

Lights of 'Irfán



Papers Presented
at the 'Irfán Colloquia
and Seminars

Book Seven

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Lights of ‘Irfán
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Book Seven
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Incline your hearts, O people of God, unto the counsels of your true, your incomparable Friend. The Word of God may be likened unto a sapling, whose roots have been implanted in the hearts of men. It is incumbent upon you to foster its growth through the living waters of wisdom, of sanctified and holy words, so that its root may become firmly fixed and its branches may spread out as high as the heavens and beyond.

— Lawḥ-i-Dunyá

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 93-94

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Preface

Bahá'u'lláh refers to His Revelation as an ocean with innumerable fine and luminous pearls hidden in its depths. Then He adds that whoever desires them must exert to reach the shore of that ocean, immerse in that ocean, and depending on the degree of his efforts, acquire his predestined share of those pearls.¹ In this exhortation there are several points that deserve our special attention:

1. Pearls of divine knowledge are hidden in the revealed words of God
2. Those desiring to acquire them must exert every effort to reach the depths of the revealed words
3. Everyone has a predestined share of those pearls
4. What may be acquired from the destined share depends on the degree of exerted effort.

Following this guidance He calls for applying knowledge and skills needed for deep and systematic study. The 'Irfán Colloquia and its publications are attempts at promoting and facilitating the efforts recommended by Bahá'u'lláh, hoping to present some of those "fine and luminous pearls" to those who desire them.

This volume of the *Lights of 'Irfán* contains some of the papers presented at various sessions of the Irfan Colloquium in 2005 that were conducted in the English language, as well as some articles that were received during that same year. 'Irfán Colloquia in 2005 were convened in seven separate sessions: in North America at Bosch Bahá'í School in Northern California and at Louhelen Bahá'í School in Michigan; and in Europe at the Center for Bahá'í Studies in Acuto, Italy, and the Conference Center in Tambach, Germany. The sessions were conducted in English, Persian, and German. At those sessions 87 scholars from different countries made a total of 96 presentations, and participated in dialogue and exchange of information with the participants. See a listing of all at <http://irfancolloquia.org>.

In this volume, the presentation on "Bahá'í Ontology" that was published in Book Six is continued and expanded. Also "Chronicles of a Birth: Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions in Spain (1850-1853)" published in Book Five is continued, covering the period 1854-1676. "The St. Petersburg 19th Century Orientalist Collection of Materials on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths" provides valuable information on a number of unpublished Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. "The Bahá'í Faith in the Arabic Speaking

Middle East” presents the beginning of a new line of studies that reveal the background, extent and various aspects of the presence of the Bahá'í Faith in that region. Some comparative studies are presented on “Andalusi Theosophy”, “Prayer Patterns in Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Bahá'í Worship”, “Origins of the Bahá'í Concept of Unity and Causality” and “Religion and Exclusivism.” Various mystical connotations of some items in the Bahá'í scripture are explored in “The Newly Born Babe of that Day” and “Seeds of Revelation and Mystic Bond between the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.” Some theological studies are presented in the article on “Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom.”

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,” on page 285. Words of Prophets/Manifestations, i.e. quotations from Sacred Writings (not including statements by Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice, or informal provisional translations), 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, without further editing. 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. Abstracts of all the presentations made at the ‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars are published in a series of separate booklets.

Iraj Ayman
Wilmette, May 2006

NOTES

¹ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* #181 and *Majmu'í-yi Alwáh-i Mubáraki-yi Hadrat-i-Bahá'u'lláh* (“Collection of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets”) p. 324

Andalusí Theosophy

A Recontextualization

J. Vahid Brown

Medieval Spain witnessed the birth and fundamental development of Islamic and Jewish theosophical movements that were largely to become the defining modes of mysticism for these faiths throughout their domains and down to modern times: the Kabbalah in Judaism, and Akbarian or *wujūdī* Ṣūfism in Islam.¹ Why both of these movements emerged into the light of history at virtually the same moment and in the same region is a question that has been almost entirely neglected by modern scholarship.² What I will attempt to accomplish in this paper is a rapprochement of three lines of research that are relevant to this question but that have hitherto been carried out in isolation from one another. These are, first, the historiographic discussion regarding the “symbiosis” and “interconfessionalism” prevailing in pre-Expulsion Andalusí philosophy; second, the vexed question of the emergence and early history of the Kabbalah; and third, the obscure intellectual origins of the Ṣūfī mystic Ibn al-‘Arabī and his “school.”³ In the scholarship on the latter two issues, almost no attempt has been made to situate these developments in relation to each other, nor have scholars given due attention to the role of Andalusí interconfessionalism in creating the necessary fertile ground for the explosion of these revolutionary theosophies. It will not be my intention to establish lines of “influence” from Ṣūfism to Kabbalah or *vice versa*. Rather, my purpose will be to suggest a recontextualization of these emergent Jewish and Islamic theosophies or esotericisms, such that the interconfessional revolution in religious philosophy in tenth- to thirteenth-century al-Andalus can be seen as the most critical source for the development of these two movements, an interconfessionalism that would continue to mark their later trajectories through history.

Symbiosis: Judeo-Islamic Philosophy in the “Golden Age”

Throughout the history of Islamicate⁴ civilization, philosophy has been a pursuit carried out in interconfessional contexts. The first flowering in Islamdom of philosophy proper — *falsafah* — was owing to the joint efforts of Syriac Christians and Arab and Persian Muslims working in Baghdád under the aegis of the first ‘Abbásid caliphs

during the eight and ninth centuries.⁵ Their translations of the intellectual legacies of ancient Greece, India and Persia into Arabic spurred the ‘Abbásid-era renaissance of science and philosophy,⁶ and these legacies presented similar challenges to the Abrahamic religious traditions. The initial Islamicate encounter with the Hellenistic heritage developed in two distinct directions, that of the *falásafah*, often dubbed the “humanists,”⁷ and that of the dialectical theologians, the *mutakallimún*. In both cases the contexts of development were inherently interconfessional. Oliver Leaman described the former as having taken place in “an atmosphere [that] consisted of the thought of Muslims, Christians, Jews and pagans, and, perhaps more significantly, of those within a religious group regardless of doctrinal differences.”⁸ Beginning in the eighth century, and in a more reactive tone to the philosophical tenets that challenged such shared dogmas as the temporal, *ex nihilo* creation of the universe and the resurrection of bodies, Jewish and Muslim *mutakallimún* set down, often in shared social and cultural contexts, their elaborate philosophical theologies of these Abrahamic faiths.⁹

Later, in al-Andalus — Islamicate Spain — the development of philosophy continued to be marked by Jewish-Muslim interconfessionalism. In a certain sense, the cultural efflorescence of medieval al-Andalus was a mirror image of ‘Abbásid Baghdád, an image that was consciously manipulated as much by the founders of the independent Andalusí Umayyad caliphate as by the Jewish leadership associated with that court. The process by which the Andalusí Umayyads created a foundation myth that drew upon ‘Abbásid symbolism while simultaneously affirming their legitimate independence from Baghdád has been documented at length by Janina Safran.¹⁰ Equally important for our purposes is the fact that the Andalusí Jewish community, under the leadership of Ḥasdai ibn Shaprut (d. 975), physician and advisor to the court of the first independent Andalusí Umayyad caliph, ‘Abd al-Raḥmán al-Nāṣir (r. 961-976), had simultaneously broken with the *yeshivot* of Baghdad and set the Jews of al-Andalus on an independent course that would lead them to rival the Babylonian centers in the spiritual and intellectual leadership of world Jewry.¹¹ The fact that both Muslims and Jews of al-Andalus understood the parallelism of these developments is evidenced by the literature emanating from both sides of the confessional divide, in which the link is made explicit.¹²

The ensuing centuries of Andalusí civilization have often been hailed as a “Golden Age” of Jewish-Muslim symbiosis, with Jews attaining unprecedented heights in the state apparatus, and witnessing a general flowering of poetry, literature, and philosophy that transcended religious boundaries.¹³ As there are numerous detailed studies of this period, I will here only briefly identify the most

important personalities associated with the “Golden Age” of Andalusí philosophy, emphasizing the interconfessional aspects of these thinkers’ lives and works. First, though, a few words must be said regarding the categorization of this literary output as “philosophy.”

The distinctions made between philosophy and religion, science and magic, or rationalism and mysticism, often confuse more than they reveal about the medieval literatures to which they are applied.¹⁴ This anachronistic division is at the heart of the problem of the inadequate contextualizations of Spanish Kabbalah and Andalusí Šúfism, and I will have more to say about this below. It would be well to emphasize from the start that for every one of the individuals mentioned below, the pursuit of philosophy was an explicitly religious affair, having as much to do with the character and knowability of God and prophecy as with the nature and properties of “natural” phenomena. The very few Islamicate philosophers for whom religious concerns were indifferent to the pursuit of truth – such as Abú Bakr al-Rází (d. 925) or Ibn al-Ráwandí (d. 910) – are the exceptions that prove the rule. The distinction made between Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism, with the former considered more congenial to religious applications than the latter, is likewise an inadequate one, not least because one of the single most Neoplatonic texts known to medieval Islamdom was thought until modern times to have been a work of Aristotle.¹⁵ The strictest Aristotelian known to al-Andalus was Ibn Rushd, who was however famous throughout the Islamicate world not as a philosopher, but as a scholar of Islamic law.¹⁶ His alter-identity in the Latin West as Averroes, the enemy of religion, was predicated upon a rather selective process of translation and mistranslation such that “the Averroes whom the West first encountered was not the full man, and...the writings the thirteenth century did not translate could have significantly altered the perception of him as an irreligious naturalist, and the perception of Aristotelianism as an implacable foe of organized religion.”¹⁷

With this *caveat* in mind, let us briefly survey the interconfessional development of philosophy in al-Andalus. Mention should first of all be made of Isaac Israeli (d. c. 955), the first great Jewish Neoplatonist who, though not an Andalusí, was to play a significant role in the interconfessional career of philosophy in al-Andalus.¹⁸ Famous to medieval Muslims, Jews, and Christians primarily for his medical treatises, his philosophical works left a prominent mark on many Jewish thinkers of al-Andalus, especially Solomon ibn Gabirol (d. 1054 or 1058), Moses ibn Ezra (c. 1060-1139), Joseph ibn Šaddíq (d. 1149), Abraham ibn Ḥasdai (fl. 13th cent.), and Shem Tov ibn Falaquera (d. c. 1295). He may also have been a principle source for Andalusí knowledge of the so-called long version of the *Theology of Aristotle*, a critical source both for Isma’ili thought and for Jewish

Neoplatonic theology in the Middle Ages, which likely emerged from a Judeo-Isma'īlī context.¹⁹ The *Theology* was also to play an important role in both Kabbalah and Andalusí *wujūdī* Šūfism, being cited by the Gerona Kabbalists,²⁰ Moses de Leon (the author of the *Zohar*),²¹ and Ibn al-'Arabī.²² In addition to the Jewish philosophers noted above, Israeli is also quoted by the 11th century Andalusí Muslim author of the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*²³ (the *Picatrix* of the Latin alchemical tradition), attributed to Maslamah ibn Aḥmad al-Majrīṭī (d. 1007), and appears to have been a source for the Muslim philosopher Baṭalyúsī (d. c. 1127),²⁴ about whom more will be said below.

The next major figure of Andalusí philosophy is Ibn Masarra of Cordoba (b. 883), often considered in both Muslim and Western sources to have been the first Šūfī of al-Andalus. Few of his works have survived, though his views can be extrapolated from quotations and summaries in later Muslim works, chiefly those of Ibn al-'Arabī.²⁵ From these sources we learn that Ibn Masarra taught that the Throne of God governs or rules the cosmos; that human beings can attain the gift of prophecy; and that given the homology between the universe and the supernal, divine Book, the key to metaphysical understanding is the esoteric interpretation of the letters of the alphabet. All three of these theses were to be discussed by Ibn al-'Arabī, and he expressly adopted the last of them.²⁶ The emphasis on the Throne of God immediately puts one in mind of the "throne mysticism" of Judaism, whereas the latter two principles were both fundamental to the Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia, on whom see below. Whatever Ibn Masarra's relationship with pseudo-Empedocles, the Hermetic doctrines associated with the latter were to find many an enthusiast in later Andalusí centuries.²⁷

Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021-1054 or 1058), generally regarded as the first Jewish philosopher in Spain,²⁸ carries on the tradition of Israeli and Ibn Masarra in Neoplatonism and in a cosmology with strikingly pseudo-Empedoclean features.²⁹ His writings were to be extremely influential to later Kabbalists, especially his doctrine of the Divine Will as something of a demiurge, intermediate between the unknowable Godhead and the creation.³⁰ Ibn Gabirol's doctrine that even spiritual entities are composed of matter and form appears to presage later Šūfī theosophical developments, particularly Ibn al-'Arabī. His most famous work, known in Latin translation as the *Fons Vitae*, a dialogue in which the characters are given almost full-blown literary personalities, marks the beginning of a trend toward narrativization in philosophical writing which would come to predominate in Andalusí literature.

With Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), we stray somewhat from the course of Andalusí philosophy. The importance of Ibn Ḥazm for our purposes

lies in what his writings reveal about the character of Jewish-Muslim relations in his time. He was not particularly well-disposed towards his Jewish compatriots, but nonetheless displays a wide knowledge of contemporary Jewish literature in his polemical works. Ibn Ḥazm knows not only the Bible, but also parts of the Talmud, the *Shi'ur Qomah* literature, and even perhaps the writings of the Karajites.³¹ His polemics against Samuel Ibn Nagrela (d. 1056), the Jewish commander of the Zirid army of Cordoba and a much-celebrated literary *virtuoso* of the court, should probably be read as springing less from a pious distaste at seeing the exaltation of a non-believer as from a certain bitterness at their respective fortunes (Ibn Ḥazm wrote from exile, having fled first Cordoba and then Seville in the wake of an *auto-de-fé* of his works there).³² In any case, Ibn Ḥazm, by drawing upon it while reacting to it, reveals the remarkable extent of the Jewish-Muslim “symbiosis” prevailing in his time.³³

If Ibn Ḥazm turned to Jewish texts for polemical purposes, Bahya ibn Paqúda (*fl.* second half of 11th cent.) found in Islamic literature an inspiration for Jewish pietism. It would probably not be overstating the case to term Ibn Paqúda the first Jewish Šúfí.³⁴ In his *Fará'id al-qulúb* (“Duties of the Hearts”) Ibn Paqúda quotes various Šúfís as well as Islamic *ḥadīth* literature, often camouflaging the material by putting the sayings of Muḥammad in the mouths of anonymous “sages” and replacing Qur'anic quotations with appropriate Biblical parallels. Like many of the Judeo-Islamic philosophers and theosophers of al-Andalus, Ibn Paqúda drew inspiration from and quoted the writings of the *Ikhwán al-Šafá*, a mysterious group of 10th-century authors, most likely writing in Basra and bearing a close relationship with the Isma'ilis, whose *Rasá'il* (“Epistles”) won for Neoplatonism a far-reaching impact in subsequent Islamic thought.³⁵ Regarding the Hebrew translation of Ibn Paqúda's *Fará'id al-qulúb*, Fenton writes that it “was to have an abiding influence on Jewish spirituality right down to present times, infusing generations of Jewish readers with Sufi notions. After having strongly influenced the Spanish and thereafter the Palestinian Kabbalists, who were particularly interested in Bahya's reflections on solitary meditation, the *Duties of the Heart* was avidly read in the eighteenth century by Polish ḥasidim.”³⁶

Ibn Síd al-Baṭalyúsi (d. 1127) is one of the more obscure figures of the period, perhaps because this Islamic philosopher did not find much of an audience among Muslims for his philosophical works, being chiefly known to them as a grammarian.³⁷ His *Kitáb al-Hadá'iq* was almost exclusively read in Andalusí Jewish circles, with the notable exception of the school of Ibn al-'Arabí; the latter refers to him approvingly and attributes to him two common tropes in Šúfí and Kabbalistic literature: that of the divine unicity as distinct from

mathematical unity, and underlying all numbers; and that of the point (= the divine Will or unicity) as the primordial source of line, plane, and volume.³⁸

The remaining luminaries of Andalusí Judeo-Islamic philosophy are too well-known to require any introduction. The interconfessional contexts in which these thinkers lived and wrote has been remarked upon by many scholars. In the circle of the Jewish poet-philosophers centering on Judah Halevi (d. 1140),³⁹ Abraham ibn Ezra (d. c. 1164), and Joseph ibn Šaddīq (1149), we find a tradition in full swing of conscious and often positive use of Islamic sources, association with Andalusí courts, and participation in a social class of — most commonly — physicians, contexts that brought Jewish and Muslim philosophers into contact with one another. Their Islamic counterparts — Ibn Bājjah (d. 1138), Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185), and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) — while showing few explicit indications of influence by Jewish sources, were nonetheless integrated into the same socio-political networks, and were clearly aware of their Jewish colleagues.⁴⁰ The popularity of these Islamic philosophers among Jewish readers was often far greater than among Muslims, and in some cases it is due to the efforts of Jews in the preservation and translation of their works that we know them today.⁴¹

Moses Maimonides (d. 1204) stands unparalleled among this group, exerting an influence which, in its capacity for leaping over confessional and philosophical boundaries, has no peer among any thinker of the Western Islamicate world. His profound knowledge of the whole course of Islamic philosophy made him a peer of such minds as Ibn Rushd, whom he further parallels in achieving lasting fame and influence as a scholar of the sacred law. As we will see below, he was studied in the theosophical movements of both religions, a fact which is perhaps the most striking evidence of his importance in the interconfessional atmosphere of al-Andalus. Maimonides and Ibn al-‘Arabí both resided in Cairo at the same time, in 1203.⁴² That they may have met is by no means farfetched, as both had access to the same philosophical and courtly circles there. Both, likewise, maintained and continuously asserted their identities as Andalusís while living the latter halves of their lives in other parts of the Islamicate world.⁴³

Jewish Theosophy: Kabbalah and the Andalusí Context

Steven Wasserstrom has already noted that, given that the field of Jewish-Islamic studies is still in its infancy, no “unproblematic story” can be told of the history that we are here concerned with.⁴⁴ It will thus not be my intention to present an alternative history of the emergence of Kabbalah, integrating it into the interconfessional

history of Andalusí thought. Rather I hope simply to point out that the need for such a recontextualization is suggested by the evidence, of which I will discuss here only four areas: the Gerona school of Kabbalists, Isaac ibn Laṭif, Abraham Abulafia, and the so-called “Jewish Šúfis” that emerged under the leadership of the Maimonidean dynasty in Egypt. First, though, some remarks on the prevailing trends in the historiography of the Kabbalah must be made.

No scholar did more to establish Kabbalah studies as an academic discipline in its own right than Gershom Scholem (d. 1982), the undisputed master of the field. No twentieth century historian of Jewish spirituality has been able to dispense with his insights, and the historiography of Kabbalah has largely followed the lines of research that he initiated. When it comes to the origins of Kabbalah, however, Scholem showed little interest in considering the context of Spain and the currents of Andalusí philosophy, much less of the latter's interconfessional character, and posited instead a re-emergence of “subterranean” gnosticism latent in Jewish thought as the key to understanding the emergence of Kabbalah.⁴⁵ He took this stance in reaction to the approaches of 19th-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars, who tended to denigrate Kabbalah as an anti-rational reaction to the glories of Spanish-Jewish philosophy. Scholem's much more sympathetic view of Kabbalah's place in the history of Judaism led him to divorce the early history of Kabbalah from its relation to this immediate, philosophical context.⁴⁶ Scholem's “counter-history,”⁴⁷ while it has been questioned and criticized with reference to a number of particular issues, has not been superseded by alternative narratives sensitive to the historical context that I am suggesting here.⁴⁸ When Scholem did offer suggestions for immediate historical antecedents, they were generally not from the direction of al-Andalus, and subsequent research has often shown up their weakness.⁴⁹ Eliot Wolfson has noted that, “[d]espite the fact that Scholem was keenly aware of the textual, philological, and historical influence of philosophical authors on Jewish mystics in the Middle Ages, he dichotomized the intellectual currents of mysticism and philosophy in too simplistic a fashion.”⁵⁰

The Gerona school of Kabbalists, whose works constitute the most important body of pre-*Zohar* Kabbalistic literature, shows just how inadequate this dichotomy is. This circle of Kabbalists was active in Spain roughly between the years 1210 and 1260, and includes among its members the well-known Biblical exegete Nahmanides (d. 1270) and his contemporaries Ezra ben Solomon, 'Azriel, and Jacob ben Sheshet.⁵¹ Though living in Christian Spain, the continuity of their thought with Andalusí Judeo-Islamic philosophy is proven by the sources which provided much of their inspiration: Ibn Gabirol, the direct source for Azriel's doctrine of the primal Will; Judah Halevi⁵²,

Abraham ibn Ezra,⁵³ and Maimonides.⁵⁴ As Idel has shown, Jacob ben Sheshet knew and employed the cosmological scheme of the long version of the *Theology of Aristotle*,⁵⁵ and explicitly utilized Maimonides' *Guide* as a source for Platonic material, albeit material which Maimonides had only quoted in order to refute.⁵⁶ A particularly interesting document originating from this circle is the *Sefer ha-Temunah*, which crystallizes certain speculations about cosmic cycles earlier elaborated by Abraham bar Ḥiyya, writing in Aragon around 1125. Contrary to Scholem's suggestion of Joachimite influence, Wilensky has shown the remarkable consistency between the *Sefer ha-Temunah* and Isma'īlī schema of cosmic cycles. Setting forth the theory as the "teachings of certain philosophers," bar Ḥiyya wrote:

After all the creatures have passed from potentiality to actuality, God once again returns them to potentiality as in the beginning and then brings them back to actuality a second and third time, and thus without end ... Others say that the days of the world are 40,000 years and that each of the seven planets reigns 7,000 years in the world. When at the end of 49,000 years they have completed their reign, God destroys His world, leaves it for 1,000 years in a state of *tohu*, and at the end of the fiftieth millennium He renews it as in the beginning.⁵⁷

What is truly remarkable about this theory is that it appears again, almost contemporaneously with the *Sefer ha-Temunah*, in a work by 'Azīz Nasafī, an Iranian Muslim follower of the Murcian school of Ṣūfism to be considered below.⁵⁸ In Nasafī's words, written in the latter half of the 13th century:

Know thou that the Transmigrationists say that there is a cycle every thousand years and at the end of a cycle there is a resurrection, a lesser resurrection. And there is a cycle every seven thousand years, and at the end of each seven thousand years there is another resurrection, a greater resurrection. And there is a cycle every forty-nine thousand years, and at the end of each forty-nine thousand years there is another resurrection, a supreme resurrection. Since you have understood this introduction now know that one of the seven thousand years is the cycle of Saturn ... Another seven thousand years is the cycle of Jupiter ... [And so on with the seven planets.] With the supreme resurrection [after 49,000 years] the earth is completely flooded, and water covers the entire land.⁵⁹

This is an exact parallel, in every particular, of the doctrine set forth by the Gerona Kabbalists. In addition, the *Sefer ha-Temunah* is the first Kabbalistic text to use the term *gilgul* for transmigration of

the soul,⁶⁰ and it is to the Transmigrationists (*ahl al-tanasukh*) that Nasafi attributes the belief. This is certainly one of the most compelling pieces of evidence arguing for an interconfessional recontextualization of these literatures.⁶¹

Another important Spanish Kabbalist demonstrating continuity with the Andalusí interconfessional context is Isaac Ibn Laṭīf, to whom Sara Wilensky has devoted a number of important studies. As she has shown, Ibn Laṭīf declared himself to be a disciple of Maimonides,⁶² and draws at length upon the Andalusí Neoplatonists discussed above, particularly Solomon Ibn Gabirol.⁶³ He even went “behind” Maimonides, so to speak, directly citing al-Fārābī in elaborating his theory of prophecy rather than simply utilizing Maimonides, who likewise was indebted to al-Fārābī on this issue.⁶⁴ He then parted company with both al-Fārābī and Maimonides on the issue of psychology, drawing instead upon Baṭalyúsi in enumerating the five-fold division of vegetative, animal, rational, philosophical and prophetic souls.⁶⁵ He continues the doctrine of the cosmic cycles held by the Gerona school, and Wilensky has posited direct dependence on Ismaʿilī sources in this regard.⁶⁶ She has also demonstrated such dependence in Ibn Laṭīf’s negative theology, wherein the Divine Will is a demiurgic “first created being” (*al-mubdaʾ al-awwal*), from which the cosmos is emanated.⁶⁷ I quote at length one passage from Wilensky’s article on this doctrine, as it admirably illustrates how intertwined the earliest Kabbalah was with the Andalusí interconfessional context:

His [Ibn Laṭīf’s] reply to the question: how can a link exist between infinite God and finite and material man (a question posed by Judah Hallevi through the Khazar), is that there is no relationship between the transcendent, infinite God and finite man, and that the infinite God cannot be grasped by human thought. He quotes Plotinus, as formulated by Ibn Gabirol in *Fons Vitae*, and adds: “I say that the limit of cognition is when the intellectually cognized subject is able to encompass the object of cognition; and He who is infinite cannot be encompassed by the finite intellect.” He maintains that the source of prophecy is not the transcendent, infinite, hidden God, but the First Created Being. The paradox can be solved by positing a link between the First Created Being and the prophetic soul (the intuitive soul). The latter term was adopted from the *Kitáb al-Hadaʾik* [sic] of the Andalusian philosopher al-Batalyawsi⁶⁸ (1052-1127), who in turn borrowed it from the *Epistles of the Sincere Brethren* (*Ikhwan al-Safa*), Neoplatonic texts closely connected to the Ismaʿilia.⁶⁹

With regard to Abraham Abulafia (d. c. 1291), another Spanish Kabbalist of the thirteenth century, we have a number of studies by the eminent historian of Kabbalah, Moshe Idel, who has shown Abulafia's intimate continuity with Andalusí philosophy and provided evidence of the influence of Şúfism on various elements of Abulafia's thought.⁷⁰ Considered the progenitor of an ecstatic or prophetic version of Kabbalah — as distinct from the theosophical mode which centered on the theory of the *sefirot* and the mystical meanings of the commandments⁷¹ — Abulafia, like many of the earliest Spanish Kabbalists, studied Andalusí philosophy prior to becoming a Kabbalist.⁷² He was one of the first people to write a commentary on Maimonides' *Guide*, and no one since him wrote as many commentaries of this work.⁷³ And once again, Baṭalyúsi's *Kitáb al-Hadá'iq* appears as an important source.⁷⁴ Idel summarizes the importance of the Andalusí interconfessional philosophical tradition thus:

In other words, Abulafia read Maimonides in Avicennian and Averroistic keys, decoded his own spiritual adventures according to Maimonides' teaching in the *Guide*, and added philosophical conceptions out of Arabic philosophy.⁷⁵

Perhaps more important for our purposes than Abulafia's continuity with Andalusí Judeo-Islamic philosophy is the fact that he represents the beginning of a trend toward direct engagement of Şúfism in Kabbalah, rather than the mediated influence via earlier authors like Ibn Paqúda or Ghazáli-in-translation such as can be identified in many theosophical Kabbalistic works. There are traces of Şúfism throughout Abulafia, both in matters of doctrine and in terms of the innovation of ecstatic techniques modeled after Şúfi practices.⁷⁶ In his circle of followers, many of whom dwelt in Palestine, this becomes a much more marked tendency, extending to the adoption of cosmological schemas and even terminology from Şúfism, and, most notably, from the school of Ibn al-'Arabí.⁷⁷ To give but one example of the many adduced by Idel, we find in a Kabbalistic compilation made by Rabbi Isaac of Acre⁷⁸, one of the foremost Kabbalists of the fourteenth century and a leading figure of the Abulafian tradition, the following five-world hierarchy: the World of Divinity, the World of the Intellect, the World of the Souls, the Imaginal World, and the World of the Senses.⁷⁹ While this schema baffled Scholem, who saw it as an odd departure from the dominant Kabbalistic cosmologies based on Neoplatonic schema, it exactly corresponds with the Şúfi five-world hierarchy that first appears in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabí's disciples.⁸⁰ The specific attributes of the Imaginal World are exactly the same in both cases, as Idel has shown in a point-by-point analysis, showing that this Şúfi-

Kabbalistic parallel “is not only one of terminology, but also of conceptual content.”⁸¹

The trend of explicit adoption of Šúfí material as represented by the Abulafian Kabbalistic tradition finds its most radical expression in the so-called “Jewish Šúfis,” who have been the subject of several ground-breaking studies by Paul Fenton. Utilizing material from the Cairo Geniza, he has greatly enriched our picture of this remarkable Jewish pietist movement in 13th century Egypt, led by the descendents of Maimonides, which explicitly drew its inspiration from Islamic mysticism and attempted an Islamicization of Jewish worship. The beginnings of this movement lie at least during the tenure of Moses Maimonides as *ra'ís al-yahúd* (president of the Jewish community) in Cairo during the last decades of the twelfth century. The first historical personality definitely associated with this movement was a younger contemporary of Moses Maimonides, Rabbi Abraham ha-ḥasíd (d. 1223)⁸², of whose extant works Fenton writes that, while “they are thoroughly permeated with the Sufi terminology and tenets which typify the [Jewish Šúfí] Pietist writings, they voice an original and specifically Jewish doctrine whose underlying inspiration was Yehúdáh ha-Levi’s *Kuzarí* and Moses Maimonides *Guide for the Perplexed*, tempered by Sufi ideology.”⁸³ One of Rabbi Abraham’s disciples was Moses Maimonides’ son, Abraham Maimonides (d. 1237), whose *Kifáyat al-‘Abidín* is one of the classics of Jewish Šúfism. Samuel Rosenblatt, in his edition and translation of a portion of that work, noted as early as 1927 that Abraham Maimonides:

...not only openly shows his admiration for the Sufis by praising their way of life, calling them the real lineal descendents of the prophets, and regretting that the Jews do not imitate their example⁸⁴, but his whole ethical system as outlined in the portion of the **כפאיה**⁸⁵ with which we are concerned appears to be Sufic from beginning to end in terminology and ideology, or at least based on some Sufic prototype.⁸⁶

Subsequent studies of this text have confirmed these assertions, and have further revealed that Abraham stood at the head of a line of Šúfí-inclined Maimonides, from his son down to his great-great-grandson, who followed him not only in leading the Egyptian Jewish community, but also in composing Jewish-Šúfí tracts and pressing vigorously for Islamic-inspired modifications to the daily rituals of Jewish life.⁸⁷ From ‘Obaydah Maimonides, son of Abraham, we have the deeply Šúfí work translated by Fenton as *The Treatise of the Pool*, which follows the lead of the *Kifáya* in valorizing Šúfism as the inheritor of the spiritual praxis of the ancient Israelite prophets and in setting forth a mystical program cast in a Šúfí idiom. Three

generations later, with David Maimonides' (d. 1415), we find the Jewish-Šúfí pietist tradition still going strong. His *Murshíd ilá al-tafarrud* ("The Guide to Detachment") is remarkable for two reasons. First of all, the range of Šúfí sources is much broader than was the case for any previous Jewish-Šúfí, encompassing such luminaries as Dhu'l-Nún al-Miṣrī, Abú Tálīb al-Makkí, al-Sarráj, Suhrawardí Maqtúl, Ghazálí, the Andalusí Ibn al-'Aríf, al-Qushayrī, and al-Halláj.⁸⁸ Secondly, this work also quotes writings of the early Kabbalists, marking a significant attempt at dove-tailing the two predominant phenomena of Spanish-born Jewish mysticism.

While this last example has described events and personalities outside of al-Andalus, it is clear that such a movement as the Egyptian Jewish-Šúfís could not have come into being were it not for the prior interconfessional developments in Iberia. While Moses Maimonides, the interconfessional Andalusí *par excellence*, does not appear to have shown any direct affinity for Šúfism, it could be argued that his attitude toward Greek and Islamic philosophy prepared the way for his son's approach toward Islamic mysticism. Moses Maimonides felt that the mysteries of creation and of the divine chariot (*ma'aseh bereshit* and *ma'aseh merkaveh*), as found in the Torah, had been opaque to Jews since Tannaitic times, the keys to their secrets having somehow how been lost.⁸⁹ His claim to have rediscovered them among the wisdom of the "Gentiles," in the Neoplatonist corpus that would provide the basis for his own philosophy and theology, is reflected in his son's claim to have found in the Šúfís the lost piety of the prophets of Israel.

Islamic Theosophy: The Murcia School and Its Interconfessional Context

The figures that I will be concerned with here were all Šúfís born in Murcia in south-eastern al-Andalus, sometimes referred to as *wujúdí* Šúfís. Much like the Jewish theosophies considered above, the Murcia school presents striking evidence of an interconfessional context.

By far the most important figure of this school is Muḥyí al-Dín Ibn al-'Arabí (d. 1240), the most influential theosopher of Islamic history. In more than 400 books — the longest of which would cover 37 volumes in its projected critical edition — he presented an astonishing synthesis of Islamic knowledge and spiritual reflection into a grand mythological picture of the cosmos. Research into the sources of his thought has been tentative at best, and like the Kabbalah, has been at times subject to the whims of counter-history.⁹⁰ As was the case with Scholem and Kabbalah, the occasional attempts at tracing the history of his thought that have been made have paid

too little attention to the Andalusí context. For example, in the sole monograph on the important doctrine of the “perfect man” in Ibn al-‘Arabí, the author surveys Augustine and Ghazálí before concluding that Ibn al-‘Arabí has the patent on the concept.⁹¹ More proximate sources of possible precedents to Ibn al-‘Arabí’s usage is neglected, and no attention is given to the fact that Maimonides uses the precise terminology (*al-insán al-kámil*) throughout the *Guide*, developing the earlier usage of the term by the great Islamic philosopher, al-Fárábí.⁹²

Ibn al-‘Arabí’s work is indeed of such a grandeur and profundity that no intellectual history could “explain” it simply by identifying sources and influences. However, his thought does not exist in a vacuum, and the attribution of novelty to his formulation of Islamic spirituality rings hollow when no attempt is made to mark off what is truly new with him from what is drawn from his milieu. Again, I am not going to attempt here to reconstruct the history of his thought, but only to point out certain facts which place him in the context of the Andalusí Judeo-Islamic symbiosis, a context in light of which the history of Ibn al-‘Arabí and his influence needs to be rewritten.

