

Article

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán: Expanding the Scope of the Bahá’í Doctrine of Progressive Revelation to Include and Engage Indigenous Spiritual Traditions [†]

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[†] Dedicated to the memory and rich legacy of three Indigenous notables: (1) Patricia Locke (*Thawáchiŋ Wašté Wíŋ*, “Compassionate Woman,” Standing Rock Sioux-Hunkpapa Lakota, and Mississippi Band of White Earth Chippewa, 1928–2001); (2) Kevin Locke (*Tłókéya Ināžiy*, “The First to Arise,” 1954–2022, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Anishinaabe of White Earth); and (3) Dr. Joel Orona (*Nihi’-taa dee’ Ch’u’ul*, “From the Fir Trees,” 1947–2021, Gila Apache, Chihene Nde Nation of New Mexico).

Abstract

The Bahá’í doctrine of progressive revelation, while universal in principle, has been limited, in scope and application, by what has previously been described as “Arya-Semiticentrism”—with a paradigmatic focus on Semitic religions (the “Abrahamic Faiths” of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, along with the Bábí and Bahá’í Faiths), and the so-called “Aryan” religions (Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism) to the relative exclusion of Indigenous religions. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán may offer a solution and resolution, to wit: “Undoubtedly in those regions [the Americas] the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.” This paper provides an exegesis of the Tablet to Amír Khán—an authenticated, authoritative Bahá’í text, with an authorized translation. Our basic premise is that, just as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has “added” the Buddha and Krishna to the Bahá’í list of “Manifestations of God,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has also “added” the principle of Indigenous Messengers of God to the Americas—without naming principals (i.e., the names of individual Indigenous “Wise Ones”), thereby demonstrating that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán effectively expands the scope of the Bahá’í doctrine of progressive revelation to include and engage Indigenous spiritual traditions.

Keywords: Indigenous; Bahá’í Faith; Tablet of Amír Khán; progressive revelation; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá



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The premise of this paper is that God did not neglect the millions of Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere, that over the centuries a “myriad of Messengers” of God were sent to various Indian nations to bring them divine theologies of which many have survived and are practiced today. For centuries, the Indigenous peoples of the Americas have been intensely religious and spiritual.

—Patricia Locke (Standing Rock Sioux-Hunkpapa Lakota/Mississippi Band of White Earth Chippewa) 1993 (P. Locke 1993; Buck and Locke 2021).

Most importantly, we have prophecies. People don’t understand that Indigenous peoples have prophecies. And we also have Prophets.

—Roman Orona (Chihene Apache/Yaqui) 2021 (R. Orona 2021, start at 4:25).

1. Introduction: The Importance of Indigenous Issues and Insights from a Global Perspective

In an increasingly interdependent and interactive world, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are experiencing ever-intensifying contacts, from conflicts to cooperation. These intercommunal and intercultural encounters include interfaces between Indigenous traditional religions and the world religions. For its part, the Bahá'í Faith is a global religion, with significant relations with Indigenous peoples worldwide, both within the Bahá'í community itself and without. This paper presents a unique Bahá'í text, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet to Amír Khán, which, as will be demonstrated, widens the scope of Bahá'í scriptural recognition so as to include Indigenous religious traditions. Before examining, explicating, and applying this key piece of Bahá'í scripture, it is important to establish historical and contemporary contexts. In so doing, the present writers have adopted a decolonizing methodology known as "Two-Eyed Seeing" (Wright et al. 2019), which is broadly summarized as follows:

Two-Eyed Seeing stresses the importance of viewing the world through one eye using the strengths of Indigenous worldviews and with the other eye using the strengths of Western worldviews, to see together with both eyes to benefit all . . . A weaving of perspectives is emphasized, with both having equal importance, but acknowledging that in some instances, one perspective may further our understanding of a specific concept or situation more than the other . . . Researchers are encouraged to learn how to weave back and forth between Indigenous and Western ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies as required. The authors use a visual of two jigsaw pieces intersecting, one not having a larger portion of the "big picture" than the other, but both contributing equitably important perspectives to the phenomenon of study . . . (Wright et al. 2019, pp. 1–2)

From the present writers' own experience working together on this article, as well as from their review of the literature, Two-Eyed Seeing is more of a vision than a lens. Two-Eyed Seeing is more of a productive interaction of Indigenous and Western perspectives, than a discrete framework of analysis. It is more intuitive than intellectually formulated. Two-Eyed Seeing is more synthesis than it is synergy. Two-Eyed Seeing, moreover, is an evolving methodology. There is no "how to" manual to follow. It points in a general direction, but without step-by-step directions. The horizon is easily seen, but the roadmap is uncertain. Although its motivations and objectives are clear, specific applications of Two-Eyed Seeing vary, depending on where and how it is applied, according to the areas of inquiry and the disciplines involved. In their article, "Confronting the contradictions between Western and Indigenous science: a critical perspective on Two-Eyed Seeing," authors Lee-Anne Broadhead and Sean Howard present some of the challenges that Two-Eyed Seeing continues to face:

In the mid-2000s, the term Two-Eyed Seeing was introduced by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall to suggest the complementarity of Western and Indigenous sciences. The concept has since been adopted and applied in a diverse range of research. This article examines the latent tension in Two-Eyed Seeing between a desire to foster dialogue—in order, ideally, to generate a trans-cultural "third space" of understanding—and the denial or suppression of major contradictions between predominantly wholistic Indigenous and predominantly reductionist Eurocentric worldviews. Examples are considered of both fruitful Two-Eyed Seeing collaborations and areas where antithetical approaches cannot be combined, for reasons that a more critical application of the Two-Eyed Seeing concept could help make clear. Conversely, revisioned in this way, Two-Eyed Seeing can deepen

appreciation of those areas of Western science, such as the delicate empiricism of Goethean science, authentically resonant with Indigenous approaches. (Broadhead and Howard 2021, Abstract, p. 111. For an extensive review of published literature on Two-Eyed Seeing, see Rankin et al. 2023).

A Two-Eyed Seeing approach has proved to be an engaging, informative, inspirational, integrative, and enlightening experience for the present writers. The authors declare that their investigation, findings, and opinions, as set forth below, represent their own informed ideas as a result of their collaborative inquiry and do not represent any official pronouncement on behalf of the Bahá'í Faith and its institutions. Rather, the authors respectfully offer the results of their investigation as a contribution to public discourse on this and related matters of interest.

2. The Tablet to Amír Khán: Introduction, Context, Text, Interpretations and Applications

The late Kevin Locke (*Thokéya Ináziŋ*, “First to Arise,” 1954–2022, Locke et al. 2018, p. 74)—a world-renowned hoop dancer, Indigenous Northern Plains flute musician, traditional storyteller, cultural ambassador, recording artist, educator, and a well-known member of the Bahá'í Faith—said: “The Tablet to Amír Khán [...] for Bahá'ís [...] is kind of like the Holy Grail when ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says that: ‘*Undoubtedly in those regions [the Americas] the call of God must have been raised in ancient times but it has been forgotten now.*’” (Locke 2021a). In a Wilmette Institute course that Buck and Locke were co-teaching, “The Great Spirit Speaks: Voices of the Wise Ones” (Buck and Locke 2021–2022; see also The Universal House of Justice 1972), Kevin Locke further stated: “For the immigrant populations and Indigenous folks who have been cut off from their spiritual heritage, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán is a touchstone that opens doors of understanding to the true history of this land.” (Locke 2021b) The reasons for Locke’s high praise of the Tablet to Amír Khán will become evident in the sections to follow.

Little is known about the circumstances surrounding the writing of the Tablet to Amír Khán, beyond the obvious fact that its recipient has been clearly identified, with some biographical details provided in the next section. The date of its revelation, however, remains a mystery. It would be useful to know whether or not it was written before or after ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s 1912 visit to America and Canada, and whether that trip was influential to ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s perceptions, and if so, in what way.

