the only prerequisite of spirituality. Spirituality or “spiritual progress (*taraqquy-i-rawḥánī*)” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Majmú’ih* 378; PUP 142) is “the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers” (on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, qtd. in *Bahá’í News* 102 [August 1936] 3). One of the “spiritual virtues and powers” that should be acquired is the capacity “*to*

perceive the Divine reality of things (ḥaqáyiḳ-i-áshyá, literally: the essential realities of all things) ... by the power of the Holy Spirit (az nafathát-i-rúḥu'l-qudus, literally: by the issuing forth of the Holy Spirit)" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Majmu'ih* 138; PT 83, 28.7). Therefore, although undoubtedly there is no spirituality without good ethical behavior, spirituality implies an awareness that goes beyond the best ethical behavior. 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly explains this concept: "*Although a person of good deeds is acceptable at the Threshold of the Almighty, yet it is first 'to know (dánistan), 'and then 'to do ('amal)*" (TB 3:549). In His explanations to the leading American Bahá'í teacher and philanthropist Laura Clifford-Barney (1879-1974) He shed a greater light on what He means:

...if to the knowledge of God ('irfán-i-iláhi) is joined the love of God, and attraction, ecstasy and goodwill, a righteous action is then perfect and complete. Otherwise, though a good action is praiseworthy, yet if it is not sustained by the knowledge of God, the love of God, and a sincere intention, it is imperfect. (SAQ 302, Mufávaḍát 211).

On the same issue He wrote:

If thou wishest the divine knowledge ('irfán-i-iláhi) and recognition (shinásá'í), purify thy heart from all beside God, be wholly attracted to the ideal, beloved One; search for and choose Him and apply thyself to rational and authoritative arguments. For arguments are a guide to the path and by this the heart will be turned unto the Sun of Truth. And when the heart is turned unto the Sun, then the eye will be opened and will recognize the Sun through the Sun itself. Then man will be in no need of arguments (or proofs), for the Sun is altogether independent, and absolute independence is in need of nothing, and proofs are one of the things of which absolute independence has no need. Be not like Thomas; be thou like Peter. I hope you will be healed physically, mentally and spiritually. (TB 1:168, Makatíb 8:119)

In this vein Bahá'u'lláh writes to Maryam:

Be a companion of the Self of the Merciful (nafs-i-raḥmān) and from the association with and resemblance to Satan enter beneath the shelter of the sanctity of the Bountiful, that perchance the hand of Divine grace may draw thee away from the paths of passion unto the heavens of everlasting might and glory. (¶ 29)

It is the path of the Four Valleys, a path that goes layer after layer from the outer expression of the individual to her inner core, her consciousness. First, from the outer layer of the self it goes to the inner core of “*the pleasing soul*” (50). Second, from the outer layer of a “*feeble brain*” it moves towards the core of a “*ready ... heart*” (52, 54). Third, from the outer layer of the “*loving seeker*” (54) it descends to the core of a “*mote of knowledge*” released from “*desire and the lowly clay*” (57). And finally, from the outer layer of a “*wayfarer*” in “*the snow-white path*” (58) it advances towards the core of “*full awareness, of utter self-effacement*” (60). Only in this condition the “*waves*” will stop shutting the seeker “*out as by a veil from the might of the Sea of Seas*” (¶ 28) and the seeker will enter “*the heavens of everlasting might and glory*” (¶ 29).

Literary aspects

Bahá'u'lláh wrote in the “Súriy-i-Haykal” that He has revealed His writings “*in nine different modes*” (¶ 51, in *Summons* 27) and the prominent Persian Bahá'í scholar, Fáḍil-i-Mázindarání (1880c.-1957), has tried to identify them (cf. Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 1:42). If we adopt his classification, our Tablet to Maryam may fall within the category of “*Tablets exhorting men to education, goodly character and divine virtues*” (Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 1:42). Specifically it can be considered as an example of the letters, *murásilát*, written by Bahá'u'lláh to the believers who were far from Him, such as the Tablet addressed to “*May handmaiden and My Leaf*” and published in its English translation in *Tablets* 251-3.

The style chosen by Bahá'u'lláh for this warm missive to His beloved cousin, certainly worrying for Him and for His difficulties, is *saj*. The rhymed and rhythmic prose known as *saj* has pre-Islamic origins. It was used by the ancient Arabic

káhin, soothsayers and sorcerers. Muḥammad ennobled it into the inimitable style of the Qur'án. The Italian orientalist Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988) remarks that "the same inimitability of the Qur'anic prose, sacred and unapproachable by definition, prevented this device from being generalized as the normal prose in the early days of Arabic literature" (in Pagliaro and Bausani 505). The *saj'* flourished only after the fourth century AH (tenth century AD). The main characters of Persian *saj'*, much loved by the greatest Persian prose-writers, are: rhyme, comprising the use of homomorphic words; rhythm, in the absence of any strict observance of the consistent rhythmic patterns typical of poetry; a clever utilization of the rhyming and rhythmic possibilities of the Persian nominal and verbal forms; a skillful suppression of the auxiliary verbs, which given their position at the end of the sentences may create according to Bausani "cloying repetitions" (in Pagliaro e Bausani 506); the use of double lines of parallel words, known as *hashv* or redundancy; the use of Arabic and/or scholarly words, locutions or even whole sentences; the use of quotations from the Qur'án, the Traditions, the Arabic and Persian poets; and the intention of "borrowing some elegance from every man of letters" (Browne, *Literary History* 88). The use of rhyme and rhythm typical of poetry and the simplicity of Persian syntax, that prefers paratactic constructions, contribute to create an exquisite and refined prose that has the same effects as poetry itself. Besides, the lack of the prosodic rules of poetry enables *saj'* writers to reproduce the same trenchant effects of poetry while benefiting from the flexibility of prose. The Persian literature is rich in wonderful examples of this literary form. However, in later centuries *saj'* has sometimes degenerated into "a certain monotony of topic, style, and treatment" as well as a "flabby, inflated, bombastic style" (Brown, *Literary History* 2:88, 89).

Bahá'u'lláh's Persian prose has been universally considered of the highest level and greatest elegance. His style, specifically that of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, has been eulogized by Shoghi Effendi as "at once original, chaste and vigorous, and remarkably lucid, both cogent in argument and matchless in its irresistible eloquence" (GPB 138). Browne stressed its "simplicity and directness" and "concise and strong" style and compared it to that of "the *Chahár Maqala*, composed some seven centuries

earlier..." (*Literary History* 2:89). Balyuzi qualified the Hidden Words' prose as "lucid, captivating" (159) and that of the Seven Valleys as "matchless in its beauty, simplicity and profundity" (161). Bausani (1921-1988) mentioned Bahá'u'lláh's "extremely beautiful traditional style," described it as "a Sa'dian style, both simple and elegant" and complained that it has "unfortunately" been "abandoned in favor of the more realistic and spoken, albeit sometimes also more complicated, tone of the contemporary prose" (in Pagliaro and Bausani 538).

The first formal element immediately perceived by any reader of this Tablet to Maryam is its poetical musicality. This element characterizes almost all Bahá'u'lláh's writings of the Baghdadi period and is a fundamental aspect, although in different modes, of His Tablets of later years. The musicality and the rhythmic assonance of the short successive sentences are reminiscent of the best examples of Persian rhymed or ornate prose, *nathr-i-árástih*, typical of the compositions of such ancient authors as the Sufi 'Abdu'lláh Anṣarí (1006-1088), who composed beautiful *Munájját*, Prayers, as Nidhámí-i-'Arúḍí (the Prosodist) of Samarqand (d. 1174), the author of *Chahár Maqála* (Four Discourses) to which Browne compared the prose of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (cf. *Literary History* 2:336) and as the Persian poet and prose writer Sa'dí (1184-1291), the author of the celebrated *Gulistán* and *Bústán*. They are also very close to the *Munsha'át*, prose compositions, of the more recent Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim, Qá'im Maqám (vicegerent) of Faráhán (1779-1835), whose "Sa'dian style" is characterized according to Bausani by

a great attention to the harmony of the periods; the use of short sentences; a great skill in placing the various components of a renewed sentence in a non-monotonous and varied correspondence; the abolition of excessive titles, complimentary remarks and litanies; a smaller number of continuous quotations of Arabic and Persian verses in the prosaic text; the elimination of undue metaphors and similitudes of bad taste; concision (in Pagliaro e Bausani 535).

These merits may also be ascribed to this Tablet to Maryam, that is moreover characterized by short sentences; the couplets of musically parallel sentences; the elimination, whenever it is

possible, of redundant auxiliary verbs; the use of scholarly words of great poetical and musical impact; the specific combination of scholarly words rich in mystical meanings and metaphorical and symbolic images, used to enhance the semantic effect of the words; and other formal constructions. All these features contribute to create a poetical structure characterized by an unceasing and pressing rhythmical cadence resulting from the exact and perfect disposition of each single word. The ensuing rhythmic harmony runs across the whole Tablet and enables each word to express the highest possible level of communication and incisiveness.

Some of the formal aspects of the Tablet will now be illustrated through an analysis of the first four sentences.

1. *ay maryam! maḏlúmiyyat-am maḏlúmiyyat-i-ism-i-avval-am rá az lawḥ-i-imkán maḥv nimúdiḥ*
2. *va az saḥáb-i-qaḏá amṭár-i-balá fí kulli ḥayn bar ín jamál-i-mubín báriḏiḥ. (§ 1)*

This first two sentences of the Tablet offer an example of *jinás*, rhythmic assonance, in the repetition of the word *maḏlúmiyyat* (wrongs), in the use of the two homomorphic words, *lawḥ* (Tabled) and *maḥv* (blotted out), and of the two rhyming locutions *saḥáb-i-qaḏá* (clouds of God's decree) and *amṭár-i-balá* (showers of affliction), that also are an example of *tashbíḥ*, poetical similitude. They also comprise two composed verbs *nimúdiḥ* (translated as "blotted out" together with *maḥv*) and *báriḏiḥ* (rained) that, beside rhyming with one another, are also deprived of their auxiliary verbs.

3. *ikh ráj az vaṭan-am sababí juz ḥubb-i-maḥbúb na-búdiḥ*
4. *va dúrí az dyár-am illatí juz riḏáy-i-maqṣúd. (§ 2)*

Sentences three and four are related to one another by the subtle thread of their rhythmic assonance and the redundant ornamental preciousities. They are rhymed through the rhyming and homophonic words, *vaṭan-am* (My country) and *dyár-am* (My land), *sababí* (reason) and *illatí* (motive), and locutions, *ḥubb-i-maḥbúb* (love for the beloved) and *riḏáy-i-maqṣúd* (willing submission to the Goal of all desire). The formal

symmetry of the two sentences enhances the efficacy of the expressed concepts, which seems to be the final intention of the Writer.

Other aspects of Arabic and Persian rhetoric, seemingly used by Bahá'u'lláh as a stylistic instrument at the service of His revealed Word, are such literary devices as *idáfiy-i-isti'arí*, metaphorical genitive; *isti'arih*, metaphor; trope, *tamthíl*, similitude, allegory, comprising the use of words describing lofty aspects of nature; *talmih*, allusion, comprising quotations from the Qur'án, the Traditions and poems; the use of *mutirádifát*, synonymy. He Himself explained that He used all these devices "out of deference to the wont of men and after the manner of the friends" (SVFV 26), so that His addressees may better understand His meanings.

As to *idáfiy-i-isti'arí*, metaphorical genitive, its use in Bahá'u'lláh's writings has been extensively commented upon by Bausani and Christopher Buck, an expert on Islamic and religious studies.²⁴ In his explanation of the locution *varqá'u'l-'irfán* (the nightingale of knowledge), Bausani observes that Western readers could be misled by the genitive used in its translation. He explains that "the preposition 'of,' which translates the Persian relational particle *-i*, is to be divested of the strictly and heavily possessive meaning typical of our languages" (*Saggi* 149). Therefore "*the nightingale of knowledge*" does not mean a nightingale whose *owner knowledge is*, 'just as the house of the father is owned by the father,' but it means a nightingale *which is* knowledge, i.e., a nightingale which "emblematically represents on the physical level what knowledge is on the metaphysical level" (*Saggi* 151-2). If we take the locution *lawḥ-i-imkán* (Tablet of Creation) (§ 1) as an example of metaphorical genitive in this Tablet, it may be interpreted as a Tablet which is, or stands for, the creation. Buck points out that the metaphorical genitive used by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* is "an important exegetical device." Bahá'u'lláh, he writes, "interprets a verse in a certain way, explicating a symbol by suggesting its referent. He then uses both symbol and referent together, bound grammatically by the Persian metaphorical genitive, to reinforce his exegesis." According to Buck, while Bahá'u'lláh repeatedly uses the metaphorical genitive, He accustoms His readers to relate the symbol and the

referent. Therefore “far from being merely ornate, his style renders the actual task of interpretation easier, as Bahá'u'lláh acclimates the reader to a metaphorical view of reality” (161).