Despite the vastness of his output, Ibn al-‘Arabí very rarely refers to philosophical predecessors. Of the contacts with his contemporaries, he refers several times to his meetings with Ibn Rushd, but his judgment of the latter is a complex issue.⁹³ He refers in his magnum opus, the *Futúhát al-Makkiyya*, to a discussion he had with a Rabbi about the mystical significance of the letter “B,” (Arabic *bá’*, Hebrew *bet*), with which both the Torah and the Qur’an begin. In a number of places, he refers to the Torah, but these appear to be very general allusions. And while his works lack any direct reference to most of the towering figures of Islamic philosophy — al-Kindí, al-Fárábí, Ibn Síná, Ibn Tufayl — he does refer at least twice to Baṭalyúsí, which underlines the commonality of sources between he and the Spanish Kabbalists. In a highly significant passage in the *Futúhát*, where Ibn al-‘Arabí describes his encounter with the mysterious “Youth” around the Ka’aba, he quotes from the *Theology of Aristotle*.⁹⁴ Once again, Ibn al-‘Arabí shares the same critical source-texts as the Judeo-Islamic philosophers and the Kabbalists.⁹⁵

It is with two of Ibn al-‘Arabí’s Murcian compatriots, however, that we find the most direct evidence of the interconfessional context for this theosophy. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Ibn Sab’in (d. 1270), a younger contemporary of Ibn al-‘Arabí, propounded a radically pantheistic doctrine, known in Islamic sources as *waḥdat al-wujúd*, and insisted fiercely on the independence of his thought.⁹⁶ Thus, he directly criticized Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-‘Arabí, his Andalusí predecessors, while at the same time developing his system using their terminology. The strikingly Hermetic character of Ibn Sab’in and his school — Hermes is included in the Sab’iniyyún *silsilah* - links it with Kabbalah,

which also found Hermeticism a fertile source for contemplation.⁹⁷ Most importantly, though, Ibn Sab'in found inspiration in Jewish sources, citing Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* in his *Risála Núriyya*⁹⁸ and including the Jewish angels Yahoel and Metatron in an invocation found in his treatise on the letter qáf.⁹⁹ His philosophical correspondence with Emperor Frederick II further displays his knowledge of Maimonidean thought.¹⁰⁰ A later follower of both Ibn Sab'in and Ibn al-'Arabí, the thirteenth-century Egyptian magician al-Búní, also "included Metatron in his repertoire, along with other Jewish motifs."¹⁰¹

This interconfessionalism becomes even more pronounced when we consider the career of Ibn Sab'in's disciple, the fellow-Murcian Ibn Húd (d. 1300), who worked as a physician and mystical guide in Damascus, finding clients among both Muslims and Jews. He is said to have proclaimed his readiness to guide any aspirant in any of the three ways – Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Following Ibn Sab'in's interest in Maimonides, Ibn Húd is known to have taught the *Guide of the Perplexed* to Damascene Jews. One source calls him the "Shaykh of the Jews," and Kraemer suggests that there may have been some connection between Ibn Húd's circle in Damascus and the "Jewish Súfis" of Cairo.¹⁰² Obviously, while the school of Murcia may have been concerned first and foremost with the inner meaning of the Qur'an, their contributions to the history of Islamate thought cannot be understood without placing them in the context of Andalusí interconfessionalism.

Conclusion

It should be clear by now how limited such historiographical distinctions as those between philosophy and mysticism, or even between Muslim and Jew, ultimately are in aiding our understanding of the movements considered above. It can also be unequivocally stated that any explanation of the Judeo-Islamic symbiosis in al-Andalus that rests on the assumption that "the high culture of the [Muslims] was to a great degree secular"¹⁰³ is absurd. What we find in these events and personalities is not simply thinkers who were incidentally Jewish interacting creatively with counterparts who were incidentally Muslim. On the contrary, we find here an interpenetration and crosspollination of values, of precisely religious ideas and ideals. The ever-eloquent Lenn Goodman wrote, referring to the medieval Judeo-Islamic philosophical "conversation":

What we learn from these conversations, as we cock our ears to listen, is first to doubt and then to deny the stereotypic notions of nineteenth-century scholarship that would assign to each race and nation a particular genius or spirit of its

own, uncommunicable and inscrutable to any other, incapable of mixture without adulteration of each distinctive and pristine essence, but transparent, invisible, unexchangeable and uncriticisable by those who share it or those who live within its thrall.¹⁰⁴

In these words lies a compelling critique of the whole historiographic debate over *convivencia*, which sees in medieval Spain an experience of human “togetherness” only through the lens of reified differences, naturalized ideological divides. Obviously, such lines were not drawn on the landscape. In terms of what this suggests for how we approach the history of mysticism, consider this influential declaration by Gershom Scholem:

There is no mysticism as such, there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system, Christian, Islamic, Jewish mysticism and so on.¹⁰⁵

This historian’s appeal itself begs the question of historicity, for what, indeed, is a religious system “as such?”

The recontextualization that I have argued for here challenges not only the prevailing historiographical approaches to the beginnings of the Jewish and Islamic philosophical mysticisms of the Middle Ages; it also questions the common Western view of medieval Islam as a civilization “intermediate” between the Hellenistic Age and the Renaissance,¹⁰⁶ whose sole purpose in the grand *telos* of history was to rescue the torch of Greek enlightenment that it might duly be passed to Europe, its rightful inheritor.¹⁰⁷ The importance of the Andalusí “Golden Age” in the development of Western civilization cannot be gainsaid, but nor should this symbiotic achievement be seen as having been without issue for the Islamicate world. Far from being simply passed on, the torch held aloft in al-Andalus fired not only the scientific revolutions of Europe; it also flooded with its lights the minds of the Jewish and Muslim mystics of the East.

NOTES

¹ The vast influence exerted upon the history of Islamic thought by the figure at the center of the Akbarian movement, Muḥyī al-dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī (known as the *Shaykh al-Akbar* (“Doctor Maximus”), whence the term “Akbarian”), has been demonstrated in a large number of studies, but see the concise presentation in Chodkiewicz, “Diffusion.” The persistence of Kabbalah into our own times is well known and it has even entered into popular culture, but critical historiography of Kabbalah in the modern period is lacking, for reasons discussed by Idel in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 25f.

² Wasserstrom and Kiener are the significant exceptions, and their relevant studies will be cited throughout what follows.

³ As will be explained below, I refer here not to the “school of Ibn al-‘Arabí” that extends via his disciple and son-in-law Šadr al-Dīn al-Qūnāwī, but rather with the so-called “Murcian school” that includes Ibn Sab’in and Ibn Hūd.

⁴ I borrow this term from Marshall Hodgson, who introduced and defended its usage in his *Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 57-60. “Islamicate” refers to the “culture, centered on a lettered tradition, which has been historically distinctive of Islamdom the society, and which has been naturally shared in by both Muslims and non-Muslims who participate at all fully in the society of Islamdom” (ibid., p. 58, with Hodgson’s emphases).

⁵ For a synopsis of these developments, see Fakhry, *Short Introduction*, chap. 1.

⁶ On which see Hodgson, op. cit., chap. 5.

⁷ On the early Islamicate “humanists” see Kraemer, *Humanism*, and Leaman, “Islamic Humanism.”

⁸ Leaman, op. cit., p. 156.

⁹ The still-standard work on this issue is Wolfson’s *Philosophy of the Kalām*. For more on the interconfessional contexts of both of these early developments, see Ben-Shammai, “Jewish Thought,” passim.

¹⁰ Safran, *The Second Umayyad Caliphate*.

¹¹ Cohen’s “The Story of the Four Captives” is an excellent study of the mythohistorical underpinnings given to this unprecedented break with Baghdad by Abraham ibn Da’ūd in his *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*. See also Ben-Sasson’s “The Emergence of the Qayrawān Jewish Community” for a study of a parallel development of independence from Baghdad on the part of the Jewish community under the Ifriqī Aghlabids.

¹² From the Jewish side, see Abraham ibn Da’ūd’s comments in his *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, translated in Cohen, op. cit., p. 159. For the Muslim side, see Šā’id al-Andalusī’s glowing report of Ibn Shaprūt’s establishment of the Andalusí Jewish community’s independence from Baghdad in his *ṭabaqāt al-Umam*, translated by Norman Stillman in *Jews of Arab Lands*, p. 210.

¹³ The literature on the “Golden Age” is vast and charged with polemic. Stillman (op. cit., pp. 53-63) and Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, present both the details of the symbiosis and surveys of the polemical arguments. See also Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, chap. six, for insightful reflections on the study of Jewish-Muslim symbiosis.

¹⁴ For a recent and provocative challenge to this anachronistic dichotomization of pre-modern philosophy, see Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*

¹⁵ I refer of course to the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, which was essentially a compilation of paraphrased extracts from Plotinus’

Enneads with commentaries by Proclus. See Kraye *et al*, *Pseudo-Aristotle*.

- ¹⁶ On account of his *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*, recently translated by Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee as *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer* (Reading, UK: Garnett Publishing, 1999).
- ¹⁷ Ivry, "Averroes and the West," p. 143.
- ¹⁸ On Israeli, see Altmann and Stern's excellent monograph, *Isaac Israeli*, with translations of most of his extant works.
- ¹⁹ On the long version of the *Theology of Aristotle*, see Fenton, "The Arabic and Hebrew Versions." On Israeli's role in its transmission, see Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, pp. 95ff; Zimmerman, "Origin," pp. 190-4; and d'Alverny, "Pseudo-Aristotle," *passim*. On the suggestion of a Judeo-Isma'ili matrix for the development of the long version, see Wasserstrom, "Islamic Social and Cultural Context," p. 100.
- ²⁰ Altmann and Stern, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-2.
- ²¹ Altmann, "Delphic Maxim," p. 33 and n. 151. In referring to de Leon as the "author of the *Zohar*," I am purposefully sidestepping the ongoing debate about this issue. Suffice it to point out that, ever since Scholem's detailed investigations into the matter of the *Zohar's* authorship (*Major Trends*, pp. 156-204) it has been recognized by historians that Moses de Leon played a central – if not sole – role in its composition. More recent debates have tended to center on whether distinctions can be made between different strata of the *Zoharic* text, some of which may not have been written by de Leon. On this whole issue see Liebes, *Studies*, chap. 2.
- ²² Fenton, *op. cit.*, p. 260n 2.
- ²³ Altmann and Stern, *op. cit.*, pp. xiii and 8. The *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* is itself a fascinating milestone in medieval interconfessionalism, lying as it does at the nexus of the parallel traditions of the magical generation of an artificial anthropoid (the *golem*, *homunculus*) in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. See O'Connor, *Alchemical Creation*, p. 189n 23 and 24.
- ²⁴ This is argued by d'Alverny, *op. cit.*, p. 69. See also Altmann, "Delphic Maxim," p. 33.
- ²⁵ The most extensive treatment of Ibn Masarra's life and thought is Asín Palacion, *The Mystical Philosophy*, a work which has been consistently criticized for making over-much of a pseudo-Empedoclean source for Ibn Masarra's doctrine. More recent treatments of Ibn Masarra can be found in Goodman, "Ibn Masarra," and Addas, "Andalusí Mysticism," pp. 911-20. Two of Ibn Masarra's surviving works are printed in M. Kamal Ibrahim Ja'far, *Min qadaya'l-fikr al-islami* (Cairo: Dar al-'ulum, 1978); note that these works were unknown to Asín and have been almost completely neglected even in more recent scholarship; the above-cited article by Goodman, for instance, though noting Ja'far's book in his bibliography, states erroneously in the article itself that none of Ibn Masarra's works survive.

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- ²⁶ See Addas, *Quest*, pp. 58f. She quotes Ibn al-‘Arabí’s *Kitáb al-Mím wa l-wáw wa l-nún* (Book of (the letters) M, W, and N), where he states that his approach to the secrets of these letters is “in the manner of Ibn Masarra.” Note that the theses regarding the Throne attributed to Ibn Masarra by Ibn al-‘Arabí — and much discussed by Asin Palacios — do not appear in either of Ibn Masarra’s surviving works, nor does one find in those texts any extended discussion of the Throne at all.
- ²⁷ Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera translated pseudo-Empedocles’ *Book of Five Substances* into Hebrew, and asserted that it had been a major influence on Ibn Gabirol. See Jospe, *Torah and Sophia*, p. 74. The pseudo-Empedoclean doctrine of the vegetative soul seems to have been generally known and often affirmed in Andalusí philosophical literature.
- ²⁸ According to Urvoy, *Ibn Rushd*, p. 5, his was “the first true ‘philosophical system’ to be developed in al-Andalus,” Jewish or otherwise.
- ²⁹ On Ibn Gabirol, see Lancaster, “Ibn Gabirol,” and Sirat, *History*, pp. 68-81. Altmann, “Delphic Maxim,” p. 35, states that the “influence of the Pseudo-Empedocles Fragments on Solomon ibn Gabirol cannot be gainsaid.” See his references in *ibid.*, n. 157.
- ³⁰ This promotion of the Will to a cosmological priority over the First Intellect is a departure from classical Neoplatonism traceable to the long version of the *Theology of Aristotle*. See the extracts and discussion in Zimmerman, “Origins,” p. 192f.
- ³¹ Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, chap. 3. The *Shi’ur Qomah* (lit. “measure of the body”) describes the proportions and mystical significances of the Divine Body, much utilized in Kabbalistic literatures. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, Index, sv. “Shi’ur Komah.”
- ³² Pulcini, *op. cit.*, p. 142n 14, writes that “Ibn Nagrela’s political, military, religious, and literary successes were a source of embitterment to the disillusioned Ibn Ḥazm during his reclusive years in Mont Lisham.” It is interesting to note also that the anti-Qur’anic work which Ibn Ḥazm attacks in this polemic, and which he attributed to Ibn Nagrela, was in fact not by Ibn Nagrela but rather Ibn al-Ráwandí, the notorious 9th century Muslim “free-thinker.” See Stroumsa, “Jewish Polemics,” p. 245.
- ³³ Some have argued, following Goldziher, that Ibn al-‘Arabí followed the áhirí legal madhhab of Ibn Ḥazm, but this is open to question. See al-Ghorab, “Muhyiddin Ibn al-Arabí.”
- ³⁴ Fenton, “Judaism and Sufism,” p. 756f.
- ³⁵ Sirat, *History*, p. 82, and Altmann, “The Delphic Maxim,” pp. 24f. and 36f. On the *Ikhwán al-Ṣafá* in general, see Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*.
- ³⁶ Fenton, “Judaism and Sufism,” p. 757.
- ³⁷ Corbin, *History*, p. 236.

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- ³⁸ See Addas, *Quest*, p. 108. On the use of these symbols of the emanative process in early Kabbalistic literature, and the suggestion of Baṭalyúsi as the source, see Wilensky, "First Created Being," p. 75n 18.
- ³⁹ There are a number of studies revealing Judah Halevi's remarkable integration into an interconfessional environment. One recent work, which surveys the history of this research while at the same time adding new insights into the depth of the penetration of Šúfí concepts into Halevi's thinking, is Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy*.
- ⁴⁰ On these networks, and the common thread of medical profession linking many of these Jewish and Muslim philosophers, see Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, p. 256, and Wasserstrom, "Islamic Social and Cultural Context," p. 99: "Jewish and Muslim philosopher-physicians thus met with and learned from each other. Their occasional friendships could develop such intensity that ibn al-Qiftí (d. 1248) and ibn 'Aqnín (an Andalusí, pupil of Maimonides) (d. early thirteenth century) were said to have vowed 'that whoever preceded the other in death would have to send reports from eternity to the survivor.'"
- ⁴¹ Wasserstrom, "Islamic Social and Cultural Context," p. 96, observes that "some of the sweetest fruits of Islamic philosophy — al-Fárábí (870-950), ibn Bájjá (d. 1138), ibn ṭufayl (d. 1185) — were preserved, translated, transmitted, and reverently studied by Jews." Dominique Urvoy, in *Ibn Rushd*, p. 109, writes of "the fact that Ibn Rushd has no important followers in the Muslim circles, that his work only survived thanks to his influence on a certain Jewish bourgeoisie."
- ⁴² Wasserstrom, "Jewish-Muslim Relations," p. 75, where it is noted that they were both resident in Cairo again in 1206, though it's unclear what is meant here, given that Maimonides died in 1204.
- ⁴³ Ibn al-'Arabí's famous biographical account of the Šúfís of al-Andalus, the *Rúḥ al-Quds*, was, according to Ibn al-'Arabí himself, inspired by the chauvanism and anti-Andalusí prejudice that he met among the Šúfís of Egypt. For Maimonides' pining for al-Andalus, see (but be warned of the Derrida-inspired prose), Anidjar, "*Our Place in Al-Andalus*." Wasserstrom notes several additional studies focusing on Maimonides' self-conception as an Andalusí throughout his life in "Jewish-Muslim Relations," p. 78n 1.
- ⁴⁴ "The Islamic Social and Cultural Context," p. 105n 1.
- ⁴⁵ *Origins*, p. 45, but stated and restated in many other instances throughout his *oeuvre*. Joseph Dan, one of Scholem's former students and the current occupant of the Gershom Scholem Chair of Kabbalah at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has noted in several instances that decades of scholarship have turned up absolutely no evidence to support Scholem's thesis of Gnostic influence; see Dan, *Early Kabbalah*, pp. 5-7, and idem, *Heart and the Fountain*, p. 29.
- ⁴⁶ In situating his approach as against his 19th-century predecessors, Scholem wrote that "the kabbalistic movement cannot be described

adequately according to the categories of the history of philosophy; it can only be explained in terms of the history of religions . . .” (*Origins*, p. 11). Cf. Eliade: “But if we are to avoid sinking back into an obsolete ‘reductionism,’ this history of religious meanings must always be regarded as forming part of the history of the human spirit” (*Quest*, p. 9). For Eliade as well as for Scholem, there is a double meaning to the term “history” here: it is not only religious meaning as the object of historical enquiry, but also the historian of these meanings, that forms a part of and plays a role in the “history of the human spirit.”

⁴⁷ See Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, passim, and Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, esp. pages 159-61.

⁴⁸ I would strongly qualify this, though, with reference to the work of Moshe Idel, who has consistently proposed alternative avenues of approach to the historiography of Kabbalah. Nonetheless, a post-Scholem comprehensive history of the early Kabbalah is yet to appear, though Yizhak Baer’s work could be considered as a framework for such an alternative. Idel seems to see Baer’s work in this way, in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 13.

⁴⁹ Scholem considered the Catharist movement as an influence in the emergence of Kabbalah, but see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic*, pp. 33-44. Likewise he considered certain characteristics of the Gerona Kabbalists to have perhaps derived from Joachim of Fiore, whereas Willensky’s research has shown an Islamic provenance to these characteristics to be much more likely. See below.

⁵⁰ “Jewish Mysticism,” p. 452.

⁵¹ According to Scholem, *Origins*, p. 369, a total of twelve members of this circle are known by name.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 410f.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

⁵⁵ “Neoplatonism,” p. 326f.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

⁵⁷ Translated in Scholem, *Origins*, p. 462.

⁵⁸ On Nasafi as a member of this school, see Chittick, “The School of Ibn ‘Arabí,” p. 519, and Ridgeon, *Persian Metaphysics*, pp. 19f.

⁵⁹ Ridgeon, *Persian Metaphysics*, pp. 237f.

⁶⁰ Scholem, *Origins*, p. 467n 239.

⁶¹ Alexander Altmann has produced a series of studies tracing various symbols and motifs through the Andalusí philosophical milieu and into the theosophies of Ibn al-‘Arabí and the Gerona Kabbalists. I cannot here recapitulate the extensive evidence adduced by Altmann, and instead refer the reader to his “Delphic Maxim,” “‘Ladder of Ascension,’” and “Motif of the ‘Shells’.” These studies are treasure-troves of the kinds of thematic continuities that could be fruitfully pursued along the lines of the recontextualization suggested here.

⁶² "Guide and the Gate," pp. 267f.

⁶³ Wilensky, "Isaac ibn Laṭif," passim.

⁶⁴ Idem, "Guide and the Gate," pp. 272f

⁶⁵ Idem, "Guide and the Gate," pp. 273f; "First Created Being," pp. 69f.

⁶⁶ Idem, "First Created Being," p. 76n 32; "Guide and the Gate," p. 272n 22.

⁶⁷ Idem, "First Created Being," pp. 72ff.

⁶⁸ This transliteration is often met with in the secondary sources, but "Baṭalyúsi" more accurately reflects how this name is pronounced. The name literally means "from Badajoz."

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 69f. Ibn Laṭif's doctrine of the First Created Being is strikingly similar to the idea of the "Muḥammadan Reality," the "third thing" in Ibn al-'Arabí's system. I cannot explore this parallel here, but it is by no means the only such correspondence between the two Spanish theosophies. These correspondences are but one of the many areas of research that my suggested recontextualization would fruitfully open up for inquiry.

⁷⁰ On Abulafia and Andalusí philosophy, see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic*, chap. 1; idem., "Maimonides and Kabbalah," pp. 54-79; on Abulafia and Ṣufism, see *Studies in Ecstatic*, chaps. 5-7, and idem., *Mystical Experience*, index, sv. "Sufism."

⁷¹ On these two major forms of early Kabbalah, see Idel, "Defining Kabbalah," passim. Idel responds to what he sees as an over-emphasis on the theosophical or speculative elements in Kabbalah in Scholem's and most subsequent scholarship, and shows that there is also a significant theurgical and ecstatic trend, represented first and foremost by Abulafia and his school. Recently, Eliot Wolfson has challenged the adequacy of this speculative/ecstatic dichotomy, highlighting the experiential elements in the former and thus questioning the very basis for this phenomenological distinction. See his "Jewish Mysticism," esp. p. 483.

⁷² According to Idel ("Maimonides and Kabbalah," p. 55, and *Studies in Ecstatic*, p. 2), Isaac Ibn Laṭif, Moses de Leon, and Joseph Gikatilla were among Abulafia's Kabbalistic contemporaries whose lives traced a similar trajectory in beginning with philosophical studies before authoring what would become central Kabbalistic texts.

⁷³ Abulafia wrote three. See Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," p. 58. It would appear that his contemporary, Joseph Gikatilla, was the only other author to write a Kabbalistic commentary to the *Guide*. Ibid., p. 62. It should also be noted that two of Abulafia's *Guide* commentaries were translated into Latin, and it was on the basis of these that many of the key elements of ecstatic Kabbalah made their way into Christian Kabbalah, along with the view, promulgated by Pico della Mirandola, that Maimonides was a Kabbalist. See *ibid.*, p. 70.

⁷⁴ Wasserstrom, "Jewish-Muslim Relations," p. 75; Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic*, p. 23n 34.

⁷⁵ *Studies in Ecstatic*, p. 16.

⁷⁶ Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic*, esp. chap. 7. There, on p. 111, Idel writes that Abulafia's connection with Šūfism was "a relationship acknowledge by the Kabbalists themselves." Unfortunately, no sources are indicated for this.

⁷⁷ I have noted a great many similarities between the Abulafian Kabbalistic texts and the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabí, and this deserves closer study. One issue that I have not seen touched on in any of the secondary literature is the remarkable similarity between the central Abulafian exegetical/theurgical technique of *ẓeruf* (letter permutation) and the Akbarian notion of *taṣarruf* (free disposal, magical power, grammatical inflection, transformation, permutation). These two words derive from the same Semitic triliteral root (*ẓ-r-f* = *ṣ-r-f*), and the contexts of their deployment in the two respective mystical traditions are often identical.

⁷⁸ Šūfí influences on Isaac of Acre had been noted as early as 1852, by Adolph Jellinek. See Fenton, in 'O. Maimonides, *Treatise of the Pool*, p. 63n 94 for an extensive outline of Isaac's appropriation of Šūfí materials.

⁷⁹ Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic*, chap. 5, at p. 73.

⁸⁰ For this hierarchy in the school of Ibn al-ʿArabí, see the masterful survey in Chittick, "Five Divine Presences," *passim*.

⁸¹ *Studies in Ecstatic*, p. 75.

⁸² There is, however, ample evidence to suggest that this Cairene pietist movement — in some form — predates both Maimonides and Abraham ha-ḥasíd. See Cohen, "Soteriology," p. 209.

⁸³ In 'O. Maimonides, *Treatise of the Pool*, p. 7.

⁸⁴ See Fenton, in *ibid.*, p. 8, for the translations of the passages in which these sentiments are expressed.

⁸⁵ This is Judeo-Arabic, a transliteration of *kifáya*, i.e., the *Kitáb Kifáyat al-ʿbidín* of Abraham Maimonides, which Rosenblatt translates as "The Comprehensive Guide for the Servants of God."

⁸⁶ In A. Maimonides, *High Ways*, p. 50.

⁸⁷ On the attempted reforms of Jewish ritual, such as the introduction of Islamic-style ablutions, genuflections, prostrations, and serried-rank congregational prayer, see Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides," p. 147f. and Fenton in 'O. Maimonides, *op. cit.*, pp. 13ff.

⁸⁸ These are identified *en passant* throughout Rosenthal's study of the text, "A Judaeo-Arabic Work under Sufic Influence." Rosenthal was unable to identify the author, which lacuna was filled in by Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," p. 763.

⁸⁹ See Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," p. 34, and Altmann, "Maimonides's Attitude," *passim*.

⁹⁰ See my "Counter-History of Islam."

⁹¹ Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabí's Theory*, *passim*, and p. 49.

⁹² On Maimonides' concept of the "perfect man" and its possibly relationship to Ibn al-ʿArabí, see Kiener, "Ibn al-ʿArabí and the

Qabbalah,” 38-44. On the “perfect man” in al-Fárabí, the source for Maimonides’ development of the concept, see Strauss, *Persecution*, p. 15.

⁹³ See Rosenthal, “Ibn ‘Arabí,” *passim*.

⁹⁴ See Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, p. 385.

⁹⁵ The number of similarities that Ibn al-‘Arabí’s works share with those of his Spanish-Jewish theosophical counterparts is vast, and cannot be detailed here. Some have already been mentioned above in connection with Abulafian Kabbalah. For a number of further parallels, see Wasserstrom, “Jewish-Muslim Relations,” pp. 75f.

⁹⁶ Despite the fact that the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujúd* is commonly fathered on Ibn al-‘Arabí in both Islamic and Western literatures, he himself never used this precise term in his known writings. According to William Chittick, the Western authority on this school, Ibn Sab’in was the first to use the term in its technical sense. See his “Rúmi and *waḥdat al-wujúd*,” p. 82.

⁹⁷ As Wasserstrom notes, “Jewish-Muslim Relations,” p. 73: “The first Jewish philosophers to claim this (Hermetic) spiritual genealogy, Moses ibn Ezra, Judah Halevi, and Abraham ibn Ezra, were twelfth-century Spanish members of the same circle. ...In this way, the figure of Hermes stood for a transconfessional wisdom, a universal revelation, which doctrine further endorsed Muslim study of Jewish works.”

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 72 and 74.

⁹⁹ Vincent Cornell, personal communication with the present author, dated 5/29/2003. For more on Ibn Sab’in and Hermeticism, see Cornell’s “Way of the Axial Intellect.”

¹⁰⁰ Wasserstrom, “Jewish-Muslim Relations,” p. 74.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁰² Kraemer, “Andalusian Mystic,” p. 72. For a survey of Ibn Húd’s career and his interconfessional activities, see *ibid.*, pp. 66-73.

¹⁰³ Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, p. 174f. Glick continues this thought by attributing the comparative absence of Jewish integration into the intellectual movements in Christian cultural spheres to the fact that the Jews’ “secular culture was incongruent with the religiously oriented high culture of the Christians.”

¹⁰⁴ *Jewish and Islamic*, pp. viii-ix.

¹⁰⁵ *Major Trends*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ The classical presentation of this view being Goitein, “Between Hellenism and Renaissance.” See Wasserstrom’s critical comments on such a characterization in *Between Muslim and Jew*, pp. 225ff.

¹⁰⁷ The obvious implication of this narrative is that philosophy, once transmitted to Europe, ceased to exist in any real sense in Islamdom. With notable exceptions, such as Corbin’s *History of Islamic Philosophy*, this view has had a rather surprising currency among twentieth-century historians. Such an otherwise keen and careful scholar as Harry Wolfson, for instance, could write seriously of “the

abrupt disappearance of philosophic activity among the Arabic-speaking peoples, which synchronizes with the death of Averroes" ("Revised Plan," p. 88).

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Out of Jewish Roots

Studies of Prayer Patterns in Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Bahá'í Worship

by Ted Brownstein

Abstract

Daily prayer is one of the essential practices of the Abrahamic religions. Some of the progressive elements of this series of revelations are demonstrated by this paper as an exploration of the development of liturgy and personal prayer patterns from its roots in Judaism and subsequent development in Christianity, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith.

Introduction

Progressive revelation is central to Bahá'í theology. It is the bedrock upon which belief in the fundamental unity of religion is built, as it provides a conceptual basis for seeing the interconnections between the world's diverse religions. All are seen as equally valid paths to God. At the same time each is seen as a spiritual advancement, built upon the traditions and successes of its predecessors.

*...in accordance with the principle of progressive revelation every Manifestation of God must needs vouchsafe to the peoples of His day a measure of divine guidance ampler than any which a preceding and less receptive age could have received or appreciated. (WOB 102)**

Less well known but perhaps equally significant, is the Bahá'í understanding of progressive revelation within the history of each religion. Receptivity of the people to new spiritual insights grows as previously revealed teachings are digested and absorbed. Thus spiritual advancement is seen as an ongoing process within each religious community. To the extent that believers grasp and apply the fundamental teachings of their founding prophet, capacity for further learning is generated. Light begets light.

* All "authoritative" publications are cited by abbreviation; see Appendix I, page 291. Words of Prophets/Manifestations are italicized (i.e. quotations from Sacred Writings, not including statements by Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice).

This divinely purposed delay in the revelation of the basic laws of God for this age, and the subsequent gradual implementation of their provisions, illustrate the principle of progressive revelation which applies even within the ministry of each Prophet. (KA, Notes, p. 220)

In view of the central importance of progressive revelation, in both its macro and micro aspects, Bahá'í scholars have a special interest in documenting the interdependence of the world's religions. By identifying the specific threads of belief and practice as they persist and develop, scholars put flesh on the skeleton of progressive revelation. In addition, we often find an inter-fertility. It is not just the newer religions which borrow and adapt practices of the older, but also vigorous older religions adopting from latter revelations, as the value of new light becomes apparent. A unified vision of the interplay and interdependence of the world's spiritual heritage emerges.

The stepwise advancement of progressive revelation is seen to exist in all regions of the earth and encompass all spiritual traditions. In cases where we know only the current spiritual practice of an indigenous tribe and little of its history, it is assumed by faith that earlier developmental stages must have existed. The task of tracing the step-by-step progress is made easier when the spiritual history of a sequence of revelations is recorded in sacred books. This is precisely the case with the Abrahamic religions. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, coupled with the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, which constitute a millennia long series of discrete revelatory stages. The existence of the relevant sacred books, Torah, New Testament, Qur'án, Bábí and Bahá'í Writings, facilitate the work of any scholar who seeks to trace the specifics and mechanisms of progressive revelation.

This paper seeks to explore both the continuities and progressive unfoldments in daily prayer within the Abrahamic family of religions. Of course, this history is extensive and this paper cannot hope to trace the hundreds of forms that daily prayer has taken over the millennia. Nevertheless, certain interesting patterns emerge from a study of major trends. Worship has been transformed from its focus on communal sacrifices to a focus on individual communion with God through prayer. Daily prayer has now become, not only one of religion's essential practices, but the heart and soul of spirituality. The progressive elements of this transformation are seen blossoming within the sequence of divine revelations running from Moses to Bahá'u'lláh. These elements are traced in this paper from their roots in ancient Israel Temple sacrifice, through the development of synagogue and church liturgies of Judaism and Christianity, five-times daily prayer of Islam and the obligatory prayer of the Bahá'í Faith.

In general, we may think of spiritual progress growing out of the teachings of each new Prophet. Of special interest are those spiritual innovations that arise out of popular custom without a claim of divine mandate that are subsequently sanctified by a later Prophet. To illustrate, there is no requirement for daily obligatory prayer in the Torah. Rather Jewish prayer practices developed over time at the Jerusalem Temple and were well established by popular custom within the Jewish Community before being sanctified by the revelations of Christ, Muḥammad and Bahá'u'lláh.

Transformation: From Human to Animal Sacrifice

The history of the Abrahamic religions demonstrates patterns of worship with decreasing emphasis on communal worship orchestrated by a priesthood and increasing emphasis on individual worship. Prior to Abraham, child sacrifice was common in Near Eastern culture. The sites of ancient sacrificial cemeteries have been found from Amman, Jordan to Carthage in Tunisia. These cemeteries date from between the 15th century BCE and the 4th century BCE. (Some scholars claim that child sacrifice continued at Carthage into the second century CE but that conclusion is not universally accepted.) The burned skeletons of otherwise healthy children were buried in urns along with inscribed prayers and vows.

Child sacrifice was a deeply entrenched custom in Israel as well. Instances of child sacrifice persisted into the period of the Kings. Moabite King Mesa offered his son out of desperation while fighting a losing battle (2 Kings 3:27). Judahite Kings Ahaz and Manassah “*do evil in the sight of the LORD*” by burning their sons as offering (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). A site of child sacrifice in the valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) was destroyed during Josiah’s Reform in the late seventh century BCE (2 Kings 23:10; see http://www.usbible.com/Sacrifice/sacrifice_israel.htm) The continuance of human sacrifices was a provocation to the Hebrew prophets. The prophet Micah decried those in his day who “*give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul.*” (Micah 6:6-7)

In the Torah, Genesis 22, we find a poignant tale wherein an angel of the LORD puts an end to child sacrifice. It depicts Abraham traveling to Mount Moriah, binding his son, Isaac, and preparing to offer him in sacrifice in obedience to God’s command. An angel intervened, halting the sacrifice. The story stirs compassion both for Isaac, as the intended victim, and for Abraham, as the one who must wield the sacrificial knife. The reader’s sympathy for them prepares the way for the change in worship that follows. The old ways will give way to new ones. From then on offerings would be of animal only. As

we read the story we emotionally align ourselves with Abraham and wonder how he will have the emotional strength to kill his own child. God says, “*Take your son, your only son, the one you love and sacrifice him as a burnt offering.*” Not only is Isaac described as Abraham’s son, but he is “the only son” and “the one you love.” All this would make it incredibly difficult for Abraham to go through with the sacrifice. Later the emotional volume is raised even higher. As Abraham is climbing the mountain with his son, Isaac asks, “Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Isaac of course does not realize that he is the intended sacrificial victim.

Isaac is bound and laid out on the altar, but an angelic hand intervenes and halts the sacrifice. A sheep whose horns happen to be caught in a nearby bush, is offered up as a substitute. Thereafter those who worshipped in the Abrahamic tradition would no longer follow the long standing practice of sacrificing first born children. The reform was later encoded in the Torah prohibiting all human sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5).

Can the ban on human sacrifice aptly be termed “progressive revelation?” Some may object claiming that God never commanded the sacrifice of children. Indeed we have no ancient record of any such pre-Abrahamic command. Yet progressive revelation need not be limited to abrogation of one divine law by another. Revelation of new laws that change common practices serves the same purpose. Clearly the ban on human sacrifice can rightly be called “progress” as it raised the value of human life and transformed belief regarding what God required from His worshippers. This new vision of God was less harshly demanding, more compassionate.

Further this ban was the first in a chain of reforms that would span multiple revelations. Soon thereafter the first foreshadows of the end of the sacrificial cult appeared.

Does the LORD delight in sacrifice and burnt offering rather than obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold to obey is better than to sacrifice, to heed is better than the fat of rams. [1 Samuel 15:22)

Although further centuries would be required, the end of the sacrificial cult was destined to follow.

Transformation: From Sacrifice to Prayer

From Abraham’s time through the Exodus, obligatory worship revolved primarily around cultic worship with animal sacrifices on special occasions presided over by holy men, such as priests or family patriarchs. Prayer was largely spontaneous. We find no information regarding systematic daily worship, either prayer or sacrifice during

the patriarchal age. Prayer at that time appears to have been on an “as needed” basis and consisted primarily of petitions in times of need. (Genesis 20:7) Only with the Torah, and the establishment of the Tabernacle along with a professional priesthood, do we find regulations regarding obligatory daily worship of any kind.

Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day constantly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight ... And you shall offer it with grain offering and drink offering ... for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD. This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD... (Exodus 29:38-42)

And you shall make an altar to burn incense on... Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning when he tends the lamps. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. (Exodus 30:1, 7-8)

Surprisingly, however, the instructions to the priests contain no mention of prayers to be offered in conjunction with the daily burnt offerings. Prayer continued to be primarily associated with petitions for aid (Numbers 21:7) or special occasion blessings (Leviticus 9:22; Numbers 6:24-26). Odd as it may seem to us, in view of our contemporary association of worship and prayer, there apparently were no formalized daily prayers in the time of either Abraham or Moses. If regular prayers of praise or thanksgiving were used, we have no record of them. The earliest mention of daily pray in the Biblical record appears around the time of the establishment of the Israelite monarchy under Kings David and Solomon.

The enlargement of the role of prayer was coupled with an expanded view of the purpose of prayer. Prayer was no longer limited to petitions for aid which tend to arise spontaneously in response to specific hurtful or potentially hurtful situations. In contrast, daily prayers were used day in and day out, during good times and bad. Prayer became a vehicle for a wider variety of spiritual expressions including praise, thanksgiving and lamentation.

The book of Psalms contains 150 sacred songs, many ascribed to David. Expressions such as “*Give thanks unto the LORD, for He is Good*” (136:1), “*Every day I will bless you*” (145:2) and “*Hallelujah, Praise ye God*” (150:6) indicate that praise and thanksgiving were an integral part of tabernacle and temple worship. The existence of a collection of songs indicates some sort of regular use. Yet the Psalter contains little explicit indication of how or when these sacred songs were sung. One notable exception is Psalm 92, which reads in part:

*A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath Day.
 It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
 And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High;
 To declare Your loving kindness in the morning,
 And Your faithfulness every night,
 On an instrument of ten strings,
 On the lute and on the harp,
 With harmonious sounds. (Psalm 92:1-3)*

The paradox here is that despite the pledge of daily praise, we find the superscription associates the psalm with the Sabbath rather than daily worship. Even though the words of the song refer to daily praise, we do not know whether there was any kind of a daily worship service at the tabernacle, or if such existed what the contents of the service might have been. We know even less about the prayer life of average Israelites. Did they have daily or special occasion prayers? Were the psalms known and used by common people in the course of their everyday lives? We simply do not know. We do know, however, that if such existed, it was not mandatory or encoded in sacred literature. Worship during that early period still revolved primarily around sacrifices.

In his prayer dedicating the Jerusalem Temple, it is significant that King Solomon refers to the Temple as “a house of prayer” rather than a house of sacrifice. This phrase broke new ground, helping to create a new prayer emphasis. He pleaded, “*May You hear the supplication of...Your people Israel, when they pray towards this place... (also) the foreigner when he comes and prays toward this Temple ...*” (1 Kings 8:30, 43). “*When anyone sins,*” “*when Israel is defeated,*” “*when there is famine in the land*” (1 Kings 8:22:53) the people were directed to pray towards the new Temple. The presence of God resided in the Holy of Holies of the Temple as represented by the miraculous Shekinah Light that resided above the outstretched cherub’s wings above the Ark of the Covenant. Within the Ark were the Tablets of Moses containing the Ten Commandments. Thus, Solomon’s Temple with its Shekinah Light was a suitable magnet for supplication and petition. However, even in connection with Solomon’s House of Prayer, we find no descriptions of daily prayer.

Some verses in the Psalms and Prophets seem on first reading to refer to daily prayer routines. These verses were later used anachronistically as evidence of the antiquity of the practice. However, rather than being daily prayer as we now conceive it, offered every day of the year, good times and bad, these references on close reading can be seen as describing relatively short periods of intense prayer during times of trouble. In the Psalms, we find David

praying for relief three times a day. *"As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice"* (55:17). The context shows that David had been betrayed by an unnamed friend and was praying for God's protection against this new enemy (vv, 18;21). Daniel is also described praying three times a day in response to trouble, a royal prohibition against worshipping the God of Israel. (Daniel 6:10). Prayer was still for special occasions, medicine to be administered on an 'as needed' basis.

A significant innovation in the role of prayer was expressed in the Psalms of David and became even more fully developed in the writings of Jeremiah. A new intimacy arose, establishing a different sort of relationship. Previously prayer had been formal and emotionally distant as implied in the imagery of the supplicant humbly entering a royal court in order to petition the King. Now, we see something more than the vertical standing of sovereign versus subject. David poured out his heart to God in prayer, shared his inner life and inmost feelings, expressed negative emotions, lamentations, fears, doubts, as well as joy and exhilaration.

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? (Psalm 22:1)

O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger, nor chasten me in your hot displeasure. Have mercy on me O LORD, for I am weak. O LORD, heal me for my bones are troubled. (Psalm 6:1-2)

I will praise you O LORD, with my whole heart. I will tell of your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You. (Psalm 9:1-2)

Jeremiah took this intimacy a step further. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple, he wrote a series of poems called Lamentations, describing the dejected state of the Jewish nation. He poured out his heart in sorrow without making request for relief. His sole interest was for God to see him and to recognize his pain of heart. *"O LORD, behold my affliction..."* (Lamentations 1:9). *"See O LORD, for I am in distress"* (1:20). The purpose of these prayers was neither praise nor petition, but open self-expression. Jeremiah's freeness of speech allowed him to go so far as to express disappointment with God. *"You fooled me, O God, so that I was fooled."* (20:7) For this reason, Wellhausen called Jeremiah, *"the father of true prayer...his book contains...confessions of personal troubles and desperate struggles."* (Idelsohn, 15) God was now more than the Almighty Sovereign Creator of Heaven and Earth. He had also become "the Friend."

The Babylonian Exile brought new challenges to worshippers of Yahweh, the God of Israel. They were deprived of their Temple and the accompanying sacrificial rites. Prayer thus took on greater and greater importance. Even after the return to Zion and the rebuilding of the Temple, many Jews remained in Babylon and shortly thereafter spread even further afield. By the third century BCE, significant Jewish populations could be found throughout the Hellenized Middle East. Synagogues, as a center of Jewish spiritual life arose during the Second Temple period as a practical adaptation to life in the Diaspora. Travel to the Temple entailed a difficult and expensive journey from Alexandria, Rome or Babylon. Large numbers did manage to get to the annual pilgrimage festivals, Passover, Pentecost and Succoth, but only the most affluent could afford to attend three times each year. Furthermore, Temple worship took place amidst the congregated throng and allowed little place for study, discussion of the Holy texts or private meditation. The synagogue developed as a supplement to Temple worship, a place for Torah reading and Sabbath prayer.

As a relatively late development, synagogues are not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. The earliest appeared during the third century BCE in lower Egypt and slowly spread around the Mediterranean. (see Second Temple Synagogues, <http://www.pohick.org/sts/>) Remains of early synagogues in Europe have been found in Delos, Greece, and Ostia, Italy. The spiritual advantages of weekly Sabbath gatherings for study and prayer invigorated Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Once these advantages were recognized, synagogues began to appear in the Holy Land around the first century BCE as witnessed by ruins discovered at Gamala and Capernaum (Galilee region), Masada, and eventually reaching even to Jerusalem in the shadow of the Temple Mount by the mid-first century CE.

The earliest synagogue in Judea has been unearthed at Qumran, the sectarian Jewish community in the Judean Desert where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. This group despised the corrupt Jerusalem priesthood and separated themselves to a life of isolation in the desert. They redefined the Temple as their holy community made up of living stones (Isaiah 54:11) and extended priestly rituals of purity to all community members. In obedience to the Laws regarding Temple rites, they bathed several times daily as the priests did, and offered the sweet fragrances of prayer, the burnt offerings of the lips (Hosea 14:2), twice daily as a substitute for the evening and morning sacrifices as prescribed in the Torah for the Temple. At Qumran, prayer was not just for the priests, nor was it limited to festival days or times of need. Rather prayer was systematized and became daily practice for the entire community. As far as we know, this is the first instance of obligatory daily prayer that is now central to Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith.

According to the beliefs of the Qumran community, God had abandoned the Holy of Holies of the Temple and now resided among them. The estrangement from the Temple cult may have given the synagogue its initial boost in the Holy Land, but its growth encompassed both establishment and antiestablishment Jews. A Greek inscription at the site of the Jerusalem synagogue declared, "Theodotus, (son) of Vettenu, priest ... built the synagogue for the reading of the law and the teaching of the commandments." Priests also saw value in the synagogue as a supplement to Temple worship, primarily as a library to allow public access to the sacred scrolls. It was a place for reading and studying Torah. But while the Temple stood, prayer was not yet a focus of synagogue activity.

After the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in 70 CE, Judaism underwent a major transformation. The cessation of the Temple cult brought an end to the leadership role of the priesthood within the Jewish community.

As their world began to urbanize, the rabbis offered a bold new concept of a Judaism which was no longer dependant on the agricultural environment ... Rites of sacrifice lost their *raison d'être* ... In the eyes of most Jews, sacrifices could only be offered at the centralized cultic site in Jerusalem. Consequently, Titus' destruction of the Temple meant that the various daily, weekly and monthly sacrifices as well as the annual festivals could no longer take place.
(<http://www.pohick.org/sts/Intrononotes.html>)

First century Rabbis met at the Council of Yavneh to establish the canon of the Tanakh and establish schools for the study of those sacred texts. The Talmud grew out of their deliberations. Prayer came to fill the void left by the end of the sacrificial cult and pilgrimage festivals. A systematic liturgy emerged with a specific order of prayers recited at specific times of the day.

Daily Prayer in Judaism

The earliest daily obligatory prayers in Judaism arose after the destruction of the Second Temple. Jews would hold daily gatherings, called *minyans*, in the synagogue up to three times a day. The Talmud specifies that at the times when the morning and evening sacrifices had been offered, the portions of the law that govern the sacrifices should be recited. "your children shall study the law concerning sacrifices and I (God) will consider it as though they had actually offered them and I will forgive their sins." (b. Meg. 31b)

In post-Biblical practice, the Shema is the core expression of Jewish faith, declaring the Oneness of God. "*Sh'ma, Israel, Adonai*

Eloheinu, Adonai Echad" which translated means "*Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the Lord is One*" (Deuteronomy 6:4), the Shema came to be recited twice a day. Whether there was originally a linkage to the morning and evening Temple sacrifices is unknown. Repetition of the Shema is not a Torah Law, but rather a custom that developed long after Moses. Although, the text itself is found in the Hebrew Bible, which was the Book of that Age, there are no instructions within the text stating that the verse should be recited.

Tradition holds that public recitation of the Shema originated in the days of the Second Temple, no later than the first century CE. Recitation of the Shema entailed not just the famous verse affirming the oneness of God (Deuteronomy 6:4) but included related passages from the Torah as follows: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 which speaks of the unity and love of God, Deuteronomy 11:13-21 which rehearses the results of obedience and disobedience to divine Torah and sets out the necessity of teaching Torah to children, and Numbers 15:37-41 which reiterates the need for obedience to Torah and sets out ordinances related to clothing which serve as symbols of God's covenant with Israel.

Another ancient prayer found in synagogue liturgy is called the Amidah. Based on the example of King David, it is a blessing repeated morning, noon and night (Psalms 55:17-18), three times a day. The Amidah is a prayer that is recited in a standing position from which its name is derived. It contains eighteen benedictions and acknowledges the faith of the forefathers of the Israelite nation. The form of the Amidah was at first somewhat flexible, with only the text of the first and last three benedictions definitely fixed. Spontaneous expressions and petitions were incorporated into the intermediary benedictions. Later the entire text of the eighteen benedictions was solidified. English translations of both the Shema and Amidah are found in Appendix A.

The recitation of these and other prayers was accompanied by the use of tefillin or phylacteries. Small leather cases containing written prayers and other holy words were tied onto the head and hands of the worshipper with long straps. The practice is based on a literal interpretation of the Biblical injunction:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart ... And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes.
(Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:6-8)

Ablutions were also part of Jewish daily prayer customs. According to the Talmud, Berachot 14b-15a, hands were to be washed before adorning tefillin or reciting either the Shema or the Amidah prayer.

It appears that originally these prayers were said privately but over time the practice developed of congregating morning, noon and night for services. Each service includes the recitation of the Shema. Only the evening and morning services include the Amidah. Orthodox “minyans” or daily prayer services have followed the same basic pattern with little variation from at least the fourth century CE until the present.

As synagogue architecture developed in later centuries, that divine presence was enshrined in an ark at the front of the synagogue containing the Torah scrolls in remembrance of the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Tablets of the Jerusalem Temple. An Eternal Light, representing the Temple’s Shekinah, was suspended over the Ark. Evening and morning animal offerings were transformed into prayers. Priests were no longer needed. A new class of professional religious leaders arose to take their place. Rabbis were scholars, learned in the Holy Books. The new emphasis was on recitation and study of the sacred texts. Although conceived of as only a temporary substitute for the destroyed temple, the synagogue became the center of religious life, the place where the presence of God was seen to reside.

Despite the accommodation to life in the Diaspora, an orientation to the Holy Land and the site of the destroyed Temple was ever present. The irreplaceable sanctity of the Holy City was, according to both the Mishnah and Gemarah, memorialized by the direction one faced while praying.

If one is standing outside the country, one should direct one’s heart to the Land of Israel. If one stands in the Land of Israel, one should direct one’s heart towards Jerusalem. If one is standing in Jerusalem, one should direct one’s heart towards the Temple. If one is standing in the Temple, one should direct one’s heart towards the Holy of Holies. Consequently, if one is in the East, one should turn his face toward the West; if in the West, one should turn towards the East; if in the South, one should turn towards the North; if in the North, one should turn towards the South. In this way, all Israel will be directing their hearts towards one place. (Talmud Berakhot 30a)

The Emerging Christian Liturgy

Christianity was built upon the foundation of Moses and the Hebrew prophets. The first Christians were Jews who continued to attend local synagogue services. In some areas, Christians were forced to separate themselves due to being branded heretics and kicked out of the synagogue. In other places, Christians and Jews continued to

pray together for centuries. There are reports of a fifth century Byzantine Bishop chastising Christian groups for failing to separate from the synagogue.

Long periods of joint worship, however, were the exception rather than the rule. Twenty years after the death of Christ, separate Christian Churches were well established in many large cities in Palestine, Asia Minor (now Turkey) and Greece. Yet, except for a few Apostolic Letters, they had no sacred text of their own on which to base their prayer services. The formation of the New Testament did not begin until decades after the death of Christ. Thus, the young Church was forced to borrow heavily from the text and traditions of Judaism. During those early years, Christians met in small groups in private homes, just as Jews did when communities lacked the resources to have their own synagogue. Congregational worship was weekly, either on the Sabbath or on the first day of the week. The structure was open, flexible and participatory. Anyone in attendance could stand up and spontaneously contribute.

When ye come together (for worship) one brings a psalm, another a teaching, another a tongue, another a revelation, another an interpretation. Let all things be done to edify. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

At that early stage, there was no established liturgy, but rather considerable latitude to shape the service according to the expectations, talents and needs of each particular Church community. Church services were modeled after the synagogue and therefore highlighted reading of the Hebrew Bible, the singing of psalms and teachings (sermons). However, early Church services were distinguished from synagogue services by the presence of miraculous gifts of the spirit such as tongues, revelations and interpretations thereof. Over time, readings from the Gospels were gradually added along with the recitation of formalized Christian prayers and creeds. However, reading from the Old Testament and the singing of Psalms has ever remained an integral part of Christian worship.

Christian Daily Prayer

One of the most significant innovations of the Christian Revelation was a progressive view of animal sacrifice. While acknowledging the divine origin of the Mosaic Law and the sacrificial rites found in the Torah, they were viewed as part of the old Covenant that had been replaced by the New. While Judaism kept the hope of the restoration of the sacrificial cults alive while adapting to the loss of the Second Temple, Christians viewed the end of the cult as permanent. There would no longer be any need for the Jerusalem Temple, altars of burnt offering, or sacrifices of bulls, goats or sheep.

The death of Christ on the cross was seen as a superior sacrifice with the power to cleanse humanity once for all time. Temple rites were reinterpreted; Christ as High Priest offering the value of His Life in a heavenly, rather than earthly, Temple. (Hebrews 9:24-26)

The loss of sacrifice as a means of approach to the divine left a vacuum that prayer filled. Prayer replaced the offerings of incense and the smoke of burnt offerings ascending to God. Christians were to immerse themselves in prayer and to “*pray incessantly*” (Romans 12:12).

The Didache, also known as the Teachings of the Twelve Apostles, is a post-Biblical Christian work generally dated circa 115 CE. In it we find the earlier known set format for daily Christian prayer. It instructs believers to recite the Lord’s Prayer three times each day.

Neither pray ye as the hypocrites, but as the Lord hath commanded in his gospel so pray ye: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done as in heaven so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debt, as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil: for thine is the power, and the glory, for ever.’ Thrice a day pray ye in this fashion. (Didache: 8:2-3)

It is unclear how widespread the thrice daily recitation of the Lord’s Prayer was among early Christians, since the authenticity of Didache was not universally accepted. Some Christian communities claimed it to be genuine Apostolic Instruction originating in the Jerusalem Council of 50 CE. Clement of Alexandria (second century) cites it once as Scripture, but no one else among the Church Fathers makes any reference to it before the time of Eusebius (fourth century). Eusebius emphatically places it among books that were not to be included in the New Testament canon. Yet apparently Didache enjoyed a wide circulation and was accepted by at least a portion of the Church as a book worthy to be read in Church services. Athanasius reports that it was still used for catechetical instruction in the late fourth century. Thus it seems likely that a considerable number of Christians would have followed its prescription for saying the Lord’s Prayer three times in a day.

Eucharist and Catholic Mass

Another Christian innovation was communion or the Eucharist. Christ had transformed the Jewish Passover into a memorial of His sacrificial death. The bread and wine of the Passover meal became the sacraments of his Memorial from which, over time, the liturgy

Catholic Sacrifice of the Mass developed. For some time the Eucharistic Service was fluid and variable.

All ceremonial evolves gradually out of certain obvious actions done at first with no idea of ritual, but simply because they had to be done for convenience. The bread and wine were brought to the altar when they were wanted, the lessons were read from a place where they could best be heard, hands were washed because they were soiled. Out of these obvious actions ceremony developed...

But we find much more than this essential nucleus in use in every Church from the first century. The Eucharist was always celebrated at the end of a service of lessons, psalms, prayers, and preaching, which was itself merely a continuation of the service of the synagogue. So we have everywhere this double function; first, a synagogue service Christianized, in which the holy books were read, psalms were sung, prayers said by the bishop in the name of all (the people answering "Amen" in Hebrew, as had their Jewish forefathers), and homilies, explanations of what had been read, were made by the bishop or priests, just as they had been made in the synagogues by the learned men and elders (e. g., Luke, iv, 16-27). This is what was known afterwards as the Liturgy of the Catechumens. Then followed the Eucharist...

...bread and wine are brought to the celebrant in vessels (a plate and a cup); he puts them on a table — the altar; standing before it in the natural attitude of prayer he takes them in his hands, gives thanks, as our Lord had done, says again the words of institution, breaks the Bread and gives the consecrated Bread and Wine to the people in communion ... (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09306a.html>)

The text of the Didache provided instructions on how the Eucharist was to be celebrated. Parameters are set such as specific prayers to bless the bread and wine before communion and a specific prayer to follow it. This latter prayer pleads for the unity of the Church by creating an interesting interpretive link between the bread of the last supper and the miracle of the multiplication of loaves.

As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so may Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

(<http://earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-lightfoot.html>)

The Didache speaks to Christians and refers to the Eucharist as “your sacrifice.” More was involved than a memorial of Christ’s sacrificial death long past. The offering was brought into the present. The participants could share in and experience of the vital moment of salvation. Here we have one of the earliest hints of Transubstantiation, the doctrine that is the basis for the Catholic Sacrifice of the Mass.

Among the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr (c. 101-150 CE) gives further evidence as to the identification of the Last Supper with a sacrificial offering. “...we have been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh” (*First Apology*, 1, 62). Transmutation, or transubstantiation as it was later called, is the doctrine that the bread and wine of the celebration of the Last Supper are miraculously changed during the service into the actual flesh and blood of Christ, thus bringing the sacrifice of the cross into the spiritual reality of the celebration.

As to when and how often the Eucharist was celebrated, many scholars link descriptions of Sunday Service liturgy with the descriptions of the Eucharist in both Didache and Justin Martyr’s Apology. But a careful reading leaves that link in doubt. Both texts contain detailed descriptions of weekly services that omit clear reference to the Eucharist, which is previously described in considerable detail. That separation seems strange if the Eucharist and Sunday Service had already been united at the early date. Nevertheless, sometime during the second century the Eucharist became a weekly observance. By the third century, Cyprian (c. 200-258) argued that the Eucharist was to be celebrated daily on the basis of Christ’s prayer, “*Give us this day our daily bread.*”

The liturgy of the Mass incorporates the use of various body positions: kneeling, sitting and standing.

Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgy of the Hours constitutes a series of prayers that were used in Catholic monasteries from ancient times. In its late and complete form, prayer services were held seven times during the day (Psalms 119:164) and once at midnight (Acts 16:25). Each service bore a Latin name, several of which corresponded to the Roman custom of numbering the hours of the day starting from dawn. The schedule may have looked like this:

Lauds – Dawn

Prime – One hour after dawn or approximately 7 AM

Terce – Three hours after dawn, c. 9 AM

Sext – Six hours after dawn, c. Noon

None – Nine hours after dawn, c. 3PM

Vespers – c. 5PM

Compline – 7PM

Matins – Midnight

The monks would sleep in the early evening after Compline, rise at midnight for the Matins and then return to bed thereafter.

This intricate system of prayer did not spring into existence fully formed. The Catholic Encyclopedia expresses the view that the Liturgy of the Hours originally consisted of three daily services, Terce, Sext and None. The writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers instruct all Christians to pray at these hours, but give no indication of whether private prayer or congregational prayer was intended.

Clement of Alexandria and likewise Tertullian, as early as the end of the second century, expressly mention the hours of Terce, Sext, and None, as specially set apart for prayer (Clement, "Strom.", VII, VII, in P.G., IX, 455-8). Tertullian says explicitly that we must always pray, and that there is no time prescribed for prayer; he adds, nevertheless, these significant words: "As regards the time, there should be no lax observation of certain hours – I mean of those common hours which have long marked the divisions of the day, the third, the sixth, and the ninth, and which we may observe in Scripture to be more solemn than the rest" ("De Oratione", xxiii, xxv, in P.L., I, 1191-3). (Catholic Encyclopedia, Electronic Version, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/none.html>)

In stages, the number of times a day specified for formal prayer increased. Practicality limited observance to monasteries as working people could not comply with so rigorous a prayer schedule. By the end of the fourth century, the hours of Vigils (Matins), Lauds and Vespers had been added. The full repertoire of eight services was in place by the end of the fifth century. The selection of these hours was based on certain times that Peter and other apostles are reported to have prayed. Rather than obedience to a specific injunction, the multitude of services is perhaps best understood as an attempt to institutionalize the apostolic mandate to "pray incessantly."

Modern Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Liturgies

Over the centuries, Church liturgies tended to grow more and more structured. Nevertheless, tremendous variety can be found from

one denomination to the next. Virtually all incorporate the singing of psalms (or hymns), a sermon (or teaching) and the Eucharist (or Holy Communion). Many also include recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

Catholic and Orthodox Services are highly scripted. For example the Greek Orthodox Service as found in the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostomos (<http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/liturgy/liturgy.html>) consists largely of responsive readings coupled with recited creeds and prayers. Protestant Services vary widely from well developed structure found in Lutheran and Anglican Churches to the relative spontaneity of the Baptist and Pentecostal Churches.

Christian Innovations

Judaism began with an orientation to the sacred space of the tabernacle / temple and only later adopted the scattered locations of the synagogue as a proxy. Christianity however began with distributed sacred space, space that was sanctified simply by assembling. *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* (Matthew 18:20) The sacred geography of the past would be abandoned. *"The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father."* (John 4:21) The idealized vision of Christian worship found in the Revelation of St. John portrays a Christian community oriented to a New Jerusalem a spiritual city built on the foundation of the Twelve Apostles with Christ as the foundation cornerstone.

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God...And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. (Revelation 21:10, 22-24)

In this vision, Jerusalem retains its Holy status, as it did within Judaism, but the city was to be Temple-less. God and Christ would serve the orienting function that the physical Temple had previously served. Under Byzantine rule, Jerusalem was a center of Christian Life. Churches were constructed at the sites related to the life and death of "the LORD" but the Temple Mount was intentionally left in ruins. The entire City was sacred, but no specific place within the City was identified with the presence of God.

Interestingly both Judaism and early Christianity made the transition from Temple oriented to congregation oriented worship at about the same time during the first century C.E. Jews view this transition as temporary and continued to anticipate the restoration of the sacrificial cult. In contrast, Christianity was born at the tail end of the Second Temple period and viewed the destruction of the Temple as a sign of that a new covenant had replaced the old Law of Moses. Nevertheless, both groups built upon the rituals of animal sacrifices and transformed them into symbolic acts. The breaking of bread, the drinking of wine and most prominently, offerings of incessant prayer took the place of the former rites.

Christ, like David and Jeremiah, poured out His personal lamentations to God in prayer at critical times. Prior to His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane the Gospels report Christ's words, "*My soul is deeply grieved even unto death...Father let this cup pass from me.*" (Matthew 26:38-39) On the cross, Christ's lament took up David's anguished cry from the Psalm, "*God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Matthew 27:46) Perhaps one of the most revolutionary innovations by some Protestant groups is the rejection of the recitation of written prayers. Prayers are said in one's own words. For some denominations, such as the Church of Christ and Jehovah's Witnesses, the prohibition extends even to reciting the Lord's Prayer. Although this prayer is the oldest documented portion of the Church liturgy, its repetition is not mandated in the text of the New Testament. Opponents of 'rote prayer' will point out that in the Gospel text, in the verses just prior to the Lord's Prayer, Jesus warns his disciples against repetitive prayer.

When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. (Matthew 6:7-9)

This command has been interpreted as prohibiting the verbatim repetition of any kind. The result is a wholesale dismissal of liturgy. Services in these churches tend to enlarge the teaching / sermon portion of the service.

Within this branch of Protestantism, prayer is seen as a vehicle for establishing a "personal relationship with God." Spontaneous, unscripted prayers uttered in one's own words, serves to create an intimate link with the Divine. Nevertheless, distinct prayer patterns persist even in these 'anti-rote' churches. The use of psalms and hymns (often prayers set to music) is common to virtually all Christian denominations.

Islam

Daily prayer, referred to in Arabic as *al-Salat*, is one of the founding principles of Islam. Muḥammad established specific times of the day and specific regulation for prayer. The Qur'án does not portray al-Salat as an Islamic innovation but rather traces its origin back to the Patriarchal Age. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (21:73), Ishmael (19:55), Moses (20:14) and Jesus (19:31) are all said to have practiced regular prayer. Subsequent generations failed to preserve their heritage and ancient prayer practices needed to be reestablished by Muḥammad.

These are some of the prophets whom God blessed. They were chosen from among the descendants of Adam, and the descendants of those whom we carried with Noah, and the descendants of Abraham and Israel, and from among those whom we guided and selected. When the revelations of the Most Gracious are recited to them, they fall prostrate, weeping. After them, He substituted generations who lost the contact prayers (Salat) and pursued their lusts ... (Qur'án 19:58-59)

Current practice is highly structured including specific hours of prayer five times a day. A series of formalized prayers called a *raka'* is used. The cycle is repeated a specified number of times at each designated hours. For example, the morning prayers, called *Salat-ul-Fajr*, consist of two cycles while the noon prayers, *Salat-ul-Zuhr*, consist of four.

Key elements of each cycle proclaim the greatness and oneness as embodied in the phrases, Alláh'u'Akbar (God is Great) and La ilaha illalláh (There is no God but God). In contrast to informal prayers, which can be said at any time of the day or night, *al-Salat* customs are specified for the designated hours. There is almost universal conformity throughout the Muslim world on the following prayer procedure, although some local variants do exist.

5. Ablutions or ritual washing, prior to prayer.
6. Pray facing the Qiblih at Mecca.
7. Verbatim recitation of specified prayers including portions of Qur'án,
8. Use of specific prayer postures such as bowing, kneeling and standing at specific points in the prayer,
9. Performed five times each day at specified hours.

Ritual cleansing is an important part of Islamic prayer practice. Mosques often contain facilities for ablutions. Parts of the body are

washed in a specific order according to a specified procedure. For example, one is to take water in the palm of the right hand and wash the face top to bottom, from forehead to chin. This outward physical preparation is to be accompanied by an inner preparation for the heart's connection with the divine. One then faces Mecca and recites a series of short prayers in praise of God. Each is said from a specified position: standing, kneeling or bowing.

Qur'anic Origins of Traditional Prayer Practices

The general belief among Muslims is that all of the prayer practices associated with *al-Salat* go back at least to the time of Muḥammad. (Some claim they go back to Abraham.) God is said to have revealed these details to Muḥammad during the Prophet's night journey (*Isra'* and *Mi'raj*). In fact, while certain features of Salat are clearly set forth in the Qur'án, such as times of day and the direction to face, other specifics such as the text of the prayers to be used, the details of ablutions, the specific positions to go with each part of the text or the number of cycles (*raka'*) to say at each hour, are not recorded in the Qur'án. Rather they derive from secondary sources (*Hadith*) and later traditions.

Chapter 4 of the Qur'án is one of its oldest sections. It deals with a early period in the career of Muḥammad, just after the Hegira, when He resided in Medina. The text shows that even in that period daily prayer routines had already been established. "*Prayer indeed has been enjoined upon the believers at fixed times.*" (4:103) They were performed publicly and accompanied by prostrations (4:102). In times of danger or battle, prayers could be shortened (4:101). This exemption indicates that already in the Medina period, Muḥammad's followers had formalized daily prayers of specified length, which then could be shortened under exceptional circumstances.

The five times for *Al-Salat* are set at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night (before retiring). Most Islamic authorities recognize the authority for these five distinct hours of prayer as originating in the Qur'án:

- Dawn — "*Establish regular prayers ... the morning prayer*" (17:78); "*at the retreat of the stars*" (52:49); "*before the rising of the sun*" (20:130) "*at the two ends of the day* [i.e. morning and evening]" (11:114).
- Noon — "*(Say) Glory be to Alláh ... when the day begins to decline.*" (30:18)
- Afternoon (or before sunset) — "*Keep up prayer at the ends of the day* [understood as beginning and end of daylight]" (11:114); "*in the late afternoon*" (30:18)

- Sunset (after sundown) – “*Keep up prayer ... in the first hours of the night.*” (11:114)
- Night – (before going to bed)- “*So (give) glory to God, when ye reach eventide and when ye rise in the morning.*” (30:17)

Some scholars (mostly non-Islamic) identify only three times of prayer in these verses, dawn, sunset and nighttime. (See *Judaism in Islam* by Abraham Katsh, p. xv) They would understand “when the day begins to decline” as signifying the hour before sunset rather than noon and they would understand “in the first hours of the night” as equivalent to bedtime. Thus the second and third *salats* would be collapsed, likewise the fourth and fifth. If true, separation into 5 prayer times would be understood as a later development.

Interestingly, some Muslims also see evidence for three rather than five daily prayers based upon the text of Qur’án 11:114 which reads, “*And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night.*”

The two afternoon prayers and the two after sunset prayers, which are spoken of together, may ...be said together. (Notes to Maulana Muḥammad Ali’s translation of the Qur’án)

As for the Establishing of our PRAYERS, Alláh has mentioned only THREE TIMES in the Qur’án. (<http://www.mostmerciful.com/realities-of-our-daily-prayers--part-three-conclusion.htm> [sic; URL correct])

When we compare ancient Jewish and Islamic prayer practice, some interesting parallels emerge. The Hebrew Bible describes the prayers of Daniel in terms that resemble al-Salat in several particulars. We read, “ . . .he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God . . .” (Daniel 6:10). Here Daniel (a) faces the Holy City, (b) assumes a kneeling posture, (c) prays three times a day.

If the proposals regarding an original three times prayer in Islam is accurate, it would bring early Islamic practice into closer conformity with Jewish and Christian practice. Disputes with Jews and Christians, during and after Muḥammad’s lifetime, may well have lead to a variety of reforms within Islam as the new religion sought to establish its own independent identity. We know from the Qur’án itself that the direction of prayer, the Qiblih, had been moved from Jerusalem to Mecca for precisely this reason.

Striking similarities exist between the Jewish Shema and the Islamic Shahadah. Both are fundamental confessions of monotheism.

The kernel of the Shema is “*Hear O Israel, the LORD thy God, the LORD is one.*” The Shahadah similarly asserts, “*There is no God but Alláh. (la ilaha illa ‘Iláhu)*” The Shahadah also parallels other Biblical passages such as, “*There is no God but the LORD.*” (Psalms 18:31) Both Jewish and Islamic daily prayers invoke the name of God and offer superlative praise, both acknowledge their respective founders, Moses and Muḥammad, (Compare Tashahhud lines 3-6 with Amidah line 2) and both encourage loyalty to God’s law. (Compare Qira’ah lines 7-9 with portion of Shema from Numbers 15:40) *Al-Salat* is always said in Arabic, regardless of the native language of the believer, as Jewish prayers are always offered in Hebrew.

Animal Sacrifice in Islam

The feast of Eid al-Adha is celebrated on the 10th day of the month of Dhul Hijja of the lunar Islamic calendar. It is traditionally marked by the sacrifice of a sheep in remembrance of Alláh’s intervention in Abraham’s sacrifice of his son Ishmael and the substitution of a sheep. Celebrants partake of the meat and share it with the poor. This sacrifice is not a whole burnt offering or an atonement offering of any kind but rather a thanksgiving and communion offering.

It is not their meat nor their blood that reaches Alláh: it is your piety that reaches Him... (Qur’án 22: 37)

No one should suppose that meat or blood is acceptable to the One True God. It was a pagan fancy that Alláh could be appeased by blood sacrifice. But Alláh does accept the offering of our hearts ... (Yusuf Alí Commentary)

The Historical Connection of Muḥammad with Jewish and Christian Communities

Islam came into existence in sixth century Arabia in response to the idolatry and excesses of the pagan Arabian tribes. Muḥammad intended to reintroduce the pure religion of Abraham, which shared a rich heritage with its Jewish and Christian offshoots. According to the Bahá’í understanding, each new revelation is rooted in and subsequently expands upon the teachings of its predecessors. Muḥammad was neither Jewish nor Christian. He was raised in Mecca and the presence of Jews or Christians in Mecca is in doubt. Secular scholars have raised questions about the sources of Muḥammad’s knowledge of them. Nevertheless Muḥammad had many opportunities for contacts with both Abrahamic Religions.

Historians mention some 20 Jewish tribes that lived in Arabia during Muḥammad’s era including two tribes of priests. Those Jews

spoke Arabic, were organized into clans like the Arabs, and seem to have fully assimilated the values and customs of desert society. Yemen (Southwestern Arabia) was generally considered a Jewish State until around 523 C.E. and had broad influence on Arabic peoples. Whole tribes had converted to Judaism. Jewish customs and traditions were known and practiced by many Arabs. The Qur'án describes three tribes of Jews living in Medina when Muḥammad fled there in 622 CE.