2.1. Amír Khán-i-Magháziĥ Áhan: Recipient of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s Tablet

Dr. Iraj Ayman (b. 1928), an Iranian Bahá'í living in the United States, provides the circumstances (but with no indication of the approximate date) for the composition of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán:

Amír Khán of Tehran refers to a Bahá'í known as Amír Khán Áhan. He owned a shop at the beginning of Naser Khosrow Street in Tehran. It had a sign of “Magháziĥ Áhan”. So he was known in Tehran as Amír Khán-i-Magáziĥ Áhan. He was importing and selling various hardware items. Amír Khán was famous for his many inventions. He had traveled to Europe and specially to Russia where he had sold some of his inventions. He is the recipient of a famous Tablet of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in response to his submission asking His guidance on what line he should peruse [*sic*: pursue] due to his many different interests. The Master advises him to concentrate on one line[, otherwise his talent and energies will be wasted. Amir Khán was the recipient of several Tablets and he had met ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land. Amír Khán was a close friend of my father. Accompanying my father, I did meet him many times. He was full of fascinating

ideas and constantly making new devices and solving technical problems. (From: research into history, On Behalf of Ayman, Iraj. Sent: Thursday, May 10, 2007 8:22 AM. To: TARIKH-LIST@LISTSERV.BUFFALO.EDU. Cited by permission of the author, Dr. Iraj Ayman. (See also [Buck 2014b](#))).

Little else is known about the recipient of the Tablet to Amír Khán. On the issue of Indigenous messengers of God, the Tablet to Amír Khán exists in splendid isolation in relation to other Bahá'í texts, relatively speaking, given the subject matter is Indigenous spiritual traditions in the Americas. In other words, the present writers agree with one peer reviewer's comment that "the Tablet the authors point to is significant, important, and not very well-known in the Bahá'í community."

2.2. Authenticated Original Persian/Arabic Text of the Tablet to Amír Khán

In Bahá'í discourse, a "Tablet" typically refers to a specific work (most often an epistle) revealed by Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892, prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith) or authored by 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921, Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son, designated successor, authorized interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, and the perfect exemplar of those precepts in practice). The Tablet to Amír Khán is an authenticated Tablet—and therefore an authoritative Bahá'í primary source (i.e., accepted as scripture within the Bahá'í canon)—with an authorized translation. In peer-reviewed scholarship, the appellation, "Tablet to Amír Khán," apparently was first used in ([Buck 1996](#)). It is conveniently catalogued as "AB05069. Tablet to Amír Khán" by Steven Phelps, in his *A Partial Inventory of the Works of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith* ([Phelps 2025](#), p. 1075). The following table (Table 1), was created by Adib Masumian, on co-author Buck's request, and is reproduced here, with permission, in an adapted format:

Table 1. Tablet to Amír Khán: Text, Transliteration, Translation.

English Translation	Transliteration	Original Text
He is God!	<i>Huwa'lláh</i>	هو الله
1. O servant of God! Thou hadst complained about (thine) inability to attain perfection in more than one craft. A multiple number of crafts causeth (one's) perceptions to become scattered. Endeavor in one of these crafts and strive and exert thyself to attain perfection therein. This is better than having a number of crafts (all) remain in a state of imperfection.	<i>Ay bandi-yi-illáhí, shikáyat az 'adam-i-itqán dar sanáyí'-i-muta'addidih nimúdih búdí. Tá 'addud-i-sanáyí' sabab-i-tafriq-i-haváss ast. Bih yikt az ín san'at-há ihtimám-i-kullí namá va jahd va kúshish kun tá itqán namá'í. Ín bihtar az án ast kih sanáyí'-i-muta'addidih hamih náqis mánad.</i>	ای بنده الهی، شکایت از عدم اتقان در صنایع متعدده نموده بودید. تعدد صنایع سبب تفریق حواس است. به یکی از این صنعت ها اهتمام کلی و جهد و کوشش کن تا اتقان تمامی. این بهتر از آنست که صنایع متعدده همه ناقص ماند.
2. In ancient times the people of America were, through their northern regions, close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it hath been said that crossing had occurred. There are other signs which indicate communication.	<i>Ahl-i-imrík dar azmini-yi-qadímih az jahat-i-shimál nazdik bih ásyá búdand, ya ní khaliqí fásilih ast. Lí-hádhá az án jahat gúyand 'ubúr va murúr shudih ast, va 'alá'im-i-dígar níz dalálat bar murávidih namáyad.</i>	اهل امریک در ازمنه قدیمه از جهت شمال نزدیک به آسیا بودند، یعنی خلجی فاصله است. لهذا از آن جهت گویند عبور و مرور شده است، و علامت دیگر نیز دلالت بر مراوده نماد.
3. As to places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets, such people are excused. In the Qur'án [17:15] it hath been revealed: "We will not chastise them if they had not been sent a Messenger."	<i>Ammá bih mahallí kih shí-i-nubuvvat narisad, án nufús ma'dhúrand. Dar qur'án mí-farmáyad: "wa má kunná mu'adhdhibín hattá nab'athá rasúla."</i>	اما به محلی که صلت نبوت نرسد، آن نفوس معذورند. در قرآن می فرماید: و ما کتا معذبین حتی نبعث رسولا.
4. Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.	<i>Al-battih dar án safahát níz dar azmini-yi-qadímih vaqtí nidá-yi-lláhi buland gashatih, va-lákin hál farámúsh shudih ast.</i>	البته در آن صفحات نیز در ازمنه قدیمه وقتی ندای الهی بلند گشته، و لکن حال فراموش شده است.
5. I will supplicate God to confirm thee in attaining perfection in one of the crafts.	<i>Az khudá mí-talabam kih khudá shumá rá tá'id farmáyad tá san'atí az sanáyí' rá takmíl farmá'id.</i>	از خدا می طلبم که خدا شما را تأید فرماید تا صنعتی از صنایع را تکمیل فرماید.
6. And upon thee be greetings and praise.	<i>Wa 'alayka't-tahfíyyatu wa'th-thaná'.</i>	و علیک التحته و الثناء.

2.3. Authorized Translation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán

The above three-column table provides the original Persian text (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 2005, pp. 177–78 (§ 247)), along with transliteration, with combined provisional translation (§§ 1, 5, and 6) and authorized (§§ 2–4) translation as well (‘Abdu’l-Bahá n.d.). A brief commentary on the authorized translation (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahá’í Reference Library 2025 (hereafter, “BRL 2025”), www.bahai.org/r/760585775, accessed on 18 August 2025), is offered below (and without comment on the provisional translations). Apart from personal advice, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán evidently deals with four issues:

1. How can one become more skillful in arts and crafts?
2. Did the ancestors of Native North Americans cross over the Bering Strait?
3. What is the fate of people who do not know of God’s latest messenger?
4. Were Messengers of God sent to North America?

Since §§ 1, 5 and 6 of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán concern a personal response and have no bearing on the subject of this paper, those paragraphs will not be discussed further here. With regard to § 2, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appears to allude to the prevailing scholarly consensus in contemporary scientific literature (“it hath been said”) regarding the theory that the Bering Land Bridge (also known as “Beringia”) once linked Siberia and Alaska, and that there is tacit agreement on the topic (i.e., “other signs which indicate communication”). While the Bering Land Bridge theory is widely accepted in the scientific community (Farmer et al. 2023), many (if not most) Indigenous peoples of the Americas object to the theory of the Bering Land Bridge as the sole, or even primary, explanation for their ancestors’ arrival in the Americas for several reasons, including cultural, historical, spiritual, and scientific perspectives (Deloria 2021).

From the preceding statement, “places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets (*nubuwwat*)” must have meant primarily the Americas, even though the answer is general, in support of which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cites Qur’án 17:15, which states:

Whosoever is guided, is only guided to his own gain, and whosoever goes astray, it is only to his own loss; no soul laden bears the load of another. *We never chastise, until We send forth a Messenger.* (Qur’án 17:15, tr. Arberry. Emphasis added; Quranic Arabic Corpus 2025, <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=17&verse=15>, accessed on 18 August 2025).

Here, the Arabic word for “a Messenger” is *rasūlan*. (Quranic Arabic Corpus 2025, [https://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=17&verse=15#\(17:15:1\)](https://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=17&verse=15#(17:15:1)), accessed on 18 August 2025). The noun *rasūl* (رَسُول), i.e., “Messenger,” occurs 332 times in the Qur’án. (Quranic Arabic Corpus 2025, [https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=rsl#\(17:15:21\)](https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=rsl#(17:15:21)), accessed on 18 August 2025). Since one can infer a probable question from a clear answer given in response, it is likely that Amír Khán asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about “the appearance of Prophets” (*sīṭ-i-nubuwwat*), among the “people of America” (*ahl-i-imrīk*), “in ancient times” (*dar azmini-yi-qadīmih*), wherein, in response, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cited Qur’án 17:15, in which the term “a Messenger” (*rasūlan*) is used. This sets the context for the statement that follows next.

“Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times” is a positive, emphatic response indicating absolute certainty. As for the expression “the Call of God” (*nidā-yi-Ilāhī*), this key expression first and foremost refers to the message brought by a Messenger of God, as the following Bahá’í texts demonstrate:

Thus Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of God [*nidā-yi-ilāhī*] hath been raised, and the light of His countenance hath been lifted up upon men. It behooveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart,

and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission, and the tokens of His glory. (Bahá'u'lláh, BRL 2025, www.bahai.org/r/712711887, accessed on 18 August 2025).

This is the day of vision, for the countenance of God is shining resplendent above the horizon of Manifestation. This is the day of hearing, for the call of God [*nidá-yi-iláhi*] hath been raised. It behoveth everyone in this day to uphold and proclaim that which hath been revealed by Him Who is the Author of all scripture, the Dayspring of revelation, the Fount of knowledge and the Source of divine wisdom. (Bahá'u'lláh, BRL 2025, www.bahai.org/r/384392688, accessed on 18 August 2025).

These two exemplary passages further attest that both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh raised the “Call of God” for this day and age. That said, these texts present fairly open and obvious references to the “Call of God” as an expression for the divine revelations brought by each. As Necati Alkan further observes: “‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s statement in the Tablet to Amír Khán is unambiguous. Who else than Prophets or Messengers can raise the ‘Call of God’?” (Qtd. in [Buck 2014a](#)).

The “Call of God” was further “upraised” by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá “around the world” in a supportive way:

All these things bring joy to the heart, and yet ‘Abdu'l-Bahá is sunk deep in an ocean of grief, and pain and anguish have so affected my limbs and members that utter weakness hath overtaken my whole body. Note ye that when, singly and alone, with none to second me, I upraised the call of God [*nidá-yi-Haqq*] around the world, the peoples thereof rose up to oppose, to dispute, to deny. (‘Abdu'l-Bahá 1978, p. 229; BRL 2025, www.bahai.org/r/586739836, accessed on 18 August 2025).

Suffice it to say that, here, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá declares that he personally has proclaimed the “call of God” far and wide, by which he is referring to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, who first raised the “call of God,” to which ‘Abdu'l-Bahá had dedicated his life, and which was a mission that he undertook by way of international travels, as well as international correspondence, as history has documented, in exquisite detail, and otherwise well attests.

These passages suggest that the “Call of God” refers to divine revelation ultimately traceable back to a Manifestation of God (in Bahá'í discourse, a Theophany or appearance of the divine, without incarnation, by way of a God-inspired messenger).

The next statement, “but it hath been forgotten now” (*va-lákin hál farámúsh shudih ast*), is a generalization, wherein the adverb “undoubtedly” (*al-battih*) does not control and, moreover, would be contrary to fact. Here, “forgotten” is modified by the adverb “now” (*hál*), meaning at the present time, i.e., “time present” ([Steingass 1892](#), p. 409: https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/steingass_query.py?page=409, accessed on 18 August 2025). This state of affairs may well have predominated at the time when ‘Abdu'l-Bahá wrote the Tablet to Amír Khán. But it certainly did not mean “now and for all time,” as it were, and certainly did not foreclose on any discovery or rediscovery of such Indigenous spiritual legacies at some point in the future. That possibility is certainly left open, especially for further investigation.

2.4. The “Deganawida Epic” as a Prime Exemplar Validating the Sum and Substance of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán

That which is forgotten, moreover, may be remembered or rediscovered. For instance, consider the teachings of Deganawida, “the Peacemaker,” of which a number of authentic, authoritative versions (collectively referred to as the “Deganawida Epic”) are extant.

The Deganawida Epic—also known as the *Kayanerenkó:wa*, or “The Great Law of Peace” (Williams 2018)—is a body of sacred Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) oral literature that recounts how the prophet Deganawida—“the Peacemaker”—joined with the orator Hiawatha to end inter-tribal warfare and to establish what is popularly known as the “Iroquois Confederacy.” The Deganawida Epic is not a single text but a cycle of narratives preserved in more than forty recorded versions (in Onondaga, Mohawk, Oneida, Seneca, and English). It describes Deganawida’s miraculous birth, his canoe journey across Lake Ontario, the “darkness of the mind” that gripped the warring nations, Hiawatha’s conversion, the condolence ceremony that healed grief, and the forging of the historic League of Five (later Six) Nations of the Confederacy (Buck 2016).

The Deganawida Epic is one example, among a diverse historical spectrum of Indigenous spiritual authority, that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán seeks to validate and recognize. This authoritative Indigenous text demonstrates the sophisticated theological and social teachings that emerged from pre-colonial Indigenous messengers in the Americas—that include various tribes and nations—precisely the kind of divine guidance that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declared “must have been raised in ancient times” but had “been forgotten now.” Among these versions, *Concerning the League* (Gibson et al. 1992) is an Indigenous sacred text that, the present writers believe, warrants recognition as part of our collective world literature. (See (Buck 2016, p. 84): “Phenomenologically, the Deganawida epic—most notably *Concerning the League*, dictated by Chief John Arthur Gibson in 1912—compares favorably with the sacred scripture in the world’s great religions and, as such, belongs to world literature.”) As independent Bahá’í scholar, Necati Alkan, also observes:

It sounds to me that the Peacemaker did raise the “Call of God” in “ancient times” (that is, in the “pre-contact” era before the Europeans came to America). It rings true. It fits ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s description in the Tablet to Amír Khán perfectly. There’s no question that Deganawida’s teachings are profound. They resonate powerfully with Bahá’í teachings. They are in harmony. They echo each other.” (Qtd. in Buck 2014a).

The Peacemaker’s revolutionary message encompasses three fundamental principles—the Good Message, the Power, and the Peace—that remarkably parallel core themes found in world religions: the cessation of violence, the unity of all peoples as one family, and the establishment of lasting peace through spiritual transformation. This Indigenous sacred text serves as compelling evidence for the Tablet to Amír Khán’s central thesis that the Americas received authentic divine messengers whose teachings remain accessible through preserved oral and written traditions. By citing this epic within the context of progressive revelation, the authors demonstrate how Indigenous wisdom traditions, far from being “forgotten” remnants of the past, continue to offer transformative spiritual teachings that resonate with contemporary global needs for peace, unity, and justice.

The Tablet to Amír Khán, at first blush, may strike the reader as simply personal advice or as answers to sundry questions but little more. Further study, however, reveals the profound implications of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s “Undoubtedly” pronouncement in the Tablet to Amír Khán, as set forth in this paper.

Scholarly as well as popular Bahá’í interest in the “Tablet to Amír Khán” (as this text came to be known) is relatively recent, as chronicled and recapitulated below. Prior to that, excerpts from the Tablet to Amír Khán had circulated in the form of various statements (each titled as a “Memorandum”) by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, in which passing references are made in the sections that follow. First, a brief retrospective overview of the background and context is provided as to how interest in Indigenous messengers of God arose significantly in Bahá’í discourse over the past several decades.

2.5. Review of Prior Scholarship on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán

Scholarly interest in the “Tablet to Amír Khán” emerged when significant attention was drawn to the statement, “Undoubtedly in those regions [the Americas] the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times” Prior to June 1993, Buck submitted an invited paper, “Native Messengers of God in Canada?: A Test Case for Bahá’í Universalism,” to the *Journal of Bahá’í Studies* (Buck 1993). Subsequently, Dr. Wendi Momen presented this paper for the author, in absentia, at the “Bahá’í Studies Seminar” (Association for Bahá’í Studies, English-Speaking Europe), held June 1993 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK.