As to *isti'árih*, metaphor, trope, Bahá'u'lláh uses the beautiful metaphor to “take the celestial pearls out of the shell of silence (*la 'Alíy-i-raḥmání rá az ṣadaf-i-ṣamt bírún avarad*)” (¶ 20). He also writes:

What does the shadow understand of the One Who casteth it? And what does a handful of clay comprehend of a subtle heart? (ẓill az muẓil chih idrāk namáyad? va muṣḥtí gill az laṭífiy-i-díl chih fahm kunad?) (¶ 18)

And again:

All the seas of the world and the rivers gushing therefrom flow forth from the eyes of this Youth, which have taken the semblance of a cloud and weep for their oppression (jamí'-i-miyáh-i-'álam va anhári-i-járíyy-i-án az chashm-i-ghulám ast kih bi-hi'at-i-ghamám zāhir shudih va bar maẓlúmiyyat-i-khud girístih). (¶ 35)

Among the metaphors may be listed also the words and locutions He uses to describe Himself. These words and locutions depict Him as the perfect Image of God, such as *nafs-i-raḥmán*, “*Self of the Merciful*” (¶ 29); as the embodiment of the divine majesty, such as *sulṭán-i-dín*, “*King of faith*” (¶ 26); as the Source of the Divine light, such as *shams-i-'izz-i-baqíyyih*, “*Day Star of unfading glory*” (cf. GWB 83:4, 124:3) (¶ 30), *maṭla'-i-quds-i-báqí*, “*Dayspring of eternal holiness*” (¶ 30), *nayir-i-áfáq*, “*Day-Star of the world*” (cf. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SWAB 112) (¶ 22); as the Bearer of God’s message, such as *qalam-i-qídam*, “*the Pen of the Ancient of Days*” (cf. GWB 60:3) (¶ 25); as the embodiment of God’s Beauty, *jamál-i-mubín*, “*veilless Beauty*” (cf. Persian Hidden Word # 9) (¶ 1), *manẓar-i-akbar*, “*Most Great Beauty*” (cf. “Tablet of Ahmad,” in BP 210, literally the most great countenance) (¶ 17), *jamál-i-quds-i-ma’naví*, “*the Sacred and Divine Beauty*” (¶ 17), *jamál-i-qídam*, “*Ancient Beauty*” (¶ 38); as the “*Object of the adoration of all mankind*” (Bahá'u'lláh, PM 48), such as *ghulám*, “*Youth*” (¶ 31, 33, 35), *ghulám-i-kan'ání*,

"*Canaanite Youth*," also an allusion to His mystical oneness with the beautiful Joseph) (¶ 19), *ghulám-i-rawḥání*, "*celestial Youth*" (¶ 31), and also *dúst*, "*the Friend*" (¶ 36), Who loves each human being for her "*own sake*" (Súriy-i-Haykal 199); and finally as the embodiment of perfect servitude to God and utter self-effacement, such as *‘abd*, "*Servant*" (¶ 24, 32), *bandiy-i-fání*, "*evanescent Servant*" (cf. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SWAB 7) (¶ 23), *bí-nishán*, "*Traceless One*" (cf. SVFV 7) (¶ 19), a servant who is therefore *mahjúr-i-miskín*, "*poor and forsaken*" (¶ 20).

As to *tamthíl*, similitude, allegory, comprising the use of words describing lofty aspects of nature, in this vein Bahá’u’lláh alludes to the steadfastness of "*a mountain (jibál)*" (¶ 3), the generosity of a "*raining cloud (abr-i-barándih)*" (¶ 4), the fierceness of a "*blazing fire (shu’liy-i-furúzandih)*" (¶ 4) and the swiftness of a "*flash (or lightening, barq)*" (¶ 12). He mentions "*the birds of the air (ṭuyúr-i-ša’rá)*" and "*the beasts of the field (vuḥúsh-i-ghazá)*" as His only companions (¶ 11) (cf. "Súriy-i-Haykal 96, 133), the "*oceans (al-abhár)*," the "*waves (al-ámwá)*," and the "*fruits (al-atḥmár)*" as having never borne what He bore (¶ 14). He also alludes to "*the immensity of the heavens (faḍáy-i-khush*, cf. GWB 327, CLII, 6) *of detachment*" (¶ 26).

As to *talmíḥ*, allusion, comprising quotations from the Qur’án, the Traditions and poems, He writes at least three Qur’án-like sentences: "*Verily He guideth all things into a straight path*" (cf. Qur’án 2:142, 213) (¶ 19); "*Nor is that for God any great matter*" (cf. Qur’án 14:20) (¶ 20); and "*soon you will bite your fingers’ ends*" (cf. Qur’án 3:115; KI 77) (¶ 31). The first two sentences are reminiscent of other Qur’anic verses often quoted by Bahá’u’lláh, such as "*all is from God*" (4:80; cf. Bahá’u’lláh, SVFV 18), "*There is no power or might but in God*" (18:39; cf. Bahá’u’lláh, KI 252), "*Nothing can befall us but what God hath destined for us*" (9:51; cf. Bahá’u’lláh, SVFV 35, reportedly quoted by Mullá Ḥusayn in Nabíl 337), God bestows "*His grace on such of His servants as He pleaseth*" (2:84; cf. Bahá’u’lláh, SVFV 41), "*Guided indeed is he whom God guideth; but for him whom He misleadeth, thou shalt by no means find a patron*" (18:16; cf. Bahá’u’lláh, "Four Valleys" 53) and "*He doeth what He willeth, ordaineth what He pleaseth*" (2:254, 5:1; cf. Bahá’u’lláh, GWB 116, LIX, 3). All these Qur’anic verses convey the idea of divine power and human powerlessness which is typical of the Bahá’í

writings. They also denote the concept that divine grace enables human beings to return to God, in spite of their great weakness. As to “*soon you will bite your fingers’ ends*” (cf. Qur’án 3:115; KI 77), it refers to a Qur’anic passage describing evil and deceitful people, who, the Qur’án writes, “when they meet you, they say, ‘We believe;’ but when they are apart, they bite their fingers’ ends at you, out of wrath” (3:15). Bahá’u’lláh seemingly uses this metaphor to describe regretting people. In the same category of *talmih*, allusion, may also fall the many allusions to personages of sacred history, such as Abraham, Joseph (Canaanite Youth, *ghulám-kan’ánî*), Imám Husayn, or *Shimr* and *yá’új* (the people of Gog), as well as to eschatological events, such as the Resurrection (*qiyámat*).

As to the use of *mutirádifát*, synonymy, Bahá’u’lláh describes Himself as “*alone and friendless (fardan va váhídan)*” (¶ 10), His departure from Baghdad as “*the mightiest testimony (hujjatî) and the most perfect and conclusive evidence (burhánî)*” (¶ 16). Moreover He mentions His “*companions (mu’ánis)*” and “*associates (mujalis)*” (¶ 11).

Lawh-i-Maryam’s poetics and inner rhythm enable the reader to fully perceive and share the painful events narrated by Bahá’u’lláh and reveal the special love He gracefully nourished for a woman who was at His service in the dawn of His Revelation.

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NOTES

- ¹ The "Leiden list" describes it as "164. Lawḥ-i Maryam Ak1 (Tablet to Maryam from 'Akka), 'Akka. Risaliḥ Ayam Ti's'ih 366-371; Rahiq-i Makhtum vol. 2 430-435" and distinguishes it from "165. Lawḥ-i Maryam B1 (Tablet to Maryam from Baghdad I). Taherzadeh, *Revelation* vol. 1 gives a short extract, cited from the Chosen Highway p. 45." The same source specifies: "There were several tablets known as Alvah-i Maryam. One of them in INBA [Iranian National Bahá'í Archives (Teheran archives)] 28. Part of one apparently sent from Baghdad is translated in Browne, 'Materials' p. 8. Addressee and circumstances see Taherzadeh, 'Revelation' vol. 1 13. One is discussed at [Ishraq-Khavari] Muhadirat 462-4. See also Ziyarat-Namih-i Maryam. One Lawḥ-i Maryam is included in BWC Best Known ["Bahá'í Bibliography. 1. Bahá'ulláh's Best-Known Works," in *Bahá'í World* 16:574-5]."
- ² Lane gives the following meaning of *'ajam*: "Foreigners, as meaning others than Arabs; often used as implying disparagement, like barbarians; and often especially meaning Persians" (s.v. *'jm*). In later years Bahá'u'lláh also stigmatized Násiri'd-Dín Sháh "as the 'Prince of Oppressors (*ra'ís aẓ-ẓalimín*)" (GPB 197, *Kitáb-i-Qarn* 397, cf. "Súratu'l-Amín").
- ³ She was a daughter of Mírzá Muḥammad-Ḥasan, son of Mírzá Buzurg and of his first wife Khán-Naniḥ, and thus an older half-brother of

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- Bahá'u'lláh, to whom he remained a loyal follower (cf. Balyuzi 13 and Taherzadeh 1:16).
- ⁴ All translations from the Persian or Italian are by the authors, unless otherwise specified.
 - ⁵ Qays Ibn al-Mulawwah is Laylí's lover, nicknamed Majnún, that is, possessed by a demon or *jinn* because he was driven mad by his love for Laylí.
 - ⁶ Zulaykhá is the name ascribed by Muslim tradition to Potiphar's wife who fell in love with Joseph.
 - ⁷ Cf. Bahá'u'lláh et al., *Bishárat* 37-8, provisionally translated by Ms. Gloria Shahzadeh.
 - ⁸ For the text cf. Ishráq-Khávarí (ed.), *Risáliy-i-Tasbíḥ* 242-70; Bahá'u'lláh et al., *Ad'iyyih* 217-8. For a discussion of its contents cf. Ishráq-Khávarí, "Writings" 628-30, Taherzadeh 1:122-5, Walbridge 267-8.
 - ⁹ "Recent Tablets from Abdul Bahá to American Baháís," in *Star of the West* 10:13 (4 November 1919):245; for the last part of this Tablet cf. *Selections* 311-2. This Tablet is addressed to "Mother Beecher," Ellen V. Tuller Beecher (1840-1932).
 - ¹⁰ "Recent Tablets from Abdul Bahá to American Baháís," in *Star of the West* 10:17 (19 January 1920):320, "Tablets received by American Baháís in 1919," in *Star of the West* 11:10 (September 1920):164. The first Tablet is addressed to Emily Olsen and Mabel Rice-Wray.
 - ¹¹ "Tablets received by American Baháís in 1919," in *Star of the West* 11:10 (8 September 1920):166. This Tablet was addressed to Jennie Anderson.
 - ¹² The metaphor of the "crimson tree" was also used by the Báb in His Qayyúmu'l-Asmá', Chapter XXVIII: "This Tree of Holiness, dyed crimson (*al-muḥammadat*) with the oil of servitude, hath verily sprung forth out of your own soil in the midst of the Burning Bush" (*Selections* 52, *Muntakhabát Áyát* 34).
 - ¹³ The metaphor of the "Crimson Light" as referring to Bahá'u'lláh was used by the Báb in His Qayyúmu'l-Asmá', Chapter XXVIII: "And when the appointed hour hath struck, do Thou, by the leave of God, the All-Wise, reveal from the heights of the Most Lofty and Mystic Mount a faint, an infinitesimal glimmer of Thy impenetrable Mystery, that they who have recognized the radiance of the Sinaic Splendour may faint away and die as they catch a lightning glimpse of the fierce and crimson Light (*núra'l-muḥaymanu'l-ḥamrá'*) that envelops Thy Revelation. And God is, in very truth, Thine unfailing Protector" (*Selections* 53, *Muntakhabát Áyát* 35). Cf. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 97.
 - ¹⁴ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 50, ¶ 84; *Epistle* 85, 88, 91; *Gleanings* 170, LXXXVI, 1, *Muntakhabátí* 113; "Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih" 71, *Majmú'ihí* 39; "Lawḥ-i-Dunyá" 97, *Majmú'ihí* 56; "Ishráqát" 120, 134, *Majmú'ihí* 69, 79.
 - ¹⁵ The metaphor of the "crimson ark" as Bahá'u'lláh's Cause was introduced by the Báb in His Qayyúmu'l-Asmá', Chapter LVII: "Indeed

God hath created everywhere around this Gate oceans of divine elixir, tinged crimson (*muḥammaran*) with the essence of existence and vitalized through the animating power of the desired fruit; and for them God hath provided Arks of ruby, tender, crimson-coloured (*sufunan min yáqútihi'l-raṭbatil-ḥamrá'*), wherein none shall sail but the people of Bahá, by the leave of God, the Most Exalted; and verily He is the All-Glorious, the All-Wise" (SWB 57-58, *Muntakhabát Áyát* 38). Cf. Shoghi Effendi, GPB 23. The "crimson ark" is called *fulki'l-ḥamrá'* in one of Bahá'u'lláh's prayers (PM 44, XXXIV, 3, *Munáját* 35).

- ¹⁶ In the English locution the "embellished, the luminous, the crimson City of God (*madíniy-i-muzayyaníy-i-munavvariyy-i-yáqútiyyíy-i-iláhi*)" (TB 260, *Majmú'ihí* 167) crimson translates *yáqútiyyih*, literally ruby red.
- ¹⁷ *Epistle* 24; "Lawḥ-i-Dunyá," in Tablets 89, 90, in *Majmú'ihí* 50, 51; "Kitáb-i-'Ahd," in *Tablets* 220, in *Majmú'ihí* 135; TB 242, *Majmú'ihí* 149.
- ¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh spent almost two years (10 April 1854-19 March 1855) in the Kurdistan mountains. First He lived in a remote place named Sar-Galú and later in the town of Sulaymanyah.
- ¹⁹ The person who discovered His whereabouts and begged Him to come back was Shaykh Sultán, the father-in-law of Bahá'u'lláh's faithful younger brother Mírzá Músá, Áqáy-i-Kalím (1818c.-1887).
- ²⁰ *Yá'júj* and *Má'júj* of the Qur'án (18:83-98; 21:96) correspond to the biblical Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38:2-3; Revelation 20:7-8). In the Qur'án they are described as tribes of wild and destructive nature. In the Traditions they are mentioned as a sign of the Day of Judgment, when they will destroy the civilizations of the world (Bukhari 4.55.565-7, 4.56.797; Muslim 41.6881, 41.6883, 41.6885, 41.6931, 41.6932, 41.7015, 41.7016).
- ²¹ Shimr, or Shamir, ibn Dhu'l-Jawshan (d.686) was the general of the army of the second Umayyad Caliph Yazíd I (645-683) that slew the Imám Ḥusayn at Karbilá on 10 October 680, cut off his head, raised it on a spear's point and brought it to Damascus to the Caliph. A prototype of cruelty and brutality, he is represented in the passion plays as dressed in chain-armor.
- ²² Cf. "Hence there was a second blast on the Trumpet, whereupon the Tongue of Grandeur uttered these blessed words: 'We have sounded the Trumpet for the second time.' Thus the whole world was quickened through the vitalizing breaths of divine revelation and inspiration" (Bahá'u'lláh, "Ishráqát" 131).
- ²³ Qtd. in Elisabetta Povoledo, "The politics of Nutella," *International Herald Tribune*, Friday, 10 December 2004.
- ²⁴ Cf. Bausani, "Some Aspects of the Bahá'í Expressive Style" 36-43, *Saggi* 147-62 and Buck, *Symbol and Secret*.