Despite the fact that Arabia was distant from the Talmudic Centers in Babylon and Palestine, the historical record shows that trade and cultural contacts were extensive. Muḥammed accompanied His uncle on trading missions to Syria, where He had come into contact with Christian monks and with Jewish scholars. Later He was asked to lead a similar expedition Himself on behalf of the wealthy widow Khadijah. Thus it should come as no surprise that the Prophet of Islam would have been exposed to Jewish beliefs and practices, not only the customs of Yemenite and Arabian Jews but the wisdom of the Talmud as well. In this environment, it is most probable that Muḥammad had direct knowledgeable of Jewish practices and His revelation accordingly incorporates a considerable number of them into His religious teachings.

The Qur'án retells various stories of the Old and New Testaments. There are extensive references to Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and Mary among others. Due to the differences between the Torah and Qur'án in some of the narratives, such as the story of Joseph, some scholars have concluded that cultural contacts were fuzzy, being mediated by time and distance. However, others contend that these differences narrow considerably in light of Talmudic interpretations. One scholar commented "For, astonishingly enough, the Biblical narratives are reproduced in the Qur'án in true Aggadic cloak." (The Haggada or Aggada is a section of the Talmud that specializes in interpreting non-legal matters. See *Judaism In Islam*, by Abraham Katsh, p. xviii) In other words, the text of the Qur'án does not merely repeat the stories told in the Hebrew Bible, but retells them in the light of the most advanced Judaic Studies of the time. If this viewpoint is correct, it would support the suggestion that Muḥammad was familiar with the best of ancient Jewish scholarship.

Similarly, some of the differences between Qur'anic accounts and the Gospels can be explained by alternate traditions within Christianity. For example, some of the details of the life of Mary found in the Qur'án, but missing from the canonical Gospels, can be traced to the *Protoevangelium of James*. (See <http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/stj20001.htm>)

Islamic Innovations within Sufism

Sufism, or *Taşawwuf*, grew out of early Islamic asceticism. It was a mystical movement that sought nearness to God through self-denial. While Sufism may have been influenced by the practices of Christian hermits as well as the Neo-Platonism of Alexandria, and the Vedantism of India, it developed into a major movement solidly rooted within the culture of Islam.

The introduction of the element of love, which changed asceticism into mysticism, is ascribed to Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyah (died 801), a woman from Basra who first formulated the Sufi ideal of a love of God that was disinterested, without hope for paradise and without fear of hell. (<http://www.franzholzer.de/html/esufi2.htm>)

The goal of Sufism was a mystical union with the divine. Sexual energy became an analogy for a one-on-one relationship with God. The Song of Songs, a series of love poems found in the Hebrew Bible, may have provided a precedent, Sufism carried the romantic theme to a higher level. Rather than to disdain the passions of sexual energy as asceticism did, viewing all passion as an obstacle to union with the divine, Sufism embraced and transformed that energy into a vehicle of union. The devotee was to have no interest in any other aspect of life or any selfish reason for turning to God. The only motivation was the desire of a lover to be with the Beloved. There were no prayers of petition, no requests for favors, no rewards in this life or hereafter. The love of God became an all-consuming passion.

One of Sufism's chief innovations was the focus on prayer as a vehicle for entering the divine presence. Through prayer the worshipper could enter an ecstatic state of nearness to God. Dance and music were used to enhance the experience. Over time, various Christian and Jewish groups adapted Sufi thought and practice to their own devotions. During medieval times, Christian mystic writers such as Saint John of the Cross and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux embellished the theme of the love of God with romantic images. A major theme of the Kabala (dated to around the 11th century) is union with the Shekinah, the feminine aspect of God. The Hasidic Movement arose among the Jews of seventeenth century Poland. Hasidim used music and dance in ways similar to the Sufi dervishes, to achieve spiritual ecstasy.

Other Possible Parallels

Other possible links between Jewish/Christian practice and Muslim practice can be mentioned, although establishing their presence in the time of Muḥammad is problematic. Ablutions, prior to prayer, are a

marked feature of *al-Salat*. Jews, likewise make use of water for ritual cleansing. The *mikvah* is most commonly known as a basin that women use for monthly purification. In earlier ages, it was also a customary method of ritual cleansing for men. Priests in the Jerusalem Temple and Qumran Sect are well known examples. Catholics also use water for ritual purposes prior to prayer and place basins of holy water at the entrance to the Church sanctuary for symbolic cleansing. We do not know what related cleansing rituals may have been used by either Jewish or Christian worshippers in the East from the time of Muḥammad, but regardless of whether a direct link existed or not, the principle of purification with water is something shared by all three traditions.

Similarly, with regard to the issue of prayer postures, we have already noted that Jews stand, sit and bow their heads for specific prayers, just as Muslims do for the five-times *Salat* prayers. Catholics likewise stand, kneel and sit for various part of the Mass. However, we do not know when these practices were instituted or what form they may have taken in 6th century Arabia.

The Catholic rosary is a series of prayers offered daily that begins with an acknowledgment of monotheism in its Trinitarian form, "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost . . ." This may be seen as a sort of parallel with the opening of *al-Salat* "In the name of Alláh" (*bismilláh*).

Islam claims to represent the True Religion of Abraham. Jews and Christians derive their belief and practice from the same roots, as Qur'án freely acknowledges.

We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismá'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we bow to God (in Islám). (Qur'án 2:136)

Recognition of similarities, whether borrowed practices or shared principles, testifies to a shared history. Progressive revelation serves to explain the dynamics of the processes of innovation and preservation of tradition. Daily prayer practices, such as specific hours for prayer, the direction of prayer, etc. had developed over the centuries as a common custom within Judaism and Christianity despite the fact that neither Moses nor Christ had commanded them. In Islam we find the first codification of laws governing daily prayer. The revelation of Muḥammad confirmed and expanded upon these customary practices. When viewed in the light, progressive revelation becomes more than updating previous revelation. It becomes an evaluation of the innovations that arose during the preceding Dispensation. The

adoption of some of those customs in the subsequent revelation effectively recognizes the value of those initiatives. New spiritual insights are thus seen to be possible, not only during the formative age of each faith, but continuously. While the Manifestations of God (founding prophets) naturally exhibit an extraordinary measure of new light, others, ordinary people who are not inspired prophets, can contribute as well.

Bahá'í Obligatory Prayers

The Bahá'í Age is seen as the age of the world's emerging maturity. Advancement of the individual is stressed. There is no priesthood or clergy. Daily prayer becomes personal and focuses, not on supplication or petition, but upon achieving nearness to God and cultivating spiritual virtues. Congregational ritual is prohibited.

Bahá'u'lláh revealed three obligatory prayers, short, medium and long, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Each of these prayers has its own character and associated practices. In previous Dispensations, daily prayer practices such as the prayers to be recited, times of day, positions and so forth developed by custom rather than coming directly from the teachings of the founding prophet. In confirmation of the customary practices of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Bahá'u'lláh gives specific instructions with each of the obligatory prayers. The worshipper selects one of the three to say each day, at her own option.

Another Bahá'í innovation is the movement of daily prayer from public to private places. The minyan and mass are designed for congregational prayer in synagogue or church. *Al-Salat* may be public or private but is most widely known by the public call to prayer from the minaret, followed by worshippers dropping whatever they are doing to prostrate themselves in market, street or home. In contrast, Bahá'í obligatory prayer is exclusively private. Congregational use of the three obligatory prayers is prohibited. There are other prayers and other occasions for praying together with others. The purpose of obligatory prayer is to enhance a one-on-one relationship between worshipper and the Divine.

The short prayer is to be said at noon. It is primarily a prayer of praise. Like the *Shema* and the prayers of the *Salat*, it proclaims the Oneness of God. "*There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.*"

The medium prayer is perhaps the most similar to *al-Salat*. It contains petitions (*strengthen my hand O My God*) as well as praise (*exalted art Thou above my praise*) and proclamation of God's uniqueness (*I bear witness to Thy unity and oneness.*) It is to be said

three time a day, requires ablutions, and is accompanied by a series of standing, kneeling and sitting postures.

The writings of Bahá'u'lláh set out specific instruction on ablutions and positions, thus confirming and extending these Islamic innovations which were established by custom rather than prophetic mandate. For example, the instructions accompanying the Medium Prayer state:

To be recited daily, in the morning, at noon and in the evening. Whoso wishes to pray (this one of the three obligatory prayers) let him wash his hands, and while he washeth, let him say: 'Strengthen my hand, O my God, that is may take hold of Thy book ...' Let him stand up, facing the Qiblih ... and say ... Let him then bend down with hands resting on knees and say... (KA)

The long obligatory prayer is said once a day, at any hour. Although ablutions are not required in the text of the Aqdas, washing in preparation for prayer is a recommended Bahá'í practice. The long prayer is also characterized by various postures.

The long prayer lays emphasis on achieving the mystical experience of entering the presence of God. Incessant prayer, purity of heart, selflessness and detachment are the vehicles that transform the soul and open the door to communion with the divine.

...make of my prayer a fire that will burn away the veils which have shut me out from Thy beauty, and a light that will lead me unto the ocean of Thy Presence.

O Thou in separation from Whom hearts and souls have melted ... Thou seest, O my Lord, this stranger hastening to his most exalted home beneath the canopy of Thy majesty and within the precincts of Thy mercy...

...Thy call hath awakened me, and Thy grace hath raised me up and led me unto Thee. Who, otherwise, am I that I should dare to stand at the gate of the city of Thy nearness...?

The intimacy and closeness with the Divine that the long obligatory prayer points to, incorporates the sharing of inner feelings of distress and anguish that we previously saw in David, Jeremiah and Christ.

Thou dost perceive my tears and the sighs I utter and hearest my groanings and my wailings and the lamentations of my heart ... My trespasses have kept me back from drawing nigh unto Thee ... and separation from Thee hath destroyed me.

In the long obligatory prayer and elsewhere in the Bahá'í writings, many of the names and attributes given to God exhibit more than the

formal relationship of sovereign to subject. God is the Desire of the World, the Beloved of the Nations, the Best Lover and perhaps most simply and powerfully The Friend.

The desire for and achievability of closeness through prayer depicted here is markedly different than the relationship established through animal sacrifices on special occasions at a distant sanctuary. God is now closer in both time and space, and more encompassing as well in the array of emotions that the worshipper shares with God. The desire to draw near to God has been a constant theme of progressive revelation. In ancient Judaism, communion offerings attempted to breach the gap between the worshipper and the Divine by sharing physical food. Procedures for the offerings are set forth in specific detail in the Torah. The choice, fatty pieces of the sacrificial animal were offered upon the altar as God's portion. The people sat within the sacred precincts of the Temple and ate their portion. In Christianity, communion took the form of the bread and wine which stands in the place of blood and flesh in obedience to Christ's direct commandment as recorded in the Gospels. Islam adopted communion sacrifices by custom. But in the Bahá'í Faith, prayer becomes the sole vehicle of communion. There are no communion meals either by mandate or custom. To "enter the presence," to "mourn separation," to "hasten home to the precincts of majesty," to "stand in the Holy City," these are the goals of spiritual communion. The ancient practice of communion had been transformed from physical acts involving food and blood (either literal or symbolic) to a mystical encounter through prayer.

Even the term "commune" has come to signify prayer. The result of achieving a connection to the Divine is "nearness" and "rapture."

...softly recite thou this commune to thy Lord, and say unto Him: O God, my God! Fill up for me the cup of detachment from all things...break off from me the shackles of this nether world, draw me with rapture unto Thy supernal realm ...
(SWAB 174)

Intone, O my servant, the verses of God...and the sweetness of Thy melody will kindle thine own soul. (BP IX)

Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his own chambers, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty will scatter abroad the words uttered by his mouth and cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. (BP IX)

As seen in the third quotation above, Bahá'í detachment does not lead to disengagement from the world. Bahá'u'lláh forbade monasticism. Detachment represents a freedom to act in the world without becoming entangled or troubled if things do not go as desired.

Further, the Bahá’í definition of prayer is expanded to include loving acts in addition to recited words.

This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. (PT 176)

The concept of action-prayer, as opposed to verbal prayer, may be the start of a new paradigm. In the past, separation from the world through living on a hilltop or at a monastery has been a way to focus oneself completely on spiritual things and to avoid the distractions of the world. Now, immersion in the spiritual life can be attained while living and acting in the world. Service to humanity when performed in a spirit of reverence becomes in itself a form of worship. If the service is selfless and wholly for the benefit of others, a spiritual state of detachment can be achieved that is comparable to that of the Sufi dervish or the Christian hermit. This form of worship may be called “engaged detachment” as a fusion of mystical and humanitarian spirituality. This fusion is especially appropriate for the world’s present Age of Emerging Maturity. The foremost spiritual issue facing our planet is the need to let go of self-absorption and recognize the interconnected oneness of humankind.

Conclusion

Progressive revelation provides a framework for understanding the interdependence of the world’s faiths. It implies the existence of common threads of tradition and practice along with the emergence of new themes from age to age. The combined affect of embracing both old and new yields a continuity of belief and practice on the one hand, and a gradual unfoldment of innovative teachings on the other.

Chart of Innovations for each Dispensation

Items marked “by written law” were established in the foundational sacred texts, e.g. Bible, Qur’án. Those marked “by custom” were established without scriptural mandate. Those marked “sectarian” were practiced by only a minority of the designated religion.

Pre-Mosaic

- End of human sacrifice (by custom)
- Personal prayer is occasional and petitionary

Jewish

- End of human sacrifice (by written law)
- Sanctuary becomes House of Prayer

- Prayer toward Jerusalem (by custom)
- Synagogue as local house of prayer (by custom)
- Introduction of daily prayer liturgy (by custom)
- Three times daily prayer (by custom)
- Designated body positions used for specific portions of daily prayer service: sitting and standing (by custom)
- Ablutions (sectarian)
- Introduction of praise, thanksgiving and lamentation prayers

Christian

- End of animal sacrifice (by written law)
- Emblematic sacrifice in the form of the Eucharist (by written law)
- Church as local house of prayer (by written law)
- Prayer toward Jerusalem (sectarian and by custom)
- Daily prayer liturgy (by custom)
- Three time daily prayer (sectarian and by custom)
- Designated body positions used for specific portions of daily service (sectarian and by custom)
- Prayer forms include thanksgiving, praise and petitions.

Islam

- Absence of obligatory sacrifice
- Prayer toward Mecca (by written law)
- Five (or three) times daily prayer (by written law)
- Designated body positions used for specific portions of daily prayers (by custom)
- Ablutions (by custom)
- Recitation of specific written prayers (by custom)
- Introduction of nearness prayers (sectarian by custom)
- Prayer forms include thanksgiving, praise and petitions.

Bahá'í

- Prayer toward Bahjí

- Daily obligatory prayers to be recited in private
- Text of prayers specified by written commandment of the founding prophet
- Choice of obligatory prayers
- Ablutions by written law
- Designated body positions by written law
- Forms include thanksgiving, praise, petitions, lamentation and nearness prayers.

From this study, several insights about the nature of progressive revelation emerge. First of all, it is apparent that many of the innovations that are introduced by a given Manifestation of God have precedents during the Dispensation of the previous Manifestation. New spiritual laws, in each age, generally adjust or enhance existing practice.

For example, the practice of praying towards Jerusalem was inaugurated by Solomon, during the Jewish Age, practiced by Jews and Christians thereafter, but not formalized into Law until the time of Muḥammad. The direction of prayer (the Qiblih) was later modified by both Muḥammad and Bahá'u'lláh, changing it to Mecca and Bahjí respectively. It can be seen therefore that one of the functions of each new revelation is to sort through the innovations of the previous age and to confirm, ban or modify them. The effect is thus more comparable to a course correction that striking out in a totally new direction. We find, for example, the innovation of the synagogue confirmed by Christian law, and the daily prayer practice of Judaism and Christianity confirmed by Islamic Law.

New laws are therefore often the first obligatory implementation of existing practices, rather than brand new innovations. In the context of Bahá'u'lláh's explanation that new revelation is tailored to the needs of the age and limited by the capacity of its recipients, it makes sense that change would be gradual.

We also find innovations from one age that are ignored or explicitly rejected in the next, perhaps due to the lack of any divine sanction in the first place. The Jewish practice of tefillin, the literal wrapping of the head and hands with the words of the Law, was never incorporated in a later revelation. Christian customs of celibate clergy and monastic vows of poverty, were rejected by Muḥammad and banned by Bahá'u'lláh. The time between the appearances of the Manifestations of God are often marked by both creativity and sectarian fragmentation of the body of believers. The Prophet, when He appears, examines the innovations of the previous age, confirming some, modifying some, prohibiting others. This serves to distinguish

innovations that are beneficial to the spiritual lives of adherents from those that may be harmful, unnecessary or inappropriate to the new age. New revelations clarify the best path for believers, establish a single standard to reconcile old sectarian rivalries and thereby reunite the people.

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh taught, “*This is the changeless faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future.*” Thus Bahá’ís would expect to find common threads running through humanity’s spiritual history.

Ultimately, in the Bahá’í view, human spiritual history is a single tapestry of interconnected strands.

When seen as a whole the various religions become stages in one comprehensive divine plan. In poetic language, the New Testament describes gentile Christians as branches grafted into the root stock of Judaism. Without Moses and the prophets, Christianity could not exist. The Bahá’í Writings enlarge this analogy, depicting a universal vision of humanity’s spiritual development as a single tree with various branches. All are leaves of one tree.

May fanaticism and religious bigotry be unknown, all humanity enter the bond of brotherhood, souls consort in perfect agreement, the nations of earth at last hoist the banner of truth and the religions of the world enter the divine temple of oneness, for the foundations of the heavenly religions are one reality. (FWU 12, emphasis added)

Appendix A

The Shema (extended version)

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart,
and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in
thine heart:

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and
shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when
thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and
when thou risest up.

And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and
they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and
on thy gates." (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto
my commandments which I command you this day, to love
the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and
with all your soul,

That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season,
the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in
thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.

And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou
mayest eat and be full.

Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and
ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them;

And then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he
shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land
yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the
good land which the Lord giveth you.

Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in
your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that
they may be as frontlets between your eyes.

And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them
when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by
the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine
house, and upon thy gates:

That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord swore unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth. (Deuteronomy 11:13-21)

And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying,

Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribbon of blue:

And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go awhoring:

That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.

I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God. [Numbers 15:37-41)

Introduction to the Amidah (Standing) Prayer

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God and God of our fathers,
 God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob,
 The great, might and revered God, the most high God,
 Who bestowest loving-kindness and possessest all things;
 Who rememberest the pious deeds of the patriarchs,
 And in love will bring a redeemer to their children's children
 for thy name's sake.

Appendix B

Modern Orthodox Jewish Prayer Services

The Morning Prayers

- Birchas HaShachar - The morning blessings.
- Pesukei D'Zimra - Verses of Praise from the Psalms.
- Shema and it's Blessings - Shema, preceded and followed by its blessings.

- Amidah - The Eighteen Blessings, which are recited quietly while standing.
- Tachanun - Nefilas Apayim, 'falling on the face'. This prayer is said with head bowed.
- Krias HaTorah - The Reading of the Torah portion.
- Ashrei – Additional Psalms particularly Psalm 20.
- Aleinu – Concluding prayer.

The Afternoon Prayers

- Ashrei - Ashrei is recited.
- Amidah.
- Tachanun
- Aleinu
- Ne'ilah - The Closing of the Gates

The Evening Prayers

- Shema and its Blessings
- Amidah
- Aleinu

Appendix C

Text and Instructions for al-Salat

According to *Islamic Daily Prayer Manual* by Farnaz Khoromi, the words of the daily prayers are composed of the following components, which are combined and repeated in various ways for each of the five prayer times.

- The Intention or *Niyah*
- The Call or *Takbir*
- The Recitation or *Qira'ah*
- The Bowing or *Ruku'*
- The Prostration or *Sujud*
- The Praise or *Tasbihat*
- The Witnessing or *Tashahhud*
- The Greeting or *Salam*

- The Closure or *Khatm*

Niyyah: Face the Qiblih (Mecca) and concentrate the heart for the purpose of witnessing God's presence.

Takbir: Stand. Hold your hands up, thumbs toward your ears, palms out. Say:

Alláho-Akbar	God is greater
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Qira'ah: Stand and recite the following passages from Qur'an 1:1-7 and 112:1-5:

1.	Besmilláhe rahmane raheem,	In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful,
2.	Alhamdo-le-lahe rabbel alameen,	Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the two worlds,
3.	Ar-rahmane raheem,	Most Gracious, Most Merciful
4.	Maleke yomeddeen,	Master of the Day of Religion
5.	Eeyyaka na'bodo	Thee do we worship
6.	Va eeyyaka nasta'een	And Thine aid do we seek,
7.	Eh'dena serat-al-mostagheem,	Show us the straight path
8.	Seratal-lazeena an'amta alayhem	The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace,
9.	Ghayr-el-maghzoobe alayhem va la-zaaleen,	Those whose portion is not wrath, and who go not astray.

1.	Besmilláhe rahmane raheem,	In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful,
2.	Ghol-ho valla-ho ahad,	Say: He is the unique and only God,
3.	Alláh-ho samad,	Alláh is Omnipresent, (the Eternal, the Absolute),
4.	Lam yaled, va lam yoolad	He begetteth no, Nor is He Begotten,
5.	Va lam yakon lahoo kofavan ahad.	And there is none like unto Him.

Ruku: While standing, lean forward and place hands on knees and say:

Sobhana rabbee-al-zaeeme va be hamde,	Pure is my Creator, the greatest and I praise Him.
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Then stand erect and say:

Alláho-Akbar	God is greater
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Sujud: (Repeat the following sequence twice.) Prostrate, placing forehead, palms, knees and toes on floor and say:

Sobhana rabbee-al-zaeeme va be hamde,	Pure is my Creator, the greatest and I praise Him.
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Then kneel with knees and toes on floor, hands on thighs, back straight and say:

Alláho-Akbar	God is greater
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Tasbihat: Stand and repeat the following sequence three times:

1.	Sobhan-alláhe,	Pure is my God,
2.	Val-hamdo-le-lahe,	Praise is for Him,
3.	Va la-elaha ella laho,	There is no God but He,
4.	Valláho-Akbar.	And Alláh is greater.

Tashahhud: Kneel as before and say:

1.	Ashhado an la-elaha-ella laho,	I bear witness that there is no God but Alláh,
2.	Vahdahhoo la sharika lah,	He is the only one and has no partner,
3.	Va ashhado anna Mohammadnan abdohoo	And I bear witness that Muḥammad is His servant
4.	Va rassoolah,	and His messenger,
5.	Alláhomma salle ala Mohammaden	O God, bestow thy Light upon Mohammad
6.	Va ale Mohammad.	and His descendent.

Salam: While still kneeling say:

1.	Assalamo alayka ayyoha-nabeeyo	Greeting to you, O messenger,
2.	Va rahmattolláhe va barakkato,	and the blessings and abundance of God to you.
3.	Assalamo alayna va ala ebadelláhe saleheen,	Greetings to us and the righteous servants of God,
4.	Assalamo alaykom va rahmatolláhe va barakato	Greetings to you all and the blessings and abundance of God.

Khatm: While still kneeling repeat three times:

Alláho-Akbar	God is greater
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CHRONICLES OF A BIRTH

Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions in Spain (1854-1876)

by 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 Náṣiri'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.

The 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 Muhammad 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 conduct⁴

1857 – False Rumors

For certain, the assassination attempt against Nāṣiri'd-Dín Sháh in 1852 did little to dispel this misunderstanding about the Bábí Faith. 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 Shí'a Afghan province of Herat. This maneuver by Nāṣiri'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 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 Babi [*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 1869⁷, 1878⁸, and twice again in 1896⁹.

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 Mirzá 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 the Bábí Faith 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 the Bábí Faith 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 induction 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 world⁷. 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 the Bábí Faith 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 the Bábí Faith 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 the Bábís.

The Diccionario Universal

Following the publication in 1862 of Charles Dreyss's *Cronología Universal*, we know of no other reference work in Spanish that mentions the Báb 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 Mirza-Alí-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*, 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 the Bábí Faith. 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 Ṭáhirih 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 o del Indo al Tigris* [Iran or From the Indus to the Tigris], devoting three pages to the Bábís. 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, Nāṣiri'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 Bábís. 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 Belgue*; 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 “Bábís” were accused of assassinating Nāṣiri’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.

The St. Petersburg 19th Century Orientalist Collection of Materials on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths

Primary and Other Sources

Y.A. Ioannesyan*

Introduction

The Russian Empire during the 19th century was highly interested in the current events and political changes which were developing in Persia, especially those events surrounding the appearance of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths. As we know Persia has always been a strategic concern of Russia's geopolitical interests and this traditional importance, which has been given to Iran has materialized itself in hundreds if not thousands of documents and writings collected by the pre-revolutionary Russian government. Among these materials, which were constantly flowing into the Russian Empire, was information about and original Writings of these two emerging religions. Fortunately this information was supplied regularly and systematized by the Russian diplomats and scholars working in Persia. Among these Russian diplomats were also trained Orientalists, who could rightly ascertain their significance. This paper is a brief introduction to the work and materials collected by these remarkable men.

Prominent Figures

The work of gathering, preserving, identifying, classifying, studying, translating and publishing the materials on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths was conducted by numerous people but the most prominent of these were A.G. Tumanski (1861-1920), both a scholar and a diplomat, and Baron V.R. Rosen (1849-1908), a pure scholar. Some of the other notable figures were scholars like Professor V.A. Zhukovski and B. Dorn, and diplomats F.A. Bakulin, M. Bezobrazoff and M.A. Gamazoff. The latter was the Head of the School of Oriental Languages of the Asian Department of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. A substantial contribution to the collection of manuscripts and especially that of lithographs was made by a prominent scholar, W. A. Ivanow.

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It would be fair to say that Russian scholars became acquainted with the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh before they found out about Bahá'u'lláh Himself.¹ Nevertheless, Russian was the first European language into which the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh were translated. Among these translations, the first and foremost is Tumanski's translation of the *Most Holy Book* by Bahá'u'lláh (see below).

Rosen (1849-1908) must be given special credit for classifying, identifying and describing the manuscripts, and establishing the Russian Geographical Society. He also edited a periodical journal "Notes of the Oriental Department of the Russian (Royal) Archeological Society", known under its abbreviated title ZVORAO (Zapiski Vostochnogo Otdeleniya Rossiyskogo Arkheologicheskogo Obshestva), where his and Tumanski's translations of Bahá'í texts were published. This journal covered a large range of subjects including: history, linguistics, religion, and culture.

Tumanski (1861-1920) was a graduate of the School of Oriental Languages of the Asian Department of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, where he studied languages under M. A. Gamazoff's instruction. He ended his career as a Major-General of the Russian army, but he was also an orientalist (iranologist and turkologist). He knew Persian, Arabic and Turkish. Not much is known about his biography, for he left Russia after the Bolsheviks took over in 1917 and wasn't considered by the ruling regime as one deserving notice. What is known about him is that for a certain period of his life he was in Ashkabad where he came into close contact with the Bahá'í community there and ever since was keenly interested in everything which concerned the Bahá'ís. He died in emigration in the Prince's Islands (near Constantinople). After his death his widow moved to Belgium. His descendents live in that country.²

We know that as early as in 1877, the first part of Writings of Bahá'u'lláh was delivered to Russia's General Consul in (Persian) Azerbaijan by M. Bezobrazoff and addressed to the Library of the Educational Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through M. A. Gamazoff.

Right from the beginning of Rosen's description of the Tablets he discerned the special character of the 29 Epistles as well as distinguished their marked difference from the early Writings of the Báb. This is not surprising when we consider that among his many accomplishments, Rosen is credited with the founding of a new school of Orientalism, which focused on the study of primary sources. His study of the texts led him to the conclusion that "All the Epistles should more or less be considered as revelations"³.

As early as 1877, Rosen describes these 29 Tablets (alwáh), first in Vol. I. of the *Collections Scientifiques* and later in 1908, along with a

number of other Tablets and Epistles by Bahá'u'lláh, in a copious volume titled *Sbornik poslanii Babída Bahau'lláha* (A Volume of Epistles of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bábí). Published by Baron. V/ R. Rosen. St.-Petersburg, 1908. (see below).

Rosen published a detailed description of the manuscripts, often illustrated with large abstracts from the original texts in French, in the *Collections Scientifiques de L'Institute des Langues Orientales du Ministère des Affaires étrangères*. Volumes. 1, 3, and 6,⁴ which was later to become known as the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies under the Russian Academy of Sciences. Unfortunately, the materials, which were added to the collection after Rosen's death, are not included in this catalogue.

The Origin of the Bábí and Bahá'í Materials Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences

The majority of Bábí and Bahá'í materials collected during the 19th century ended up in St. Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire⁵. Eventually, these materials were distributed between the following three learning centers: The St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies under the Russian Academy of Sciences (formerly the Asiatic Museum), the National Library (formerly the Public Library) and the Oriental Faculty of St. Petersburg State University. The largest of these collections is in the abovementioned St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, which for the most part this paper concerns⁶.

The St. Petersburg 19th Century Orientalist Collection of materials on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths consists of manuscripts, lithographs and published materials. The most significant of these can be divided between the (1) the Writings of the Báb, the Prophet-Founder of the Bábí Faith who was Bahá'u'lláh's Forerunner and (2) the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

In this paper I will further distinguish the materials into two broad groups: primary sources (PS) and secondary sources (SS). PS are manuscripts or publications of manuscripts of the Writings (with and without translations), and SS are manuscripts and publications of other materials like eyewitness accounts and historical documents about the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths. The materials are organized in the following manner. First, I list the PS for the Báb, which are unpublished⁷, I then treat the PS for Bahá'u'lláh which are also unpublished. Second, I list the PS for Bahá'u'lláh, which are published. Third, are writings (PS) of Bahá'u'lláh's son – Abdu'l-Bahá. Fourth, are the SS for Bábí and Bahá'í histories.

The majority of the manuscripts below, whether in Persian or Arabic as well as the lithographs belong to the collection of The St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies under the Russian Academy of Sciences, therefore, unless otherwise indicated, are to be found in three major catalogues and I have organized my paper starting with the first, second and third respectively. However, whenever it is necessary to specify the first two catalogues I will refer to them by their short titles: *The Concise Persian MS Catalogue* (PMS) and *The Concise Arabic MS Catalogue* (AMS). I also make reference to some materials listed in the *Collections Scientifiques ...* and *A Catalogue of Lithographs in Persian Preserved in the Library of the Oriental Faculty of the St. Petersburg State University*.

Please note that all the manuscripts and lithographs are listed and briefly described according to their language of origin, either Persian or Arabic.

The following are the three principle catalogues to the Collection. The catalogues names are given in Russian, but the catalogue itself is organized according to the works' heading, which is in Persian or Arabic:

- Persidskie i tadzikskie rukopisi Instituta Vostokovedeniia Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk (A concise catalogue of the manuscripts in Persian, preserved at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies under the Russian Academy of Sciences, in two volumes), short name The Concise Persian MS Catalogue (PMS);⁸
- Arabskiye rukopisi Instituta Vostokovedeniia Akademii Nauk SSSR. Kratkii katalog (A concise catalogue of the manuscripts in Arabic, preserved at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies under the Russian Academy of Sciences, in two volumes), short name: The Concise Arabic MS Catalogue (AMS);⁹
- Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Leningradskogo otdeleniia Instituta vostokovedeniia AN SSSR (A catalogue of the lithographed books in Persian preserved in the above Branch of the above Institute, in two volumes);¹⁰

Additional resources

- *Collections Scientifiques de L'Institut des Langues Orientales du Ministère des Affaires étrangères* (A detailed description of many materials from the St. Petersburg Collection).

- A small number of the materials belonging to other collections are registered in the specialized catalogues of the related collections, for example:
- Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Vostochnogo otdela nauchnoi biblioteki Leningradslogo gos. universiteta (A catalogue of lithographs in Persian preserved in the Library of the Oriental Faculty of the St. Petersburg State University).¹¹

Review of Materials

We go on now to the review of the materials. The first number in each listing stands for the sequential number in the related Catalogue, while the second number in parenthesis is the code under which the given manuscript or lithograph is registered under.

I. Unpublished lithographs and manuscripts, described or registered in Catalogues

1) The Writings of the Báb, the Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh (1819-1850)

- a) The Persian Bayán ('Bayán-i-Farsi')¹² – the major doctrinal work of the Báb. Written in Persian, it comprises 8000 verses and is divided into nine sections called *Vahids* (lit.: 'units'), of 19 chapters each, except for the last which has ten chapters. The Institute has 2 manuscripts of the *Persian Bayán*:
 - i) #392 (A 458)-PMS. The manuscript is a gift to the Institute of Oriental Languages by Russia's General Consul in Astrabad (Northern Iran) F. A. Bakulin, which was delivered on 4 April 1877. The manuscript has a dedication note. It consists of 394 lists and contains 9 *Vahids*. The name of the copyist and the date are not mentioned. This manuscript is described by Baron V. R. Rosen in his *Collections Scientifiques*, Vol. III: Mss. Persans, pp. 4-13. The description is followed by a large extract from the *Persian Bayán*, containing the whole of the first *Vahid*. Baron Rosen also published there a list of the titles of the remaining eight *Vahids* of the Book. This manuscript is also mentioned by B. Dorn: [Mellanges Asiatiques, Vol. VII, 177];
 - ii) #393 (#439)-PMS. Another manuscript of the Persian Bayán, which is also a gift from F. G. Bakulin. This was received on 5 May 1874, as it follows from the note in the manuscript. The manuscript though written in a very clear hand is incomplete. It consists of 98 lists and contains only 7 *Vahids*, without the name of the copyist and the date.

This manuscript is also mentioned by Baron Rosen in his description: *Collections Scientifiques*, Vol. III. Mss. Persans, p. 3.

- b) The Commentary on the Surih of Josef (Qayyúmu'l-Asmá') – the first chapter of which was revealed in the presence of Mullá Husayn (the first to believe in The Báb) on the evening of 22 May 1844. This event marked the Báb's open declaration of His mission. Bahá'u'lláh described the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá' as “*the first, greatest, and mightiest of all books*” of the Báb. Written in Arabic it consists of 9300 verses and contains 111 chapters. Each of the chapters, except for the first, has a verse from the Surih of Josef in the Koran and the Báb's commentary on it. A whole chapter is titled “Surih of Josef”.

The Institute has two manuscripts of the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'. Both are beautifully performed, written in a clear hand, and in red ink. Neither of them bears the title. However, their identification as being manuscripts of the given work of the Báb is beyond any doubt (see below):

- i) #3169 (ca. 1167)-AMS. It has 158 lists. Not only does it fit into the above description of the content of the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá' (for example, it has on f. 7A a chapter, titled “Surih of Josef”), in addition to that on f. 1b the work is referred to as: “The Best of Stories” (“Ahsanu'l-Qisas”), which, according to E. G. Browne, is but another name for the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'.¹³ Apart from the copyist's postscript the manuscript contains a few others which all-together provide a clue to the history of the manuscript. It follows from the copyist's postscript that the manuscript was finished in the month of Shawwal of 1297 A.H. (1880 A. D.). Below this there is a postscript by another hand saying: “What the copyist left out is that this noble book was, with God's help, finished by humble, poor, rebellious, [yet] hoping for the Mercy of the Lord, the All-Sufficient, – Muḥammad Mahdi ibn Karbalayi Shah Karam in ...the month of Jumadiu'l-Ula of 1261 of Hijra (1845 A.D.). May the Lord forgive the copyist, the reader and him who will ask God to forgive the copyist”.