After that, an unpublished article, “American Indian Religion and the Bahá’í Faith,” originally written by Dr. Joseph Weixelman, was submitted to the *Bahá’í Encyclopedia*. The article was later revised by Jacqueline Left Hand Bull (Bahaipedia 2025), then edited by Dr. Moojan Momen and Dr. Wendi Momen, with the last revision by Jacqueline Left Hand Bull, for publication in the *Bahá’í Encyclopedia*, an excerpt of which is as follows:

2. *Native American prophets[:]* [. . .] While in the Bahá’í scriptures, no specific Messengers of God who have appeared in North America are named, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, evidently referring to the existence of such Messengers among the [N]ative American peoples, states that “[U]ndoubtedly in those regions [America] the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times” (Research Department Memorandum). In accordance with the Bahá’í teaching of [P]rogressive [R]evelation, the teachings of these [N]ative American spiritual teachers paved the way and prepared the people for the coming of Bahá’u’lláh. (Bull and Weixelman 1994; provided courtesy of the *Bahá’í Encyclopedia Project*, by Gayle Morrison, Coordinating Editor, *Bahá’í Encyclopedia Project*, personal communication (by email), 17 July 2024).

This article had not yet been accepted for publication in the *Bahá’í Encyclopedia*, but was under serious consideration. (Bull and Weixelman 1994. (Note: “American Indian Religion and the Bahá’í Faith” is an unpublished, draft article, written for possible inclusion in the *Bahá’í Encyclopedia*, an ongoing project of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States. It will not appear in the *Bahá’í Encyclopedia* in its present form and should not be considered representative of the project. Provided courtesy of the *Bahá’í Encyclopedia Project*, by Gayle Morrison, Coordinating Editor, *Bahá’í Encyclopedia Project*, personal communication (by email), 17 July 2024)).

In the headnotes, the space after “Approved” has been left blank). *Bahá’í Encyclopedia* editor Moojan Momen had added the comment: “While in the Bahá’í scriptures, no specific Messengers of God who have appeared in North America are named, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, evidently referring to the existence of such Messengers among the [N]ative American peoples, states that “[U]ndoubtedly in those regions [America] the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times” (Research Department Memorandum).” (See Momen 1995; qtd in Buck 1995). The “Bibliography,” which included reference to Buck’s unpublished 1993 paper, “Native Messengers of God in Canada?” (Buck 1993), did not include Vinson Brown’s landmark book on this topic, *Voices of Earth and Sky: The Vision Life of the Native Americans* (Brown 1974, 1976). Naturegraph had also published *Lord of the Dawn: Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent of Mexico* (Shearer 1971), a book-length poem about the ancient Toltec wisdom bearer and ruler.

Meanwhile, in a discussion of the Tablet to Amír Khán (but not by this name) on the now-defunct private Internet list-serve, “Talisman” (Talisman Archives 1994–1996), Momen confirmed this significant editorial gloss:

There is in fact a statement from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referring to America to the effect that “undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in

ancient times” (Memorandum of the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, “Zoroaster and Buddha: Simultaneity of Manifestations,” 24 May 1988 (Research Department 1988)). I would argue that this is the equivalent of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá acknowledging the existence of America [*sic*: American] Manifestations of God, and I added a statement to this effect to the article “American Indian Religion and the Bahá’í Faith” that was intended for the Bahá’í Encyclopedia. (Momen 1995; qtd. in Buck 1995)

Originally intended for publication in the *Journal of Bahá’í Studies*, “Native Messengers of God in Canada?: A Test Case for Bahá’í Universalism” was published in *Bahá’í Studies Review* (Buck 1996). In *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá’í Faith* (Smith 2000b, 2000a), Peter Smith referred to the sum and substance of the Tablet to Amír Khán (but not by name) briefly, in two entries, “Prophets” (2000a) and “Indigenous Religions” (2000b), which should be cross-referenced and read together), to wit: “‘Abdu’l-Bahá specifically stating that God’s call had undoubtedly been raised in the Americas in the past.” (Smith 2000b, p. 196). And further: “Some Bahá’ís thus regard figures such as the Native American prophets Viracocha (Inca), Quetzalcoátl (Toltec) and Deganawida (Iroquois) as divine messengers.” (Smith 2000a, p. 279). These two entries are significant in that they further demonstrate a growing acceptance (which has not yet reached a consensus) of this reading of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán.

In *Reason and Revelation: New Directions in Bahá’í Thought*, edited by Seena Fazel and John Danesh, a book chapter, “Bahá’í Universalism and Native Prophets” was published (Buck 2002). In *Online Journal of Bahá’í Studies* (published under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of New Zealand), a 91-page article, “Messengers of God in North America Revisited: An Exegesis of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amir Khán,” co-authored by Buck and Donald Addison, Ph.D. (Choctaw), was published online (Buck and Addison 2007).

In 2016, in an article for *Encyclopædia Iranica*, “*Mazhar-e Eláhi* (Manifestation of God),” Moojan Momen, in part, wrote: “In addition to those mentioned in the Bible and Qor’án, such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad, the authoritative Bahai texts also recognize Zoroaster, Krishna, and the Buddha as Manifestations of God and assert that numerous others have come to humanity whose names may have been lost, such as, for example, among Native Americans (Bahá’-Alláh 1984, no. 87, 115–16; tr., 84 [*sic*: 87]; Fázél Mázan-daráni, 46–47).” (Momen 2016). Like Peter Smith, Moojan Momen briefly referred to the substance of the Tablet to Amír Khán—not by name, but by citing “Fázél Mázan-daráni, 46–47.” (See Fázíl-i-Mázindaráni 1985–1986, pp. 46–47 (citing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amir Khán), in the original Persian). Momen’s other reference refers to (Bahá’u’lláh 2006, pp. 115–16 [§ 87], original Persian text) and (Bahá’u’lláh 1990, pp. 172–75 [§ LXXXVII, i.e., § 87], English translation by Shoghi Effendi), which states, in part:

Our purpose in revealing these words is to show that the one true God hath, in His all-highest and transcendent station, ever been, and will everlastingly continue to be, exalted above the praise and conception of all else but Him. His creation hath ever existed, and the Manifestations of His Divine glory and the Daysprings of eternal holiness have been sent down from time immemorial, and been commissioned to summon mankind to the one true God. That the names of some of them are forgotten and the records of their lives lost is to be attributed to the disturbances and changes that have overtaken the world. (Bahá’u’lláh 1990, p. 174, www.bahai.org/r/075015137, accessed on 18 August 2025)

As implicit support of the Tablet to Amír Khán, reference may also be made to Bahá’u’lláh’s statement, which is a universalism, in the *Tafşír-i-Va’sh-Shams* (Commen-

tary on the Surah of the Sun). (See entry “BH00271” in (Phelps 2025, p. 34)). Shoghi Effendi has translated part of this Commentary in Section 89 (§ LXXXIX) of *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* (Bahá’u’lláh 1990, pp. 175–77), <https://www.bahai.org/r/354078886>, accessed on 18 August 2025). A provisional translation by Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini of Bahá’u’lláh’s highly significant universalism is as follows: “Every nation of the world hath been illuminated by one of these luminous Suns.” (Buck and Mohammadhosseini 2019). Transliteration (by Buck) is as follows: *Kamá tará inna kulla millatin min milali al-arḍi istaḍā’at bi-shamsin min hádhihi al-shumúsi al-mushriqa*. The original Arabic text of Bahá’u’lláh’s statement is available online:

المشرق الشموس هذه من بشمس استضاءت الأرض ملل من ملة كل إن تری كما

(Ocean of Lights 2025)

This statement is a “universalism”—“The principle of regarding humanity as a whole, rather than in terms of different nations, races, etc.” (Oxford English Dictionary 2025b), q.v. “universalism,” 2.b.)—because “every nation” would obviously include the Western Hemisphere and the Indigenous peoples dwelling therein. Other scholars concur as well, such as Moojan Momen (Momen 2016) and Peter Smith (Smith 2000b, 2000a). In connection with the Tablet to Amír Khán, Dr. Mohammadhosseini also observed: “A: Yes, especially since Abdu’l-Baha, in his Tablet to Amir Khán, explicitly indicates that Manifestations of God were sent to the Americas. But there are several Baha’i texts that clearly imply this.” (Buck and Mohammadhosseini 2019).