Lawḥ-i-Maryam (Tablet to Maryam)¹ Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh

A provisional translation

He is sorrowful in My sorrow

1. O Maryam! The wrongs which I suffer have blotted out the wrongs suffered by My First Name (the Báb) from the Tablet of creation² and the showers of affliction rained at all times upon this veiless Beauty from the clouds of God's decree.
2. My expulsion from My country was for no other reason except My love for the Beloved, and my removal from My land was for no other motive but My willing submission to the Goal of all desire (*riḍáy-i-maḡsúd*).
3. In the summons of God's decree I was even as a kindled and shining lamp and in the time of heavenly trials I was as steadfast (*thábit*)³ as a mountain.
4. In the revelations of grace I was even as a raining cloud and in restraining the enemies of the King of Oneness like a blazing fire.
5. The tokens of My might have become a cause of the envy of My enemies and the effulgences of My wisdom have turned into instruments of the perfidy of the malicious.
6. There was not a night during which I rested in a safe place, not a morning in which I lifted My head from My couch with ease.
7. I swear by the Beauty of God! Ḥusayn wept for the wrongs I have suffered and the Friend (Abraham) cast himself into the fire for My grief.
8. Were thou to examine carefully the matter, the eyes of might are weeping behind the Tabernacle of sinlessness and

the people of glory are moaning in the precincts of loftiness.
Unto this beareth witness the Tongue of truth and glory.

9. O Maryam! From the land of Ṭá (Teheran), after countless afflictions, We reached 'Iráq at the bidding of the Tyrant of Persia, where, after the fetters of Our foes, We were afflicted with the perfidy of Our friends. God knoweth what befell Me thereafter!⁴
10. At length I gave up My home and all therein, and renounced life and all that appertaineth unto it, and alone and friendless, chose to go into retirement.⁵
11. I roamed the wilderness of resignation, travelling in such wise that in My exile every eye wept sore over Me, and all created things shed tears of blood because of My anguish. The birds of the air were My companions and the beasts of the field My associates.⁶
12. I passed beyond this fleeting world even as the flash of the spirit, and for two years or rather less I shunned all beside God, and closed Mine eyes to all except Him, that haply the fire of hatred may die down and the heat of jealousy abate.⁷
13. O Maryam! The celestial mysteries should not be unraveled and it is not pleasing that the heavenly secrets be divulged, that is the mysteries of the inner treasures of My Soul, this I mean, and nothing else.
14. By the righteousness of God! I have borne what neither the oceans, nor the waves, nor the fruits, nor any created thing whether of the past or of the future, hath borne or will be capable of bearing.⁸
15. In that period of My exile none of My brothers or any other inquired about this Cause, or sought to understand it, although this Cause is greater than the creation of the earth and of the heavens.
16. I swear by God! One moment of My journey excelleth a service in both worlds (*'ibádati'l-ṭhaqalayn*, cf. "Tablet of Aḥmad," in *Bahá'í Prayers* 212), because that retirement was

the mightiest testimony and the most perfect and conclusive evidence.⁹

17. Yea, a man of insight (*ṣāḥib-i-baṣar*) is needed to behold the Most Great Beauty (*manẓar-i-akbar*, cf. "Tablet of Aḥmad" ¶ 2) and whosoever has no inner eye (*baṣar*) is deprived of perceiving the grace of his own beauty, how much more of the Sacred and Divine Beauty.
18. What does the shadow understand of the One Who casteth it? And what a handful of clay comprehend of a subtle heart?
19. At length God's decree (*qaḍāy-i-ilāhī*) reminded some of His spiritual servants of this Canaanite Youth, and with a handful of writings they began to make enquiry in all places and with all persons until they discovered a trace of that Traceless One in a mountain cave. Verily he guideth all things into a straight path (cf. Qur'án 2:142, 213).¹⁰
20. I swear by the Sun of Eternal Truth! This poor and forsaken One was so astonished and amazed by the presence of the newcomers, that this Pen is powerless to describe it, unless another sharp Pen (*qalam-i-ḥadīd*) steps forth from behind the Immortal Realm, and rends asunder the veils, and expounds its secrets with absolute sincerity and with the truth of certitude, and with a suitable language sets to explaining, and takes the celestial pearls out of the shell of silence. Nor is that for God any great matter (cf. Qur'án 14:20).
21. In brief, the seal of mystery was broken by the hand of the Unconstrained. Otherwise, none could understand but the men of understanding and the detached.
22. Then, the Day-Star of the World returned to 'Iráq. We found no more than a handful of souls, faint and dispirited, nay utterly lost and dead. The Cause of God had ceased to be on any one's lips, nor was any heart receptive to its message.¹¹
23. Therefore this evanescent Servant arose for the protection and the exaltation of the Cause of God, in such wise that one would say that a new Resurrection (*qiyámat mujaddad^{an}*) had come to pass, and the greatness of

the Cause was manifested in every city, and witnessed in every land, so that all the authorities showed courtesy and good manners.

24. O Maryam! That this Servant has arisen to face enemies of all sects and tribes kindled the envy of the foes, in a manner which no one can describe or imagine. Thus hath it been decreed by One Who is the Glorious, the Almighty.
25. O Maryam! The Pen of the Ancient of Days says that purifying the heart from everything but God is among the most important matters. Therefore, sanctify thy heart from all but the Friend, so that thou mayest be worthy of the Realm of eternal reunion (*bisât-i-uns*, cf. *Kitáb-i-Mustaṭāb* 197, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 255).
26. O Maryam! Move from the constraints of imitation towards the immensity of the heavens (*faḍáy-i-khush*, cf. GWB 327, CLII, 6) of detachment. Cleanse thine heart from the world and all that is therein, so that thou mayest attain unto the King of faith and mayest not be debarred from the Sanctuary of the Merciful. Tear asunder the veil of fancy through the power of sublime renunciation (*inqitá*, cf. KI 77) and enter into the holy seat of certitude.
27. O Maryam! A tree has a hundred thousand leaves and fruits, but they are all destroyed and wiped out by a breath of the autumnal and winter winds. Therefore do not distract thy gaze from the Root of the Divine Tree and from the Branch of the Tree of divine glory.
28. Look how the sea is calm and peaceful in its bed in majestic dignity and composure. But by reason of the gales of the Will of the Eternal Beloved, unnumbered forms and shapes become visible on its surface and all these billows seem contrary and adverse. And thus all people busy themselves with the waves and are shut out as by a veil from the might of the Sea of Seas, from whose movement the signs of the Unconstrained become manifest.
29. O Maryam! Be a companion of the Self of the Merciful (*nafs-i-raḥmán*) and from the association with and resemblance to Satan enter beneath the shelter of the sanctity of the Bountiful, that perchance the hand of

Divine grace may draw thee away from the paths of passion unto the heavens of everlasting might and glory.

30. O Maryam! Return from the fleeting shadows unto the Day Star of unfading glory. The existence of all shadows endures or moves away by reason of the existence of the sun. Should the sun withhold its grace for but a moment, everything would end in the pavilion of nothingness. O the pity and the regret that people should busy themselves with perishing appearances and be deprived of the Dayspring of eternal holiness.
31. O Maryam! Appreciate the value of these days, for soon thou wilt not see the celestial Youth in the pavilion of the created world and thou wilt behold the signs of despondency in every thing. Soon ye will bite your fingers' ends (cf. Qur'án 3:115; KI 77) in your regret and will not find the Youth, were ye to search the uttermost corners of the heaven and the earth. This is what hath descended from the Kingdom of supernal glory. Yea, soon thou wilt see the people biting their fingers' ends in their longing for this Youth, and wilt witness ~~see~~ how all of them will search after Him throughout the heavens and the earth and will not attain unto His presence.
32. Thus, the matter came to such a pass that this Servant decided to come forth among the people of sedition (*bayn-i-yá'júj*, literally among the people of Gog), separated from all else except a few women that had to stay with Him. And I brought none along with Me, not even the maids of My Consort, dependent on what God may desire.
33. This Youth departed in such a state that My succor were the drops of My tears, My confidants the sighs of My heart, and My friend My pen, and My companion My Beauty, and my army My reliance, and my people (*hizb*) My trust.
34. This is what I set forth unto you of the secrets of the Cause, so that thou mayest be of them who understand.
35. O Maryam! All the seas of the world and the rivers gushing therefrom flow forth from the eyes of this Youth, which have taken the semblance of a cloud and weep for their oppression.

36. In short, We offered this head and this soul in the path of the Friend for all eternity and whatever may happen We are pleased and thankful.
37. This head at one time was raised on a spear-point, at another was delivered into the hands of Shimr, again I was cast into fire, and again I was suspended. And this is what the infidels have wrought against Us.
38. And thus, O Maryam, We have marked this Tablet with a wondrous lamentation and a vernal weeping, and have dispatched it to thee, so that thou mayest moan with ease and share the grief of the Ancient Beauty.
39. Besides, inasmuch as his eminence Jináb-i-Bábá was present in the first year and is acquainted with certain facts, may God grant that the Holy Spirit bestow sincerity and certitude to his tongue and thou mayest be informed of a drop of the story of this Youth. We remember Husnî Khánum and Şughrá Khánum.

NOTES

- ¹ Ishrâq-Khâvarî, *Risâliy-i-Ayyâm-i-Tis'ih* 366-71; cf. *Raḥîq-i Makhtûm* 2:430-435.
- ² From "O Maryam..." to "...Tablet of creation," GPB 118, VII, 31.
- ³ Ishrâq-Khâvarî, *Risâliy-i-Ayyâm-i-Tis 'ih* 367 gives *nâbît* literally "growing, germinating" (Steingass 1366). It should be a typo for *thâbît*. Cf. Ishrâq-Khâvarî (ed.), *Mâ'idîy-i-Âsmânî* 4:330.
- ⁴ From "O Maryam..." to "...befell Me thereafter," GPB 118, VII, 31.
- ⁵ From "At length..." to "...into retirement," translated by Balyuzi, cf. *King of Glory* 117.
- ⁶ From "I roamed..." to "...My associates," GPB 120, VII, 35.
- ⁷ From "I passed beyond..." to "...flash of the spirit," cf. Browne's translation in *Materials* 5; from "for two years ..." to "...of jealousy abate," translated by Shoghi Effendi, cf. *God Passes By* 119, VII, 31.
- ⁸ Translated by Balyuzi, cf. *King of Glory* 117, cf. GPB 118, VII, 31.
- ⁹ "the mightiest testimony and the most perfect and conclusive evidence," translated by Shoghi Effendi, cf. *God Passes By* 124, VII, 42.
- ¹⁰ From "At length..." to "...straight path," cf. Browne's translation in *Materials* 5.
- ¹¹ From "We found no more than..." to "...receptive to its message," GPB 125, VII, 44; *Kitáb-i-Qam-i-Badí'* (*God Passes By*) 262.

The Emergence of World Civilization

An Exposition on Excerpts from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

James B. Thomas

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to extract the essence of Shoghi Effendi's ideas presented in that chapter of his seminal work — *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* — entitled "The Unfoldment of World Civilization." The book deals with the far and immediate future of global civilization that is particularly pertinent for the twenty first century and it is the last chapter that is so rich in possibilities. If ever a literary work were to be identified as a monument to its author this one would certainly suffice for the Beloved Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi.

In setting the stage for the study of a future Bahá'í civilization, the Guardian first drew out the contrast in the rise of the Administrative Order of the Faith of God and the disintegration of society as evidenced during the Great Depression of the 1930s. But it was not the Depression alone nor the events leading up to it before the crash of 1929 that caused the disintegration noted by Shoghi Effendi. They were rather symptomatic of much deeper cumulative breakdowns of social institutions harking back to the first warnings by Bahá'u'lláh in the previous century. The Guardian pointed out the mysterious manner in which the signs were heralding the birth of that World Order that would signalize the Golden Age of the Cause of God. He added that all fair-minded observers could not fail to discern them nor should one be misled by the slowness of the unfoldment of the civilization that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh were laboring to establish. And one

should not be deluded by the apparent well being resulting exclusively in material gain. He then referred to a well known quote by Bahá'u'lláh: *"Soon, will the present day Order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead... The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this Most Great, this new World Order."* [WOB 161-162]

One of the fundamental principles of The New World Order espoused by Bahá'u'lláh involves the unification of the entire human race. He was quoted in reference to the Lesser Peace (political peace) with warnings to the rulers of the world after they refused "The Most Great Peace" as embodied in the famous letters to the kings and religious leaders of the world:

Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions... Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice. [GWB 253]

The Most Great Peace based on the divinely appointed ordinances that are implicit in the World Order that stands associated with the Holy Name of Bahá'u'lláh was brought into focus. The Guardian asserted *"the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes and nations – can rest on no other basis, and can be preserved through no other agency..."* [WOB 162] And from Bahá'u'lláh: *"It beseemeth all men in this Day to take firm hold on the Most Great Name, and to establish the unity of all mankind. There is no place to flee to, no refuge that any one can seek, except Him."* [GWB 202]

Humanity's Coming of Age

Shoghi Effendi inferred that the advent of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh should be regarded as signaling the coming of age of the human race. That its mission is the "organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations." That it should not be viewed as just another spiritual revival, or only a further stage in progressive Revelation. It should be viewed as

“marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man’s collective life on this planet.” He took this startling concept a step further:

The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture — all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Era — should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop. [WOB 162]

The Guardian then compared “That mystic, all-pervasive, yet indefinable change, which we associate with the stage of maturity inevitable in the life of the individual...” to a similar stage that “must sooner or later be attained in the collective life of mankind, producing an even more striking phenomenon in world relations, and endowing the whole human race with such potentialities of well-being as shall provide, throughout the succeeding ages, the chief incentive required for the eventual fulfillment of its high destiny.” [WOB 164]

The Process of Integration

This period in which we live was “likened to the culminating stage in the political evolution of the great American Republic the stage which marked the emergence of a unified community of federated states....” Reference was made to the stirring of a new national consciousness coupled with the birth of an infinitely richer civilization than its component parts could separately achieve. This may be viewed as the coming of age of the American people. Similarly, the stage at which mankind has now arrived is ripe for the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh which “has been endowed with such potentialities as are commensurate with the maturity of the human race — the crowning and most momentous stage in its evolution from infancy to manhood.” [WOB 166]

It was explained that the founders of past Religions have shed the splendors of one common Revelation at various stages

that marked the advance of mankind toward maturity. As such, they may be regarded as preliminary Manifestations paving the way for that Day when the whole world will have born its destined fruit. However, the underlying expressions of Bahá'u'lláh that established absolute oneness of all the Prophets should never be obscured. The Guardian further stated:

Any variations in the splendor which each of these Manifestations of the Light of God has shed upon the world should be ascribed not to any inherent superiority involved in the essential character of any one of them, but rather to the progressive capacity, the ever-increasing spiritual receptiveness, which mankind, in its progress towards maturity, has invariably manifested. [WOB 166]

The Final Consummation

The progression of mankind current in this day was characterized, as a “stupendous evolution in the collective life of the whole human race” and that those who associate this with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh are the only ones who can grasp the significance of His words.