As it follows from another postscript (in Russian), the given manuscript is “a copy made from the original, preserved in the Library of Prince 'Alí Qulí Mirzá I'tizadu'l-Saltanih, son of Fath 'Alí Shah, [who was] Minister of Education”. It also says that the manuscript was “a gift from I. Grigorovitch, presented on 12 August

1880 – 17 Ramadan 1297 A. H.” Thus, putting together all this information contained in the postscripts, it is fair to conclude that the manuscript dated 1880 was a direct copy of a much earlier manuscript, written in 1845 (only a year after the Báb’s proclamation of his mission in 1844!), made by a copyist named Muḥammad Mahdi ibn Karbalayi Shah Karam.

- ii) #3070 (B 1141)-AMS. Another manuscript of the same Writing, consisting of 252 lists. Unlike the previous MS. this is described in detail by Baron V. R. Rosen in the first volume of his *Collections*...¹⁴ with the publication of a number of extracts. As Baron V. R. Rosen points out, the given MS is without a title, divided into 111 chapters, each beginning with the words: ‘in the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate’ and except for the first chapter contains a verse from the Koranic Surih of Josef. These characteristics, after comparing the text with E. G. Browne’s description of a manuscript of the *Commentary on the Surih of Josef*, enabled Bar. Rosen to identify the work as the famous Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’. In his description he even traced the Koranic verse of each chapter of the Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’ back to the Koran¹⁵.

The manuscript was a gift from M. Bezobrazoff, presented on 4 April 1877. It is undated and has no mention of the copyist.

- c) ‘Two Suras from the Koran of the Báb’. #3071 (C1660) AMS. A manuscript of 52 lists, consisting of 4 texts in Arabic: ff. 1b-24b, 25a-32a, 32a-50b, 50b-52b. In the Concise Arabic MS Catalogue is designated as: Two Suras from the Koran of the Báb. The style of all the four texts is that of divine revelations, therefore they could only proceed out of the pen of either the Báb or Bahá’u’lláh.

The first one can with certainty be identified as the Surih-i-Baqara of the Báb, described by E. G. Browne in the “27 Bábí Manuscripts” (p. 498). The last text mentions the word/name “Bahá” (“the light of Bahá” etc) several times, and also the *ghiyas* and the *mustaghas*.

F.1 has a memorial note from V. A. Zhukovski, a date: 1919; and a number: 82.

- d) Untitled and undated manuscript in Arabic consisting of 87 lists. #3073 (A 923) AMS.

It has a postscript in Russian on the last page, from which it is

clear that the manuscript was obtained by W. A. Ivanow:¹⁶ “Bought in Isfahan 24/11 VII 1910. W. Ivanow”, while a note on the first page probably indicates the year of its joining the collection: 1916.

The manuscript is erroneously registered in the Concise Catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts as the [Kitáb-i-] Íqán by Bahá'u'lláh (*The Book of Certitude*), which indeed it is not. Nor is its author Bahá'u'lláh. There are many reasons to consider the text, divided into verses (numbered in red ink) as being written by the Báb. ‘Zikrulláh’ (‘the remembrance of God’) – one of the titles of the Báb, is often mentioned in the text, while believers are either summoned to believe into ‘zikrulláh’ or defined as believers in him. Apart from that one of the verses says: “*Enter ye the house from the side of the Gate (the Báb) on the great and glorious path*”, while another runs as follows: “*We have already ordained unto you in the Book of Precepts...*”. The latter is a well-known Writing of the Báb, translated into French by M. Comte de Gobineau.

A curious note in Persian, definitely not in the copyist's hand, on the inner side of the cover not only dispels the last doubt concerning Bahá'u'lláh's not being the author but also suggests that the text most likely originated before the declaration by Bahá'u'lláh of His Mission: “May God's mercy and the Prophet's praise be on the guardian of the book (*hajib-i-kitáb*) and on its other followers: Azal, Bahá', ‘Abbas Affandi and the rest...”

- e) The Arabic Bayán (National Library); This could be the “Arabic Bayán”, known to be a smaller and less weighty work of the Báb, revealed in the fort of Chihriq, mentioned by E. G. Brown,¹⁷ but definitely not the one translated into French by M. Comte de Gobineau under the title: “The Book of Precepts”¹⁸.
- 2) The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith (1819-1892)
- a) The Book of Certitude (Kitáb-i-Íqán) – A Volume in Persian revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad about two years before His declaration of His Mission. In it Bahá'u'lláh among other things proclaims and substantiates some key principles of the Bahá'í teachings, such as the oneness of God, the progressive revelation etc, explains the station and mission of the Prophet-founders of world religions (manifestations of God's will), the spiritual meaning of prophecies about the return of Christ, the coming of the Qa'im, presents the essential qualities of the ‘true seeker’ of religious truth.

The Book of Certitude is represented in the collection by a lithograph and 5 manuscripts.

The lithograph was printed in Bombay in 1310 A. H.(1893 A.D.) and is described in the Catalogue of Lithographed books in Persian in the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Oriental Institute (code: PsII 164)¹⁹. This is not the same as the undated lithograph described by Baron V. R. Rosen in an article and in the *Collections...*²⁰. However, it fits fully into Baron V. R. Rosen's description of the latter as "being accomplished with utmost care".²¹

Another copy of exactly the same lithographical edition belongs to the Oriental Faculty of the St. Petersburg State University and accordingly registered in its catalogue (code: ¶-25/4).²²

The five manuscripts of *The Book of Certitude* which, with the exception of one, are all dated, are registered in the Concise Persian MS Catalogue²³ under the following sequential numbers and codes (after the code we put respectively the date): #277 (A 183) – 1296 A.H. (1878-1879 A.D.); #278 (A 461) – 1299 A.H (1881-1882 A.D.); #279 (A 1592) – 1305 A.H. (1887-1888 A.D.); #280 (B 1143) – undated; #281 (ca. 1168) – 1291 A.H. (1874-1875 A.D.), while B 1143 and A 461 were also described by Baron V. R. Rosen (the former of the two described in detail, illustrated by large extracts of the text).²⁴ I made a comparison of the manuscripts with the lithograph and published the results in a supplement to my academic translation of *The Book of Certitude* into Russian, which came out recently.²⁵ The main conclusion of my research is the following: though the lithograph, on the one hand, and the manuscripts, on the other, do reflect slightly different versions, the differences are very insignificant, and even those few instances which cannot be attributed to the copyist's error, do not have any effect on the meaning of the sentence, much less so on the Book as a whole.

The most beautifully and carefully accomplished are manuscripts A 183 and A 461, made upon a common pattern.

- b) 'Baháiyih'. #384 (ca. 1168-) PMS. This is a volume of 60 lists, registered in the Concise Persian MS Catalogue under the general title: Baháiyih. It contains four short Epistles in Arabic (ff. 1a-2a; 2a-3b; 3b-7a; 7a-13b) and a much longer one in Persian (ff. 13b-60b). Of this latter the above Catalogue says that "the treatise deals with and elaborates on the issues explained in the other Bahá'í work – [the Kitáb-i-

Jíqán. It is composed in the form of an epistle". All the epistles are written in Bahá'u'lláh's style, though only in the one in Persian, which is written in answer to the question "how it was possible for the *Supreme Letters* to be turned into those who were doomed for the bottom of hell (Sajjin)" does Bahá'u'lláh mention His name, Ḥusayn, and refers to the Bayán of the Báb as "[having been] sent down from the Heaven of My previous Manifestation" (f. 16a). The addressee is mentioned by name once – 'Alí (f. 22b), while there is also one reference to Jinab Siyyid Jawad (f. 26a).

One of the texts makes mention of "this great prison" (f. 7b).

- c) 'Lawḥ-i-Bábí'. #3072 (A185) AMS. This one page epistle in Arabic, is a text with a beautifully decorated ornament frame, and has an intriguing history. The Epistle is registered in the Concise Arabic MS Catalogue as "Lawḥ-i-Bábí". It is not described in the *Collections Scientifiques*, probably because it was received after Baron V. R. Rosen's death. It is contained in an envelope with several explanatory notes (in Russian) on separate sheets of paper, enclosed together with the manuscript. The note, written probably by A. G. Tumanski, says that the Epistle "is undoubtedly of Bábí origin", "obscure in language and mystical in nature", "is composed in rhymed prose", "it's author is definitely Bahá'u'lláh", "containing, quite probably, some historical allusions in the end", "every second phrase in the Epistle has invariably the refrain: 'fa subhana rabbi-l-'ala'", which "in one instance only is replaced by: 'fa subhana rabbana-l-'ala'". "From the standpoint of its language and style it is most similar to the 'Alwáḥu-l-Salatin' and to the 'Suratu-l-Haykal'". The author of the note cites certain phrases from this Epistle and the above Tablets to highlight this similarity.

Another, much shorter explanatory note, written by another person, tells us a little about the history of this Epistle in Russia: "Assistant professor Khilinski, uncle of General von ... (a German name, unclearly written) brought from Mashhad (the name of this city is written in Persian) [and] presented as a gift the letter of ...himself". The name preceding the word "himself" could be read as "Bahá'". If this assumption is correct, the writer of this note thought the Epistle to be written in Bahá'u'lláh's hand. This impression is confirmed by the logical emphasis on the word "himself" which wouldn't be the case if the words just implied that the Epistle was a work of Bahá'u'lláh.

Also enclosed into the envelope is a visiting card, which says:

“Konstantin Vladimirovitch Khilinski”.

The manuscript was supposedly joined to the Institute MS Collection in the 90's of the XIXth century.

The Epistle itself, written in tiny letters, left no room for doubt that it belonged to Bahá'u'lláh. The author of the note, which I quoted earlier, was absolutely right saying that the epistle was not to be found among the materials, published by Baron V. Rosen or E. G. Browne. It turned out to be the famous Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh: The Tablet of the Holy Mariner (Lawḥ-i-Malláh-i-Quds) in Arabic, revealed on 26 March 1863. When I compared the MS in question with the photo of the manuscript of the same Tablet, preserved in the Bahá'í World Centre (the photo was printed in M. Sours' "The Tablet of the Holy Mariner", both the manuscripts seemed to me written by exactly the same hand. Since the MS in Haifa was written by Abdu'l-Bahá, the MS in St. Petersburg must also have been written by Abdu'l-Bahá. This is my tentative conclusion till it is confirmed by the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre. In any case in certain instances its text is closer to the English translation of the Tablet, made by Shoghi Effendi, than that of the MS in Haifa.

- d) Bahá'í prayers in Arabic. #3077 (A 182). It has 164 lists and (F. 1a.) contains an explanatory note by Baron V. R. Rosen: "Brought from Astrabad by L. P. Grigoryev on 1 June [18]92. Signature: V. Rosen".

A paper tag is stuck to f. 1a, which says: V. Rosen. 'A Book of Prayers' (This title is in Arabic).

- e) 'Rasa'il-i-Bábíyyih'. #3078 (A 184) AMS. It has 149 lists. A Volume of Epistles in Arabic and Persian. Some of the texts are similar to prayers. It is registered in the Concise Arabic MS Catalogue under the title: Rasa'il-i-Bábíyyih.

The manuscript is incomplete: the end is missing.

An explanatory note by Baron V. R. Rosen, analogous to the previous MS: "Brought by L. P. Grigoryev from Astrabad in Sept. 1892.

Bahá'u'lláh's authorship of the given volume is beyond any doubt. This is obvious not only from the language and style but also from a reference in one of the texts to the 'Lawḥ-i-Ra'is': Bahá'u'lláh reminds the addressee of the prophecy He made in that Tablet concerning the downfall of the Ottoman Empire:

Look at the kingdom of Rum. For it did not desire war, however, it was desired by the like of you. Therefore its flames were fanned and its inflammation rose. The government and religion grew weak as was witnessed by every fair-minded observer. Its calamities increased until its smoke covered the Land of Mystery (Adrianople) and the surrounding areas, so that what God hath sent down in the 'Lawḥ-i-Ra'is' may appear. Thus, God's command in the Book from God, the All-Protecting, Unchangeable, was fulfilled.

II. Published manuscripts

1) The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- a) Kitáb-i-Aqdas ("The Most Holy Book") – the major Bahá'í Writing, the importance of it for the Bahá'is is not limited to just the laws and ordinances set forth in it by Bahá'u'lláh.

In the collection of the Institute there are three manuscripts of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (*The Most Holy Book*), all the three are preserved in an excellent state. None of them, however, can be identified with the one used by A. G. Tumanski for the publication and translation into Russian of the given Book (See below).

- i) #3073 (A 460). Consists of 45 lists. Dated 1300 A. H. (1882-1883 A.D.), as is indicated in the end of the manuscript. It does not contain the last verse, with the prohibition of the use of opium ("It hath been forbidden you to smoke opium").

The manuscript was described by Bar. V. R. Rosen in *Collections...* VI, pp. 144-145, #246.

The last page has a postscript with a dedication: "This is presented as a gift to his Excellency Matvey Avel'yevitch Gamazoff". Signed: I. Grigorovitch. On 12 July 1888.

A little below a note from M. A. Gamazoff says: "Gamazoff has delivered it to the Library of the School of Oriental Languages on 6 Sept. [18]88". Signed: Gamazoff;

- ii) #3074 (A 975). Consists of 80 lists. The manuscript has the text of the *Most Holy Book* in full (including the last verse).

There is a postscript in Persian in the end: "Has been

collated with special care with the new manuscript on 1 Jamadi 1306 A. H. (1888-1889 A.D.).”.

The last page has a dedication note in Russian: “Is presented as a gift to the Library of the School of Oriental Languages by G. D. Batyushkoff in 1906”.

This (the fact of its joining the collection so late) explains why the given manuscript was not described by Baron V. R. Rosen.

- iii) #3075 (A 497). Consists of 44 lists. Contains the text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in full. The text of *The Most Holy Book* is followed by a Bahá’í marital prayer on 2 pages (the latter is registered in the Concise Arabic MS Catalogue under a separate sequential number: 3082; the code is the same). The manuscript is undated.

The manuscript bears a stamp: Library of the School of Oriental Languages of the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

A dedication note says: “Presented as a gift to the Library of the School of Oriental Languages in 1906”.

The original text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas with Russian translation was preceded by a large and very informative introductory article, dealing among other things with the history of the Bahá’í religion, published by A.G. Tumanski in 1899.

For the history of this translation and publication it is best to quote (in our translation) an extract from A. G. Tumanski’s above introductory article: “Finally, the third volume, which included the “Most Holy Book” — the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, which I present now to the reader, was lithographed in 1892 (1308 A. H.) in Bombay, and I received the first copies of it in early November 1893. This was during the time when I was finishing the translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas from the manuscript, obtained by me in 1890, consequently, I felt the need to collate its text with the canonical edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The present edition is based on the latter [canonical] edition, while the differences between this version and my manuscript are marked: my manuscript version is designated by the letter P”²⁶. Thus, as it follows from this account, A. G. Tumanski first made his translation from his own manuscript, which he then collated with the official edition of the text, sent to him in an lithographed form, making the

latter the basis for his publication of the original text and the final version of his Russian translation of the *Most Holy Book*. As for A. G. Tumanski's own manuscript, which he mentions in the above quote, he also makes reference to its description by Baron V. R. Rosen²⁷. Unfortunately, that reference proved incorrect. So, his manuscript is not registered in any Catalogue, and nothing is known about it as well as about the lithographical edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, which he used (see also below).

- b) Among the scholarly publications of Bahá'í original texts a prominent place is occupied by a copious volume of the Tablets and Epistles of Bahá'u'lláh, prepared for publication from different manuscripts by Baron V. R. Rosen, whose sudden death interrupted this work and did not allow him to carry the project through.²⁸ Its publication, however, was accomplished by Baron V. R. Rosen's college — P. Kokovtseff, who supplied the Volume with an introduction, which he humbly titled: "Instead of Introduction". In the Introduction he provided us with some important clues to the history of the Volume and its sources.

Thus, we find out from the Introduction, that the texts, included into the Volume, were drawn from two manuscripts. One of them (under the code B1142, see its description below) attracted Baron V. R. Rosen's attention back in 1877, when, making a description of the newly obtained manuscripts, he for the first time became closely familiar with the Writings of the Central figures of the new religion. The above manuscript, presented by M. Bezobrazoff, consisted of 29 Tablets in Arabic by a writer, named Huseyn [Huseyn 'Alí Nuri = Bahá'u'lláh], who was at the time unknown to Baron V. R. Rosen. One should bear in mind, that as A. G. Tumanski rightly pointed out, the knowledge of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings preceded the knowledge of Bahá'u'lláh himself in Russian academic circles (see above). Therefore, it took a great effort on Baron V. R. Rosen's part to identify the author of these Tablets and Epistles. Among the latter there was one (N 20), untitled, as all the others and addressed to the kings, which was later identified to be the *Tablet of Kings* or the *Suriy-i-Muluk*. Its comparison with another manuscript, namely that of the *Commentary on the Surih of Josef* (see above) by the Báb, enabled Baron V. R. Rosen to make a provisional but none the less correct conclusion that the author of the Epistle in question 'could in no way be the

Báb himself, as long as the preceding manuscript [i.e. the *Commentary on the Surih of Josef*] really proceeded out of the pen of the reformer [i.e. the Báb].²⁹ Later the Library of the Educational Department of Oriental Languages received a new group of writings (MS code: A 459, old code: 247, see its description below), among which Baron V. R. Rosen discovered another copy of the same Tablet N 20 of the earlier manuscript. This time the text was titled: 'Suriy-i-Muluk' (*Tablet of Kings*). This wondrous find enabled Baron V. R. Rosen to identify the author of the Tablet as Bahá'u'lláh, in spite of E. G. Browne's opinion, thinking at the time otherwise. Later E. G. Browne, a prominent scholar of Babism had to agree with Baron V. R. Rosen's brilliant arguments³⁰ and even reproduce them in English in his article.³¹

This also prompted Baron V. R. Rosen to publish the whole manuscript with all the 29 Tablets and Epistles by Bahá'u'lláh in Arabic. The latter occupy the first half of the Volume (the text of the *Tablet of Kings* was published from both the manuscripts, see below), while the second half of the book presents 34 other Epistles of Bahá'u'lláh, including the *Tablet of Nasir* (Lawḥ-i-Nasir), from Baron V. R. Rosen's own manuscript, which makes the total number of the texts in the Volume — 63. This latter manuscript, belonging to Baron V. R. Rosen, unfortunately is not yet found. All we know about it is that it was dated 9 Sha'ban [12]97 A. H. (17 July 1880) and contained 34 Epistles, half of which were in Persian, half in Arabic. The manuscript was untitled, Bahá'u'lláh's authorship of the Epistles was confirmed by the cryptogram 152 at the end of the manuscript, which equals the numerical value of the name *Bahá'*, according to the *abjad* system. This was also figured out by Baron V. R. Rosen. P. Kokovtseff, who accomplished the publication of the Volume, after Baron V. R. Rosen's death, points out that the manuscript was given to him for temporary use, owing to Prof. Zhukovski's help. To conclude, thus, before obtaining a titled copy of the *Tablet of Kings*, Baron V. R. Rosen by using convincing arguments, such as the cryptogram 152 = Bahá', similarities of passages between the *Tablet of Kings* and the *Epistle to the Queen of England*, from the Alwáḥu-l-Salatin and etc., already proved that the author of the *Tablet of Kings* was Bahá'u'lláh.

Baron V. R. Rosen also published in full some other Epistles of Bahá'u'lláh (see below).

- c) Untitled work. #3079 (B 1142) AMS. This is a volume of 29 Epistles of Bahá'u'lláh in Arabic. These form the first part of Baron V. R. Rosen's published Volume, previously referred to.³² The manuscript consists of 72 lists and includes the Suratu'l Muluk (the beginning on f. 36b).

The manuscript is partial: the last Epistle (#29) is incomplete.

It has a memorial note on the first page half in Russian half in French: "Don de Mr. Bezobrazov" (Mr. Bezobrazoff's gift).

The manuscript is described in detail by Baron V. R. Rosen [*Collections Scientifiques*, Vol. I, pp. 191-212)], who also quotes the beginning of each Epistle under the same number as in the published volume [ibid, pp. 200-212].

- d) Untitled manuscript. #3079 (A 459) AMS. This is a manuscript consisting of 182 lists. Each text in the volume is preceded by the cryptogram 152 (indicating the name: Bahá'[u'lláh]) in red ink.

The volume includes the Suratu'l Muluk (its dating in the Concise Arabic MS Catalogue is wrong), the title of which appears on the margin in red ink (f. 1b); the Suratu'l-Haykal, including the Alwáhu-l-Salatin (ff. 40a-154a); the Lawh-i-Ra'is (ff. 154a-166a) and some other Epistles, published by Baron V. R. Rosen in the *Collections Scientifiques*, VI, pp. 145-243.

The manuscript is beautiful and written in an excellent hand. It is preserved in a very good state.

The last page has a note in Russian: "I am granting it as a gift to his Excellency Matvey Avelievitch Gamazoff. [Signature:] Grigorovitch, 12 July 1888".

Another note below says:

"The Library of the Educational Department, Sept. [18]88. [Signature:] Gamazoff".

- e) Untitled manuscript. #3676 (B 1144) PMS. The manuscript, consisting of 11 lists, contains Writings of Bahá'u'lláh in Persian: Lawh-i-Maqsud (ff. 1b-9b), and two Epistles on the occasion of the tragic events in Ashkhabad, one addressed to Abdu'l-Karim (ff. 9b-10b), the other – to 'the friends in [different] lands' (ff. 10b-11b). The latter were published in the original and Russian translation by A.

G. Tumanski [A. G. Tumanski. 'Dwa poslednikh Bábídskich otkroveniia'³³ in *Memoires de l'Academie imperiale des sciences de St.-Petersbourg*, Vol. 6, 1891. St.-Petersburg, 1892, pp. 317-321]. The texts of the Epistles were also reproduced in the original by Baron V. R. Rosen in his description [*Collections...*, VI, pp. 248-250]. The Lawḥ-i-Maqsud was not published in full, but was fully described by Baron V. R. Rosen, who illustrated his description by large extracts of the text from the manuscript [*Collections...*, VI, p. 245].

The manuscript is in an excellent state. The Lawḥ-i-Maqsud is titled, the Epistles are untitled, for which reason they are not mentioned in the Catalogues.

- f) 'Alwáh' #433 (Ps II163). A lithographical volume of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh: *The Tablet of Effulgences* (Lawḥ-i-Tajalliyát), *The Tablet of Splendours* (Lawḥ-i-'Ishraqát), *The Tablet of Ornaments* (Lawḥ-i-Tarazát), *The Tablet of the Words of Paradise* (Lawḥ-i-Kalimát-i-Firdawsiiyyih). It is registered in the Catalogue of Lithographed books in Persian in the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Oriental Institute as: Alwáh — revelations of Bahá'u'lláh (code: Ps II 163).³⁴ The date and place of its publication are unknown.

It is highly doubtful that the Volume could serve as an original source for A. G. Tumanski's published edition of the same Tablets as supplements to the *Most Holy Book* (see below).

2) Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá 35 (all lithographs)

- a) The Secret of Divine Civilization. There are two copies of this lithograph in St. Petersburg: one in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, the other — in the State University:
- i) #434 (Hd II267). Registered in the Catalogue of Lithographed books in Persian in the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Oriental Institute under its Arabic/Persian title: Asrar al-Ghaybiyya li Asbab al-Madaniyya.³⁶ Printed in Bombay in 1299 A.H. (1882 A.D.)
 - ii) #168 (O II 1871). Another copy of the same edition. Registered in the Catalogue of the lithographs in Persian in the Library of the Oriental Faculty of the St.

Petersburg State University under its Arabic/Persian title.³⁷

- b) A Traveller's Narrative.³⁸ There are three copies of this lithograph in St. Petersburg: two in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, the third – in the State University:
- i) #435 (Ps II 172). Registered in the Catalogue of Lithographed books in Persian in the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Oriental Institute under its Persian title: *Maqalih-i-Shaxsi Sayyah ki dar tafsil-i-qaziyyih-i-Báb nivishtih ast*.³⁹ Printed in Bombay in 1308 A. H.(1890 A.D.).
 - ii) #437 (Pk 637). Another edition of the same writing. Registered in the Catalogue of Lithographed books in Persian in the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Oriental Institute.⁴⁰ Printed in 1335 A. H. (1917 AD)
 - iii) #169 (X II 294, ¶-23/2⁴¹ – double coding). Another copy of the same edition. Registered in the Catalogue of the lithographs in Persian in the Library of the Oriental Faculty of the St. Petersburg State University under its Persian title.⁴²

III. Secondary sources of the history of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths and for other related issues

- 1) #3351 (ca. 1885) - PMS "The Book of Astrabad, Mazinadaran, Gilan, Simnan, Damghan and other [places]".

Ff. 55a-58b of this manuscript contain an account of the events related to the Bábí movement in the Mazindaran and neighboring areas. The account has a distinct anti-Bábí flavor. On ff. 55a,b one finds what could be a direct quote from famous Ṭáhirih (Qurratu'l 'Ayn).

The manuscript is described by B. Dorn in the *Melanges Asiatiques*, Vol. IV, p. 199, N 12.

- 2) #495 (B 1145) – PMS. The New History (Tarikh-i-Jadid) by Mírzá Ḥusayn Hamadani.⁴³ A manuscript of 110 lists. The text is incomplete: it ends on f. 110b.

The manuscript is described by Baron V. R. Rosen in *Collections...* VI, p. 244. The work itself is dealt with by A. G. Tumanski in his article.⁴⁴

- 3) #441 (Hd II 255). The lithograph is registered in the Catalogue of Lithographed books in Persian in the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Oriental Institute under its Arabic/Persian title: *Dala'il al-'Irfan fi Zuhur al-Hujja wa-l-Tibyan*.⁴⁵ The author is Hajj Mírzá Haydar 'Alí Isfahani. Printed in Bombay in 1312-1313 A. H. (1895 A.D.).

This a treatise on the appearance of the Mahdi, who is identified by the author with the Báb.

The treatise was written in 1310 A. H.(1892-1893 A.D.).

- 4) #440 (Ps I 98). The lithograph is registered in the Catalogue of Lithographed books in Persian in the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Oriental Institute under its Persian title: *Asas-i-Tarikh-i-Jadid* by Mírzá Ḥasan b. Muḥammad-Taqi Taliqani.⁴⁶

The lithograph was supposedly printed in Iran. The place and time of its publication are not mentioned.

As it follows from the added note on the cover of the book it was sent by the author to V. A. Zhukovski, through someone named Shubin, in 1915.

- 5) This manuscript merits a longer description, it is registered in the Concise Persian MS Catalogue under the code: B 1146, sequential number: 383, title: *Bahá'iyih*. It consists of only 5 lists and contains 5 short texts in Persian:

- a) A piece of poetry in honor of his majesty the Russian emperor. The unknown poet, who composed this poetry, consisting of 72 verses, expresses his appreciation to the emperor for the secure life Bahá'ís could lead in Russia;
- b) Two poetical pieces, consisting of 19 verses each, by a writer, whose pseudonym was either Ruhani or Ruha;
- c) A piece of a purely religious verse by an unknown poet;
- d) A note on the Bahá'í law on heritage and the division of a Bahá'í year into 19 months;

This has an added note at the end, saying that it was composed on the request of A.G. Tumanski in 1308 A.H.;

- e) A note on the chronology of some important events in the Bábí and Bahá'í history, with an explanation of the Bahá'í calendar.

It should be noted, that though the explanatory part was written on the request of A.G. Tumanski by some knowledgeable Bahá'í, maybe A. F. Gulpaygani, this *Risalih*

shouldn't be confused with the *Risalih-i-Iskandariyyih*, consisting of 35 pages, written by A. F. Gulpaygani for A. G. Tumanski and mentioned by the latter in the above article.

The manuscript is described in detail by Baron V. R. Rosen in the *Collections...*, VI, pp. 251-252 (#250).

- 6) #442 (Pu 174). The lithograph is registered in the Catalogue of Lithographed books in Persian in the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Oriental Institute under its Persian title: *Burhan-i-Lami'*.⁴⁷ Its author is Abu-l-Fadl Gulpaygani. Written in 1330 A. H. (1911 A.D.) in Syria. Printed in Chicago (Press of Bahá'í News) with the English translation and a portrait of Abdu'l-Bahá.

This is a polemic work in answer to the article by protestant missionary Peter Z. Easton, published in the magazine: "Evangelical Christendom".

- 7) 'Majmu'ih'. #3853 (A 716) PMS. A manuscript of 18 lists with poetry in Persian, registered in the Concise Persian MS Catalogue under the title: *Majmu'ih*. The above catalogue describes it in the following way: "The volume contains two short *masnavis*, a fragment of a *masnavi* and two *qasidas*. The first [*masnavi*] has 182 verses, the second — 212 verses. The manuscript is dated 20 Sha'ban 1270 A. H. (1853-1854 A.D.). Probably, this *masnavi* is titled 'Saha'if'".

This dating is obviously derived from the added note on the last page (f. 18b), written in a hand different from the poetical text itself. The note, addressing "God's people", calls on them to peruse and know the worth of "these pages" (*saha'if*, *varaqa*t), for, it says, "the day of the greatest testimony is close (*yawm-i-shahadat-i-akbar nazdik ast*)". It also mentions the day on which the manuscript was finished: Thursday, the twentieth day of the month of Sha'ban, year 127 ?. The last figure seems to be missing or at least not to be clearly seen. It looks to us highly unlikely that the year 1270 A.H., corresponding to 1853-1854 A.D. could be the correct date. The main theme of the poetry in the volume is bringing glad tidings of and rejoicing at [the revelation] of Bahá, whose "visible countenance has arisen" and who "has torn asunder the veils". These metaphors as well as the subject itself are more relevant to the time after the declaration by Bahá'u'lláh of his Mission in 1279 A.H (1863 A.D.).

Some verses are preceded by introductory notes and admonishments.

Attached to the manuscript is a sheet of paper enclosed in an

envelope, with a prayer to be said during the washing of the hands. The sheet is signed (in Persian): "A scribe...of Abdu'l-Bahá Ḥusayn". The word, immediately following 'scribe', which could be an epithet, is unclear.

The year of the manuscript joining the collection is mentioned in another note: 1917.

- 8) #443 (Pu 10). This is a lithographical volume of Tablets (Lawḥs) of Bahá'u'lláh, compiled by Siyyid Jalal b. Hazrat Sina. The volume is without a title. Printed in Tashkent in 1336 A. H.(1918 A.D.) by the "Idarih-i-Vahdat". Registered in the Catalogue of Lithographed books in Persian in the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Oriental Institute.⁴⁸
- 9) #170 (¶-23/4).⁴⁹ The lithograph is registered in the Catalogue of the lithographs in Persian in the Library of the Oriental Faculty of the St. Petersburg State University under its Persian title: 'Akka'-i-Firgh.⁵⁰ Printed in 1311 A. H.(1894 A.D.) supposedly in Bombay.

This is a treatise by an anonymous Bahá'í writer concerning Islam and the contemporary world. Performed in Mishkin-Qalam's hand.

Unfortunately some of the earlier published manuscripts or those used for publications in pre-revolutionary Russia have not been found. This is the case of most manuscripts in A. G. Tumanski's or Baron V. R. Rosen's private possessions. That such manuscripts did exist we know from the fact of their being published or mentioned in different publications. Below is a list of these publications:

- a) Bahá'u'lláh's epistle: Lawḥ-i-bisharát (*The Good Tidings Epistle*), published by Baron V. R. Rosen [Baron V. R. Rosen. Poslaniye Blagiye Vesti – in *Memoires de l'Academie imperiale des sciences de St.-Petersbourg*, Vol. VII. Saint-Petersburg, 1893, pp. 183-192].
- b) The manuscript of Bahá'u'lláh's epistles in Arabic, included by Baron V. R. Rosen into the published Volume of Epistles. The manuscript is mentioned in the introduction to the Volume (see above).
- c) A. G. Tumanski's manuscript of the *Most Holy Book* (Kitáb-i-Aqdas), which he used together with the lithographical version for the publication of the original text and its Russian translation (see above). The lithograph is not found either.
- d) The Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, published by A. G. Tumanski as Supplements to the *Most Holy Book*:
 - i) *The Tablet of 'Alí* (Lawḥ-i-'Alí) – Suppl. 1;

- ii) *The Tablet: The Simplest of Essence* (Lawḥ-i-Basitu'l-Haqiqā) – Suppl. 2;
 - iii) *The Tablet of Splendours* (Lawḥ-i-Ishraqāt)⁵¹ – Suppl. 3;
 - iv) *The Tablet of Ornaments* (Lawḥ-i-Tarazāt) – Suppl. 3;
 - v) *The Tablet of Effulgences* (Lawḥ-i-Tajalliyāt)⁵² – Suppl. 3;
 - vi) *The Tablet of the Words of Paradise* (Lawḥ-i-Kalimat-i-Firdawsiiyih)⁵³ – Suppl. 3
- e) *The Will and Testament of Bahá'u'lláh*, published by A. G. Tumanski under the title: Kitáb-i-Ahdí (The Book of My Testament) [A. G. Tumanski. Posledneye Slovo Bahá'u'lláhi (Bahá'u'lláh's Last Word) – in: *Memoires de l'Academie imperiale des sciences de St.-Petersbourg*, Vol. VII. Saint-Petersburg, 1893, pp. 193-203].
- f) Certain texts from F. A. Bakulin's archive, including one attributed to the Báb. These materials were published by V. A. Zhukovski in his article: V. A. Zhukovski. Rossiyski imperatorski konsul F. A. Bakulin v istorii izucheniya Bábíзма (Russian Imperial Consul F. A. Bakulin in the History of the Bábí Studies) – in: *Memoires de l'Academie imperiale des sciences de St. Petersburg* Vol. XXIV. Petrograd, 1917, pp. 33-90.
- g) *The Jani History* (Tarikh-i-Jani) manuscript, owned by A. G. Tumanski, with an episode missing in E. G. Browne's manuscript of the same work. The episode describes how Bahá'u'lláh volunteered to take upon Himself the blows intended for His younger half-brother Mirzá Yahya to save the latter from flogging when they were both arrested. The episode with a reference to this manuscript was published by A. G. Tumanski in his article: A. G. Tumanski. K Voprosu ob avtorakh istoriyi Bábídiv izvestnoy pod imenem Tarikh-i-Manukchi ili Tarikh-i-Jadid (On the question of the authorship of the History of the Bábí's known as Tarikh-i-Manukchi or Tarikh-i-Jadid – Zapiski..., edited by Baron V. R. Rosen. Vol. VIII. Saint-Petersburg, 1844, pp. 33-45.