Brief mention should be made here of the “Indigenous Messengers of God” series, in which Kevin Locke (Lakota) and Christopher Buck collaborated in co-authoring 73 articles of the 109-article series (Buck et al. 2014–2022; see also (Buck 2024) for a list of all 109 articles, with online links provided), using the “Two-Eyed Seeing” methodology (Buck and Locke 2022). This series began with several articles on the Tablet to Amír Khán, with further references throughout the series, passim. The “Indigenous Messengers of God” series presented articles on: (1) Deganawida, the Peacemaker; (2) White Buffalo Calf Woman; (3) Breath Maker; (4) Sweet Medicine; (5) Lone Man; (6) Quetzalcoatl; (7) Viracocha; (8) Mother Corn; (9) Iyatiku (Corn Woman); (10) Talking God; (11) Gluskap; (12) Wesakechak; (13) Nanabush; (14) Chinigchinich; (15) Marumda; (16) Ulikron; (17) Ibeorgun; (18) Tunapa; (19) Kuchamaa; (20) Bochica; (21) Bunjil; (22) Rainbow Serpent; (23) The Yam Prophet; and (24) Raven. (Buck et al. 2014–2022; for a comprehensive list, with links, see Buck 2024. Special thanks to Jonah Winters and Arjen Bolhuis for posting this bibliography of the 109-article “Indigenous Messengers of God” series on “Bahá’í Library Online.” (Bahá’í Library Online 2025). Personal communications (via email), 4–5 January 2025.).

Moreover, it is historically informative and fitting to acknowledge how Indigenous peoples in America were meeting and deepening during the mid-1990s by holding Native “talking circles” and conversations on the Tablet to Amír Khán. Dr. Joel Orona and Esther R. Orona served as co-directors for the Native American Baha’i Institute (NABI) from 1995 to 1998. In the fall of 1995, Dr. Orona led a monthly four-part series of Indigenous Talking Circles and discussions on “‘Abdul-Bahá, the Tablet to Amír Khán, and the Prominent Role of Native Peoples.” Participants discussed Native American traditional knowledge systems, spiritual beliefs, ‘Abdul-Bahá’s 1916 Tablet to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, and ‘Abdul-Bahá’s equally important statement that, “Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times.” These gatherings—not by design, but rather due to the geographical location of the Native American Baha’i Institute, located on the Navajo reservation (i.e., the Navajo Nation)—may have served as the first time where all participants of this Bahá’í gathering were of Indigenous ancestry. Participants included

members of the local Navajo community, Dr. Orona (Apache), his wife Esther (Yaqui), and other Indigenous peoples from the surrounding area.

3. The Tablet to Amír Khán: An Indigenous American Viewpoint

Since this Tablet by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá deals with Indigenous American culture, it is important to assess it from an Indigenous viewpoint, a viewpoint that has rarely been examined previously. One of the authors of this paper, Michael A. Orona, is both of Apache and Yaqui ancestry and a Bahá’í and is thus well positioned to offer an assessment. The authors wish to make clear that they approach this study with a perspective shaped by lived experience, that the positionality of each author informs their respective understanding, and that, while still striving to critically engage with the material, they are attentive to other viewpoints. This is especially true for the Indigenous co-author.

In Indigenous cultures across the world, poetry and storytelling serve as vital vessels of knowledge transmission, spiritual wisdom, and cultural continuity. These art forms are far more than mere entertainment or artistic expression—they represent sophisticated systems of preserving and passing down essential truths that have sustained Indigenous peoples for countless generations. Through oral traditions, Indigenous peoples have maintained their histories, spiritual teachings, ecological knowledge, and moral guidelines in ways that transcend the written word.

The power of Indigenous poetry or storytelling lies in its holistic nature. Indigenous poems are not simply narratives with beginnings and ends, but rather living teachings that spiral through time, connecting past, present, and future generations in an unbroken circle of wisdom. When elders share stories, they are not merely recounting events or tales—they are engaging in a sacred act of transmission that involves the speaker, the listeners, the ancestors, and the spiritual forces that animate the natural and spiritual world. Each telling of a story adds new layers of meaning, allowing ancient wisdom to remain relevant and vital for contemporary challenges.

As an Apache and member of the Bahá’í Faith, Dr. Joel Orona’s 2019 book of poetry, *The American Indians—Then, Now and Forever* (J. Orona 2019), mirrors the traditional storytelling and poetry practices of his elders and conveys an Indigenous understanding that knowledge is not linear but circular in nature. Through carefully chosen words, rhythmic patterns, and metaphorical language, he creates multi-layered works that simultaneously preserve traditional knowledge while speaking to present-day realities. His unique poetic structure allows for the expression of complex spiritual concepts that would be diminished or distorted if rendered in direct, linear prose. Dr. Orona’s circular approach to knowledge transmission echoes the praised methodology found in the works of celebrated Indigenous poets such as Leslie Marmon Silko and Joy Harjo, who similarly bridge ancestral wisdom with modern literary forms. However, Dr. Orona’s integration of traditional Apache storytelling techniques coupled with contemporary Bahá’í spiritual beliefs and principles uniquely positions him and his distinct literary craftsmanship to underscore the significance the Tablet to Amir Khán places on Indigenous peoples at this time in history.

As an Indigenous poet raised in the Native storytelling tradition of his elders, Dr. Orona expresses how Indigenous knowledge keepers can encode teachings about the interconnectedness of all life, the sacred nature of the land, and the ongoing presence of ancestral wisdom. Through his artistic prose, Dr. Orona helps the next generation of Indigenous youth understand their place within the ancient lineage of Indigenous knowledge transmission, while also providing tools for navigating modern complexities through traditional wisdom frameworks.

In the poem, “On Medicine Men” (J. Orona 2019, pp. 14–15), Dr. Orona’s work serves as a bridge between ancient wisdom and contemporary challenges by acknowledging the

important role previous Indigenous “Manifestations of God” (referred to here as “Medicine Men”) have played in the spiritual development of Indigenous communities:

ON MEDICINE MEN
(The Manifestations)

Where are the medicine men?
Not the medicine of bottled pills,
With speed, convenience and flare,
But those guiders of virtue and honor.

Instead, we have the firm,
Gripped to put out the word.
If it's too little, too fast, or too much,
Who is there to cure the side effects?

Where are the medicine men,
To bear new generations,
With simple truths,
Borne of ancient wisdom?

Not the money, pastor, priest, or shaman,
But those spirits of detachment,
Imparting light,
As a candle in the darkness.

Where are the medicine men,
Wise through progressive revelations,
That pierced a thousand riddles,
And cured ten-thousand ills?

Discredited and disavowed,
They've been left to teach in backwaters,
Where wealth dumps its refuse,
Where firms and congregations don't invest.

Still, their antidote is never censored,
For sordid hearts seek their elixir,
And wounded souls,
Petition for their balm.

Having drank from pure streams,
Inhaled the essence of verdant fields
And taken in all learning from the four directions,
The hills give passage

To these medicine men,
Who come in every era,
Amidst the clamor and confusion:
Bestowing the gifts of wonderment.

—J. Orona (2019, pp. 14–15)

This poem explicitly resonates deeply with the spiritual authentication found in the Tablet to Amír Khán, particularly in its recognition of Indigenous spiritual leadership

through time. The poem's opening question—"Where are the medicine men?"—takes on profound significance when viewed alongside 'Abdu'l-Bahá's definitive statement that "Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times." Both texts speak to the existence and importance of Indigenous spiritual guides, though from different perspectives and across different times. (On "Medicine Men" as "Manifestations of God," see e.g., [Buck et al. 2014–2022](#); [Buck 2024](#)).

Regarding the "Undoubtedly" statement, co-author Michael Orona recalls learning from his father, Dr. Joel Orona, about the Tablet to Amír Khán, as a young man—possibly in the 1990s. Dr. Orona, who was not raised as a Bahá'í, found the Faith as a younger man only after studying Islam, Buddhism, and other religious traditions in his search for a spiritual tradition (world religion) that would acknowledge and equally accept his own Indigenous spiritual and cultural beliefs. While studying Islam and the Quran is when Dr. Orona first encountered the passage, "Every nation has its Messenger." (Qur'an 10:47, trans. Arberry. See "Verse (10:47)—English Translation," [Quranic Arabic Corpus 2025](#), <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=10&verse=47>, accessed on 18 August 2025).