This Day, however, is unique, and is to be distinguished from those that have preceded it. The designation ‘Seal of the Prophets’ fully revealeth its high station. The Prophetic Cycle hath verily ended. The Eternal Truth is now come. He hath lifted up the ensign of power, and is now shedding upon the world the unclouded splendor of His Revelation. In this most mighty Revelation, all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation. That which hath been made manifest in this preeminent, this most exalted Revelation, standeth unparalleled in the annals of the past, nor will future ages witness its like. [WOB 167]

The following confirmative words reiterated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s pronouncement were quoted: “*Centuries*,” He affirms in one of His Tablets, “*nay, countless ages, must pass away ere the Day-*

Star of Truth shineth again in its mid-summer splendor, or appeareth once more in the radiance of its vernal glory...." [WOB 167]

Pangs of Death and Birth

Up to this point the Guardian has set the stage for a deeper understanding of what bodes for the future in the life of humankind. Beginning fifteen short years after the passing of his beloved grandfather 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi brought to bear, the culmination of spiritually disintegrating conditions of the world in the nineteen thirties. Concurrently he reflected upon the startling fulfillment of prophetic utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá with expectations of much more to follow especially regarding the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh and the Golden Age of the Most Great Peace. He explained that the World Order that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh fosters was yet to be born, that the creative energies released by the Heroic Age of the Faith were not yet crystallized into a world society that would mirror forth the brightness of His glory. Although the framework of His Administrative Order was erected, and the Formative Age had begun, the promised Kingdom remained "uninaugurated."

Reference was made to "the generation of the half-light" destined to endure the dark forces that would spawn a flood of agonizing afflictions before the dawn of the Golden Age of the Faith. The ensuing seven decades since the writing of these letters have certainly confirmed those dire warnings, and there is yet more to come before this travailing age "can yield its fairest fruit." He referred to that time as an incubation period for the World Commonwealth envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh. He further said "We stand on the threshold of an age whose convulsions proclaim alike the death-pangs of the old order and the birth-pangs of the new." [WOB 169]

Universal Fermentation

The Guardian summarized the reality of a process that the bulk of mankind was apparently not fully aware that he called Universal Fermentation. This was defined as a worldwide phenomenon that continues to this day involving religious, social, economic and political evidences in anticipation of the

Day when unity of the human race will be established. He further asserted that we were in a twofold process, each of which would “bring to a climax the forces that were transforming the face of our planet. The first was and is essentially an integrating process, while the second was and is fundamentally disruptive.” One is an unfolding System that will serve as a pattern for a future world polity toward which a disordered world is advancing. The other is a disintegrating influence that tends to tear down the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity’s progress towards its destined goal.

A titanic, a spiritual struggle, unparalleled in its magnitude yet unspeakably glorious in its ultimate consequences, is being waged as a result of these opposing tendencies, in this age of transition through which the organized community of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh and mankind as a whole are passing. [WOB 170]

The Guardian explained that the constructive process was associated with the nascent Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, that it was the harbinger of a New World Order whereas the destructive forces were characterized by a civilization that was falling into chaos and decline.

This Age of Transition

Our focus was then drawn to the outstanding events that were transpiring in that formative period referred to as “this Age of Transition” and the tendencies that characterized it. Its tribulations were the precursors of “that Era of blissful felicity” which would “incarnate God’s ultimate purpose for all mankind.” It was inferred that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing in 1921 ushered in its opening phase.

Shoghi Effendi identified two momentous events that just preceded this opening phase in which we are still living. They were precipitated by World War I with the fall of the German Empire and the extinction of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The war “signalized the opening of the Age of Frustration destined to precede the establishment of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.” At the time of this writing over seventy years ago, the Guardian referred to these events as being “the

earliest occurrences of that turbulent Age, into the outer fringes of whose darkest phase we are now beginning to enter.” [WOB 170] The twentieth century has certainly confirmed the truth of these remarks.

Germany had previously conquered Napoleon III and reveled in glory that would be short lived even after the warnings by Bahá'u'lláh: *“O King of Berlin!... Take heed lest pride debar thee from recognizing the Day-Spring of Divine Revelation, lest earthly desires shut thee out, as by a veil, from the Lord of the Throne above and of the earth below. Thus counseleth thee the Pen of the Most High...”* [KA 51] And again: *“O banks of the Rhine! We have seen you covered with gore, inasmuch as the swords of retribution were drawn against you; and so you shall have another turn. And We hear the lamentations of Berlin, though she be today in conspicuous glory.”* [KA 53]

Germany was utterly vanquished only to rise again and plunge Europe into that darkest phase of a turbulent age spoken of by Shoghi Effendi, a phase of unparalleled horror that reached its zenith in World War II.

Collapse of Islám

Within the context of sweeping changes in the politico-religious life of man in the early twentieth century there was a central theme of profound import regarding the long standing world of Islam and its collapse. The Guardian first pointed out how the power of the Shí'ih hierarchy crumbled in the wake of Muslim fanaticism after centuries of impregnable power. Secularization eroded the very foundation of Islámic orthodoxy. And Shí'ih Islam in particular paid the price for its intense hostility toward the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. It “had been degraded and demoralized, and was being condemned to hopeless obscurity and ultimate extinction.” Bahá'u'lláh encapsulated the process:

Behold, O Muḥammad, how the sayings and doings of the followers of Shí'ih Islám have dulled the joy and fervor of its early days, and tarnished the pristine brilliancy of its light. In its primitive days, whilst they still adhered to the precepts associated with the name of their Prophet, the Lord of mankind, their career was

marked by an unbroken chain of victories and triumphs. As they gradually strayed from the path of their Ideal Leader and Master, as they turned away from the light of God and corrupted the principle of His Divine unity, and as they increasingly centered their attention upon them who were only the revealers of the potency of His Word, their power was turned into weakness, their glory into shame, their courage into fear. Thou dost witness to what a pass they have come. [GWB 69]

With the downfall of the Qájár Dynasty and its unrelenting harassment of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh there followed the humiliation of the Shi'ih ecclesiastical leaders. The atrocious acts perpetrated on the Bábís, the martyrdom of the Báb, the banishment of Bahá'u'lláh to the most desolate of cities and the numerous cruel sentences passed on to His innocent followers "stand out as among the blackest acts for which posterity will hold this blood-stained dynasty responsible" declared Shoghi Effendi. "One more barrier that had sought to obstruct the forward march of the Faith was now removed." [WOB 173]

Bahá'u'lláh had been exiled from the land of His birth and through it all bore the brunt of increasing calamities placed on Him and the followers of the Báb when placed under the jurisdiction of the Sultán of Turkey.

The orders which these foes issued, the banishments they decreed, the indignities they inflicted, the plans they devised, the investigations they conducted, the threats they pronounced, the atrocities they were prepared to commit, the intrigues and baseness to which they, their ministers, their governors, and military chieftains had stooped, constitute a record which can hardly find a parallel in the history of any revealed religion. The mere recital of the most salient features of that sinister theme would suffice to fill a volume. [WOB 174]

The Bábí Cause of which Bahá'u'lláh was its leading proponent triumphed in spite of the endless persecution by the Iranian leaders both secular and religious. Add the cruel

machinations of the arrogant Turkish despot 'Abdu'l-'Azíz and the seditious actions of Bahá'u'lláh's own kindred and one can only marvel that the survival of the Cause is "one of the most intriguing and mysterious episodes of contemporary history." Through it all, the eroding, insidious forces of decay resulted in catastrophic convulsions within the Ottoman Empire culminating with the murder of the Turkish Sultán in 1876. Precipitating the overthrow of his successor, 'Abdu'l-Hamíd II in 1909 were the Russo-Turkish conflict, wars of liberation and the Young Turk movement in 1908 that liberated political and religious prisoners. For the first time since the tender age of eight and a half years, 'Abdu'l-Bahá breathed freedom.

With startling swiftness these events were followed with the calamitous Balkin wars and the liberation of Palestine including 'Akká and Haifa. Further dismemberment was decreed by the Treaty of Versailles and the Sultanate was abolished. The House of Uthman fell and the Caliphate was extinguished. The State Religion ceased to be and the Sharí'ah Law was annulled. About this, with respect to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, the Guardian stated:

The overthrow of the Sultanate and the Caliphate, the twin pillars of Sunnı́ Islam, can be regarded in no other light except as the inevitable consequence of the fierce, the sustained and deliberate persecution which the monarchs of the tottering House of 'Uthman, the recognized successors of the Prophet Muḥammad, had launched against it. [WOB 173]

Shoghi Effendi compared the evidence of divine visitation that fell on the persecutors of Jesus Christ with those of Bahá'u'lláh during the first century of their respective dispensations. The Roman Emperor besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the rebuilt temple. He desecrated the Holy of Holies and removed its treasures to Rome. He further delivered the penultimate insult by establishing a pagan colony on mount Zion after massacring the Jews and dispersing the survivors. Christ had warned:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth

gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!... (Luke 13:34) And when He was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. (Luke 19:41-44)

In a similar context, Bahá'u'lláh was quoted regarding Constantinople:

O Spot that art situate on the shores of the two seas! The throne of tyranny hath, verily, been established upon thee, and the flame of hatred hath been kindled within thy bosom, in such wise that the Concourse on high and they who circle around the Exalted Throne have wailed and lamented. We behold in thee the foolish ruling over the wise, and darkness vaunting itself against the light. Thou art indeed filled with manifest pride. Hath thine outward splendor made thee vain-glorious? By Him Who is the Lord of mankind! It shall soon perish, and thy daughters and thy widows and all the kindreds that dwell within thee shall lament. Thus informeth thee the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. [KA 52-53]

It was to the cruel Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz that Bahá'u'lláh wrote one of His famous letters to the leaders of the world. In it He admonished the brutal monarch, in clear and certain terms that he should set before him God's unerring balance and to weigh his actions every day and every moment. He warned: "*Bring thyself to account ere thou art summoned to a reckoning, on the day when no man shall have strength to stand for fear of God, the day when the hearts of the heedless ones shall be made to tremble.*" [GWB 235] To the ministers of the Turkish State He commanded "*to keep the precepts of God, and to forsake your own laws and regulations, and to be of them*

who are guided aright... Ye shall, ere long, discover the consequences of that which ye shall have done in this vain life, and shall be repaid for them." [GWB 122-123] Bahá'u'lláh compared them to the many leaders of earlier ages who, while superior in rank, had committed the same things they were committing only to be consigned to inevitable doom. To the inhabitants of Constantinople He warned "*God assuredly dominateth the lives of them that wronged Us, and is well aware of their doings. He will, most certainly, lay hold on them for their sins....*" [GWB 129]

Thirteen hundred years would elapse after the passing of Muḥammad before the illegitimacy of the Caliphate would be publicly demonstrated. The Guardian quoted an astonishing Muslim tradition that corroborated the theme of the fall of Islam:

In the latter days a grievous calamity shall befall My people at the hands of their ruler, a calamity such as no man ever heard to surpass it. So fierce will it be that none can find a shelter. God will then send down One of My descendants, One sprung from My family, Who will fill the earth with equity and justice, even as it hath been filled with injustice and tyranny... A day shall be witnessed by My people whereon there will have remained of Islam naught but a name, and of the Qur'án naught but a mere appearance. The doctors of that age shall be the most evil the world hath ever seen. Mischief hath proceeded from them, and on them will it recoil... At that hour His malediction shall descend upon you, and your curse shall afflict you, and your religion shall remain an empty word on your tongues. And when these signs appear amongst you, anticipate the day when the red-hot wind will have swept over you, or the day when ye will have been disfigured, or when stones will have rained upon you. [WOB 179]

Bahá'u'lláh addressed the people of the Qur'án and affirmed: "*O concourse of Muslim divines! By your deeds the exalted station of the people hath been abased, the standard of Islam hath been reversed, and its mighty throne hath fallen.*" [WOB 179]

Deterioration of Christian Institutions

Shoghi Effendi put the question: Could the deterioration that attacked the fabric of the Religion of Muḥammad exert its baneful influence on the institutions associated with the Faith of Jesus Christ? He maintained that no unbiased observer could fail to admit that the forces of irreligion and of a purely materialistic philosophy were spreading and were beginning to invade some of the most powerful Christian institutions of the western world. He affirmed that some of these institutions were already aware of the pervasive influence of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. He inferred that they would regard with deepening dismay the rise of His New World Order, as their inherent strength would increasingly deteriorate. He noted Bahá'u'lláh's comment made a half-century earlier:

The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it? [GWB 199]