Conclusion

The main imperative of Russian pre-Revolutionary scholars, who observed the advents of both the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths was to deeply study and comprehend these new phenomena. The rich collection of materials, which they brought together were all accumulated during the decades prior to the Bolshevik take over in 1917. Pre-Revolutionary scholars should also be recognized for their scientific approach, which contributed greatly to the value of their research and

publications and have preserved their significance up to this very day. Unfortunately, this balanced scientific approach to Religious Studies was replaced with an extremely political one during Soviet times. Religion in general was considered “the opium of the people” and it could only be approached in a highly biased and negative manner, so the conclusion to be arrived at in the course of a scholarly study was predetermined from the beginning. These circumstances detracted a lot from the motivation of scholars interested in the subject, since a thorough research of any original material on religion lost much of its significance, while at the same time the publication of primary sources became useless. Consequently, starting in 1918 these materials were practically ignored. This doesn't mean that they were not taken proper care of. On the contrary, in the all of the learning centers of the former Soviet Union, manuscripts and lithographs, regardless of their content, had always been provided with the best conditions possible for their preservation. In general, the situation regarding scientific research started to change in the late 80s and early 90s. Now much can be done in the field of Religious Studies in general and that of Bábí and Bahá'í studies in particular, so this collection will be of great importance to contemporary and future scholars.

NOTES

- ¹ Thus, A. G. Tumanski wrote: “Our knowledge of the Writings of Bahá'u'llah preceded that of himself and his reform” (A. G. Tumanski, *Kitábe Akdes. Svyashenneyshaya kniga sovremennykh babidov. (The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book of the present-day Bábí's. Text, Translation, Introduction, Supplements), Memoires de l'Academie imperiale des sciences de St.-Petersbourg, VIII Serie, Vol. 3. (St.-Petersburg: Royal Academy of sciences, 1899), XXVII-XXVIII).*
- ² This information was kindly shared with us by O. F. Akimushkin.
- ³ “toutes les lettres devaient etre considerees plus ou moins comme des revelations” (M. M. Güzburg, V. Rosen, B. Dorn, K. Patkanov, J. Tchoubinof. *Collections Scientifiques de L'Institute des Langues Orientales du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Vol. I (St.-Petersburg: Imperimerie de l'Academie imperiale des sciences, 1877), 192),* see also A. G. Tumanski *ibid*, XXVII.
- ⁴ The full title: *Collections Scientifiques de L'Institute des Langues Orientales du Ministère des Affaires étrangères. Les Manuscrits Arabes. Décrits par M. M. Güzburg, V. Rosen, B. Dorn, K. Patkanov, J. Tchoubinof. VI, fasc.2. St.-Petersbourg, 1891. Vol. III. Les Manuscrits Persans, décrits par Le Baron Victor Rosen. S. Petersbourg, 1886, p. 1-51; Vol.VI. Les Manuscrits Arabes, 1891, p. 141-255.*
- ⁵ Between Peter the Great's reign in the mid 16th century until the rise of Soviet communism in the 20th century, when it was transferred back to Moscow.

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- ⁶ I thank Dr. O. Akimushkin from the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies for his assistance in my work on these materials and Dr. S. Zabihi from the Research Department of the UHJ for his useful critical comments on this article.
- ⁷ What we imply by ‘published’ here is not the Writings as such, most of which as part of Bahá’í Scripture are published now in many languages, but that the text of a given manuscript or another of the same Writing was published or used for a scholarly publication of Bahá’í Texts in pre-Revolutionary Russia.
- ⁸ O. F. Akimushkin (et al.), *Persidskie i tadzikskie rukopisi Instituta Vostokovedeniia Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk: (kratkii alfavitnyi katalog)/; pod redaktsiei N. D. Miklukho-Maklaia; korrigenda i addenda O. F. Akimushkin*, 2 vols, 2 ed. (New York: Norman Ross Publishing Inc., 1998).
- ⁹ A. B. Khalidov, ed., *Arabskiye rukopisi Instituta Vostokovedeniia Akademii Nauk SSSR: Kratkii katalog*, 2 vols. (Moskow: Nauka, 1986).
- ¹⁰ O. P. Shcheglova . *Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Leningradskogo otdeleniia Instituta vostokovedeniia AN SSSR*, 2 vols. (Moskow: Nauka, 1975).
- ¹¹ O. P. Shcheglova. *Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Vostochnogo otdela nauchnoi biblioteki Leningradskogo gos. universiteta*. (Moskow: Nauka, 1989).
- ¹² Bayán lit. means ‘explanation, exposition, utterance’.
- ¹³ Thus, E. G. Browne writes: “Ahsanu’l-Kisas, another name for the Báb’s Commentary on the Sura-I-Yusuf, also called Kayyumu’l-Asma” (E. G. Browne, trans., *Tárikh-i-Jadíd: The new History of the Báb*. 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 2:398, (n 5)). See also E. G. Browne. Catalogue and Description of 27 Bábi MSS in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 11. (London: 1892), 261-268, 699-701;
- ¹⁴ M. M. Günsburg, V. Rosen, B. Dorn, K. Patkanov, J. Tchoubinof, *Collections Scientifiques*, 1: 179-191.
- ¹⁵ In chapter 53 (f. 111b) verses 52 and 53 of the given Surih are quoted, in chapter 54 (f. 113b) — also verse 53, in chapter 81 (f. 176b) — verses 80 и 81, in chapter 103 (f. 229b) — part of verse 103 and in chapter 104 — the end of verse 103 and verse 104.
- ¹⁶ W. A. Ivanow — a prominent Russian scholar, expert on the Persian Language and dialects as well as on Ismailism, who spent most of his life in emigration.
- ¹⁷ See E. G. Browne, *The Bábis of Persia* in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, New Series. (London: W.H. Allen & CO, 1889), 21: 921; E. G. Browne, trans., and ed., *A Traveller's Narrative written to illustrate the Episode of the Báb*. 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 2: 345-346.
- ¹⁸ See M. compte de Gobineau, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*, 3^e édit., (Paris: 1900); E. G. Browne, *ibid*, 2: 203.

- ¹⁹ See O. P. Shcheglova, Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Leningradskogo otdeleniia Instituta vostokovedeniia, 1: 213.
 - ²⁰ See V. R. Rosen Novii Bábidskiye rukopisi... (New Bábi Manuscripts...), #461 in Memoires de l'Academie imperiale des sciences de St.-Petersbourg, IV. (St.-Petersburg: Royal Academy of Sciences, 1889); M. M. Günzburg, V. Rosen, B. Dorn, K. Patkanov, J. Tchoubinof, Collections Scientifiques, 6:144.
 - ²¹ "d'une execution tres soignée".
 - ²² See O. P. Shcheglova, Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Vostochnogo otdela nauchnoi biblioteki Leningradskogo gos. Universiteta, 93.
 - ²³ O. P. Shcheglova, Persidskie i tadzikiye rukopisi Instituta Vostokovedeniia Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk, 1: 66-67.
 - ²⁴ For the former see M. M. Günzburg, V. Rosen, B. Dorn, K. Patkanov, J. Tchoubinof, Collections Scientifiques, 3: 32-51, for the latter – Ibid, 6:143.
 - ²⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán ("The Book of Certitude"): An academic translation from the original Persian into Russian, with an introduction, commentaries and a textological supplement by Y. A. Ioannesyan (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoye Vostokovedeniye, 2001).
 - ²⁶ A. G. Tumanski, Kitábe Akdes, XXVII-XXVIII.
 - ²⁷ M. M. Günzburg, V. Rosen, B. Dorn, K. Patkanov, J. Tchoubinof, Collections Scientifiques, 6: 243.
 - ²⁸ See V. R. Rosen, compiler, Sbornik poslanii babida Baháulláha (A Volume of Epistles of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bábi). (St.-Petersburg: Royal Academy of Sciences, 1908).
- The Volume is available at least in two libraries: the library of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies under the Russian Academy of Sciences and the library of the State University in Kazan (The Tatarstan Republic of the Russian Federation). We owe the information about the Volume in the University of Kazan to F. L. Sharifullina.
- ²⁹ "cet auteur toutefois ne saurait aucunement etre le Bab lui-meme, pourvu que le manuscrit precedent provienne reellement de la plume du reformateur" (M. M. Günzburg, V. Rosen, B. Dorn, K. Patkanov, J. Tchoubinof, *Collections Scientifiques*, 1: 191).
 - ³⁰ See *ibid*, 6:145-149.
 - ³¹ See E. G. Browne, Some Remarks on the Bábi Textes edited by Baron Victor Rosen in Vols. I and VI of the Collections Scientifiques de l'Institut des Langues Orientales de Saint-Petersbourg in Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. (London: published by the Society, 1892), 269, 273 (footnote).
 - ³² See V. R. Rosen, Sbornik poslanii babida Baháulláha, 1-82.
 - ³³ The title is translated as "Two Recent Bábi Revelations".

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- ³⁴ See O. P. Shcheglova, Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Leningradskogo otdeleniia Instituta vostokovedeniia, 1: 213.
- ³⁵ Abdu'l-Bahá, outside the Bahá'í community also known as Abbas Effendi (1844-1921) — Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son. In the Kitáb-i-Ahdí (Book of the Covenant) Bahá'u'lláh named Abdu'l-Bahá as his successor and the authorized Interpreter of his Writings.
- ³⁶ See O. P. Shcheglova, ibid, 1: 213-214.
- ³⁷ See O. P. Shcheglova, Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Vostochnogo otdela nauchnoi biblioteki Leningradslogo gos. Universiteta, 93.
- ³⁸ See E. G. Browne, trans., and ed., *A Traveller's Narrative written to illustrate the Episode of the Báb*, 2 vols.
- ³⁹ See O. P. Shcheglova, Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Leningradskogo otdeleniia Instituta vostokovedeniia, 1: 214.
- ⁴⁰ See O. P. Shcheglova, ibid.
- ⁴¹ The first letter of the second code is Cyrillic.
- ⁴² See O. P. Shcheglova, Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Vostochnogo otdela nauchnoi biblioteki Leningradslogo gos. Universiteta, 93.
- ⁴³ See E. G. Browne, trans., *Tárikh-i-Jadíd: The new History of the Báb*. 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893).
- ⁴⁴ A. G. Tumanski. K Voprosu ob avtorakh istoriyi babidov izvestnoy pod imenem Tarikh-i-Manukchi ili Tarikh-i-Jadid (On the question of the authorship of the History of the Bábí's known as Tarikh-i-Manukchi or Tarikh-i-Jadid — in Memoires de l'Academie imperiale des sciences de St.-Petersbourg, ed. Baron V. R. Rosen, 8: 33-45.
- ⁴⁵ See O. P. Shcheglova, Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Leningradskogo otdeleniia Instituta vostokovedeniia, 1: 216.
- ⁴⁶ See O. P. Shcheglova, ibid, 1: 215.
- ⁴⁷ See O. P. Shcheglova, ibid, 1: 216.
- ⁴⁸ See O. P. Shcheglova, ibid, 1: 216.
- ⁴⁹ The letter of the code is in Cyrillic.
- ⁵⁰ See O. P. Shcheglova. Katalog litografirovannykh knig na Persidskom iazyke v sobranii Vostochnogo otdela nauchnoi biblioteki Leningradslogo gos. Universiteta, 94.
- ⁵¹ This Tablet was addressed to Jalil-i-Khu'I (W. Momen. *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989), 122.
- ⁵² This Tablet was revealed in honor of Ustad 'Alí-Akbar, a martyr of Yazd (W. Momen, ibid, 221).
- ⁵³ This Tablet was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in honor of Haji Mírzá Haydar-'Alí (W. Momen, ibid, 126).

Origins of the Bahá'í Concept of Unity and Causality

A Brief Survey of Greek, Neoplatonic, and Islamic Underpinnings

B.R. Khadem

Introduction and Overview

Though the Bahá'í writings are explicit and, in important regards, unique in their exposition of the concept of unity, the Bahá'í conception is not without significant historical and intellectual precedent. This essay attempts to highlight several of the more prominent of these underpinnings by considering, however summarily, the history of the concept of unity (and its inseparable counterpart: the concept of causality) as it developed in ancient Greek thought, Neoplatonism, and, subsequently, in Islamic philosophy and mysticism.

In particular, the following points are discussed: (1) the Greek account of the eternity of being and of God as the Sun of Reality; (2) the Neoplatonic account of creation by way of emanation; (3) the accounts of various Muslim thinkers (particularly Fárábí, al-Ghazálí, Suhrawardí, and Ibn 'Arabí) joining the concepts of creation and revelation and introducing an account of the unity of being by way of the names and attributes of God; (4) the anomaly of Ibn Rushd in the post-Ghazálí Islamic world, his resurrection of Aristotelianism, and his significant impact upon Europe; (5) the Bahá'í concept of unity, its inheritance and systematization of the insights of its intellectual predecessors (particularly that of Ibn 'Arabí), its distinction in establishing the Manifestation of God, rather than God, *per se*, as the ground of the unity of being, and its implications in light of the Bahá'í assertion that the Supreme Manifestation has appeared.

It should be noted that, in relying upon several primary Greek sources, the Qur'an, and secondary sources on Islamic philosophy,¹ this paper seeks to provide an introductory and cursory overview of the respective treatments of this problematic, as a prelude to further study. As such, it makes no attempt to undertake a thorough, let alone detailed, review of Islamic philosophy, nor does it attempt to detail the social history of the flow of ideas through the three contexts.

Background: the Basic Problem of Being

Before considering the question of unity, and the multiple historical accounts thereof, brief consideration should be given to the even more fundamental problem of “being.” One of the earliest and most historically influential formulations of this problematic can be found in the writings of the Ancient Greeks, consisting, essentially, of the following debate: although Parmenides and Plato argued that only universals *are*, Aristotle disagreed, arguing that only particulars (ultimate subjects) *are*. Though this debate remained largely unresolved in the Islamic world, certain thinkers — such as Ibn Sina and Suhrawardī — provided a resolution through the merging of the two elements: the doctrine of the particularity of essences (i.e. doctrine of the individual soul).

Parmenides and Plato: Being is Universal

Of the Greek thinkers, one of the earliest extant accounts of being is that of Parmenides (d. 515 BC). The essential problematic he dealt with was the following: amidst this world of things that are constantly changing (e.g. birth, growth, death), on what ground can one assert that anything *is*? In other words, how can identity (the endurance of being) be predicated on something that is never the same from moment to moment? Parmenides made a decisive distinction: That which “*becomes and perishes*,” which “*alters its place*” and “*changes its shining*,” is the “*illusion (Greek: *doxa*) of mortals, in which there is no true belief*.”² In contrast, the way of truth (Greek: *alethea*) is the way of the totality-of-being (Greek: *estin*) which is:

not-generated, imperishable, whole, sole-of-its-kind . . . is now at once all one . . . And never will the force of belief say that from being something became besides it . . . For if it became, it is not, nor is it if some time it will be. Thus generation is extinguished and destruction is not-to-be-heard. Nor is it divisible . . . it rests in itself.³

His students, the Eleatics, radicalized this teaching in such a way as to lay the ground for a reaction by Plato. While agreeing with Parmenides that there is only *doxa* with respect to that-which-changes, they further asserted that such things (are)⁴ non-beings. Only eternals (the sun, the gods, etc) *are*.

At first, Plato’s (d. 347 BC) account of being, in Book VI of *Politeia*, seems to confirm the Eleatic orthodoxy of the non-being of the particular. Inquiring into the essence of rightness (Greek: *dikaē*), he agrees that particular things — “the many” — are constantly changing and (are) therefore not beings proper. However, he departs

from the Eleatics in his declaration of what is being. Though “the many” are not beings, “*according to one idéa of each as one being, we proclaim ‘what is’ each.*”⁵ Thus, being proper pertains to the single, universal, and unchanging *idéa* (i.e. “looks,” “forms,” or, as called in later philosophy, “archetypes”) that unify the many particulars. For instance, though the particular trees in a given grove are not beings, they are illusory copies of the one true tree – which is an *idéa*.

Aristotle: Being is Particular

Aristotle (d. 322 BC) objects. He explains that “[b]eingness, as said in the most decisive and first and foremost sense, is what neither is said about anything underlying, nor is in anything underlying.”⁶ Restated positively, being is said of ultimate subjects and not of predicates.

This effectively turns Plato’s conception of being on its head. Only particular things, “the many,” the “each,” are ultimate subjects.⁷ Conversely, “that which prevails on the whole” (precisely the universal *idéa*) are always predicated on particulars.⁸ Thus, being lies in the particular thing, of which the *idéa* is a predicate or attribute.

Aristotle, however, does not discount the being of the *idéa* entirely. He explains that the distinctive and essential attribute of each particular being is its *idéa*. It is only through perceiving “the prior” (the being’s *idéa*) that the “posterior” (the particular being) can be truly understood. Without perception of the prior, “what is perceptible and first to each is often only slightly perceptible, and has hold of little or nothing of what is.” He employs an example: because the point is the *idéa* of (is prior to) the line or surface, true knowledge of a surface amounts to the understanding that it is a collection of points.⁹

Islamic Thinkers: Bridge of Universal and Particular

At the heart of this difference between Plato and Aristotle is a disagreement as to the most fundamental criteria of being: constancy vs. uniqueness. The Greeks presented these two criteria as mutually exclusive because they assumed that the *idéa* are universals (e.g. in a grove of trees, all trees are copies of *the one universal idéa of tree*).

Though this debate was largely unresolved in the Islamic world,¹⁰ certain thinkers, including Ibn Sina (d. 1037) and Sohrevardi (d. 1191), advanced the doctrine of the *particularity* of the *idéa*. Ibn Sina, in critiquing the Platonic doctrine of the *idéa*, explains that the universals exist in particular embodiments.¹¹ Sohrevardi, similarly, suggests that the *idéa* are not single prototypes of a multitude of

particulars; they may, rather, be embodied in particular representations.¹²

In other words, to each particular being corresponds a particular *idéa* distinct from the *idéa* of others of the same species (e.g. in a grove of trees, each tree has its own *idéa*; similarly, all men do not share the same soul but each man has an individual soul). This resolves Plato and Aristotle's dispute by adopting both of their criteria. Plato was correct to assert that what truly *is* about a being is its *idéa*, which *idéa* yet fulfills Aristotle's requirement of ultimate subjectivity because it is not common to the entire species but, rather, is unique to this particular member of the species.

The Unity of Being

On what ground, if any, can the multiplicity of beings in the world be considered not merely as a sum but as a *totality* (i.e. one being, a unity)? This question necessarily invokes the question of causality, which, in turn, invokes the question of God.

Greek Doctrine of the Eternity of the World (*Fusis*)

Though later philosophy asserted that the multiplicity of beings were together as one in the mind of a creative God, the ancient Greeks did not conceptualize God as a creator. Rather, their notion was that God, like the sun, causes the movement of all beings, but does not thereby create anything. Parmenides explains that Estin (the totality of being) is "not-generated [from without] [for] how and whence would it have grown? Out of not-being...it is neither sayable nor thinkable."¹³ Similarly, nowhere in Plato is a creative God asserted,¹⁴ merely the Supreme *idéa* (Greek: *tou-agathou-idean*) Who "holds-above far beyond" all other *idéa* and is their Unmoved Mover.¹⁵ Nor does Aristotle assert the being of a creator-God; the closest he comes to it is asserting that "all things are either ground or from a ground."¹⁶ The implication is that those beings that are themselves grounds are not from a further ground, therefore being groundless (uncreated).¹⁷

Rather, the Greeks accounted for the oneness of being through the doctrine of the totality-of-being (Greek: *fusis*) whereby the totality of being, though moved by God, generates itself eternally. Though the sun provides the energy needed for nature to endure, it does not on that account create nature — rather, nature perpetuates itself. Parmenides explains that *fusis* is "**whole**, sole-of-its-kind...is now at once all **one** . . . Nor is it divisible...it rests in itself" (emphasis added).¹⁸ Aristotle confirms, "nothing is without order in *fusis* because *fusis* itself is to **all things** a cause of order" (emphasis added).¹⁹ Thus, *fusis* is the account of the plurality of beings as one being (a totality).

However, Aristotle raised initial arguments against this account of the unity of being. First, by extension of his argument with Plato regarding the *idéa* are merely attributes,²⁰ he objects to the being of an alleged "Supreme *idéa*." Further, he argues that it is impossible to classify the totality of being under the master genus of "Being" (*fusis*). Despite his convoluted explanation,²¹ the heart of his argument is compelling: "Being" itself is indefinable because every definition must always already pre-suppose being (every definition takes the form of "X is Y"). Therefore, Being cannot be an ultimate genus (i.e. classification, definition).

Having objected to the two central elements of the Greek account of the unity of being (the Supreme Mover and *fusis*), Aristotle asks: "Then in what sense are different things called good?" He offers another account, suggesting, albeit tentatively, the "analogy of being." He explains: "[the good of beings] do not seem to be a case of homonymy by chance ... Perhaps it is by way of analogy: that is, as sight is good in the body, so intelligence is good in the soul, and similarly another thing in something else."²²

In the end, however, Aristotle retracts this argument. Having found no basis for any such analogy, he explains, "this question must be dismissed for the present." With no other way to legitimize a pursuit of the "Science of Being," he simply assumes that there is a Supreme Being, one that he at times describes as self-thinking Thought (Greek: *Nous Noesis*), and at others as the Unmoved Mover that moves all beings through the attractive power of love (Greek: *eros*).²³

The Neoplatonist Doctrine of Creation

The concept of creation, distinct from that of *fusis*, asserts that God ("the First") is the creator of all beings. This concept of a Creator-God was present in the Judaic tradition (Book of Genesis) and continued in the early Christian tradition (Book of John). A subsequent bastion of this thinking was Gnosticism, which was decisive in disseminating the doctrine, particularly from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD.²⁴

The influence of these three currents of thought (Judaic, Greek, Gnostic) upon Platonism²⁵ resulted in Neoplatonism, a syncretism of ancient Greek and Judeo-Christian thinking.²⁶ As Plotinus (d. 269) and Proclus (d. 485) both explain, God, through His self-contemplation, emanated (created) the First Reason, which in turn emanated a sequence of further Reasons through a series of similar acts of contemplation. Each of these Reasons has created a particular celestial realm, the last of which created the entire world of nature. Thus, it is important to note that God, as the First in the series of causation, does not directly create the world of nature, nor

can it be deduced that He necessarily “intervenes” (or even knows of) the happenings of particular beings in the contingent realm (i.e. in time and history). The eternal is bifurcated from the historical.

Significantly, this account results in an ambiguity that speaks, at least partially, to Aristotle’s objections. Beings are *not* unified under the master genus of Being because, as Proclus explains, the First (God) is not a being. Rather, the First (is) featureless and nameless, exalted above categories of sensible and intelligible beings, and can only be inferred from perusal of the first caused being (Reason).²⁷

However, viewed from the perspective of the First Reason, the totality of being *is* unified under the master category of Being because the First Reason is itself a being (created). Proclus explains that “[a]ll things are found in the First Reason, since the First Agent has made this product to contain many Forms and each of these Forms to contain all the particular objects corresponding to that form.”²⁸ Hence, all beings exist as a totality in God’s Intelligence, and their creation lies precisely in their *existence* (the Greek-appropriated Latin word “*ex-sistere*” means “to cause to stand outside of”). The apparent diversity of creation is due merely to the divinely-ordained differences of dispositions of creatures, resulting in varying degrees of reception of the *single, uniform* outpouring.²⁹

Islamic Thinkers

Fárábí

Fárábí (d. 950), a Sufi and “philosopher,” was one of the first Islamic thinkers to expound an explicit theory of the unity of being. Without doubt, one of the most important contributions he made to the concept was his distinction between necessary and contingent³⁰ being. Meditating upon the Qur’anic articulation of the utter transcendence, unity, and independence of God, Fárábí explained that, while God is a being who is “necessary-in-Himself,” all other beings are “necessary-through-Another” (this can be loosely understood as “contingent”). This distinction amounts to a preservation of the unity of God by way of his exclusive right to an entire ontological domain.

Further, adapting the Neo-Platonist scheme, Fárábí explains that God, through an act of Self-contemplation, emanates the First Intellect.³¹ Through contemplation of its Author, the First Intellect emanates the Second Intellect, and through self-contemplation, it emanates the outermost heaven. The process continues until ten Intellects and the specific heavenly spheres are emanated, the last of which creates the terrestrial world, in which Man stands at the apex.³²

However, in attempting to propose an authentically Islamic doctrine, Fárábí makes a significant departure from the pre-Islamic account of emanation. Specifically, he attributes to this Tenth Intellect not only the capacities of creation, but also revelation. Thus, he equates this Intellect with the Angel of Revelation, Gabriel.

al-Ghazálí's Critique

Hamid al-Ghazálí (d. 1111) vehemently objected to certain features of Neoplatonic thinking, particularly as articulated by Fárábí (and by his successor, Ibn Sina).³³ One of his chief criticisms of the emanation scheme was that it denies God's quality of omniscience as postulated in the Qur'an. The concept of God as "Self-Thinking Thought" suggests that God's knowledge is limited to Himself or, at most, to the First Intelligence, which is the only being that directly emanates from Him. The scheme does not suggest that God knows all of the beings that emanate further down in the chain – including, for instance, particular terrestrial beings. However, the Qur'an explains that *nothing* escapes God's knowledge, not even "the smallest particle in heaven or on earth."³⁴

Further, he argues that the Neo-Platonist assertion of separate chains of independent causation is at odds with God's absolute power and prerogative to act freely. In other words, God is the only being with will – He causes everything, directly. Though it may appear that other beings have agency to effectuate effects, such effects were in truth pre-ordained by God and only correlated with the particular agents.

Simultaneously, Ghazálí objects to the ancient Greek and Neo-Platonist assertions of the eternity of the world, which he views as an arbitrary limitation on God's power. He argues that, according to the Qur'an, God created the creation out of absolute nothingness (creation *ex nihilo*) – i.e., creation *happened in time* because at one point there was nothing and only at a later point was there something.³⁵ Causation is temporal.

al-Ghazálí's Proposal

While opposing the Neoplatonic account of the unity of being, Ghazálí offered an alternative account, which proved to be particularly influential in subsequent Islamic mystical and philosophical thinking. For starters, he confirms the general equation that Fárábí attempted – namely that God is a *Revealer*. However, whereas Fárábí attributed this power of revelation to an intelligence that was ten steps "removed" from God, Ghazálí's account is more radical: God, Himself, acts as a revealer. This effectively replaced all of the emanated intelligences with a God Who intervenes with, and sustains the unity of, His creation through

historical revelations. Along these lines, he explains that “the Qur’an and other revealed scriptures are the expression of” the (Neo-Platonic) intelligible world.³⁶

Having dismissed the demonstrative complexity of Neo-Platonist emanation with this single stroke, he offers, instead, an account of the unity of being that simply asserts the relative *nothingness* of creation. He employs the symbolic language of light and love. For instance, in his commentary on the Qur’anic verse depicting God as the light of heaven and earth,³⁷ he explains that light applies to God primarily and to all else only derivatively. He declares. “there is *no* being in the world other than God ...everything other than He ...is pure nonbeing ...and is perishing eternally and everlastingly.”³⁸

Suhrawardí

Suhrawardí was deeply influenced by Ghazálí’s account. As a youth, he entered the Sufi path and is known to have studied Ghazálí’s *Mishqat al-Anwar*, which inspired him with important elements of his light imagery. Thus, typical of Suhrawardí’s account is a depiction of the essence of all beings as lights originating from the love of the Light of Lights.³⁹

However, despite his adherence to these elements of Ghazálí’s account, Suhrawardí departed from it in other respects, such as his “revival” of the Neoplatonist doctrine of emanation. Suhrawardí elaborated upon this doctrine, delineating various levels of reality that emanate from God. In particular, he proposes the following order of emanation: God, the world of pure Intelligences (*jabarut*), the world of pure lights (*malakut*), the world of the fixed archetypes, and the material world (*mulk*).

Ibn ‘Arabí

Ibn Arabí’s conception of the unity of being is often recognized as the most mature and subtle of accounts amongst the great Islamic thinkers and mystics. While there is no question that he made important new contributions to this concept, it should also be recognized that he benefited from, and utilized, conceptual features elaborated upon by his predecessors. As this section will explain, Ibn ‘Arabí’s account employs the following concepts that preceded him: the distinction between necessary and contingent being (*Fárábí*), emanation (Neo-platonism, *Fárábí*, Suhrawardí), the realm of the fixed archetypes (Suhrawardí). Further, Ibn ‘Arabí employs poetic imagery that can be traced to Hallaj (e.g. the mirror metaphor) and Junayd al-Baghdadi (e.g. the shadow metaphor, discussed by Junayd in connection with an individual’s attainment of the last of the four stages of *tawhid*).

To begin with, Ibn ‘Arabí, in his *Fusus al-Hikam*, makes the ontological premise that the essence of every being in creation is

that it is a *name*. He posits this based upon the observation that, linguistically, the Arabic words for “world” (*‘alim*), “knowledge” (*‘elm*), and “sign” (*‘alama*) all derive from the same root (*‘a-l-m*). Furthermore, the Qur’án’s Surah of the Fath pluralizes “world” in the grammatical form of a sentient being (*‘alemin*). These observations lead him to conclude that all beings are, essentially, both means to the knowledge of God (i.e. names) and are actively engaged in pursuing the knowledge of God (i.e. sentient).

Upon this foundation, Ibn ‘Arabí proposes a scheme of creation by way of emanation (despite the efforts of al-Ghazálí, Ibn ‘Arabí succeeds in fixing the emanation scheme in subsequent mystical accounts of being). He explains that, in primordial, pre-eternity, God existed alone – represented by the first part of the Hadith, “I was a Hidden Treasure.” Here, God is most properly called *al-Haqq*, which, as a concept, does not allow for Lordship, because He did not yet create any subject-worshippers.

Next emanated the Fayd al-Aqdas (Most Holy Outpouring), which represents the existence, in His knowledge, of the archetypes of all things. These archetypes (*a’yan*) correspond to the totality of all the names and are eternal precisely because they do not exist in the visible realm of death and decay. This Outpouring can be understood as corresponding to the second sentence of the same Hadith, “I desired to be known.” Elsewhere, he equates this First Emanation with the Reality of Muḥammad (*al-Haqiqa al-Muḥammadiya*), which both created the creation and communicates God’s will to the world historically. He explains that this Reality refers not to the historic person of Muḥammad, but rather the eternal spirit that animated *all* the prophets from Adam through Muḥammad, of which Muḥammad was the fullest.⁴⁰

The third stage is the Fayd al-Muqaddas (the Holy Outpouring), which is the emanation of all created things in the visible realm, each of which corresponding to a single archetype. This is represented by the last sentence of the Hadith, “Therefore I created the creation in order to be known.” God, in this respect, is most properly designated as “Alláh,” because of his Lordship over these particular subjects.

This scheme of creation has important implications. Firstly, the purpose of creation is not for God to reveal Himself to man, but for God to reveal Himself to Himself. Second, the creation is the perfect receptacle for the emanation of these names and attributes (as Ibn ‘Arabí explains, it has the perfect *isti’dad* – the command “*Kon*” is perfectly in harmony with the response of “*Yakun*”). To say the same, the entire creation can be likened to a mirror, *reflecting* the light of the sun. Third, man has a very special status amongst the creation, because, as Ibn ‘Arabí explains in his first chapter of the

Fusus al Hikam, to Adam was taught the names and attributes of all things, earning him the designation of “*al-Insan al-Kamil*.” Therefore, man, amongst the entire creation, can be the fullest reflection of God and the fullest means of God revealing Himself to Himself. For this reason, the entire cosmos is referred to as the “*Insan al-Kabir*” – i.e. a macrocosm of man.

From these considerations, the implications regarding the Unity of Being become quite plain and clear. Given the scheme above, God is the *only* necessary being (*wajib al-wujud*); all else is contingent being (*mumkin al-wujud*). Thus, with respect to God, all other beings *are not*; but with respect to themselves, they *are*, inasmuch as they are reflections or shadows of God. It is clear, therefore, that Ibn ‘Arabí’s account of the Unity of Being does not imply that man can achieve union (*ittisal*) with God, nor that created beings are non-beings in an absolute sense. While the multiple beings of creation *are*, their mode of being is that of a shadow or reflection of God – the sole being and the ultimate ground of the unity of being.⁴¹

Ibn Rushd

In opposition to the “mystical shift” in the thinking of the Muslim world, exemplified in the thinking of figures such as al-Ghazálí and Ibn ‘Arabí, Ibn Rushd attempted a rejuvenation of philosophy in general, and of an account of the unity of being, in particular, through a comprehensive refutation of both the Neoplatonists (i.e. Fárábí and Ibn Sina) and al-Ghazálí. While acknowledging that the Neoplatonist emanation scheme is reconcilable with Plato, he argues that it distorts the teachings of Aristotle. Such a scheme analogizes God’s agency to contingent agency, suggesting that God can create only one effect. This, however, places a false limitation on Divine power, which, in principle, is capable of creating everything directly.⁴²

His refutation of al-Ghazálí (in the sarcastically entitled *Tahafut-al-Tahafut*), undertakes a systematic rebuttal of the assertions in al-Ghazálí’s *Tahafut*. For instance, regarding Ghazálí’s gripe with the Neoplatonists over the question of God’s knowledge, Ibn Rushd claims that the entire debate is moot; both parties are guilty of ascribing human modes of attributes and knowledge to God. In truth, God’s attributes and knowledge are utterly transcendent and categorically unknowable, inasmuch as “*the First Being knows the nature of particular beings through that Being per se, Who is Himself.*”⁴³

Similarly, he argues against al-Ghazálí’s (and the Ash‘arites’) purported refutation of the will of created beings, explaining that such a proposition is self-defeating because it nullifies the concept

of action altogether. Further, repudiating causality is tantamount to repudiating knowledge, because knowledge is the act of eliciting the causes underlying a given process. This, further, amounts to a rejection of the notion of a wise Creator Who creates knowable patterns in the creation by which He can be known.⁴⁴

Ibn Rushd also rebuts al-Ghazálí's criticism of the thesis of the eternity of the creation, arguing that the Qur'an does not postulate that God's creation of the universe was temporal (i.e. it doesn't say that God existed together with non-being, and subsequently the world came into being after it was not). In effect, Ibn Rushd rejects the standard Christian and Muslim view of creation *ex nihilo*, adopting, instead, Aristotle's account – "*the least doubtful and most congruent with the nature of being*"⁴⁵ – which account asserts the eternity of the world with respect to its potentiality. Though God did *create* all beings, as the Qur'an postulates, this creation amounted to God's giving form to eternally pre-existing matter.

Though Ibn Rushd's thesis of rationalism and Aristotelianism had little influence in the post-Ghazálí Islamic world, it had a considerable following in Europe. In the thirteenth century, his works were translated into Hebrew and Latin, becoming, thereby, a substantial part of Europe's Aristotelian heritage. His Western devotees included: Maimonides, Siger de Brabant, Moses ben Tibbon, Hermann the German, the "Averroesites" in the University of Paris, Levi ben Gerson, Albert the Great, and, most notably, Saint Thomas Aquinas.⁴⁶

The effects of this Aristotelianism significantly modified the concept of causality. In short, thirteenth century Christian theologians recast the teaching of creation according to Aristotle's description of God as *Nous Noesis* (self-thinking Thought), resulting in the doctrine that creation proceeds specifically from God's *thinking* (Latin: *ratio*, reason). The consequence: *all beings are thoughts of God*. To say the same: all beings have a ratio (reason); all beings are essentially intelligible.⁴⁷ The intelligibility of beings, in turn, legitimizes science and technique as the means of uncovering those beings. Several centuries later, Leibnitz (d. 1716) articulates the fullest expression of this doctrine as the Principle of Sufficient Reason: "*nihil est sine ratione*" – nothing *is* without a ground, or, stated positively: all that *is* is grounded in reason (*everything* has a ground).⁴⁸ Here, the departure from Aristotle⁴⁹ is quite evident: even those beings that are grounds must, themselves, be grounded. The impossibility of an infinite regress of causes requires the being of an ultimate, *self-grounding* ground (God).