In his continued spiritual quest, Dr. Orona came to eventually learn about the Bahá'í Faith and its foundational principle of Progressive Revelation, the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and thus the spiritual traditions of Indigenous peoples being acknowledged as part of this universal divine plan of guidance which corresponded to Dr. Orona's unshakable belief that Native peoples have always been guided by Indigenous prophets and spiritual leaders. It was after hearing about the universal principles of the Bahá'í Faith that he immediately accepted (that same evening, in March 1974) a religion that not only welcomed his Indigenous beliefs but would actively embrace the diversity of his cultural traditions.

Dr. Orona's distinction between modern medicine "of bottled pills" and those "guiders of virtue and honor" parallels a deeper understanding of spiritual authority that transcends institutional religion. His reference to "those spirits of detachment/ Impairing the light/ As a candle in the darkness" suggests precisely the kind of divine guidance that 'Abdu'l-Bahá acknowledges must have existed in pre-colonial America. The poem's mention of "progressive revelations" is particularly striking, as it echoes both Indigenous understandings of ongoing spiritual guidance and the Bahá'í principle of progressive revelation.

The phrase "That pierced a thousand riddles/ And cured ten-thousand ills" speaks to the comprehensive nature of Indigenous spiritual leadership, addressing both material and spiritual needs of their communities. This aligns with the Tablet's implicit recognition of Indigenous peoples as recipients and transmitters of divine guidance, capable of addressing the full spectrum of human needs and development.

When Dr. Orona writes of these medicine men being "Discredited and disavowed," yet continuing to "teach in backwaters," he touches upon the historical suppression of Indigenous spiritual traditions and lack of importance placed on Indigenous spiritual knowledge. However, the poem's assertion that "their antidote is never censored" resonates with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's confirmation of the validity of these spiritual traditions, suggesting that despite attempts to silence or dismiss Indigenous spiritual leadership, their divine authority persists.

The poem's final stanza, speaking of medicine men who "come in every era/ Amidst the clamor and confusion:/ Bestowing the gifts of wonderment," aligns powerfully with the Tablet's recognition of ongoing divine guidance in Indigenous communities. The "Undoubtedly" in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement often struck Dr. Orona as a profound validation of what Indigenous peoples have always known—that their spiritual traditions and leaders were divinely inspired and guided—a theme he often referred to in Native American talking circles and various informal gatherings with other Indigenous peoples during his

time as co-director, along with his wife Esther Renteria-Orona, of the Native American Bahá'í Institute from 1995 to 1998.

This confirmation would have been particularly meaningful given the historical context of colonial suppression and dismissal of Indigenous spiritual traditions. The Tablet's acknowledgment of pre-colonial divine guidance in the Americas provides historical and spiritual validation for the continuing role of Indigenous spiritual leaders—the very “medicine men” whose presence and importance Dr. Orona's poem celebrates and calls for in our contemporary world.

Through both these works, we see a powerful affirmation of Indigenous spiritual authority and its continuing relevance. The “medicine men” of Dr. Orona's poem, who have “taken in all learning from the four directions,” represent the same divine guidance that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá confirms must have existed in ancient America. Together, these texts suggest that Indigenous spiritual leadership remains vital for humanity's collective spiritual development and healing.

3.1. *Two Remarkable Promises by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Read Together as One*

‘Abdu'l-Bahá offered two remarkable promises about America and its inhabitants. The first statement foretells what is often referred to by Bahá'ís as the “destiny of America”:

The American continent gives signs and evidences of very great advancement; its future is even more promising, for its influence and illumination are far-reaching, and it will lead all nations spiritually. The flag of freedom and banner of liberty have been unfurled here, but the prosperity and advancement of a city, the happiness and greatness of a country depend upon its hearing and obeying the call of God. (‘Abdu'l-Bahá 1982, p. 104)

There has been much discussion about this promise, including its scope and range of meaning (Buck 2009, 2015; Khan 2009; Medina 2010). Yet none of these readings, so far, appear to have sufficiently incorporated, if at all, another extraordinary promise by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, which is focused on the destiny of the “[I]ndigenous population of America”:

Attach great importance to the [I]ndigenous population of America. [...] Likewise, these Indians, should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world. (‘Abdu'l-Bahá 1993, p. 33)

These two texts are typically read separately, in different contexts. Both promises, however, when read together, appear to state that America is destined to have a significant world role in promoting world unity, such that it will “lead all nations spiritually,” and that part and parcel of that highly influential and transformative leadership is that the Indigenous peoples across the Americas would prospectively enlighten the world. When read together as one, these two prophecies not only foretell, they forthtell as well. See the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) definition of “forthtell”: “rare. transitive. To tell forth, publish abroad” (Oxford English Dictionary 2025a). In other words, these mantic (i.e., prophetic) statements are also social mandates. A true prophecy is a prophecy that not only will come true but will do so by merit of its inherent truth and by necessity. Such predictions of the future are predications for the present. Thus, the foresight in a true prophecy can be the result of profound insight as to what will occur, by virtue of what must (or should) inevitably transpire, over time.

These two key promises are visions of the future as it could, should, and/or will be. They are destiny statements, implicit manifestos, mandates, mission statements. For promises to be fulfilled, they must be acted upon. From a Bahá'í perspective, these promises are certain to come true at some point in the future. But the circumstances and timing must

be ripe and right, since promises are not self-executing and do not automatically become fulfilled. In other words, the timing is not a foregone conclusion, for the simple reason that the fulfillment of these two prophecies depends on time and circumstance. Fulfillment of these two prophecies is not a matter of “if” but of “how” and “when.” The conditions for their respective fulfillments, after all, must be optimal. With this understanding in mind, it is important to consider the principle and prospect of actually accelerating or “hastening” the fulfillment of this world-transforming vision, by playing Indigenous and non-Indigenous Bahá’ís playing their respective roles in contributing to the fulfillment of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prophecy as to the spiritual destiny of Indigenous peoples of the Americas, who become “illuminated” and inspired by the Bahá’í teachings:

We cherish the hope that at this final Conference the friends will arise with enthusiasm and determination not only to win the remaining goals of the Plan but to carry out Shoghi Effendi’s injunction to win the allegiance of members of the various tribes of American Indians to the Cause, *thereby hastening the period prophesied by the Master when the Indian peoples of America would become a source of spiritual illumination to the world.* (The Universal House of Justice 1977, emphasis added).

Whether in Alaska’s southeastern islands and rugged mountains, or in Canada’s huge Indian reserves from the west to the east, many Amerindian believers have arisen to serve the Cause, and through their joint efforts, their sacrificial endeavors and distinctive talents *they bid fair to accelerate the dawn of the day when they will be so “illuminated as to enlighten the whole world.”* (The Universal House of Justice 1976, emphasis added).

So, although these two concurrent (and possibly interrelated) prophecies—the “destiny of America” and the destiny of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas—are not self-executing, they are, in a manner of speaking, self-fulfilling—not in an abstract sense, but in a participatory mode. The greater the effort, the faster the necessary circumstances will be right and ripe in order to bring about their respective realization and fulfillment.

3.2. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán: Further Considerations from an Indigenous American Bahá’í Perspective

This Tablet impresses immediately as a meeting of traditional wisdom and contemporary knowledge. The words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá resonate with an ancestral memory, speaking to both the wounds and the wisdom carried through generations of Indigenous peoples. His addition of Indigenous messengers of God carries with it the concept that God’s divine guidance has been made available to all human beings throughout history.

When coupled with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s writings of America’s destiny to “lead all nations spiritually” and his prophecy of the role Indigenous peoples will play in enlightening the world, it confirms what Indigenous elders have long known—that the spiritual traditions and understanding they have maintained through centuries of hardship carry profound importance for humanity’s collective future.

This Tablet serves as a pivotal spiritual and historical text, bridging ancient Indigenous wisdom with the progressive revelation of the Bahá’í Faith. Several aspects are particularly worthy of academic inquiry:

First, the Tablet’s primary significance lies in its revolutionary challenge to conventional historical narratives, offering instead a perspective that centers Indigenous spiritual authority. Rather than the colonialist positioning of Indigenous peoples as recipients of enlightenment from European settlers, the Tablet explicitly states in the North American region, “the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times. . . .” This prophetic vision merits extensive scholarly analysis, as it fundamentally reconstructs Indigenous-settler

relations by positioning Native peoples as bearers of divine guidance, as evidenced in the Tablet's explicit recognition of pre-colonial spiritual leadership. This Tablet, moreover, significantly underscores the agency, wisdom, and integral role Indigenous peoples will play in shaping spiritual and cultural narratives in world-historical contexts and in contemporary discourse as well.