Secularism, the menace that attacked Islam and every other established religion had laid hold on the communities of Christianity to such a degree that the Guardian considered the time in which we were moving as one of the most critical in the history of Christianity. Many Christian missionaries proclaimed: "A wave of materialism is sweeping round the world." Their reports reflected "the drive and pressure of modern industrialism, which are penetrating even the forests of Central Africa and the plains of Central Asia, make men everywhere dependent on, and preoccupied with, material things." [WOB 181] All this was compounded by the rise of communism characterized as 'religious irreligion' that had its own passionate sense of mission. Though the Soviet Union collapsed a half-century later, there still remains to this day one fifth of the world under the communist yoke of atheism. It was further stated that this form of attack was something new in history with respect to religion in general. And equally hostile to Christianity was nationalism, especially militant

nationalism. Yet unlike communism, nationalism is often bound up with one religion or another. On the other hand, the policies following World War I exerted a pernicious effect on the institutions and beliefs connected with Christianity, one of the most widely spread and best-organized religious systems of the world. Intolerant and militant nationalism attributed to the philosophy of Georg Friedrich Hegel deified the state, inculcated a war-spirit and incited racial animosity according to Shoghi Effendi. It also marked a weakening of the Church and diminished its spiritual influence:

It was being stabbed by an alien and militant atheism from without, and by the preachers of a heretical doctrine from within. Both of these forces, each operating in its own sphere and using its own weapons and methods, have moreover been greatly assisted and encouraged by the prevailing spirit of modernism, with its emphasis on a purely materialistic philosophy, which, as it diffuses itself, tends increasingly to divorce religion from man's daily life. [WOB 183]

The Guardian characterized the clash between these contending interests as disastrous and irreparably damaging. Examples were listed including the dismemberment of the Greek Orthodox Church in Russia and the blow sustained by the Church of Rome after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Also included was the separation of Church and state in Spain and the persecution the Catholic Church in Mexico. Listed too were the terrorization of Catholics and Lutherans in the heart of Europe and the turmoil experienced by the Church in Africa resulting from military campaigns. The decline in the fortunes of Christian Missions in Persia, Turkey and the Far East also exemplified reverses experienced by Christian ecclesiastical institutions in almost every part of the world. At this juncture, Shoghi Effendi posed an interesting question with an observation:

Might not this disintegrating tendency, from which Sunni and Shi'ih Islam have so conspicuously suffered, unloose, as it reaches its climax, still further calamities upon the various denominations of the Christian Church? In what manner and how rapidly this process,

which has already set in, will develop the future alone can reveal. Nor can it, at the present time, be estimated to what extent will the attacks which a still powerful clergy may yet launch against the strongholds of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the West accentuate this decline and widen the range of inescapable disasters. [WOB 184]

He then quoted a surprising prophetic statement by a Protestant minister of the times:

If Christianity wishes and expects to serve the world in the present crisis... it must cut back through Christianity to Christ, back through the centuries-old religion about Jesus to the original religion of Jesus. Otherwise, the spirit of Christ will live in institutions other than our own. [WOB 184]

An interesting parallel was drawn between the events in the early Christian centuries and the first century of the Bahá'í Era. The dominant religion of the Roman people was pagan but it was confronted by evasive philosophies and popular cults. They were surrounded by Neo-Platonists, Gnostic philosophers, Philonism, Mithraism and a myriad of sects, which perverted the state religion. These and paganism were swept away by the new Christian Faith. In the modern era, beginning with the first century of the Bahá'í Faith, most Christian Institutions were faced with conditions similar to those facing Roman state religion in the first centuries of the Common Era, namely conflicting beliefs and practices. Ironically, this condition was augmented by the bankruptcy of that same Faith that had conquered paganism in an earlier time. To all this, Shoghi Effendi made a timely promise:

Such institutions as have strayed far from the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ must of necessity, as the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh takes shape and unfolds, recede into the background, and make way for the progress of the divinely-ordained institutions that stand inextricably interwoven with His teachings. [WOB 185]

He inferred that the indwelling Spirit of God which animated the members of the early Church would be reborn in light of the

redefinition of its fundamental verities and the clarification of its original purpose. But he made a defining statement about the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh with respect to Christianity. He said that there could be no variance with the animating purpose or authority invested in the Faith of Jesus Christ and concluded with the following unequivocal words of Bahá'u'lláh.

We testify that when He came into the world, He shed the splendor of His glory upon all created things. Through Him the leper recovered from the leprosy of perversity and ignorance. Through Him the unchaste and wayward were healed. Through His power, born of Almighty God, the eyes of the blind were opened, and the soul of the sinner sanctified... He it is Who purified the world. Blessed is the man who, with a face beaming with light, hath turned towards Him. [GWB 85-86]

Signs of Moral Downfall

Shoghi Effendi distinguished moral downfall as a thing apart from, yet intricately connected to the decline of religious institutions. He makes reference to the life and conduct of the individual as a counterpart to the organic whole of religious institutions. No matter what direction one might turn in the mid nineteen thirties, one could not fail to be struck by prevailing moral decadence among men and women. And it was undoubtedly the decline of religion as a social force that was responsible for such a degrading condition in the Christian world. The Guardian reiterated:

No wonder, therefore, that when, as a result of human perversity, the light of religion is quenched in men's hearts, and the divinely appointed Robe, designed to adorn the human temple, is deliberately discarded, a deplorable decline in the fortunes of humanity immediately sets in, bringing in its wake all the evils which a wayward soul is capable of revealing. [WOB 187]

He declared that under such conditions, the degradation of human conduct and the dissolution of human institutions reveal themselves in their most revolting ways and that this was the state that individuals and institutions were approaching. Further, when the human conscience becomes stultified and the

sense of decency obscured, the feelings of joy and hope are gradually extinguished. He quoted Bahá'u'lláh's lamenting questions: "*How long will injustice continue? How long is chaos and confusion to reign amongst men? How long will discord agitate the face of society?*" [GWB 215]

Breakdown of Political And Economic Structure

The manner in which the moral downfall and the degeneration of religious institutions that took place in the first century of the Bahá'í Era was also reflected in the politico-economic realm but remains too complex to adequately estimate or analyze in a brief survey. Yet the potential impact of the world wide dilemma resulting from the increasing rivalries and ingrained hatreds in Europe and of the Great Depression were becoming a matter of deep concern for Shoghi Effendi.

The Great Depression, the aftermath of the severest ordeals humanity had ever experienced, the disintegration of the Versailles system, the recrudescence of militarism in its most menacing aspects, the failure of vast experiments and new-born institutions to safeguard the peace and tranquility of peoples, classes and nations, have bitterly disillusioned humanity and prostrated its spirits. [WOB 188]

The Guardian supported his argument with reference to a few small voices that were raised by religious scholars as well as political pundits regarding the looming alarm of worldwide conflagration. "If war should break out again on a major scale in Europe, it must bring the collapse of civilization as we know it in its wake" was the warning of a prominent Minister in Europe. Another Christian dignitary commented:

It is likely there will have to be one more great conflict in Europe to definitely establish once and for all an international authority. This conflict will be the most horrible of horrors, and possibly this generation will be called on to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of lives. [WOB 189]

The League of Nations was still in its embryonic state when the dark shadow of impending global disaster was sweeping

over a hapless world. Yet, Shoghi Effendi raised a glimmer of hope of a future triumph that this institution or “any other body that may supersede it, is destined to achieve.”

Bahá'u'lláh's Principle of Collective Security

There were several significant landmarks in the “checkered” history of the League. The Guardian mentioned the Treaty of Guarantee, the proposal for a United States of Europe, economic unification of the continent, the Geneva Protocol and the policy of sanctions. After much deliberation, fifty some members pronounced “their verdict against an act of aggression which in their judgment has been deliberately committed by one of their fellow-members, one of the foremost Powers of Europe.” This was “an event without parallel in history.” [WOB 191]

For the first time in the history of humanity the system of collective security, foreshadowed by Bahá'u'lláh and explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, has been seriously envisaged, discussed and tested. For the first time in history it has been officially recognized and publicly stated that for this system of collective security to be effectively established strength and elasticity are both essential.... [WOB 191-192]

Leaders of nations pronounced a movement of public opinion supporting the verdict. In the 1870s Bahá'u'lláh had said, “*The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized.*” [TB 165] And 'Abdu'l-Bahá, referring to the sovereigns of the world, reiterated: “*They must conclude a binding treaty, and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world, and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race...*” Then He followed with a startling characterization: “*All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to insure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant.*” [WOB 191-192]

On the other hand, Shoghi Effendi observed that The League of Nations still lacked the universality required for “the efficacious settlement of international disputes.” In fact, the

United States held it aloof while Germany and Japan abandoned its cause. Still, "the fact must be recognized that so important a decision marks one of the most distinctive milestones on the long and arduous road that must lead it to its goal, the stage at which the oneness of the whole body of nations will be made the ruling principle of international life." [WOB 193] It was however, "a faint glimmer in the darkness" that enveloped an agitated humanity. The process of disintegration had to continue. Much suffering would occur among nations, creeds, classes and races before they would be forged into one organic commonwealth. We had been warned by Bahá'u'lláh:

The civilization so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences will, if allowed to overlap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men... If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation... [SDC 64]

Community of the Most Great Name

The Guardian explained that the Bahá'í community alone was aware of the silent growth of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. They were the ones who were continuously consolidating through their activities a world embracing polity "amidst the welter of a tempestuous age." It was a slow and unobtrusive building process to which the World Bahá'í community was consecrated and that constituted the one hope of a stricken society.

In a world with impaired political and social institutions and whose religious systems had become anemic, this "healing agency" was taking shape and was mobilizing its forces for the complete redemption of mankind. For almost a century it had succeeded in preserving its identity in spite of the incessant persecutions to which its leaders had been subjected. Its enemies had actually caused the Faith to purge and purify its life instead of retarding its growth. They had utterly failed to create a permanent schism among its ranks. Those who seditiously violated the trust of its cause were powerless to cloud its radiance.

Persia had been the first to repress and oppose it. Its monarchs had miserably fallen, their dynasty had collapsed, their name was execrated, the hierarchy that had been their ally and had propped their declining state, had been utterly discredited. Turkey, which had thrice banished its Founder and inflicted on Him cruel and life-long imprisonment, had passed through one of the severest ordeals and far-reaching revolutions that its history has recorded, had shrunk from one of the most powerful empires to a tiny Asiatic republic, its Sultanate obliterated, its dynasty overthrown, its Caliphate, the mightiest institution of Islam, abolished. [WOB 196]

Concurrently, the Bahá'í Faith forged unerringly ahead, unified and undaunted. Its followers had become so inspired that nothing could undermine their resolution.

A World Religion

The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh had succeeded in visibly demonstrating its claim to be regarded as a World Religion and not simply a philosophy of life or a mere sect of Shí'ih Islam, a movement or an eclectic code of ethics. Its destiny would in time reach the status of a world-embracing commonwealth and would become the instrument of the Most Great Peace. Indeed, the Faith was characterized by one of Europe's royalty:

It is like a wide embrace, gathering together all those who have long searched for words of hope. It accepts all great Prophets gone before it, destroys no other creeds, and leaves all doors open. The Bahá'í teaching brings peace to the soul and hope to the heart. To those in search of assurance the words of the Father are as a fountain in the desert after long wandering. Their writings are a great cry toward peace, reaching beyond all limits of frontiers, above all dissension about rites and dogmas.... [WOB 197]

The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh had transformed the hearts of its followers and made them lovers of mankind regardless of race, creed or nationality. It preserved their patriotism and safe

guarded their lesser loyalties. More importantly, it reaffirmed the Divine origins of all religions and the underlying unity with respect to the links that bind them together.

Their Faith they conceive to be essentially non-political, supra-national in character, rigidly non-partisan, and entirely dissociated from nationalistic ambitions, pursuits, and purposes." They do not identify with political or ecclesiastic institutions but do uphold the laws of the Faith and do live by its principles. These are considered to be "the warp and woof of the institutions upon which the structure of His World Order must ultimately rest. [WOB 199]

Shoghi Effendi listed a variety of accomplishments by the Faith in the short span of time since its inception, a few of which follow. It had demonstrated the force of its cohesive strength and of its integrating power in the fashioning of the legal instruments designed to safeguard and regulate the corporate life of its institutions. It had accumulated adequate resources, material as well as cultural in every inhabited continent. It was proving its virility and capacity in laying the foundations for the gradual formation and establishment of its educational, cultural and humanitarian institutions. It was demonstrating extraordinary vitality with which its valiant defenders, its elected representatives, its itinerant teachers and pioneer administrators were pleading its cause. It was acknowledged by the spontaneous tributes paid by royalty, princes, statesmen and scholars to the sublimity of its cause and the station of its Founders. It was counteracting the disintegrating influences to which religious systems, moral standards, and political and social institutions were being subjected. He summarized:

From Iceland to Tasmania, from Vancouver to the China Sea spreads the radiance and extend the ramifications of this world-enfolding System, this many-hued and firmly-knit Fraternity, infusing into every man and woman it has won to its cause a faith, a hope, and a vigor that a wayward generation has long lost, and is powerless to recover. They who preside over the

immediate destinies of this troubled world, they who are responsible for its chaotic state, its fears, its doubts, its miseries will do well, in their bewilderment, to fix their gaze and ponder in their hearts upon the evidences of this saving grace of the Almighty that lies within their reach – a grace that can ease their burden, resolve their perplexities, and illuminate their path. [WOB 201]

Divine Retribution

The Guardian quoted a familiar phrase of Bahá'u'lláh's. "*O ye peoples of the world! Know, verily, that an unforeseen calamity followeth you, and grievous retribution awaiteth you. Think not that which ye have committed hath been effaced in My sight.*" [HW 44] And another: "*We have a fixed time for you, O peoples. If ye fail, at the appointed hour, to turn towards God, He, verily, will lay violent hold on you, and will cause grievous afflictions to assail you from every direction....*" [GWB 213] How forbidding, how prophetic were these words! A short three years after this letter by Shoghi Effendi, the calamitous WW II began with horrific consequences that we are still dealing with sixty plus years after the armistice. He then encapsulated Bahá'u'lláh's description of the stages in the evolution of human civilization:

The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend. [WOB 201]

World Unity the Goal

The penultimate goal of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the spiritual unification of the planet. Following that, the ultimate

goal is to establish a Universal Peace supported by a World Federation wherein the personal freedom of all individuals would be secure and the autonomy of its state members safeguarded. This commonwealth, envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh in the late 1800s must consist of a world legislature that would control the entire resources of its component nations. Its responsibility would be to enact laws that would satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. As He exclaimed:

O ye children of men, the fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race... He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful, cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body. [WOB 202-203]

The Guardian continued with an extraordinary description of the Golden Age of Bahá'u'lláh's Dispensation. He listed numerous idealized conditions that would become reality by virtue of the Divine outpourings of the pen of Bahá'u'lláh. Every aspect of life from the innermost heart of the soul to the outer world embracing unity of global society will be empowered by the agency of the Blessed Beauty. No aspect of life on this earth will be neglected. He reminded the reader of the prophecies of Isaiah some twenty-five centuries earlier:

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more... (Isaiah 2:4) And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots... And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:1-2)

St. John, the author of the Apocalypse, was further quoted regarding The New Jerusalem, a term that 'Abdu'l-Bahá described as Divine Civilization and symbolized by Bahá'u'lláh as His Most Holy Book, the book of laws which constitute a

charter for the New World Order “whose provisions must remain inviolate for no less than a thousand years.” [PUP 101-102]

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea... And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God... And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:1-4)

The Guardian called to mind an affirmation by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

One of the great events which is to occur in the Day of the manifestation of that Incomparable Branch (Bahá'u'lláh) is the hoisting of the Standard of God among all nations. By this is meant that all nations and kindreds will be gathered together under the shadow of this Divine Banner, which is no other than the Lordly Branch itself, and will become a single nation. [SAQ 55]

And finally from Bahá'u'lláh regarding the new creation, that World Order in the Golden Age of His Dispensation:

Great is thy blessedness, O earth, for thou hast been made the foot-stool of thy God, and been chosen as the seat of His mighty throne. The realm of glory exclaimeth: “Would that my life could be sacrificed for thee, for He Who is the Beloved of the All-Merciful hath established His sovereignty upon thee, through the power of His Name that hath been promised unto all things, whether of the past or of the future. [GWB 30]

Conclusion

Shoghi Effendi has masterfully identified the negative impacts of tumultuous events in human history of the last century and has skillfully laid out the solutions that are readily

available based on the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh. The Guardian emphasized unity of the body of mankind as the essential mission of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and he said that the tribulations of the Age of Transition that we were entering were characterized as the precursors of the era that would incarnate God's ultimate purpose for mankind. Further, the collapse of Islam and the deterioration of Christian Institutions resulting from chronic internal corruption allowed secularism and a wave of materialism to sweep the world. Intricately connected with this were the signs of moral downfall and the resultant breakdown of political and economic structure. The Great Depression added further disillusionment and with the menacing aspects of a recrudescing militarism the spirits of humanity became prostrate.

Only a Divine Physician could heal an ailing society and this would involve Bahá'u'lláh's Principle of Collective Security, which would be universally realized by the holding of a vast, all-embracing assemblage. The first steps were achieved with the establishment of the League of Nations. Albeit embryonic, the League produced an event unparalleled in history by pronouncing a verdict by fifty of its members against one of its own due to an act of aggression. But it was the Bahá'í community alone that was aware of the silent growth of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Indeed, the Faith had emerged as a World Religion and reaffirmed the Divine origins of all religions with their underlying unity.

This treatise is but a mere sketch of Shoghi Effendi's letter dated March 11, 1936. In it he captured the enormous vision of Bahá'u'lláh in brilliantly descriptive language and he brought the impact of spiritual realities on the material world into bold relief. His baleful predictions made over seventy years ago have become painfully true and the end is not in sight. Still, in the context of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh there is a resplendent light at the end of a very long tunnel. In reflecting on human culture from the birth of its spiritual identity through the stages of childhood and adolescence we find ourselves abstrusely approaching a threshold of an unparalleled golden age in the spiritual and material life of man on this planet.

Elucidations

Designation of Mírzá Yahyá Azal in the Writings of the Báb

Part 1: Memorandum from the Research Department

Universal House of Justice

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 1 December 2004

From: Research Department

Tablet of the Báb; the Appointment of Azal and His Titles

The Research Department has considered the questions contained in the email message of 15 January 2004 from ... to the Universal House of Justice. As a context for his queries, ... appends a number of extracts from Web sites and email communications he has had with several individuals. ... appears to be particularly interested in “the nature of the designation of Azal” and to this end seeks information about the authenticity of the Lawḥ-i-Vaṣāya, which he understands is regarded by the Azal’s as the basis for Mírzá Yahyá’s titles and position. He also enquires about the meaning of a particular verse in the Persian Bayán. We provide the following response.

Tablet of the Báb

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Elucidations

Designation of Mírzá Yahyá Azal in the Writings of the Báb

Part 1: Memorandum from the Research Department

Universal House of Justice

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 1 December 2004

From: Research Department

Tablet of the Báb; the Appointment of Azal and His Titles

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Part 2: Will and Testament of the Báb

رونیس وصیت نامه حضرت باب

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الم ذلك الكتاب حكم من بقية الله امام عدل مبين ان اقرؤا يا ايها الملاء من ذوى القربى حكم البدع فانه لصراط حق يقين اذكر شكاً انه عيد من بقية الله ينزل الروح من اذن الله على قلبه ليكون على العالمين حجة وشهيداً. لا والقرآن انه لعبد من حجة الله بمثل ما كان الناس ينطقون افعير الله يقدر ان ينزل بمثل تلك الآيات لا والشهر الحرام فانه لحق مثل ما كنتم فى امرالله لتوثقون.

الا يا ايها الخال* ان اليوم لم يحل علىّ على قدر خردل من شئى الا ان ينفق فى سبيل الله و كان الله ريك لسميع عليم و انك لتعلم بان علىّ دين من امى* و من انت* تعلم حكمها و اننى الان لاهب كل ما كتب الله لى اليهما بعد الدين لتثبت فؤادى من حكم الله و لاكون فى عهد الله لمن القانمين ولاكنى اصرف فى المال اذا شئت لامرالله انه لا اله الا هو لعزير حكيم و انى انا الضيف فى البيت الله لا اله الا هو لغنى شكور فيا ايها الخال فرق حسابى ان كان بينى و بين احد من الناس ثم انصف المال و اكتب لهما فان اليوم ما كنت مالك ذرة والله عزير حكيم وان ما كتب الله لى من مال الدنيا تلك الآيات ذكر من الله على العالمين جميعاً و ان البيت* حرم العدل و ان له يوم بينى مثل الكعبة فى المسجد الحرام و انه حرم امن للخاضعين جميعاً و كذلك حكم الله لارض التى ولدت عليها* فسوف بينيها مثل البيت من كتب الله ذالك الحكم له و ان ذالك احسن الجزاء فى ام الكتاب لمسطور فيا ايها الخال فى البلد* ان اسئل من امى لو ترضى فامر لاحد ان يعمر ظاهر البيت ممّا يبدل باذن ريك من حجر البر فانه لبيت عتيق ثم امر لمن له خط نسخ ان يكتب بماء الذهب سورة الرضوان فى اثنى عشر ورقات مذهبة فانى اردت ان تبدل ما يتعارف فى رجع الحج بآيات الحق و انا رجال من التجار نلاحظ نفع المال و ان ذاك لهو الفوز الكبير و ان حرفاً من آياتنا اعزّ عندنا من ملك الآخرة و الدنيا لانه ينزل من لدن امام مبين و اسئل البيت ان احتجن بالمملوكة ترسل اليهن من تلك الجزيرة انشاءالله لمن قريب و سبحان الله رب العرش عما يصفون و سلام على المرسلين و الحمدلله رب العالمين*.

* منظور از کلماتی که با ستاره مشخص شده اند به ترتیب: حاج میرزا سید محمد خال اکبر، والده مبارک، حضرت حرم، بیت مسکونی واقع در کوچه شمشیرگرها، منزل آقا میرزا علی پسر حرم (محل ولادت حضرت باب) و حاج میرزا سید علی خال اعظم است. (نویسنده)

Part 3: The Prophecy concerning the advent of Man Yuzhiruhu'lláh¹

The Báb evidently foresaw the imminent advent of the Promised One whom He described in such glowing terms. This is clear from many of the statements He made to contemporaries, whom He exhorted to recognize both Himself and – as soon as He appeared – the promised *Man yuzhiruhu'lláh*. In a letter written to a Muslim clergyman named Sulaymán, for instance, He called upon the addressee to turn to Him (the Báb), since he would otherwise be accursed. If he failed to accept the Báb, God would forgive him only if he turned, by means of a letter, to '*Him whom God shall make manifest*' (SWB 1:9:7) – i.e. in the near future, during Sulaymán's lifetime. From another letter, written by the Báb to the Sharif of Mecca and others, it is again evident that the Báb expected the Promised One to appear during the lifetime of the Sharif. The Báb admonished the Sharif of Mecca

To embrace the Cause of God and to implore that the matter of thine allegiance be brought to the attention of Him Whom God shall make manifest, that He may graciously enable thee to prosper and cause thy fire to be transformed into light. (SWB 1:7:3, p. 30)

Furthermore, it is implied in the Persian Bayán that *Man yuzhiruhu'lláh* would appear during the 19 years following the Báb's declaration of His mission (1844); i.e., in the period up to the year 1863, although God alone would know the hour of His coming. (Bayán VI:3) The early Bábis, too, clearly expected the Promised One to arrive soon. Only this can explain the fact that during the years immediately following the martyrdom of the Báb so many proclaimed themselves to be the Promised One.

In contrast to this, the Azali doctrine that the Promised One was to appear only after 1511 or 2001 years was based on statements made by the Báb in the Persian Bayán concerning *Ghiyáth* (Help) and *Mustagháth* (He who is called upon for help) (Persian Bayán II:17, III:15), from which the numbers 1511 and 2001

¹ From *Making the Crooked Straight*, by Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh, Ulrich Gollmer, trans. by Geraldine Schuckelt (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000).

are derived by means of the Abjad system. This is interpreted as an indication that the promised *Man yuzhiruhu'lláh* will not appear until this length of time has elapsed. This argument was probably developed by the Azalis in order to dismiss Bahá'u'lláh's claim. They certainly referred to this in their rejection of Bahá'u'lláh, as Browne confirms: "To these texts the Ezelis specially appeal in justification of their rejection of Bahá'u'lláh's [sic] claim to be the Promised Deliverer..." (*JRAS* April 1892, p. 299) It is clear from the words of the Báb in the Persian Bayán, however, that the Azali view does not conform to that of the Báb when the latter expresses the hope that the Promised One would come before the end of the *Mustagháth*:

None knoweth save God as to when the Manifestation shall be. Whenever it occurs all have to follow the Point of Truth and thank God. However, it is hoped of God's grace that it will arrive before the Mustagháth and the Word of God will be exalted by it. (Persian Bayán III:15)

It is obvious from these words that the Báb regards the *Mustagháth* as a period of time during which the Manifestation will appear. Bahá'u'lláh evidently shares the Báb's cyclical view and also sees *Ghiyáth* and *Mustagháth* as cycles within which the Promised One will appear. He speaks of the year 9 within the *Mustagháth* in which *Man yuzhiruhu'lláh* has appeared. (*Raḥīq-Makhtúm*, p. 514) In response to the Azali objection that He was already announcing the advent of the Promised One, Bahá'u'lláh argued:

Shake off, O heedless ones, the slumber of negligence, that ye may behold the radiance which His glory hath spread through the world. How foolish are those who murmur against the premature birth of His light. O ye who are inly blind! Whether too soon or too late, the evidences of His effulgent glory are now actually manifest. It behoveth you to ascertain whether or not such a light hath appeared. It is neither within your power nor mine to set the time at which it should be made manifest. God's inscrutable Wisdom hath fixed its hour beforehand. (GWB 50)

The Báb, too, was convinced that the Promised One 'might appear at any time,' (TN, intro, p. xvii) as Browne correctly observed.

Letters Written on Behalf of the Guardian

by Universal House of Justice

Contents

- Introductory letter
 - Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi
 - Status of Research Department Memoranda
 - Bahá'í Writings Based in Fact?
-

12 January 2006

Dear __

We have received an email letter of 23 July 2005 from Mr. _ ...[Personal information omitted]... It would be appreciated if you would convey the following information and the enclosed item to Mr. _ ...[Personal information omitted]... Enclosed you will find a memorandum prepared by the Research Department that should be of assistance to him in resolving his questions. In addition to this information, the Universal House of Justice has asked that we provide the following comments to be conveyed to him.

With regard to your questions about the authority of letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, particularly those sent from the Holy Land during the latter part of his ministry, there is no justification for summarily dismissing the authoritative guidance contained in this body of correspondence. If concerns arise in relation to specific messages or topics addressed, clarification can be sought from the Universal House of Justice.

As to your question concerning when a matter is referred to the Research Department, this is determined by the Universal House of Justice depending on the nature of the inquiry. For example, in reply to questions regarding interpretation of the Text or the findings of general scholarship, the Research Department would provide references from the authoritative texts and offer comments that assist inquirers to draw their own personal conclusions. Other questions that require a decision on a specific case, consideration of general policies, or elucidation of obscure matters would, after consultation by the House of Justice, be referred to the Department of the Secretariat for reply.