Initial Reflections on the Bahá'í Synthesis

Inheritance and Systematization of Previous Concepts

It is clear, upon an even cursory review of the Bahá'í writings, that numerous elements of the aforementioned intellectual heritage have been incorporated into the Bahá'í concept of the unity of being. As a starting point, it should be noted that the Bahá'í account preserves the Ancient Greek insight regarding the eternity of the universe, enshrined in the Greek concept of *Fusis*:

If we could imagine a time when no beings existed, this imagination would be the denial of the Divinity of God. . . If the beings were absolutely nonexistent, existence would not have come into being. Therefore, as the Essence of Unity (that is, the existence of God) is everlasting and eternal – that is to say, it has neither beginning nor end – it is certain that this world of existence, this endless universe, has neither beginning nor end. (SAQ part IV)

Simultaneously, Bahá'í writings preserve the seemingly opposite, theological concept of creation *ex nihilo*, espoused by the likes of al Ghazálí:

All praise to the unity of God . . . Who, out of utter nothingness, hath created the reality of all things, Who, from naught, hath brought into being the most refined and subtle elements of His creation....How could it, otherwise, have been possible for sheer nothingness to have acquired by itself the worthiness and capacity to emerge from its state of non-existence into the realm of being? (GWB 65)

This apparent contradiction – simultaneous acceptance of the eternity of the universe, on the one hand, and God's creation of the universe from nothingness, on the other, is addressed by Bahá'u'lláh explicitly in the Tablet of Wisdom: “Wert thou to assert that [the universe] hath ever existed and shall continue to exist, it would be true; or wert thou to affirm the same concept as is mentioned in the sacred Scriptures, no doubt would there be about it.” (TB 140)

Secondly, the Bahá'í conception adopts the concept of creation by way of emanation, which concept was first encountered in the Neoplatonist scheme and, despite the efforts of al-Ghazálí, persisted amongst numerous of the great Muslim thinkers. More particularly, the Bahá'í conception generally confirms the point made by Fárábí, that the source of creation is also the source of revelation. However, whereas both the Neoplatonist and Muslim emanationists espoused a scheme of creation by way of a lengthy and somewhat mechanical ordering of emanated Intelligences, the Bahá'í writings, perhaps

lending some credence to the spirit of al-Ghazálí's critique, seem to avoid excessive nitpicking regarding the details of this scheme. Numerous expositions of this scheme have, nevertheless, been presented in the Bahá'í writings, perhaps the most prominent of which focus on the concept of the Primal Will as the first emanation from God and the direct agent involved in creation.

Thirdly, the Bahá'í writings adopt several of the essential features of Ibn 'Arabí's particular account of the unity of being, including the notion that all beings are essentially names and attributes and that Man represents the consummation of these names and attributes.

Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty.
(GWB 64)

'Arabí's claim that all beings are simultaneously means of, and engaged in, the knowledge of God, seems to be echoed in the Bahá'í Writings:

*[A]ll things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, **indicateth, and is expressive of**, the knowledge of God. So potent and universal is this revelation, that it hath encompassed all things visible and invisible.* (GWB 177, emphasis added)

Distinct Features of the Bahá'í Account

While confirming numerous features of Ibn 'Arabí's account, one of the important points distinguishing the Bahá'í account seems to be its explicit assertion that these names and attributes are not, strictly speaking, of God, but, rather, are of the Manifestations of God.

*Man, the noblest and most perfect of all created things, excelleth them all in the intensity of this revelation, and is a fuller expression of its glory. And of all men, the most accomplished, the most distinguished, and the most excellent are the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth. Nay, **all else besides these Manifestations, live by the operation of Their Will, and move and have their being through the outpourings of Their grace.***
(GWB 177, emphasis added)

Similarly,

[b]y the revelation of these Gems of Divine virtue [the Manifestations] all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty, and grace, are made manifest. (GWB 46, emphasis added)

The justification for declaring that the Manifestation of God, rather than God, is the ground of the unity of being seems to derive from the prior conception of God's utter transcendence:

He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men. . . The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace. (GWB 46)

Indeed, precisely because of God's transcendence and consequent inaccessibility to Man, God

hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence. (GWB 46)

Even more succinctly, “[t]he Unseen can in no wise incarnate His Essence and reveal it unto men. He Who is everlastingly hidden from the eyes of men **can never be known except through His Manifestation**” (GWB XX, emphasis added).

However, the radical import of grounding the unity of being in the Manifestation (rather than in God *per se*) cannot be appreciated without reference to the particular teleological view of history espoused in the Bahá’í writings. The Bahá’í writings, of course, assert that history consists of universal cycles that are unimaginably long in duration, consisting of “innumerable and incalculable periods and epochs,” at the end of each of which “not a trace or record of it will remain.” (SAQ 160-2) Each universal cycle, in turn, consists of two phases: an age of prophecy and an age of fulfillment, the former of which is characterized by “Prophets” or “Manifestations of God,” and the latter of which is characterized by a single, “great and supreme Manifestation” who “makes the world the center of His radiance” and whose “appearance causes the world to attain to maturity.” (SAQ 160-2) Though other Manifestations arise during an age of fulfillment, their role is derivative: they “renew certain commandments relating to material questions and affairs, while remaining under His shadow.” (SAQ 160-2)

Further, the Bahá'í writings are unequivocal in asserting that this most radical of all possible historical events – the appearance of the Supreme Manifestation and therefore the essential consummation of history – has now taken place:

O ye that inhabit the heavens and the earth! There hath appeared what hath never previously appeared. He Who, from everlasting, had concealed His Face from the sight of creation is now come. (GWB XIV)

Further,

It is evident that every age in which a Manifestation of God hath lived is divinely ordained, and may, in a sense, be characterized as God's appointed Day. 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. (GWB XXV)

And, as 'Abdul-Bahá has stated so simply: “We are in the cycle which began with Adam, and its supreme Manifestation is Bahá'u'lláh.” (SAQ 160-2)

Though far beyond the scope of this paper, there can be no doubt that, given this conception of history, the Bahá'í concept of the unity of being is laden with implications unprecedented in the Greek, Neoplatonic, or Islamic intellectual forbears. The understanding of these implications are therefore now part of the current and future labors of thought for Bahá'í thinkers. Given the Bahá'í grounding of the concept of unity of being in the Manifestation of God rather than in God *per se*, and given the assertion of the appearance of the Supreme Manifestation, then the general concept of the essence of all beings as names, attributes, and referents to the “Manifestations” must now be re-thought specifically and pointedly with reference to the “Supreme Manifestation.” The very notion of unity, previously a possibility that existed within the confounds of the relation between a historic nation and its particular Prophet, must now be re-thought in light of a Supreme Manifestation who has appeared to fulfill mankind at large and all of the kingdoms of creation in general. Similarly, the concept of a Manifestation as emanation, emanator, and creator must be re-thought in light of Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation that “*through a word spoken by [God] in this Revelation, all created things were made to expire, and through yet another word, all such as [God] didst wish were, by [His] grace and bounty, endued with*

new life," (PM 42) and that "*We have caused every soul to expire ... [w]e have, then, called into being a new creation.*" (GWB XIV)

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to account for certain aspects of the intellectual history underpinning the Bahá'í account of the unity of being while pointing, however initially, to some of the ways in which the Bahá'í account seems to depart, perhaps radically, from all prior conceptions. In doing so, the present author has hoped to shed light on the richness and diversity of elements contributing to the Bahá'í conception, while showing that the Bahá'í account is in no way a mere sum of these prior conceptions.

It has been argued, in brief, that the Bahá'í account confirms both the Ancient Greek notion of the eternity of the universe and the theological account of creation *ex nihilo*; that it upholds but simplifies the Neoplatonic conception of creation via emanation; that it confirms the general Islamic identification of the source of creation with the source of revelation; and that it employs many of the central features of Ibn 'Arabí's account of the unity of being by way of the universal reflection of divine names and attributes.

Perhaps more importantly, this paper has argued that the Bahá'í conception seems to rest upon a ground that is unprecedented in all prior accounts: the conception of the Manifestation of God in every age as both the cause of beings and the object of their reflection, and the radical assertion that we, in our current age and in very recent times, have witnessed the historic happening of the most weighty of all possible events: the appearance on the terrestrial plane of the Supreme Manifestation. As the Ground of Grounds and the Causes of Causes, the Supreme Manifestation has, with a single stroke, destroyed the creation of old, and along with it all prior limitations and possibilities, and has raised up a new creation endowed with unprecedented and hitherto unimagined possibilities for the reflection, by the totality of being, of the divine attributes and names.

NOTES

¹ English quotations of the works of the Islamic thinkers cited in this paper are largely drawn from the translations of Majid Fakhry. See, generally, Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (1983).

² Parmenides, *Fragments*, No. 8.

³ Parmenides, *Fragments*, No. 8.

⁴ This paper parenthesizes conjugations of the verb "to be" whenever the sentence employing this verb predicates non-being upon its subject.

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- ⁵ Plato, *Politea*, Book V, line 507(b).
- ⁶ Aristotle, *Categories*, Book V, ch. ii, (a)(11-18).
- ⁷ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VII, ch. xiii, 1038 (b)(10).
- ⁸ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VIII, ch. xiii, 1038 (b)(35). See also Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book I, ch. vi, 5 (explaining that the *logos* of "Man" and of "this man" are the same and, therefore, the *idéa* of man is not separate from the particular man but, rather, belongs to each particular man).
- ⁹ See, e.g., Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VII, ch. iv, 1029 (b)(3-13).
- ¹⁰ For instance, Ibn Arabí's account of the "Fixed Archetypes" (Ayaneh Thabiteh) in his *Fusus al-Hikam* is largely a reiteration of the Platonic account of the universality of the *idéa*.
- ¹¹ Ibn Sina, *al-Shifa*, at 290.
- ¹² Sohrevardi, *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, at 92.
- ¹³ Parmenides, *Fragments*, No.8.
- ¹⁴ In this connection, Plato's *Timeus*, suggesting a creator-god (demiurge), must be overlooked because it is a mythological, not philosophical, depiction.
- ¹⁵ Plato, *Politea*, Book V, line 509(b).
- ¹⁶ Aristotle, *Physics*, Book III, ch.iv, 200(b)(5).
- ¹⁷ To say the same, though Aristotle explains that the grounds for any being consists in "the four causes," nowhere does he assert that the "four causes" themselves have a cause.
- ¹⁸ Parmenides, *Fragments*, No. 8.
- ¹⁹ Aristotle, *Physics*, Book VIII, ch.i, 252(a)(22).
- ²⁰ See Plato, *Politea*, Books IV and V. Contrast with Aristotle, *Categories*, Book V, ch. ii, (a)(11-18); Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VII, ch. xiii, 1038 (b)(10); Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VIII, ch. xiii, 1038 (b)(35); Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book I, ch. vi, 5 (explaining that the *logos* of "Man" and of "this man" are the same and, therefore, the *idéa* of man is not separate from the particular man but, rather, belongs to each particular man); Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VII, ch. iv, 1029 (b)(3-13).
- ²¹ He explains that for a genus to exist, it must contain different species, which difference requires differentia which themselves *are*. Thus, if we attribute *being* to the differentia, then there is no difference between the species and the genus, and therefore the purported genus of "being" is not a genus. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book III, ch.iii, 998(b)(17-29).
- ²² Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book I, ch.vi, 12.
- ²³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book XII, ch.vii, 1072(a)(25).
- ²⁴ See generally Jonas, Hans, *The Gnostic Religion*.
- ²⁵ For an account of Platonism, see Paper Section III(B), below.
- ²⁶ A major factor in this syncretism was "the introduction of the Jewish Scriptures into Greek intellectual circles via the translation known

as the *Septuagint*. The encounter between the creation narrative of Genesis and the cosmology of Plato's *Timaeus* set in motion a long tradition of cosmological theorizing that finally culminated in the grand schema of Plotinus' *Enneads*." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

²⁷ Proclus, *Liber de Causis*, Proposition 5.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ Proclus, *Liber de Causis*, Propositions 19, 21, and 23.

³⁰ See Madkour, Ibrahim, "al Fārābī," in *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, Sharif, Muḥammad, ed., pp.450-460.

³¹ *Id.* at 115 (citing Fārābī, *Ihsa' al-Ulum*, p.100).

³² *Id.* at 139 (citing Ibn Sina, *al-Najat*, pp.184, 278).

³³ See also Paper Section III(C)(iii) below.

³⁴ The Qur'an at 34,3.

³⁵ Fakhry at 225 (citing Al-Ghazālī, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, p.53).

³⁶ *Id.* at 248 (citing Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkat al-Anwar*, p.18). Note that such usage of Neo-Platonic terminology grounds Ibn Rosht's later accusation that Ghazālī commits duplicity in his polemic against Neo-Platonism.

³⁷ The Qur'an at 24:34.

³⁸ Fakhry at 249 (citing Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkat al-Anwar*, p.55).

³⁹ *Id.* at 301 (citing Ibn Sina, *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, pp.12,149).

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 253 (citing Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Ibnu'l-'Arabī*, p. 71). Note the difference between this doctrine and the Christian doctrine of Christ as *the only* manifestation of the *logos*.

⁴¹ Fakhry at 252 (citing Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Ibnu'l-'Arabī*, p. 82).

⁴² Ibn Rushd, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, at 176.

⁴³ Ibn Rushd, *Tafsir ma Ba'd al-Tabi'ah*, III, 1707.

⁴⁴ Ibn Rushd, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, at 519,522.

⁴⁵ Ibn Rushd, *Tafsir ma Ba'd al-Tabi'ah*, III, at 1497-8.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 275. (noting, however, that amongst Ibn Rushd's European following, he was often "denationalized" from Islam – misperceived by some as a Christian leader of Latin rebellion against the Church, or as a Jewish intellectual leader in Spain and Southern France).

⁴⁷ To state the same inversely: if all beings are intelligible, then they are all, essentially, thoughts. As thoughts, they must proceed from a thinking mind that is creative. Man's thinking does not create beings; therefore all beings are thoughts of God.

⁴⁸ See Leibnitz, Wilhelm Von, *La Monodologie, Principles of Nature and of Grace Founded on Reason*, Item VII.

⁴⁹ See paper Section II(A) above.

Lawḥ-i-Hikmat, Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom

Towards a Progressive Bahá'í Theology

Wolfgang A. Klebel

Introduction

In writing a paper on Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom, an attempt is made to appreciate some aspects of this Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh in a personal reflection on His Revelation. He has called this Revelation a "*Beauteous*," (KA 61¹) and a "*Most Potent Revelation*" (GWB 95) and has encouraged us to explore this "*Mysterious and Transcendent*," (GWB 325) this "*Perspicuous and Luminous Revelation*," (GWB 196) We experience often enough this Revelation as "*Bewildering and Challenging*," (GWB 254)

This commentary should be understood as an attempt to respond to this bewildering challenge, to see the perspicuity and the transcendent mystery of this Revelation and how to solve the apparent contradiction between the terms "mysterious and transcendent" on the one hand and "perspicuous and luminous" on the other². Responding to the Revelation of the Manifestation becomes the center and standard of our philosophical and theological discourse; the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh must be the point of departure of all Bahá'í theological thinking and only in this sense, and in following the Covenant³, will theological studies promote unity rather than disunity, as it has happened in previous Dispensations.

No external criteria can be used to judge any Divine Revelation; it is the internal consistency and the life- and world-changing power that gives proof of the reality and truth of the Manifestation. Bahá'u'lláh states

Say: The first and foremost testimony establishing His truth is His own Self. Next to this testimony is His Revelation. For whoso faileth to recognize either the one or the other He hath established the words He hath revealed as proof of His reality and truth. (GWB 105)

Shoghi Effendi called this process a revolution in the life of mankind:

For no more convincing proof could be adduced demonstrating the regenerating spirit animating the Revelations proclaimed by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh than their power to transform what can be truly regarded as one of the most backward, the most cowardly, and perverse of peoples into a race of heroes, fit to effect in turn a similar revolution in the life of mankind. (ADJ 18)

It needs to be noted that these reflections on the Tablet of Wisdom do not attempt to describe or comment on the Tablet as a whole, the author would neither be able to provide this, nor does he have the linguistic requirements to make such an attempt. Consequently, this paper selects specific topics from this Tablet and reflects only the thoughts of this writer to these verses, not at all presenting a complete commentary of this Tablet or any kind of official interpretation of the Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith.

To select special verses from this Tablet for reflection appears to be justified, when considering the statement of Bahá'u'lláh “*that in each verse of the Tablet of Hikmat an ocean is concealed.*” This statement is reported by Adib Taherzadeh in his book *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*.⁴ Therefore, every verse of this Tablet has an inexhaustible multitude of meanings and the presented reflections are only one way of understanding a particular verse.

This, of course, implies that whenever meaning is found in the Writings, there is always an immeasurable amount of truth, revealed in these Writings, either not known at all, or not yet understood. Whatever is confirmed and communicated in this paper, we should never forget the warnings expressed by Bahá'u'lláh, not to reject what cannot be understood at this time and to implore God to open our hearts to a more true understanding and a deeper appraisal of the inexhaustible treasure of this Revelation, as He stated:

O servant! Warn thou the servants of God not to reject that which they do not comprehend. Say, implore God to open to your hearts the portals of true understanding that ye may be apprised of that of which no one is apprised. Verily, He is the Giver, the Forgiving, the Compassionate. (TB 188)

Consequently, the reader is encouraged, in true consultation, to add her/his understanding of these verses to this paper;⁵ in a communication of different opinions the truth will become clearer and the depth of meaning can be more richly explored. This paper, therefore, is nothing else than a preliminary attempt to understand today's thinking and philosophizing in the light of this “*Mysterious and Transcendent,*” (GWB 325) this “*Perspicuous and Luminous*” Revelation. (GWB 196)

While most of these reflections are presented here following the sequence of the Tablet of Wisdom, which is commented upon in its overall structure and sequence, the following special issues will be elaborated more thoroughly, whenever these issues seem to be presented in the Tablet.

We will specifically comment on the idea of Progressive Theology; on the consequences of Philosophical Error; and on the theory of Form and Matter and other similar oppositional concepts. Another question will be raised about the Fundamentals of Philosophy and what a True Philosopher is, according to Bahá'u'lláh. Finally, the issue of Spiritual Materialism will be discussed in this context and the Philosophy of Dialogical Thinking will be applied to the understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Ultimately, the heuristic value of these findings for a Bahá'í philosophy will be suggested, not so much in definite conclusions, but rather in the direction in which such a potential philosophy may develop.

Progressive Theology

This topic is not directly mentioned, but implied in the Tablet, and it is presented here in the beginning, as it appears to this writer to be an integral part of the following reflections on the Tablet. The term Progressive Theology is obviously coined in relation to the term of Progressive Revelation, which is a Bahá'í principle. This principle indicates that the successive appearances of the Manifestations of God throughout history are for the purpose of progressively revealing the mysteries of God to humankind throughout the ages.

In the Bahá'í understanding of religion, there is only one religion of God and all major religions are consecutive and progressive steps of this one religion. Consequently, the concept of Progressive Revelation corresponds with the idea that humankind is evolving and maturing over time and every Revelation of God is presented at the level of understanding, which humanity has at that specific period. Corresponding to the Progressive Revelations that occurs every five hundred to one thousand years, there is a process during the period from the appearance of one Manifestation to the next, where theology or the understanding of this Revelation makes progress, which is here called Progressive Theology.⁶

During this period humankind is improving spiritually, philosophy and sciences are progressing, the understanding of the world is growing, and this will further promote a better understanding of the previous Revelation.⁷ What has to be stressed in this context is the fact that the human progress of spirituality,

philosophy and science is not independent of the previous Revelation, as it is usually assumed by secular historians. In the Tablet of Wisdom, Bahá'u'lláh specifically mentions the fact that it is the Manifestation who aids philosophers, when He said:

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)

Further, Bahá'u'lláh stated that the Manifestation of God is directing and causing the prevalence of philosophy in one country or in one period of time:

Consider Greece. We made it a Seat of Wisdom for a prolonged period. However, when the appointed hour struck, its throne was subverted, its tongue ceased to speak, its light grew dim and its banner was hauled down. Thus do We bestow and withdraw. Verily thy Lord is He Who giveth and divesteth, the Mighty, the Powerful. (TB 149)

That the Manifestation of God is the cause of all scientific progress is clearly stated by Bahá'u'lláh:

O Inmost Heart of this Temple! We have made thee the dawning-place of Our knowledge and the dayspring of Our wisdom unto all who are in heaven and on earth. From thee have We caused all sciences to appear, and unto thee shall We cause them to return. And from thee shall We bring them forth a second time. Such, indeed, is Our promise, and potent are We to effect Our purpose. Erelong shall We bring into being through thee exponents of new and wondrous sciences, of potent and effective crafts, and shall make manifest through them that which the heart of none of Our servants hath yet conceived. (SLH 35, emphasis added)

These quotes indicate that it is the Manifestation Who bestows and withdraws, Who aids and causes the progress of philosophy, Who promotes the progress of human science and understanding in general. It is the Manifestation of God Who initiates and promotes this process of increasing understanding we call Progressive Theology.

This process is circular: the Manifestation through His Revelation promotes human progress and this progress then assists in

better understanding the Revelation of the Manifestation, which again improves the scientific inquiry. In this paper this circular process is presupposed and it is the key to this presentation.

As a matter of fact, it is this writer's personal experience that has pointed to this conclusion. Contemporary philosophical writings were recognized and found almost verbatim in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, improving their philosophical meaning. At other times the opposite happened; modern philosophical thoughts were better understood by this writer after a deepening in the Bahá'í Revelation.⁸

That this progress of science and philosophy can provide insight into the Bahá'í theology and in a circular process improves the science and philosophy as well, has been stated by the Universal House of Justice:

Those believers with the capacity and opportunity to do so have repeatedly been encouraged in their pursuit of academic studies by which they are not only equipped to render much needed services to the Faith, but are also provided with the means **to acquire a profound insight into the meaning and the implications of the Bahá'í Teachings**. They discover also that the perceptions gained from a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh clarify the subjects of their academic inquiry. (UHJ, 1998 Mar 19, Compilation on Scholarship; emphasis added)

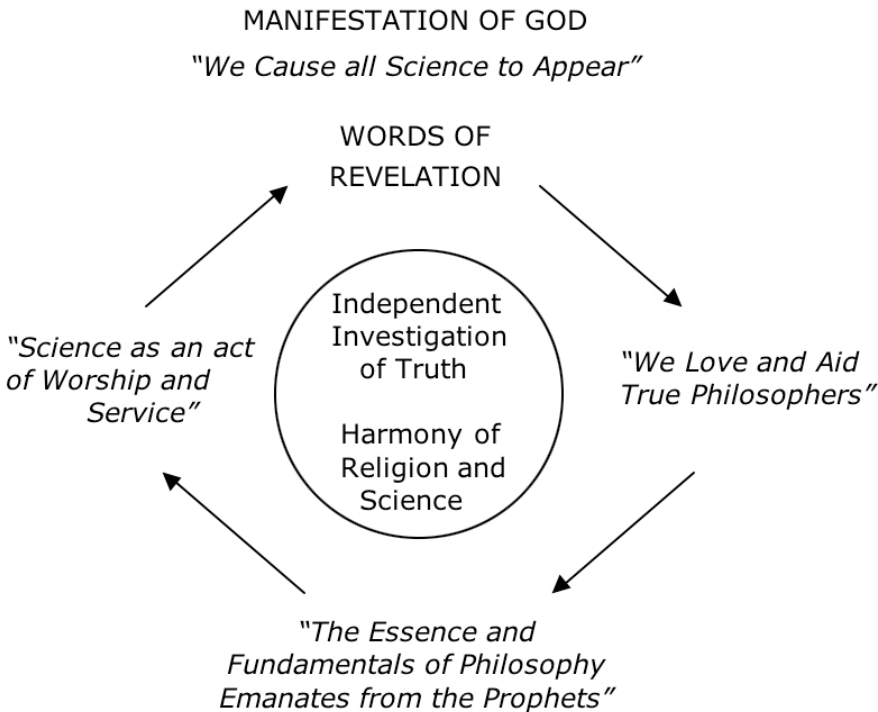
Most recently, the Universal House of Justice has mentioned the same idea again and included not only religious people but even those who do not have a religious inclination in this process of increasing understanding:

Bahá'is will come to increasingly appreciate that the Cause they serve represents the arrowhead⁹ of an awakening taking place among people everywhere regardless of religious background and indeed among many with no religious leaning. (OCF p. iii, emphasis added)

The Bahá'í Faith is the "arrowhead," of an awakening; the tip of the process of change in the thinking of humanity, and it is noted that this awakening, this re-thinking, is not restricted to Bahá'is, or religious people, but even includes many "with no religious leaning." As will be pointed out, the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the cause of this new thinking, this revolutionary development of science and philosophy, as He stated when He wrote "*We caused all sciences to appear.*" (ibid, footnote 8)

It needs to be noted again that this is a circular and ongoing process. The Revelation causes the sciences and arts to develop; the study of these sciences and arts provide means to better understand the Revelation; and this better understanding will improve the academic inquiry of the research and study.

The figure below describes this circular process in the words of Bahá'u'lláh on top, at the right side and at the bottom of the figure; and on the left side in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who implies in the concept of worship and service the value of arts and sciences in assisting of a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. This deeper understanding will again aid the philosopher to improve his/her thinking and will assist in clarifying the inquiry as the Universal House of Justice has pointed out. The guiding principles in this process are the Independent Investigation of Truth and the Harmony between Science and Religion.¹⁰



Nevertheless, in the same way that an individual Bahá'í goes through a process of progress in the understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh during her/his lifetime, the Bahá'í community in its theological thinking will go through the same process over time. The Bahá'í principle of "independent investigation of truth" does not stop once a believer accepts the

Faith; it is an ongoing process. Adherence to the Covenant¹¹ will guarantee the unity and relevance of this theological development.

In the following table these two processes are placed besides each other with the distinction that the process of Progressive Revelation takes place over five hundred to thousand years, while the process of Progressive Theology is an ongoing process during these five hundred or thousand years. Another distinction is the fact that Progressive Theology is a substantially different process and totally dependent on the previous Revelation and its official interpretation.

Progressive Revelation	Progressive Theology
Humankind Maturing	Humankind Improving
Successive Manifestations bring Progressive Revelations in History	Ongoing Progress of Philosophy and Science through the Power of the previous Revelation
Unity of the Manifestations	Unity of Theology in the Covenant
Progressive Understanding of the Divine	Progress in Understanding the World
Progressive Unity of Humanity	Progress in Understanding Humanity
Spiritual Progress of Humankind	Spiritual and Theological Progress in Understanding the Revelation
Every 500 – 1000 years	Ongoing until the next Revelation

Consequences of Philosophical Error

The Tablet of Wisdom begins with an introduction to the addressee¹² and with a succinct and brief description of today's world, in which Bahá'u'lláh illustrates the grievous situation of humanity.

We exhort mankind in these days when the countenance of Justice is soiled with dust, when the flames of unbelief are burning high and the robe of wisdom rent asunder, when tranquility and faithfulness have ebbed away and trials and tribulations have waxed severe, when covenants are broken

and ties are severed, when no man knoweth how to discern light and darkness or do distinguish guidance from error.
(TB 137)

In the last sentence of this narrative Bahá'u'lláh seems to be describing different philosophical views prevalent in these days. These views of the human inability to know truth were presented in many philosophical systems; most of them are rather widespread today. The following theories can be counted among these views: in ancient times pre-Socratic sophism, today modern agnosticism, relativism and post modernism, and in some ways nominalism and conceptionalism, all of which deny the possibility of distinguishing truth from falsehood, good from bad, light from darkness and guidance from error. It appears that these are the basic causes of the above mentioned problems of today's world such as injustice, unbelief, global tribulations and lack of trust in society.

The conclusion from these statements points to the fact that not all philosophy and scientific theory is equally valid and beneficial to humankind. There are certain differences among theories, ideologies, and philosophical assumptions that influence a whole civilization, leading either to its betterment or to its downfall. This fact was clearly demonstrated during the last century, where the clash of different ideas about "who is man" resulted in two world wars, in continuing ideological conflicts and terror, and worldwide disunity and in the death of about 10 percent of the world population.¹³

In the next section, which we will not specifically comment upon,¹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh calls on the peoples of this world to "*forsake all evil and hold fast that which is good.*" (TB 138) Following that He makes reference of the sorrow that the present situation of the world has provided for Him and how He was mistreated by the rulers of His day. He closes this section with the statement that "*the people have perpetrated a grievous injustice.*" (TB 140)

At this point Bahá'u'lláh responds to the question that was put to Him about the beginning of creation.¹⁵ He describes this beginning with several seemingly contradictory statements in order to indicate the inscrutable truth about creation, such as a beginning without beginning and an end without end. Both statements are presented as truth, the statement of the creation as having existed forever and the statement of a beginning of creation. The conclusion of this section is the explanatory statement for the contradiction mentioned above, which will not be followed up here further.

And in the station of 'I did wish to make Myself known', God was, and His creation had ever existed beneath His shelter from the beginning that hath no beginning, apart

from its being preceded by a Firstness which cannot be regarded as firstness and originated by a Cause inscrutable even unto all men of learning. (TB 140)

The World of Existence, Form and Matter and the Integration of Opposites

In the following paragraph, which will be the next topic to be reflected upon in more detail, Bahá'u'lláh uses some known philosophical terms in explaining the beginning of creation. He talks about preexistence¹⁶ of the world of creation and how it came into being:

The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. (TB 140)

This statement could be compared with the philosophical concepts of form and primal matter as the scholastic tradition has explained it, following the Aristotelian metaphysic. Bahá'u'lláh seems to use the terms of what is usually called the peripatetic school of philosophy as presented by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. These philosophical concepts were further developed in the Scholastic philosophy during the medieval period.¹⁷

The first note to be added here is that Bahá'u'lláh described beings as coming into existence not only through the information of the primal matter, through form and matter, as the classic philosophy will have it, but He introduces the function of heat in this process. In other words, He states that this coming together of the active force and its recipient is caused by energy, i.e. heat, which brings the world of existence into being. We can see in this formulation an indication that the world of existence, as Bahá'u'lláh sees it, is not a static and substantive world, but a dynamic and evolutionary one, to speak in modern terms.¹⁸ It is energy, it is heat which brings the world into being. 'Abdul-Bahá speaks about attraction and love in this context, stating:

All created things are expressions of the affinity and cohesion of elementary substances, and nonexistence is the absence of their attraction and agreement. Various elements unite harmoniously in composition, but when these elements become discordant, repelling each other, decomposition and nonexistence result. Everything partakes of this nature and is subject to this principle, for the creative foundation in all its degrees and kingdoms is an expression or outcome of love. (PUP 123)

This seems to imply that it is not matter giving the form its existence by information, but it is the *attraction* and *cohesion* between *elementary substances* (active force and recipients, form and matter) that creates concrete actuality. In the same way, lack of this *attraction*, which is basically an *expression of love*, will cause decomposition and nonexistence. While in this picture some elements of the Platonic or Neoplatonic philosophies are incorporated, the structure is essentially different. Here it is not that forms or ideas – existence in potential – give existence to matter, but rather both potential and form are brought into existence through love and attraction. Teilhard de Chardin, a century later, similarly expressed that the ever-higher unification and convergence of reality is caused by love, or spirit, which is always part of reality.

The most penetrating interpretation we can give of the world – the interpretation we find in much the same terms in all mystical and philosophical systems – is to regard the world as a movement of universal convergence, within which the plurality of matter is consummated in spirit. This view of things takes into account the fundamental and creative role of erotic attraction.¹⁹

Besides the introduction of heat in the process of coming into existence, Bahá'u'lláh explains the subject further and differently. He defines the relation between that which is the active form and its recipients in an altogether new way, when He adds, “*These two are the same, yet they are different.*” (TB 140) This can only mean that the form and the matter are in one way the same and in another way different. Being the same while simultaneously being different does not necessarily constitute a contradiction; as a matter of fact, one could say more pointedly, the more they are the same, the more they are different. Generally, when we oppose two concepts, we assume that an increase on one side will cause a decrease on the opposing side. Yet there is another kind of relationship, which is called polarity or “integral opposition,” as one could translate the German term *Integraler Gegensatz*.²⁰ In this term two rather opposing concepts are combined, are integrated. Integration is typically not placed together with opposition, yet in this understanding these two opposing concepts are deliberately united, or as it could be said, they are integrated, indicating that both the integration and the opposition is present, i.e., when these two concepts are united, they form a logical unity of a higher level of reality. This process is formed similar as the Hegelian dialectic, but the process is seen differently; there is no need for a Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis, which are abstract concepts, an idealistic formality. Here we talk about a concrete integration. In other words it could be said that in these concepts reality is described as it actually is, not separated as

reality appears in the thinking process, but reality as it is in concrete actuality.

The Bahá'í concept of Unity in Diversity is formed in the same way: two logically contradictory terms are combined to describe a higher level of reality. In the quote of 'Abdu'l-Bahá above, a similar logical process is at work, when He says "*Various elements unite harmoniously in composition, but when these elements become discordant, repelling each other, decomposition and nonexistence result.*"

We have a unity of various and different elements, not by forcing these elements into unity, not by eliminating these elements in order to establish unity, but by respecting and promoting the different elements in the new unity of a higher order.

In this dynamic structure, out of different elements a higher unity and harmony is produced, through unification and love, yet this structure would decompose as soon as there is the opposite of harmony and attraction; as soon as there is discord and absence of harmony, the structure decomposes. Extrapolating from these statements one could postulate that this is the structure of the universe, where in a dynamic unification new structures are continuously created, structures in which diverse and multiple elements are united in a new unity. This principle of dynamic unification of multiple elements does solve the age-old question about the whole and the part. Which is first, which is more important, the whole or the part? Contrary to this static view, in which for example Aristotle stated that the whole is prior to the part, we must now state that the whole is through the part and the part is through the whole. They both are united through this attraction, this spiritual element that is internal to all material structures.

We can find thoughts like this in the philosophy of Teilhard de Chardin and more recently in Xavier Zubiri and Ken Wilber²¹. The recent book of Sen McGlinn, *Church and State*, applies this concept to the relationship between religion and government, following the Bahá'í Writings. While he calls the relationship organic unity, philosophically he describes the same relationship in the picture of the living organism, which was used in the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.²²

In this polar relationship, both sides are increasing together, like in a magnet, where both poles become stronger when the magnet's strength increases; or, the more opposition the more integration. This is certainly known in personal matters. The more I know and accept another person as different, as "the other", the deeper and stronger the unity with this person can become.

When the differences are disregarded the result is not unity but uniformity, or disorder and anarchy at the other side of the extreme, both demonstrating the lack of unity. The importance of moderation and the danger of the extremes were described by Bahá'u'lláh, who stated at many occasion in His writings this problem of moderation and the excesses:

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. (GWB 342)

The same relationship applies in the Bahá'í understanding of the concepts of "Unity in Diversity." When people unite they become more the same in their unity, yet at the same time their differences will become more marked and this will contribute to the overall value of the unity. They are the same, therefore they are in unity; they are different, and therefore they are diverse. The more unity, the more diversity is possible, and vice versa. This mutual enhancement in a polar relationship is an indication of a spiritual relationship. In a material relationship, it is simple, the more money I give away, the less money I will have. With spiritual values it is the opposite, the more love I give away, the richer I get in love.