Second, the emphasis in this Tablet and the other passages quoted above on the spiritual qualities inherent in Indigenous cultures—i.e., Native connection to the land, Indigenous beliefs in the sacred interconnectedness of all things, and long-standing traditions of collective wisdom and healing—implicitly represent these not as historical remnants but as essential spiritual healing for humanity's future. This perspective offers rich ground for extensive examination of how Indigenous knowledge systems can address contemporary global challenges. ([M.A. Orona 2025](#) (start at 29:15)).

The Tablet explicitly demonstrates the Bahá'í principle of unity in diversity through its recognition of Indigenous spiritual authority, particularly evidenced in its acknowledgment of pre-colonial divine guidance in the Americas. It suggests that America's spiritual destiny can only be fulfilled through the full recognition and integration of Indigenous wisdom. This perspective necessitates a thorough examination of spiritual leadership through an Indigenous paradigm, particularly considering how traditional circular governance models, as practiced by numerous Native nations, contrast with conventional hierarchical structures. ([M. A. Orona 2024](#) (start at 41:13)).

The perspective of traditional Indigenous circular governance models is reflected in the Native American medicine wheel—a symbol of healing and health utilized by numerous Native American tribes and Indigenous peoples worldwide. The wheel underscores that unity is not achievable unless and until all people are part of the solution and all must play an active role.

This Tablet serves as a bridge between worlds that are often perceived as separate, but are, in truth, deeply complementary. It validates the importance of preserving and sharing Indigenous spiritual traditions while simultaneously affirming the role Indigenous people play in humanity's evolving spiritual consciousness. The Tablet's vision of Indigenous spiritual wisdom does not suggest dominance or superiority but rather speaks to the role of Native peoples as protectors and agents of traditional knowledge and wisdom. As the late Dr. Joel Orona observed: "Native peoples shall provide spiritual healing in this day to the ills that have plagued humanity for far too long." ([J. Orona 1994](#)).

Indeed, the Universal House of Justice—the supreme governing body of the worldwide Bahá'í community—has made a similar point when it wrote that it is "deeply concerned about the welfare of Indian people of America and yearns to see them take their rightful place as a significant element in the spiritualization of humanity, the construction of a unified world, and the establishment of a global civilization." ([The Universal House of Justice 2002](#)).

This Tablet appears to have increased relevance as the world faces unprecedented challenges, from climate change to social fragmentation. The Indigenous understanding of living in harmony with Mother Earth, of seeing the sacred in all things, of maintaining balance and reciprocity in all relationships, provides essential paradigms for addressing contemporary global challenges and spiritual development. The Tablet offers a living roadmap for spiritual transformation in confirming Indigenous spiritual authority by creating a bridge between ancient wisdom and modern spiritual evolution. It positions Indigenous peoples as agents of traditional knowledge systems who must play an active role in the establishment of a unified global civilization. For people of non-Indigenous ancestry, the Tablet offers a transformative pathway toward genuine partnership, mutual respect, and acknowledgement of Indigenous spiritual sovereignty, thereby enabling both

communities to collaborate in fulfilling America's prophesied spiritual destiny through integration of Indigenous wisdom, progressive revelation, and ultimately creating a unified approach to humanity's collective spiritual maturation.

The Tablet to Amír Khán implicitly challenges America and the world abroad to redefine spiritual leadership through the integration of Indigenous wisdom, demonstrating how traditional knowledge can guide contemporary spiritual development through generations of Indigenous ceremony, storytelling, and lived experience. From both an Indigenous and a Bahá'í perspective, this Tablet implies a sacred responsibility and a promise—that the ancient wisdom of Indigenous peoples, combined with the progressive teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, can help light the way toward humanity's spiritual maturation.

4. The Bahá'í Faith and Progressive Revelation

The Bahá'í doctrine of progressive revelation ([Dehghani 2022](#)) presents a global perspective on the history of religions worldwide, from the standpoint of the “eye of God”—in other words, from a “bird's-eye view,” to use a common idiom. From a Bahá'í vantage point, the idea is that, although religions appear to have existed in sundry times and places, there is a unifying spirit and wisdom that may be discovered upon deeper investigation into their essential realities.

Progressive revelation, of course, is a hermeneutic that is admittedly faith-inspired and informed yet may be tried and tested through independent investigation and scholarly inquiry. The first test is commonality. Progressive revelation assumes continuity in core, perennial teachings, principally in the areas of moral, ethical, and mystical precepts and praxis ([Buck 2012](#)). As for the “progressive” aspect, each successive religion, in its origins and inception, should demonstrably present fuller and more advanced teachings, as well as laws tailored for that time and place, and for that day and age. The overarching idea is that, just as the world undergoes physical and biological evolution, humankind is undergoing social and spiritual evolution as well. Spiritual evolution is progressive in nature, and, for that purpose, God sends Messengers at critical junctures throughout history to prepare and propel that spiritual and social evolution forward. At some point, in the grand scheme of things, these different religious forces, in the course of human civilization, will converge, as they appear to be doing at the present stage in world history, which is why Indigenous peoples matter in terms of the integration of these convergent influences, especially in ideally enriching the outcome.

The Bahá'í doctrine of progressive revelation, while universal in principle, has been limited, in scope and application, by what has previously been described by the late Don Addison (Choctaw; see [Legacy.com 2018](#)) as “Arya-Semiticism” ([Buck and Addison 2007](#), pp. 219, 26), i.e., a central focus on Semitic religions (i.e., the so-called “Abrahamic Faiths” of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, along with the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths) and the so-called “Aryan” (“Noble”) religions (i.e., Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism). Bahá'í popular literature often provides a list of “Manifestations of God” which excludes Indigenous religions. This is the problematic for which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán may offer a solution and resolution.

Bahá'ís view major world religions as chapters of one continuous progressive revelation from God and the recognition that the prophets or divine manifestations of these religious traditions bring spiritual teachings appropriate to humanity's evolving capacity and needs. Among some Indigenous traditions, the foundational belief in spiritual intergenerational wisdom emphasizes the importance of learning from Indigenous ancestors, elders, prophets, and the world around us. The distribution of knowledge, teachings, spiritual values, wisdom, and experience is shared through oral traditions, ceremony, and various

forms of storytelling. The sharing of these Indigenous spiritual traditions is regarded as timeless, seamless, and sacred (M.A. Orona 2025).

Central to the Bahá'í belief of progressive revelation and Indigenous intergenerational knowledge is the acknowledgment that spiritual truth unfolds gradually through time. Both Bahá'í and Indigenous perspectives view spiritual wisdom and knowledge as something that accumulates and evolves over generations. It is not static or isolated to a single time. Both beliefs recognize that spiritual teachings and understanding deepen over time and that each generation has a responsibility to recognize, honor, preserve, and apply this sacred wisdom and spiritual teachings to the needs of the present day (M.A. Orona 2025). Equally important is that both beliefs, progressive revelation and intergenerational Indigenous knowledge traditions, honor those who carry and transmit spiritual truth, whether they are elders of a community or a messenger of God. Both acknowledge that spiritual truth is not fixed but matures with experience, understanding, and divine timing.

5. Implications of the Tablet to Amír Khán for a Wider Appreciation of Progressive Revelation

In the following sections, a rationale is presented for such recognition of the general category of “Indigenous Messengers of God” in the Americas (and possibly, by implication, in Oceania, Africa, and elsewhere) at the level of principle, without specific acknowledgment of principals (i.e., of individual Indigenous Messengers of God).

5.1. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Inclusion of Buddha and Krishna as Recognized Manifestations of God

According to the Universal House of Justice, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá added the Buddha to the list of Manifestations of God:

Bahá'u'lláh made no mention of Buddha, and if it had not been for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement we would not have been in a position to state definitely that Buddha had been a Manifestation of God. There are a myriad traditions in the legends of peoples that point back to some sort of divine revelation but, as the beloved Guardian’s secretary pointed out on his behalf in a letter written to an individual believer on 13 March 1950, “. . . We cannot possibly add names of people we (or anyone else) think might be Lesser Prophets to those found in the Qur’án, the Bible and our own Scriptures. For only these can we consider authentic Books.” We must just accept that there are undoubtedly many prophetic figures of whom all authentic record has been lost. (The Universal House of Justice 1986)

This shows that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had the power of discernment and prerogative authority to add to the list of Manifestations of God. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá added Krishna as well: “The Message of Krishna is the message of love. All God’s prophets have brought the message of love.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 2006, p. 35).

While ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had the prerogative and spiritual authority to make such sweeping and categorical pronouncements as to who may—and who may not—be recognized as authentic “Manifestations of God,” individual Bahá'ís can only offer their informed opinions. Generally, speaking, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá defined independent Manifestations/Messengers/Prophets of God as the founders of their own religions, as stated here:

The universal Prophets Who have appeared independently include Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muḥammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh. The second kind, which consists of followers and promulgators, includes Solomon, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. For the independent Prophets are founders; that is, They establish a new religion, recreate the souls, regenerate the morals of society, and promulgate a new way of life and a new standard of conduct. Through Them

a new Dispensation appears and a new religion is inaugurated. Their advent is even as the springtime, when all earthly things don a new garment and find a new life.

As to the second kind of Prophets, who are followers, they promulgate the religion of God, spread His Faith, and proclaim His Word. They have no power or authority of their own, but derive theirs from the independent Prophets. ('Abdu'l-Bahá 2014, *Some Answered Questions*, 43:5–6 (Chapter: Paragraphs); www.bahai.org/r/039574197, accessed on 18 August 2025; Persian, www.bahai.org/r/662957167, accessed on 18 August 2025).

When asked specifically about the Buddha and Confucius, 'Abdu'l-Bahá further explained:

Buddha also established a new religion (*dín-i-jadíd*) and Confucius renewed the ancient conduct and morals, but the original precepts have been entirely changed and their followers no longer adhere to the original pattern of belief and worship. The founder (*mu'assis*) of Buddhism was a precious Being Who established the oneness of God, but later His original precepts were gradually forgotten (*bi-kullí az miyán raft*) and displaced by primitive customs and rituals, until in the end it led to the worship of statues and images. ('Abdu'l-Bahá 2014, *Some Answered Questions*, 43:7–8; www.bahai.org/r/901661125 accessed on 18 August 2025; Persian, www.bahai.org/r/432425779, accessed on 18 August 2025).

In the statement above, 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the Buddha as a founder of a new religion, whereas Confucius is characterized as a renewer of ancient Chinese tradition and morals, rather than a founder, per se. Consequently, Bahá'í doctrine recognizes the Buddha as a "Manifestation of God" but does not accord Confucius with that same status. Note here 'Abdu'l-Bahá's use of the expression translated as "forgotten." 'Abdu'l-Bahá also stated that the original teachings of Christianity, over time, were likewise "forgotten":

Again, consider to what an extent the original precepts of the Christian religion have been forgotten (*farámúsh gardídi*) and how many heresies have sprung up. For example, Christ forbade violence and revenge and enjoined instead that evil and injury be met with benevolence and loving-kindness. But observe how many bloody wars have taken place among the Christian nations themselves and how much oppression, cruelty, rapacity, and bloodthirstiness have resulted therefrom! Indeed, many of these wars were carried out at the behest of the popes. It is therefore abundantly clear that, with the passage of time, religions are entirely changed and altered, and hence they are renewed. ('Abdu'l-Bahá 2014, *Some Answered Questions*, 43:12, www.bahai.org/r/595065528 accessed on 18 August 2025; Persian, www.bahai.org/r/653962581, accessed on 18 August 2025)

This bears on what 'Abdu'l-Bahá meant by "forgotten" in the Tablet to Amír Khán, as discussed earlier (see § 2.3, *supra*).

5.2. Conclusion: In the Tablet to Amír Khán, 'Abdu'l-Bahá Has Added (in Principle) Indigenous Messengers of God to the Americas

The present authors wish to make clear that this study advances prior scholarship on the Tablet to Amír Khán and is therefore original. The Tablet to Amír Khán, moreover, advances beyond the general Qur'anic principle that "Indeed, We sent forth among every nation a Messenger" (Qur'an 16:36, trans. Arberry; see "Verse (16:36)—English Translation," *Quranic Arabic Corpus* 2025, <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=16&verse=36>, accessed on 18 August 2025), though not merely because it specifically refers to Native Americans. What makes this Tablet revolutionary is its methodological approach to validating Indigenous spiritual authority. Rather than requiring Indigenous traditions

to conform to established Abrahamic prophetic models, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá acknowledges the unique spiritual frameworks through which divine guidance has been transmitted in Native American spiritual traditions.

The Tablet to Amír Khán, moreover, recognizes that divine messengers may manifest through different cultural and spiritual paradigms—including medicine men, Indigenous prophets, and tribal spiritual leaders—without diminishing their authenticity. This inclusive approach provides Indigenous Bahá’ís with validation that their ancestral spiritual traditions are authentic channels of divine revelation.

Furthermore, the Tablet to Amír Khán establishes a precedent for how the Bahá’í principle of “Progressive Revelation” can be applied to non-Abrahamic spiritual traditions without requiring these traditions to abandon their distinctive expressions. This also offers a framework for understanding how Indigenous spiritual practices, oral traditions, and ceremonial life can be integrated into a global religious consciousness while maintaining cultural and spiritual integrity.

On the authority of the Tablet to Amír Khán, the present writers submit that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has added (in principle) Indigenous Messengers of God to the Americas within the sweep and scope of progressive revelation. Here, a distinction can be made between an explicit “principle” and implicit “principals.” The primary evidence, as presented in this paper, is that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement in paragraph 4 of the Tablet to Amír Khán, i.e., “Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times,” is emphatic and unequivocal, must be taken into serious account, and be accorded the careful consideration that it therefore warrants.

The present writers suggest, moreover, that the Tablet to Amír Khán and the material presented in this paper may initiate and facilitate a discussion on moving beyond surface-level interchanges to a fundamental transformation of how Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities interact, based on mutual respect, recognition of rights and sovereignty, and genuine partnership in building a shared future.

5.3. Conclusion: The Tablet to Amír Khán: A Major Authoritative Work for Diverse Audiences (From an Indigenous Perspective)

The Tablet to Amír Khán stands as a pivotal and authoritative text within Bahá’í scripture that has gained recognition across diverse academic and Indigenous communities for its revolutionary approach to Indigenous spiritual traditions. This authenticated work, with its authorized translation, addresses a fundamental gap in current religious discourse by expanding the Bahá’í doctrine of progressive revelation to explicitly include Indigenous messengers of God in the Americas.

For scholars, the Tablet represents a breakthrough in overcoming what researchers have termed “Arya-Semiticism”—the historical focus on Semitic and so-called “Aryan” religions, while marginalizing Indigenous spiritual traditions. Furthermore, the co-authors’ rigorous academic and methodological approach, which employs “Two-Eyed Seeing,” a decolonizing framework that weaves together Indigenous and Western perspectives with equal importance, provides an innovative scholarly foundation for recognizing pre-colonial divine guidance, thereby fundamentally challenging outdated conventional historical narratives.

From an Indigenous perspective, the Tablet to Amír Khán serves as a profound validation of ancestral wisdom and spiritual authority. The Tablet acknowledges what Indigenous elders have long maintained—that their spiritual traditions carry essential guidance for humanity’s collective future. Rather than positioning Indigenous peoples as recipients of external enlightenment, the Tablet centers Native spiritual sovereignty and recognizes pre-existing Indigenous divine messengers.

For non-Indigenous audiences, both academic and general, the Tablet to Amír Khán bridges ancient wisdom with modern spiritual evolution, suggesting that Indigenous understanding of living in harmony with Mother Earth provides essential paradigms for addressing contemporary global challenges. The text implicitly demonstrates that unity in diversity requires full recognition and integration of Indigenous knowledge systems.

The Tablet to Amír Khán thus represents a rare convergence of scholarly rigor, spiritual authority, and cultural bridge-building, making it accessible and meaningful to academics studying religious evolution, Indigenous communities seeking recognition of their spiritual heritage, and broader audiences committed to genuine interfaith dialogue and justice.

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