Finally, you ask whether Bahá'ís should accept all statements in the Writings as based in fact, unless there is an explicit reference to a particular statement being conditioned on other information. It should be clear from the examples provided in the memorandum of the Research Department that there are some cases where passages from the Writings affirm specific facts and other cases where passages conform to the beliefs of particular peoples. It is, therefore, necessary for the reader to determine the meaning of statements that are not explicit by applying sound hermeneutical principles found in the Teachings. While there is often room for a range of personal interpretation on such matters, and a degree of ambiguity will invariably exist in some cases, usually a common understanding is formed, which will change over time should additional evidence come to light. Differences of personal opinion about the meaning of the Text should not be allowed to create discord or wrangling among the friends.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 12 January 2006

From: Research Department

Letters written on Behalf of the Guardian

In an email letter of 23 July 2005 addressed to the Universal House of Justice, Mr. _ poses a number of questions concerning the degree of authority to be accorded to the letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi and to the memoranda prepared by the Research Department, and he enquires whether all statements in the Writings should be accepted as being “based in fact, unless explicitly stated as being conditioned on other information.” The Research Department has studied the issues raised by Mr. _, and we offer the following comments.

Reference is made to statements on the Internet which apparently infer that the Guardian discontinued the practice of reviewing all letters written on his behalf when the amount of correspondence increased. Mr. _ seeks confirmation of the fact that Shoghi Effendi continued to review all letters written on his behalf until the end of his life. The Research Department sets out below the only information it has, to date, been able to locate on this subject.

In a postscript appended to a letter dated 7 December 1930, written on his behalf to an individual believer, Shoghi Effendi described the normal procedure he followed in dealing with correspondence written on his behalf:

I wish to add and say that whatever letters are sent in my behalf from Haifa are all read and approved by me before mailing. There is no exception whatever to this rule.

Given the Guardian’s categorical assertion, it follows that any “exception” to “this rule” would require his explicit permission. For example, in the latter years of his ministry, Shoghi Effendi assigned to the Hand of the Cause Leroy Ioas the special responsibility for monitoring the progress of the

goals of the Ten Year Crusade. In implementing this specific function, Mr. Ioas worked under the close supervision of the Guardian; however, not all of his letters – for example, those simply requesting information about the goals – were viewed by Shoghi Effendi before being transmitted.

Mr. _ also enquires about the relative degree of authority associated with letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi. He indicates that he is puzzled by a statement in a letter written on the Guardian's behalf, which indicates that such letters are "less authoritative," especially since he presumes that Shoghi Effendi would have reviewed these letters prior to their being sent out. It seems likely that the statement referred to by Mr. _ is contained in the following extract from a letter dated 25 February 1951 written on behalf of the Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly. It is suggested that a careful reading of this statement, which is cited below, will resolve the concern raised by Mr. _. The extract states,

Although the secretaries of the Guardian convey his thoughts and instructions and these messages are authoritative, their words are in no sense the same as his, their style certainly not the same, and their authority less, for they use their own terms and not his exact words in conveying his messages. (25 February 1951 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles)

Note that the letters written on behalf of the Guardian are also described as being "authoritative." No additional information has, to date, come to light on this subject.

Status of Research Department Memoranda

Mr. _ raises a number of issues concerning the authority of memoranda prepared by the Research Department and wishes to know whether "believers could resubmit their questions, if they felt it necessary to have a more 'authoritative' answer than the Research Department could provide." We cite, below, an extract from an English translation of a letter dated 26 January 2003 in Persian, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, which contains guidance pertaining to some of the issues raised by Mr. _:

According to the guidance of the House of Justice, letters received at the Bahá'í World Centre are sent to various Departments, according to their topic. For instance, all the letters related to the Research Department are sent to that Department so that, with the guidance of the House of Justice, appropriate responses could be prepared which are then sent out through its Department of the Secretariat.

In response to your question, it should be said that while the answers from the Research Department are prepared according to the instructions of the House of Justice, they should be regarded as opinions of that Department. These views, although quite useful and helpful in illuminating and clarifying the issues or questions at hand, should not be regarded as being as authoritative as the guidance and pronouncements of the Universal House of Justice. The House of Justice has decided that material prepared by the Research Department should be sent out unchanged to the recipients, as it would like the friends to consider and study the material with great diligence. Of course, accepting the comments and opinions of the Research Department does not hinder the friends from using their own judgement in understanding and explaining issues. The personal understandings of the Bahá'ís in these cases are, of course, respected in their own right.

Bahá'í Writings Based in Fact?

Mr. _ expresses the view that in order to develop “a coherent unity of thought among believers” it is necessary to resolve the issue concerning whether “Bahá'ís should accept all statements in the Writings as based in fact, unless explicitly stated as being conditioned on other information.” He elaborates his point by referring to statements in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. For example, he notes that in “The Promulgation of Universal Peace”¹ the Master indicates that the Pentateuch prescribes “the cutting off of the hand of the thief.” In this regard, he asks if Bahá'ís are “to confidently accept that this was in fact ... the law (and subsequently lost to the scriptures), or that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was merely doctrinally

infallible, and that the essential point was the principle He was trying to convey.” He, thus, seeks clarification of a statement in a letter dated 3 June 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice that appears on a Web site. This letter distinguishes between the nature of the infallibility of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and of the Guardian as it relates to “subjects not pertaining to the Faith.” The extract in question is as follows:

2. There is nothing in the Writings that would lead us to the conclusion that what Shoghi Effendi says about himself concerning statements on subjects not directly related to the Faith also applies to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Instead we have assertions which indicate that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s position in the Faith is one for which we find “no parallel” in past Dispensations. For example, Bahá’u’lláh, in addition to His reference to the Centre of His Covenant as the “Mystery of God,” states that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá should be regarded as God’s “exalted Handiwork” and “a Word which God hath adorned with the ornament of His Own Self, and made it sovereign over the earth and all that there is therein.” And from Shoghi Effendi we have the incontrovertible statement that the Guardian of the Faith while “overshadowed” by the “protection” of Bahá’u’lláh and of the Báb, “remains essentially human,” whereas in respect of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Shoghi Effendi categorically states that “in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.”

By way of introduction we wish to note that the statements of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred to by Mr. _ are from the Master’s published talks. It was the custom that, as He delivered these talks, His words were written down in Persian, and the words of the translator were taken down in English, bringing the reliability and accuracy of the translations and the transcriptions into question. As a consequence, the authority of most talks and verbal utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is not the same as that accorded to His written Text. This principle and the general status of such compilations as “The Promulgation of Universal Peace” and “Paris Talks” are elaborated in the

following extract from a letter dated 9 March 1977 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer:

Among the utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, foremost is the compilation of His immortal talks entitled "Some Answered Questions." The original of this important compilation is preserved in the Holy Land; its text was read in full and corrected by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself. The translation, although not perfect, was considered by the Guardian to be adequate for the time being; in due course it will be thoroughly checked and improved, of course. Unfortunately, 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not read and authenticate all transcripts of His other talks, some of which have been translated into various languages and published. For many of His addresses included in "The Promulgation of Universal Peace" and "Paris Talks," for example, no original authenticated text has yet been found. However, the Guardian allowed such compilations to continue to be used by the friends, and the Universal House of Justice has indicated that the same ruling applies to "Star of the West." In the future each talk will have to be identified, and those which are unauthenticated will have to be clearly distinguished from those which form a part of Bahá'í Scripture. This does not mean that the unauthenticated talks will have to cease to be used — merely that the degree of authenticity of every document will have to be known and understood.

With regard to the two references in "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," to the punishment in question, the first appears in a talk dated 12 October 1912 and the second in a talk of 8 November 1912. The World Centre does not have a Persian transcript for the 12 October talk but the Persian transcript for the second talk is published in "Khitábát." Study of this transcript reveals that the Persian version does not correspond to the English translation, and the reference to the punishment in question does not occur.² In this instance, it seems to us that the apparent association of the punishment in question with the Torah and Jewish law may well be an artifact of the

unreliability of the English transcript of the talk in which it occurs.

As to Mr. _'s request for further clarification concerning the implications of the statement concerning the degree of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's infallibility contained in the letter dated 3 June 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice and which is cited earlier in this memorandum, it is suggested that Mr. _ might find it useful to study the complete letter from which the passage of interest is drawn, since the letter contains additional elucidation about the nature of divinely conferred infallibility. Another useful resource is Shoghi Effendi's comprehensive explanation of the uniqueness of the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that appears in "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh."³

Additional questions are raised concerning the historical accuracy of statements by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master. For example, Mr. _ mentions Bahá'u'lláh's references to the period in which Empedocles and Pythagoras lived and asks whether Bahá'is believe, "as a matter of faith that modern historians are wrong on these points, or again, that the doctrine alone is infallible."⁴ To assist Mr. _ in thinking about these issues, we call to his attention the guidance contained in the following extract from a letter dated 3 November 1987, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer. The letter states,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of ... and has directed us to convey the following in response to your question about Empedocles and Pythagoras referred to in the Lawḥ-i-Hikmat.

In a Tablet written in response to questions raised about this Tablet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá clarifies the perspective toward statements made by Bahá'u'lláh in the Lawḥ-i-Hikmat which differ from the current concepts of western historians. The Master states that histories of the times before Alexander the Great are very confused and that when the subject came under scholarly discipline in later times the greatest difficulty was, and still is, experienced in giving dates with any certainty. He further points out that the Words of

Bahá'u'lláh are the standard and that the statements made in the Tablet of Wisdom are in accordance with certain of the historical records of the East.

In reference to the specific passage in the Lawḥ-i-Hikmat regarding Empedocles and Pythagoras being contemporaries of David and Solomon, the following is an excerpt from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer who enquired about this passage:

We must not take this statement too literally; “contemporary” may have been meant in Persian as something far more elastic than the English word. (15 February 1947)

It is noteworthy that at both the beginning and end of this section of the Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh indicates that He is quoting “some accounts of the sages.” These would have been the historical accounts familiar to the person whom He is addressing in the Tablet. The fact that Bahá'u'lláh makes such statements for the sake of illustrating the spiritual principles that He wishes to convey, does not necessarily mean that He is endorsing their historical accuracy. In this connection it is interesting to note the answer given by the beloved Guardian's secretary on his behalf to a question about the “fourth heaven” mentioned in the Kitáb-i-Íqán. The translation of the passage is as follows:

As to the ascent of Christ to the “fourth heaven” as revealed in the glorious Book of Íqán, he [the Guardian] stated that the “fourth heaven” is a term used and a belief held by the early astronomers. The followers of the Shí'ah sect likewise held this belief. As the Kitáb-i-Íqán was revealed for the guidance of that sect, this term was used in conformity with the concepts of its followers.

NOTES

¹ See “The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912,” rev. ed.

(Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982, 1995 printing), p. 365 and p. 404.

² “Khitábát, Talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1984), see p. 615.

³ See, particularly, “The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters” (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991, 2004 printing), pp. 131-139.

⁴ See “Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas” (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, 2005 printing), p. 145.

Daniel's Prophecies

MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 13 December 1990, Revised February 1996

From: Research Department

From time to time, questions are raised by the Bahá'ís about the interpretation of the Biblical prophecies contained in the following verses in Daniel 12:11-12:

And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days.

Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days.

To assist the friends in their study of this subject, the Research Department has prepared a summary of the elucidations contained in the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá and the letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi on this theme. Three main issues are addressed: the interpretation of 1,290 days; the interpretation of 1,335 days; and the date of the commencement of the "hundred lunar years," which, as mentioned by Shoghi Effendi in "God Passes By" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), page 151, will precede the consummation of the 1,335 days.

1. 1,290 Days

In "Some Answered Questions" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), pages 43-44, Abdu'l-Bahá interprets the prophecy concerning the 1,290 days in the following terms:

The beginning of this lunar reckoning is from the day of the proclamation of the prophethood of Muḥammad in the country of Hijaz; and that was three years after His mission, because in the beginning the prophethood of Muḥammad was kept secret, and no

one knew it save Khadijah and Ibn Nawfal. After three years it was announced. And Bahá'u'lláh, in the year 1290 from the proclamation of the mission of Muḥammad, caused His manifestation to be known.

Note that the Master indicates that, in this instance, time is measured by the "lunar" calendar. Since the proclamation of the mission of Muḥammad took place ten years prior to the Hegira, i.e., His flight from Mecca to Medina, from which date the Muslim calendar begins, the year 1290 from the proclamation of the mission of Muḥammad was the year 1280 of the Hegira, or 1863-64 A.D.

There are references to 1,290 days in "God Passes By," on pages 110 and 151. In these passages, Shoghi Effendi confirms that the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad, which occurred in 1863 (1280 A.H.), represents the fulfilment of the 1,290 days.

2. 1,335 Days

Two Tablets revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá which are published in "The Passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá" (Haifa: 1922), by Lady Blomfield and Shoghi Effendi, provide interpretations of the 1,335 days referred to by Daniel:

Now concerning the verse in Daniel, the interpretation whereof thou didst ask, namely, "Blessed is he who cometh unto the thousand three hundred and thirty five days." These days must be reckoned as solar and not lunar years. For according to this calculation a century will have elapsed from the dawn of the Sun of Truth, then will the teachings of God be firmly established upon the earth, and the Divine Light shall flood the world from the East even unto the West. Then, on this day, will the faithful rejoice! (p. 31)

O servant of God! The afore mentioned a thousand three hundred and thirty-five years must be reckoned from the day of the flight of His Holiness Muḥammad, the Apostle of God, (Hegira) salutations and blessings rest upon Him, at the close of which time the signs of the rise, the glory, the exaltation, the spread of the

Word of God throughout the East and the West shall appear. (p. 31)

From these Tablets it appears that:

1. The spread of the Faith throughout the world will signal the fulfilment of this prophecy.
2. The “days must be reckoned as solar and not lunar years.”
3. The Tablets suggest that the prophecy is fulfilled by two different dates. The first derives from the centenary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh; the second is calculated from 622 A.D. — hence, 1963 and 1957.

Shoghi Effendi associated Daniel's reference to the 1,335 days and Abdu'l-Bahá's statements about this prophecy with the centenary of the formal assumption of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic office and the worldwide triumph of the Bahá'í Cause. He stressed that the prophecy refers to occurrences within the Bahá'í community, rather than to events in the outside world, e.g., the establishment of peace. While the Guardian clearly allied the triumph of the Faith with the successful termination of the third Teaching Plan undertaken by the believers, in his letters and those written on his behalf, three specific dates are mentioned as marking the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy.

2.1 1960 — A lunar reckoning

Concerning the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad, Shoghi Effendi, in “God Passes By,” page 151, wrote:

The “hundred lunar years,” destined to immediately precede that blissful consummation (1,335 days), announced by Daniel ... had commenced.

One hundred years, by a “lunar reckoning,” after the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh coincides with 1960.

2.2 1963 — A solar reckoning

When the world-embracing Spiritual Crusade was announced in October 1952, Shoghi Effendi linked the

completion of this decade-long enterprise with the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy:

LET THEM AS THEY ENTER IT VOW ONE VOICE
ONE HEART ONE SOUL NEVER TURN BACK
ENTIRE COURSE FATEFUL DECADE AHEAD UNTIL
EACH EVERY ONE WILL HAVE CONTRIBUTED
SHARE LAYING ON WORLD-WIDE SCALE AN
UNASSAILABLE ADMINISTRATIVE FOUNDATION
FOR BAHÁ'U'LLAH'S CHRIST-PROMISED
KINGDOM ON EARTH SWELLING THEREBY
CHORUS UNIVERSAL JUBILATION WHEREIN
EARTH HEAVEN WILL JOIN AS PROPHESED
DANIEL ECHOED 'ABDU'L-BAHA ON THAT DAY
WILL FAITHFUL REJOICE WITH EXCEEDING
GLADNESS. ("Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957"
(Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 44)

Thereafter, the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy concerning the 1,335 days is associated with the end of the Ten Year Crusade. For example, in a letter dated 9 February 1953 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a group of Bahá'ís, his secretary wrote:

The purpose of the Conferences¹ will be the world-wide propagation of the Faith. They will lay the foundations of the service of the Bahá'ís of the world for the great Ten Year Crusade ahead — which, God willing, will be consummated in the fulfilment of the prophecies of Daniel, and the achievement of the initial goals set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, whereby the world will be flooded with the Glory of the Lord.

And, in a letter dated 11 May 1956 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, we find the following statement:

...when we fulfil the Ten Year Crusade, we will have brought into fulfilment Daniel's great prophecy of "Blessed is he who waits and comes to the 1335 days."

¹ International Conferences scheduled to take place during 1953.

2.3 1957

There are several references in letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi which give 1957 as the date of the fulfilment of the prophecy. For example:

It is far too early to make any predictions about peace of any sort, judging by the ebullitions of the world's affairs these days! 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in His Tablets, connects the prophecy of Daniel — 1957 — with the proclamation and spread of the Cause. (31 July 1946 to an individual believer)

It is interesting to note that, when a National Spiritual Assembly sought clarification from the beloved Guardian about whether the 1,335 days culminate in 1957 or in 1963, Shoghi Effendi in a letter dated 30 June 1952 written on his behalf indicated:

Regarding the prophecy of Daniel ... this prophecy refers to the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Ridván, Baghdad. Reference to this can be found in "The Passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá" in quotations from two of His Tablets. (30 June 1952)

2.4 The Calculation of the Date

A number of believers requested guidance from Shoghi Effendi about how to calculate the date that will coincide with the fulfilment of the 1,335 days. We provide two responses written on behalf of the Guardian:

The 1335 days referred to by Daniel will be fulfilled in 1963. The date of the Hijra is 622 A.D. The 1335 days is figured according to the solar calendar, but in adjusting the 1335 days, one must take into consideration the time at which the prophecies were given and change them into solar time, which would bring the date to 1963.

There is one thing of importance for the Bahá'ís to understand; and that is, that this prophecy refers to happenings within the Faith, not occurrences outside the Faith. It refers specifically to the spread of the Faith

over the face of the earth. This will be accomplished when the Bahá'í Faith is firmly established in all of the virgin areas outlined in the Ten Year Crusade, and the other goals of the Crusade are completed. Thus it behoves us to work day and night in order to accomplish this glorious goal. (18 December 1953 to an individual believer)

As regards your question concerning the date 1335: The reckoning of this date does not bring it to the exact date of 1963, but a few more years. Nevertheless, there is no conflict in this, because 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that it will be the beginning of the diffusion of the Light of the Faith in the east and the west. This will already have begun to come about before 1963, which is the fulfilment of the 100 years from Bahá'u'lláh's Declaration. (31 January 1955 to an individual believer)

It is noteworthy that insufficient information is provided in the first extract to permit a precise calculation, while in the second, the Guardian's secretary indicates that a calculation would not give "the exact date of 1963, but a few more years." The Research Department has not been able to locate any additional authoritative texts which contain detailed instructions concerning how to make the calculation.

3. The "Hundred Lunar Years"

In *God Passes By* page 151, Shoghi Effendi allies the "hundred lunar "years after the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh with the fulfilment of the 1,335 days of Daniel's prophecy. The only other reference to one hundred "lunar" years that the Research Department has, so far, been able to find, is contained in a letter dated 31 October 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly. This letter clarifies the mistaken assumption that the year 1335 relates to the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's mystic experience in the Siyah-Chal (i.e., 1952-1953):

He wishes me to point out that this is inaccurate as on page 151 of "God Passes By," in the references to His Declaration, the Guardian clearly states that with this

Declaration the “hundred lunar years” ... had commenced. The mystic experience of Bahá'u'lláh was in the Siyah-Chal and has nothing to do with Daniel's prophecy.

This statement of the Guardian is itself based on extracts from two of the Master's Tablets which are published in “The Passing of Abdu'l-Bahá.”

In addition, a believer asked Shoghi Effendi about the relationship between the establishment of peace and the fulfilment of the prophecy about the 1,335 days and requested the source of, a reference to, and the starting date of, a prophecy concerning the “one hundred years after the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh” referred to in a pilgrim's notes. The Guardian in a letter dated 1 April 1946 written on his behalf made the following response:

‘Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretation of the prophecy of Daniel does not definitely connect it with either the Lesser or the Most Great Peace, but rather with a great step forward on the part of humanity and the Bahá'í Faith. All we know is that the Lesser and the Most Great Peace will come — their exact dates we do not know.

The 100 years is from 1853; the Master explains this in some of His Tablets, and is quoted in “The Passing of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá.” Both of the letters cited above base their conclusions on the same two Tablets of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, which are quoted in section 2 of this memorandum. Since the beloved Guardian rules out a relationship between Daniel's prophecy and the intimation of the coming of revelation to Bahá'u'lláh, it is evident that some other explanation must be found for the significance of the one-hundred-year period that begins in 1853.

4. Concluding Remarks

While it is clear that the prophecy concerning the 1,335 days is associated with the spread of the Bahá'í Faith throughout the world, several different dates are given in our authoritative texts for the actual fulfilment of this prophecy. As mentioned earlier, the two Tablets of the Master which are cited in “The Passing of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá,” page 31, suggest different dates for the fulfilment of the prophecy of the 1,335 days: 1963 and 1957.

Further, in the letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian indicates that these same Tablets form the basis for his interpretation of the date of the fulfilment of the 1,335 days referred to in Daniel. Three different dates are either given by the Guardian or can be inferred from these same Tablets – 1957, 1960, and 1963.

In addition, these same Tablets are also given as the reference for the one-hundred-year period that began in 1853.

In light of the foregoing, it is, therefore, suggested that:

4. The prophecy of Daniel about the 1,335 days is not fulfilled by just one single date. Its fulfilment is, rather, a process that extends over a period of time.
5. The fulfilment of the prophecy coincides with the period of the Ten Year Crusade, 1953-1963, a span of time that includes 1953 (the end of the hundred years whose significance is unclear), 1957, 1960, and 1963.

It is interesting to note that Shoghi Effendi described the Ten Year Crusade as the “ninth part” of that “majestic process, set in motion at the dawn of the Adamic cycle” by means of which the “light” of God’s Revelation will be diffused in both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, through the operation of a decade-long world spiritual crusade whose termination will, God willing, coincide with the Most Great Jubilee commemorating the Centenary of the Declaration of Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdad. (30 April 1953 to the All-America Intercontinental Teaching Conference, published in MBW p. 155)

Furthermore, the Guardian in a letter dated 7 March 1955 written on his behalf to an individual believer states:

Thus in the Ten Year Crusade, we are actually fulfilling the prophecy of Daniel, because with the completion of the Ten Year Crusade in 1963 we will have established the Faith in every part of the globe.

What a great privilege it is that individuals such as we are, have an opportunity to not only spread the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, but in this period of the Ten Year Crusade, are actually engaged in the fulfilment of prophecy.

Appendix I

Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their abbreviations used in this book*

- ABL** 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, Commemorative ed. London, UK: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987
- ADJ** Shoghi Effendi. *Advent of Divine Justice*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990
- ADP** Abdu'l-Bahá. *Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy*. Comp. Elizabeth Fraser Chamberlain. Boston, MA: Tudor Press, 1918
- BA** Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922 – 1932, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1984
- BP** compilation. *Bahá'í Prayers*
- BW** World Centre Publications. *Bahá'í World, The*, volumes I (1925) through XX (1986-92); new series 1993-2007. Haifa: World Centre Publications.
- BWF** compilation. *Bahá'í World Faith*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976
- CUHJ** The Constitution of The Universal House of Justice. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1972
- CC** *Compilation of Compilations* volumes I-3. World Centre Publications / Bahá'í Publications Australia. Vol. 1-2: 1991; Vol. 3: 1993
- CF** Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith. Messages to America, 1947-1957*. Wilmette: Illinois, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1965.
- ESW** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988
- FWU** 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Foundations of World Unity*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979
- GPB** Shoghi Effendi. *God Passes By*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
- GWB** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983
- HW** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Marzieh Gail. *Hidden Words*. Numerous editions
- KA** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi and the Bahá'í World Centre. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
- KI** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983
- KJV** King James Version, The Bible. Numerous editions
- LDG** Shoghi Effendi. *Lights of Divine Guidance*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Germany, 1982
- LG** compilation. *Lights of Guidance*. India: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
- MBW** Shoghi Effendi. *Messages to the Bahá'í World: 1950-1957*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1971
- MSEI** Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent
- MUHJ63** Universal House of Justice, comp. Geoffrey W. Marks. *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-86: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996
- OCF** Bahá'u'lláh, comp. Research Department of the UHJ. *One Common Faith*.

- Bahá'í World Centre, 2005
- PB** Bahá'u'lláh. *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Center, 1972.
- PM** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi. *Prayers and Meditations*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987
- PT** 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Paris Talks*. Ontario: Nine Pines Publishing
- PUP** 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 2nd ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982
- Q** Qur'án. Numerous editions
- SAQ** 'Abdu'l-Bahá, comp. and trans. Laura Clifford Barney. *Some Answered Questions*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
- SDC** 'Abdu'l-Bahá, trans. Marzieh Gail. *Secret of Divine Civilization*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990
- SLH** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. World Centre Publications. *Summons of the Lord of Hosts*. Australia: Bahá'í Publications Australia,
- SV** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Marzieh Gail. *Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, 4th ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991
- SWAB** 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
- SWB** Báb, The. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
- TAB** 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Tablets of Abdul-Bahá Abbas*, volumes 1-3
- TAF** 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Tablet to Auguste Forel*
- TB** Bahá'u'lláh, comp. Research Department of the UHJ, trans. Habib Taherzadeh. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988
- TDH** Shoghi Effendi. *This Decisive Hour, Messages from Shoghi Effendi to the North American Bahá'ís 1932–1946*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1992
- TN** 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Traveller's Narrative*, A. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
- WT** 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994
- WOB** Shoghi Effendi. *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991

* No formal list of abbreviations exists, but semi-formal lists can be derived from abbreviations used by the Bahá'í World Centre. First, a partial list is in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-86*. Second, the BWC downloads site has a list of their filename abbreviations at <http://library.bahai.or/README/README-TREE.htm>. Those two have been combined. See more at <http://bahai-library.com/?file=abbreviations>

Appendix II

Contents of *Lights of ‘Irfán* Books One-Seven

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Appendix III

Publications of the ‘Irfán Colloquia

English-Language Publications

- *Scripture and Revelation*, Moojan Momen (ed.), Oxford, UK: George Ronald, 1997
- *The Bahá’í Faith and the World’s Religions*, Moojan Momen (ed.), Oxford, UK: George Ronald, 2005.
- *The Lights of ‘Irfán: Compilation of Papers Presented at the ‘Irfán Colloquia*, Iraj Ayman (general ed.), Book One, 2000; Book Two, 2001; Book Three, 2002; Book Four, 2003; Book Five, 2004; Book Six, 2005; Book Seven, 2006; Book Eight, 2007.
- *Occasional Papers* volume 1: “Images of Christ in the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” by Maryam Afshar.

Persian-Language Publications

Publications for sale:

- *Safini-yi ‘Irfán*, Books I to X (Collections of the papers presented at the ‘Irfán Colloquia in Persian)

Publications produced for and given to the participants of the ‘Irfán Colloquia:

- *Mathnavyi Abha* by F. Radmehr (A Commentary of the Mathnavi of Bahá’u’lláh)
- *Ráhnamay-i Mutál’i-yi-Athár-i-Qalam-A’lá*, Books I to IV (Guidebooks for the Study of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh)
- *Ráhnamay-i Mutál’-yi-Athár-i Hazrati-‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, Books I to IV (Guidebook for the Study of the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá)

- *Basitu'l-Haqiqat* (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb and a some explanatory articles on “Basitu'l Haqiqih”)
- *Tajjaliyyih Barkhi Jilviah-háy-i Hayát-i Bahá'í dar Zindigáni-yi Hazrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, by Flower Sámi (Manifestations of Living a Bahá'í Life as Appears in the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: a Study in the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá)

All 'Irfán publications in English and Persian may be ordered from:

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German-Language Publications

- *Beiträge des 'Irfán-Kolloquiums 2003: 'Irfán-Studien zum Bahá'í-Schrifttum* (Collections of the papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia in German). Hofheim, Germany: Bahá'í-Verlag. Book I, 2004; Book II, 2005; Book III, 2006.

'Irfán publications in German may be ordered from:

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Eppsteiner Strasse 89

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