It should never be forgotten that this Unity in Diversity has to be applied in moderation. When the unity is stressed to the extreme, it results in uniformity; when diversity is pursued excessively, anarchy and disorder results. The balance of this principle is moderation. Both the unity and the diversity have to enhance each other in order to make this principle functional.

That diversity of the world is not in opposition to its unity but rather is promoting unity, was expressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the picture of the garden in which the diversity of flowers, of colors and scents, increases the beauty and unity of the garden. Summarizing this concept He states:

This difference and this variation strengthen love and harmony and this multiplicity is the greatest aid to unity. (BWF 295)

In fact, as history and psychology can teach us, uniformity can only be sustained through violence and terror, while a loving and trusting relationship, accepting diversity, will strengthen itself. This human and political wisdom was already understood by the Chinese Sage Mencius, (Meng-tzu: 4th century BC) when he stated:

To pretend Force is Humanity — that's the mark of a tyrant, and a tyrant needs a large country. To practice Humanity through Integrity — that's the mark of a true emperor, and a true emperor doesn't need a large country.

If you use force to gain the people's submission, it isn't submission of the heart. It's only a submission of the weak to the strong.

But if you use Integrity to gain the people's submission, it's a submission of the sincere and delighted heart.²³

Any system of morals is built on this relationship. On the other hand, the classic capitalist system assumed that the selfishness of the individual will enrich the world.

Daniel Bell²⁴ has formulated this, stating "For Adam Smith, individual exchange, in which each man pursues his own self-interest, is the basis of freedom, self-satisfaction, and mutual advantage, when rationally pursued through the division of labor, it is also the basis of accumulation and wealth." This just does not happen, or if it happens, it happens only for the capitalists who are enriched, not the worker.

The same is true for the opposing moral system of communism, as described in the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels²⁵ as "an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all". This assumes that the more people are materialistically equal in the same class, and the more other classes are suppressed, the more they will be uniform and happiness in freedom will prevail; in other words, the less some individuals or classes are valued, the richer the collective becomes for the prevailing class, i.e., the proletariat. In none of the different Communist States, no matter of their different nationality or culture, was this actually realized. The only people who prospered were the party members, not the proletariat or the country as a whole.

Neither of these two extreme materialistic philosophies of freedom through opposing economic developments panned out, and both produced the opposite result. In both forms, in rampant capitalism and in militant communism, only the leaders are free, not the people. It is interesting to note that capitalism could develop and flourish as soon as it accepted social constraints and moderation. The same did not happen with communist states, except in what is called democratic socialism as practiced in Europe. As soon as both systems reach some level of moderation and acknowledge a more spiritual understanding of the human condition, they will abolish their extreme position and be more functional²⁶.

Bahá'u'lláh initiates a new understanding of the relationship between form and matter, which uses the Aristotelian terms and formulates the issues by using scholastic concepts, but transcends this understanding in the context of this new and "most potent Revelation". This understanding is not a special situation, but a

general principle in this Revelation²⁷. Bahá'u'lláh states in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

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, emphasis added)

In order to understand “the world of unity and diversity” (Sameness and Difference) as well as the world of “variation and oneness” (parts and whole) and “limitation and detachment” (material aspect of creation and the spiritual detachment from it), we have to leave the land of denial, the mindset of denying the spiritual realm, and reach “the highest and innermost sanctuary of the inner meaning of the Word of God”, which is the Revelation of the Manifestation.

The polarity of unity and diversity, as well as variation and oneness, is here integrated in the “ocean of acceptance” of the Revelation, after the eye is purged from all conflicting elements of materialistic thinking. In this statement the philosophical tradition that is expressed in the opposition of form and matter, of spirit and matter, of whole and part, of the one and the many, of individual and collective as well as the seemingly opposition of the self and the other, of the I and the Thou is transcended and integrated.

In the *Seven Valleys*, Bahá'u'lláh has presented the four states of the self as Outwardness and Inwardness, as Firstness and Lastness.

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...” (SV 27²⁸)

First and Last, or Firstness and Lastness, are opposites that are dependent on each other and not only opposed, but also related, so we can formulate the following list of opposed categories, which are integrated in the Spiritual Reality:

First	Last
Spirit	Matter

Unity	Diversity
Whole	Part
One	Many
Individual	Collective
Self	Other
"I"	"Thou"

This integral opposition or polarity of these concepts needs to be clearly understood, not as opposed, as classical logic would have it, or as being set against each other, as political partisanship demonstrates, but rather as existing through each other. They are increasing and decreasing not in opposition but in mutual harmony. The categories of Self and Other, of "I" and "Thou," are in need of some further explanation. What is here opposed is not the I of one person to the Thou of another, but the fact that one person is an I for her/himself and the same person, at the same time, is a Thou for all others. The same is true for the Self and the Other. We are always both. The understanding of this opposite relationship follows strictly from Bahá'u'lláh's statement in relation to first and last, preceding the above quoted section where He says:

For instance, let thine Eminence consider his own self; thou art first in relation to thy son, last in relation to thy father. In thine outward appearance, thou tellest of the appearance of power in the realms of divine creation; in thine inward being thou revealest the hidden mysteries which are the divine trust deposited within thee. (SV 26)

This means the same person is First and Last, depending on his relationship, the same can be applied to all the above opposites. A person is Spirit, is First, is Whole, is an Individual, is a Unity and a Self in relation to his/her parts or subordinates, or lower entities or his family; at the same time he/she is Matter (potential), Last, is Part of a Collective, is an Other to Many, is Diverse and Different to Others in relation to all higher units and organizations, as well as to his family of origin.

It is this writer's opinion that this relationship of opposites is the basis of a Bahá'í cosmology, and he has presented a paper on this topic with the title "True of Thyself"²⁹. This assumption needs certainly further investigation, but will not be followed up here.

This philosophical understanding of the concrete reality of being was presented in the last century by a number of European authors, some of them, which I am familiar with, will be mentioned here:

- Vladimir Solov'ev (1853-1900) formulating "Full freedom of Parts in Perfect Unity of the Whole"
- Leo Gabriel (Vienna 1902-1987) in his book: *Integral Logic, The Truth of the Whole* 1965
- Romano Guardini (Munich, Germany 1885-1968) in his book *Opposition: an Attempt to a philosophy of the Living-Concrete*
- Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. (France and China: 1881-1955) who developed an "Ontology of Unification" according to Karl Wucherer
- Karl Rahner, S.J. (Innsbruck, Austria 1904-1984) in his book: *Ontology of the Relationship between the Individual and the Community*, 1960
- Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld, (Vienna Austria, born 1929), who stated in the quoted book the "Integral Opposition of Unity and Plurality," which is a fundamental principle of his philosophy.³⁰

None of these authors were familiar with the Bahá'í Writings,³¹ they do not mention these writings and do not get their understanding directly from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. And yet, they live and philosophize in the shade of this Revelation, they are, as stated above, under the influence of this "Most Potent Revelation." It needs to be noted here that the four last of these authors are Catholic theologians, and the first two are philosophers from Catholic or Orthodox background. Their understanding of the relationship between the one and the many, the integral opposition of these concepts of unity and plurality, makes it easier for us to understand the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Here the circle of the Progressive Theology closes in a new and better comprehension of the Revelation.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has elucidated this same relationship between the part and the whole. (Note that for increased clarity these verses are displayed here different from the authorized English translation, where the whole section forms one paragraph.)

Consider; we plant a seed. A complete and perfect tree appears from it, and from each seed of this tree another tree can be produced.

Therefore the part is expressive of the whole, for this seed was a part of the tree, but therein potentially was the whole tree.

So each one of us may become expressive or representative of all the bounties of life to mankind.

This is the unity of the world of humanity.

This is the bestowal of God.

This is the felicity of the human world and

This is the manifestation of the divine favor. (BWF 219)

What is so remarkable in this formulation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the fact that the *unity of the world of humanity* is not something social, legal, political, or established by a contract, as we would normally assume. To the contrary, the unity of the world of humanity is a personal, individual and spiritual matter; it is a gift, a *bestowal of God*. It is based on the fact that *each one of us* must become *expressive or representative of all the bounties of life to mankind!* Only that is the unity of the world of humanity as presented in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh!

This aspect has not been considered by the theologian and philosophers mentioned above, it is specific to the Bahá'í Revelation. Additionally, it brings a new meaning to the integral philosophy and it predicts that only this understanding and this evolution can work. The circular process of progressive theology is here again demonstrated. The philosophical considerations of modern philosophers and theologians help us to better understand the meaning of the Revelation. At the same time the Revelation brings new and unexpected aspects into these philosophies improving them and giving occasion to further development.

It might be said that this relationship between being the same and being different is not only a Bahá'í principle, usually formulated as unity in diversity, but it is also, and this is true of all Bahá'í principles, a basic structure of the world of existence, of reality and of human awareness, or reason, which is able to recognize this basic structure. This ontological structure, these categories of being, could philosophically only be fully understood after the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. And this very Revelation is at the same time improving and completing the philosophical understanding.

Bahá'u'lláh continues in the next sentence to point out the importance of this understanding. It is a structure which is specifically announced by Him, when He says "*Thus doth the Great Announcement inform thee about this glorious structure* (TB 140)." Note that Bahá'u'lláh is the Great Announcement and He calls the structure He describes here "glorious," which indicates the importance of this new and revolutionary Revelation.

Again one should note that this structure of reality and its dynamism has been later somehow recognized independently by Xavier Zubiri in his book about the *Dynamic Structure of Reality*, when he stated:

In this sense the Universe would be absolutely dynamic in itself Now, the various realities that compose the universe, as I was saying, are not precisely substances, but structural systems. Reality is composed not so much of underlying things, but of structural things: of structures.³²

It needs to be emphasized that Zubiri was familiar with modern physics and modern physicists, such as his friend Heisenberg. The philosophical implications of this “*glorious structure*”, in relation to modern physics and cosmology, are certainly another point of interest, but will not further be pursued here.

In the next sentence of the Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh indicates as the origin of this process the “*Word of God, which is the Cause of the entire creation.*” (TB 140) In describing the Word of God, Bahá'u'lláh again describes this Word as being “*higher and far superior to that which the senses can perceive*” i.e., to all sense perception and it is being “*sanctified from any property or substance.*” (TB 140-1) This higher and sanctified reality can be called spiritual and it is clearly distinguished from material property and substance.

Here we must use the term spiritual not as being opposite, or on the same level as sense perception, i.e., spiritual is not seen in contradiction of material, it is the transcendent aspect, the inner reality of all material existence. One is reminded at the formulation of Teilhard de Chardin who stated:

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.*³³ (Italics in original)

In the Bahá'í Writings, a distinction is made between the seen and the unseen, or the manifest and the hidden, and this distinction applies to the whole creation, it is predicated about the world, about man and about the Manifestations of God.³⁴ While the definition of Teilhard does not exactly correspond with this understanding, it comes rather close, considering the general understanding of what is called spirit or spiritual.

Generally the term ‘spiritual’ is used when indicating another, a transcendent and immanent, a different reality, which cannot be placed at the same level of reality as the material, sensible world.

Moreover, in this context spirituality is often commonly seen as something like matter, but subtler, more “spiritual.”

Contrary to this, the world of existence is here seen as not simply the world of the sense perception with some added spirituality. Reality is essentially and primary spiritual, and the material is only another aspect of this reality. This understanding is certainly new in Western tradition, even though it was anticipated in the Neoplatonic philosophic tradition, but it is better compatible with modern quantum physics and other developments of science.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has expressed this understanding of spirit in the biblical sense, which will be further discussed in a later section of this paper in the Chapter on Dialogical Thinking.

Therefore, the proceeding of the human spirits from God is through emanation. When it is said in the Bible that God breathed His spirit into man, this spirit is that which, like the discourse, emanates from the Real Speaker, taking effect in the reality of man. (SAQ 206)

At former times, when many physical events had no material explanation they were explained “spiritually”: things like growth, life, thunder, waves, wind etc. were all ascribed to the gods, were placed in the spiritual realm, while the gods themselves were represented in the form of material statues. As soon as modern science “secularized” these concepts, the world lost its spiritual values, it was demystified. Eventually, and definitely in the Darwinian explanation of the development of man, the “spiritual” was replaced by material causes such as random selection and the survival of the fittest. That way, spiritual values were reduced to material things. In other words, the child was thrown out with the bathwater. The crucial issue is the error of either negating the existence of the spiritual, or of reducing it to the material or of treating spirituality like material things, and that is what we will later call Spiritual Materialism.

The next section is like a commentary on the Prolog of the Gospel according to John. Bahá’u’lláh describes the Manifestation of the Word “*without any syllable or sound*” and describes it as the “*Command of God, which pervadeth all created things.*” (TB 141) He further states:

It has never been withheld from the world of being. It is God’s all-pervasive grace, from which all grace doth emanate. It is an entity far removed above all that hath been and shall be. (TB 141)

The reality of the Word of God is prior and above all that has been and shall be, and it is the Word of God, which is the cause of creation and cause of the continuous existence of the world.

Philosophy and Philosophers

Here Bahá'u'lláh interrupts His explanation and mentions the unbelievers, who would only misunderstand Him to cavil against God. He further remarks that because of their inability to attain to the mysteries of knowledge and wisdom, they rise in protest and burst in clamor. The reason for this lack of understanding is the fact that they object only *“to that which they comprehend,”* (TB 141) and not to the Revelation, which they do not understand. The only thing they understand is the material, as one could say in this context.

In other words, they do not accept the Revelation; they don't understand it because of their materialism. Consequently, not understanding the truth presented by the Word of God, they only object to what they can imagine and they eventually have to eliminate the gods they have erected in their own imagination. It could be said that this is a straightforward explanation of modern atheism. This confrontation with modern atheism, of a Nietzsche, Freud or Marx, who reject their own construction of the reality of religion³⁵ and the spiritual, seems to be implied in this statement. As Bahá'u'lláh says, *“Their objections, one and all, turn upon themselves, and I swear by thy life that they are devoid of understanding.”* (TB 141)

After this paragraph, Bahá'u'lláh returns to the issue of the beginning and states that *“Every thing needs have an origin and every building a builder”* (TB 141) And He indicates that the Word of God is the Cause which hath preceded the contingent world, as it was stated in the Prolog of the Gospel according to John. Later He states that Nature *“in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator”* (TB 142) and states further: *“Nature is God's will,”* (TB 142) referring to the primal Will in the Islamic tradition. God's Will, God's Word is the cause of creation and Bahá'u'lláh remarks that Nature itself is lost in bewilderment before its Revelation.

Turning to humankind, Bahá'u'lláh now talks about the rebirth of man (another theme from the Gospel of John) and admonishes the reader:

Walk thou high above the world of being through the power of the Most Great Name, that thou mayest become aware of the immemorial mysteries and be acquainted with that wherewith no one is acquainted. (TB 142-3)

This walking in the mystery can be interpreted as the spiritual life of the believer. Consequently, Bahá'u'lláh admonishes the reader: "*Teach thou the Cause of God.*" (TB 143)

After this explanation of the spiritual life, Bahá'u'lláh returns to the theme of nature, describing it in a materialistic and atheistic sense and calling it "*Nature as it is in itself.*" (TB 144) People who have rejected God, and therefore cling to this concept of nature, are called "*far astray and falling short of the ultimate purpose.*" (TB 144) In the following Bahá'u'lláh then explains:

When the eyes of the people of the East were captivated by the arts and wonders of the West, they roved distraught in the wilderness of material causes, oblivious of the One Who is the Causer of Causes, and the Sustainer thereof.
(TB 144)

The arts and wonders of the West are technology and scientific progress, all based on the understanding of material causes. The West has by and large forgotten "*the One Who is the Causer of Causes.*" In a similar way the idea of God as the Causer of Causes was expressed by Teilhard de Chardin, the French Jesuit, who formulated it differently, stating two generations later: "Properly speaking, God *does not make: He makes things make themselves.*"³⁶ (Italics in the original) In other words God is not a material cause in this world; He is the Causer of these Causes. The theological implications of this statement, and how it is an expression of the fact that God is beyond any human understanding and has no causal connection with the created world, is here assumed and will not be followed up in this paper.

After this declaration, Bahá'u'lláh turns to the core message of this Tablet, stating

Now We have, for the sake of God, the Lord of Names, set Ourselves the task of mentioning in this Tablet some accounts of the sages, that the eyes of the people may be opened thereby and that they may become fully assured that He is in truth the Maker, the Omnipotent, the Creator, the Originator, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.
(TB 144)

The eyes of the people are directed away from "*clinging to Nature as it is in itself,*" (TB 144) and are directed toward God, towards the Word of God, who is the Manifestation of God's Names as the Maker, the Omnipotent, the Creator, the Originator.

Here follows a description of philosophy and of contemporary men of learning. Bahá'u'lláh clearly makes two important statements in this paragraph:

Most of the modern knowledge has been acquired from the sages of the past, for it is they who have laid the foundation of philosophy, reared its structure and reinforced its pillars.

...The sages aforetime acquired their knowledge from the Prophets, inasmuch as the latter were the exponents of divine philosophy and the Revelers of heavenly mysteries.
(TB 144-5)

In order to prove His point, He states in the next paragraph that Empedocles was a contemporary of David while Pythagoras lived in the days of Salomon. (TB 145) This statement has been interpreted by historians that Bahá'u'lláh is affirming that there was a material, a physical and literal connection between these philosopher and Prophets. This supposition was developed by Peter Terry.³⁷

There are two issues related to this statement. Bahá'u'lláh distinguishes between the Manifestation and the secondary prophets who depend on the Manifestation, such Salomon and David, when He states about the Manifestations of God:

Every one of them is a mirror of God, reflecting naught else but His Self, His Beauty, His Might and Glory, if ye will understand. All else besides them are to be regarded as mirrors capable of reflecting the glory of these Manifestations Who are themselves the Primary Mirrors of the Divine Being, if ye be not devoid of understanding.
(GWB 73)

The question is, did Bahá'u'lláh state in this sentence only a historical fact or did He imply more than that?

The first things to note is that neither David nor Salomon are independent Manifestations of God; their prophesies are derived from Moses, who is seen in the Bahá'í Faith as the Manifestation of Israel, receiving the Revelation from God. All following prophets of the Old Testament are secondary messengers of God, and are dependent on the original Prophecy of Moses.³⁸ Here they are described as contemporary of these philosophers, as living at the same time and receiving the Revelation of Moses through David and Solomon, i.e., the philosophers receiving the essence and fundamentals from the prophets. As we will see later, it is the power of the Manifestation, who directs and influences the true philosophers, either through direct contact or through the spiritual influence of every new Revelation.

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains the difference of influence or emanation of spirituality independent from physical contact on the example of the Apostles: Judas was physically in the presence of Christ, but Paul

never had contact with Christ during his earthly mission, and yet Paul was preaching the Gospel of Christ. (Rom 15:19 and 1 Cor 9:18)

Physical nearness or remoteness is of no importance; the essential fact is the spiritual affinity and ideal nearness. Judas Iscariot was for a long time favored in the holy court of His Holiness Christ, yet he was entirely far and remote; while Paul, the apostle, was in close embrace with His Holiness. (TAB 719)

The following statement of Bahá'u'lláh needs to be understood in the same way of *spiritual affinity and ideal nearness* of the philosophers to the Prophets. This influence is here called emanation.

The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets. (TB 145)

Additionally, in the next sentence Bahá'u'lláh gives us the reason why this statement creates confusion and misunderstandings. He appears to say that the issue is clear but people differ and misunderstand His statement:

That the people differ concerning the inner meanings and mysteries thereof is to be attributed to the divergence of their views and minds. (TB 145)

From this quote it seems to be not totally clear what is actually meant here; does Bahá'u'lláh speak primarily of the essence and the fundamentals of philosophy or does He speak of the way the philosophers have learned from the prophets? Again, a careful reading of the next section gives us the answer.

Bahá'u'lláh reports a case where an inspired Prophet made a spiritual statement that was then thoroughly misunderstood in a material or literal way.

He exclaimed: 'Lo! All are filled with the Spirit.' From among the people there was he who held fast unto this statement and, actuated by his own fancies, conceived the idea that the spirit literally penetrateth or entereth into the body, and through lengthily expositions he advanced proof to vindicate this concept; and groups of people followed in his footsteps. (TB 145)

So it is not the actual hearing of the message but the way it is heard, spiritually or literally that makes the difference in understanding.

Bahá'u'lláh even adds that He could give detailed account thereof, but feels that this would depart from the main theme. It appears that in this context He has clearly pointed out that spiritual statements cannot be interpreted in a material way, cannot be

understood with the means of material methods of knowing or methods of science, even of Western historical science.

It could be concluded that the important fact is not if the message is heard literally or not; the important fact is the spiritual affinity or understanding of the one who hears the message, either physically or spiritually, which makes the difference. In either case, the fundamentals of philosophy emanate from the prophet, as Bahá'u'lláh stated above.

One could also say that there are two different ways of thinking as Teilhard de Chardin has pointed out:

However, it is just at this point, in fact, that we meet an initial split in the thinking mass of mankind....

Beneath an infinite number of secondary differentiation, caused by the diversity of social interests, of scientific investigation or religious faith, there are basically two types of minds, and only two: those who do not go beyond (and see no need to go beyond) perception of the multiple – however interlinked in itself the multiple may appear to be – and those for whom perception of this same multiple is necessarily completed in some unity. There are only, in fact, pluralists and monists: those who do not see, and those who do.³⁹

Bahá'u'lláh speaks of inspired speech and literal interpretation. He clearly points out the difference between these two ways of thinking, a difference based on the acknowledgment of the Word of God, of the Manifestations and of the fact of Creation and Revelation.

The other way of thinking is described as the Western way, which “*roved distraught in the wilderness of material causes oblivious of the One Who is the Causer of Causes.*” (TB 144) Teilhard’s formulation of thinking in the perception of the multiple versus thinking of the same multiple as “completed in some unity” comes close to this understanding of Bahá'u'lláh. This should not be surprising when we consider that Teilhard sees the goal of creation in the point Omega, which is the return of Christ, an independent Manifestation of God in Bahá'í understanding. Therefore, one can conclude as well that Teilhard’s philosophical understanding is based on a Prophet, i.e. on the “Universal” or “Cosmic Christ”⁴⁰.

The process of seeing the spiritual in material and literal ways is described in the concept of spiritual materialism. Actually, the concept of spiritual materialism goes even farther, because spiritual materialism describes a philosophical view that attempts to conquer

and manipulate spirituality in material ways. In the following, this term will be further explained.

Spiritual Materialism

Spiritual Materialism is a new term that was introduced by Toegel in his dissertation about transpersonal psychology in general and about Ken Wilber specifically, among others. He uses this term mentioned in the title of a book by Chögyam Trungpa,⁴¹ in a very specific sense and defines it the following way.

Spiritual Materialism is a specific spiritual attitude, which approaches the transcendental aspect of reality basically as if it was material.⁴²

Following this definition Toegel describes the basis of this worldview, stating:

The basic materialistic attitude started from the idea that everything, which is not specifically human, and sometimes even that, can be grasped which concepts of the material world. From this results a specific demeanor that is supported by the superiority of the circumstances and the physical world. This attitude understands humans, their thinking and understanding as being elevated above all levels of reality. The universe might be infinitely large, but the investigating mind is unquestionably above it. Respect or humility towards the unknown is totally unknown in this way of thinking.

If this attitude is directed towards the transcendental area, then they will research it in the same way the material area is researched. This attitude will make one “travel” in it, will make a “cartographic picture” of it, will even “conquer” it and will try to “possess” it. Moreover, they will attempt to subdue this area with the same tools and methods that are successful in the physical world.

In this attempt, modern science plays a very specific role. In the perception of humanity, the idea of science has already developed “religious” dimensions. If it is said today that something is scientifically proven, than this statement will satisfy thinking and feeling at least as well, as in the olden days the statement “Roma locuta, causa finita”⁴³ Therefore, what seems to be more appropriate, then using this fountain of truth and knowledge, this collective consciousness, in order to research the transcendal aspect of reality as well?⁴⁴

This modern attempt to not only understand the spiritual, but to try to conquer and use it has been alluded to by Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of Wisdom, where He stated:

The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets. That the people differ concerning the inner meanings and mysteries thereof is to be attributed to the divergence of their views and minds.
(TB 145)

It is crucial to understand this sentence right. It is not likely that the meaning of this sentence is that we always could follow a literary trace from the Prophet's writings to the statements of specific philosophers. There might not be any historical connection between the Prophets and the philosophers, but Bahá'u'lláh still claims that the essence and fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets. By 'emanate' we have to understand a spiritual causation, which in the Writing is usually explained by the comparison with the rays of light emanating from the sun.

The assumption in this comparison is the fact that the rays come from the sun but are not diminishing the sun. This may not be correct physically, but this is the common-sense understanding from which this attribution is made. The essence and fundamentals of philosophy come from the prophets like the rays come from the sun, and the connection is not necessarily a physical, causal or literal but a spiritual relationship. This is explained by Bahá'u'lláh in the next passage of this paragraph, which was mentioned before and is here reprinted in its entirety,

We would fain recount to thee the following: One of the Prophets once was communicating to his people that with which the Omnipotent Lord had inspired Him. Truly, thy Lord is the Inspirer, the Gracious, the Exalted. When the fountain of wisdom and eloquence gushed forth from the wellspring of His utterance and the wine of divine knowledge inebriated those who had sought His threshold, He exclaimed: 'Lo! All are filled with the Spirit.' From among the people there was he who held fast unto this statement and, actuated by his own fancies, conceived the idea that the spirit literally penetrateth or entereth into the body, and through lengthy expositions he advanced proofs to vindicate this concept; and groups of people followed in his footsteps. To mention their names at this point, or to give thee a detailed account thereof, would lead to prolixity, and would depart from the main theme. Verily, thy Lord is the All-Wise, the All-Knowing. There was also he who partook of the choice wine whose seal had been

removed by the Key of the Tongue of Him Who is the Revealer of the Verses of thy Lord, the Gracious, the Most Generous. (TB 145-6)

This paragraph clearly describes what was described as spiritual materialism, as Bahá'u'lláh points out that this 'philosopher' took that spiritual statement literally and described the spiritual experience of being filled with the Spirit in a physical or materialistic relationship so that the spirit penetrated or entered into the physical body. Bahá'u'lláh then points out that this "philosopher" would describe this process in detailed account thereof and would find many followers.

Referring to the idea that spiritual materialism tries to conquer and manipulate spirituality in a materialistic way describes as well the method of some Sufis and other Mystics, who felt that their methods of meditation and their mystical experiences are the path to God and are in no need of the prophets. This view was contradicted by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Seven Valleys* when He said about the Sufis:

They who soar in the heaven of singleness and reach to the sea of the Absolute, reckon this city – which is the station of life in God – as the furthestmost state of mystic knowers, and the farthest homeland of the lovers. But to this evanescent One of the mystic ocean, this station is the first gate of the heart's citadel, that is, man's first entrance to the city of the heart; and the heart is endowed with four stages, which would be recounted should a kindred soul be found. (SV 40)

Bahá'u'lláh sets His understanding apart from the traditional Sufi idea of being able to reach God and indicates that all of this "spiritual" effort does only bring the soul to the city of heart, which is the Manifestation.⁴⁵

It should be noted here that the surprising success of Ken Wilber's integral philosophy, besides its many interesting and exciting aspects, can be explained by a similar understanding of the mystical tradition, as Toegel has pointed out.⁴⁶ Modern man, who basically thinks in materialistic ways, is given in Wilber's philosophy the ability to belong to the elite and to a new and higher level of being.

Man can improve himself and mankind through spiritual techniques that can be scientifically studied and this possibility, as presented by Wilber, is certainly seductive. Wilber's extension of modern developmental psychology into the future improvement of the human condition through a mystical technology is expressed in the statement:

And every I becomes a God, and every WE becomes God's sincerest worship, and every IT becomes God's temple⁴⁷.

Wilber presents a Promethean, Mystical Technology and Pantheism for postmodern humanity. This ambitious program needs to be pointed out; nevertheless, Wilber summarizes modern developmental psychology in a very comprehensive way and does clarify many basic and valuable philosophical principles, certainly contributing to the advancement of philosophy today. This must not be overlooked, when the shortcomings of his philosophy are criticized and his theological arguments are refuted.

Contrary to this vain imagining of a direct mystical access to God through philosophy and meditation, Bahá'u'lláh states:

Verily, the philosophers have not denied the Ancient of Days. Most of them passed away, deploring their failure to fathom His mystery, even as some of them have testified. Verily, thy Lord is the Adviser, the All-Informed. (TB 146)

Then Bahá'u'lláh describes several philosophers starting with Hippocrates, "who believed in God" (TB 145), and Socrates, whom He praises "as indeed wise, accomplished and righteous." (TB 145) He describes Socrates' message:

He dissuaded men from worshipping idols and taught them the way of God, the Lord of Mercy, until the ignorant rose up against him. They arrested him and put him to death in prison. (TB 146)

Following this description, He mentions Plato and Aristotle, stating:

After Socrates came the divine Plato who was a pupil of the former and occupied the chair of philosophy as his successor. He acknowledged his belief in God and in His signs, which pervade all that hath been and shall be. Then came Aristotle, the well-known man of knowledge. He it is who discovered the power of gaseous matter. These men who stand out as leaders of the people and are pre-eminent among them, one and all acknowledged their belief in the immortal Being Who holdeth in His grasp the reins of all sciences. (TB 146)

After that, Bahá'u'lláh describes the philosopher Balinus, who praises God as the Creator and who follows the "hermeneutic writings" originated by "the first person who devoted himself to philosophy."⁴⁸ (TB 148) This appears to be a reference to the origin of philosophy, indicating that the first philosophers established their knowledge on the acknowledgement of God, the Creator. Next, Bahá'u'lláh describes the process of inspiration that allows Him to

read books that appear to Him *"in the form of a Tablet."* (TB 149) This interesting fact will not be followed up here.

Bahá'u'lláh mentions another remarkable fact. He states that the Lord, the "All-Wise," does distribute the knowledge to different lands, saying *"Thus do We bestow and withdraw, Verily the Lord is He who giveth and divesteth, the Mighty, the Powerful."* (TB 150) He presents as an example the history of Greek philosophy:

Consider Greece. We made it a Seat of Wisdom for a prolonged period. However, when the appointed hour struck, its throne was subverted, its tongue ceased to speak, its light grew dim and its banner was hauled down. Thus do We bestow and withdraw. Verily thy Lord is He Who giveth and divesteth, the Mighty, the Powerful. (TB 150)

It is not only true that *"the essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the prophets,"* (TB 145) as Bahá'u'lláh has stated above, it is also true that the place and the time frame in which philosophy is preminent in a country is determined by the Prophets, by God. Obviously, this is not a scientifically provable fact, this is not something that historians can research and find evidence for in a scientific investigation. It is rather a fact of Revelation, of Faith and of acknowledging the station of the Manifestation and the fact that God's wisdom and providence is guiding this world. Without this religious truth and believe, the statement simply makes no sense.

This fact can be described in the following example. If we find in nature something, let's say an unusual rock formation or interestingly looking piece of wood, of which we do not know if it is a product of human creation or if it is something that comes out of *"nature as it is,"* we would not be able to distinguish the difference easily. Even a detailed analysis will not always make it clear what it is, unless we find signs and marks of human activity on this piece of nature. If the assumed human producers of this piece of evidence were sophisticated in hiding their handiwork, we might never be able to prove scientifically how this product was made or how it did develop. On the other hand, if we are told by a trustworthy witness that it is a human creation, we most likely could interpret the marks and find it possible, if not most likely that this is a human creation.

In other words, the scientific inquiry would follow the testimony and therefore only reinforce the known facts, but not prove them. In the same fashion, scientific and historical investigation can follow the truth of a Revelation, reinforce scientifically and historically its truth, without being able to prove it independently. This is, as a matter of fact, the scope and object of the present investigation.

Considering that God, the Knower, the Maker and the Creator has created this world, and that His marks are the most hidden of the hidden, they only become the most manifest of the manifest if we trust the witness to the fact of creation. We are, in so many words, reaching the limits of any scientific or human investigation. No spiritual materialism will prove anything here. It is the acceptance of the truth of the Prophet which will answer this question. Even philosophy cannot penetrate this veil, unless man assumes hypocritically that his reason and intellect is the final and only way to find the truth.

Dialogical Thinking

In this perspective, the new dialogic thinking can provide the philosophical bridge to understand the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Bernhard Casper describes in his book "The Dialogical Thinking"⁴⁹ the following three thinkers: Franz Rosenzweig, Ferdinand Ebner, and Martin Buber. Unfortunately, only some works of Buber have been translated into English⁵⁰. It has to be noted that Rosenzweig and Buber are from a Jewish background, Ebner was Catholic.

Thinking in the dialogical sense is in opposition to the Cartesian "I think," (*cogito*) which was the historical basis of modern thinking and modern science, and which can be called substantial thinking.⁵¹ According to Ebner this kind of thinking is caused by the "Solitude of the I" (*Ich-Einsamkeit*, a concept coined by Ferdinand Ebner, following Kierkegaard) as well as by the Western individualism or thinking from Descartes' individually based "cogito, I think." This substantial thinking, which is expressed in the third person, he, she or it, and relates to things, describes things and is therefore the legitimate way of thinking of modern science and physical causality. Yet it is inappropriate when used in terms of personal thinking. As a matter of fact, in every day language we find it impolite and rather offending when somebody speaks about a present person in the third person i.e., speaks about him or her when they are present. In proper speech we use either the name or the personal pronoun "you" and always speak to the person and not about him or her, as if they were not present.

Ferdinand Ebner builds his philosophical system on four basic thoughts, which will be presented here⁵²:

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.

When I speak to you, I constitute myself as a spiritual being that is able to communicate with you, (or Thou; this singular term is preferred as it is not a polite plural which 'you' is in the English language). And both understand themselves and each other, as spiritual beings; this relationship is therefore the origin of human spirituality. Then again, the "I" neither creates the "Thou" nor the "Thou" the "I". This spirituality is only possible because the eternal Thou, the Creator, has given the Word to man. Therefore, when we speak to the eternal Thou, that is when we pray to God, we speak from the human spirituality in the spirituality of Faith, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names – the human spirit and the rational soul – designate one thing. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul, embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings. But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it cannot discover the heavenly secrets. (SAQ 208-9)

From this "I – Thou" relationship and its origin in the relationship with the human I to the Creator, Ebner finds his way to the Word of God that was in the beginning with God, as stated in the Prolog of John's Gospel.

Several conclusions must be drawn from this thought, which is the basis of every understanding of man as a spiritual being. Ebner gives it a most important place in understanding of man, when he writes:

It became clear to me what it means that man is the only speaking creature that he is in the middle of a mute world

the only one, who '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.

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'.

In the last word, Ebner refers to the Prolog of the Gospel of John, (1-5) where it is said:

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. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

It needs to be noted here that Ebner's concept of the word as key of spiritual life has been expressed by Bahá'u'lláh a century before, when He said:

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. (TB 173, emphasis added)

Ebner developed this relationship of man, who has the word, with the Word that was in the beginning and was the light of men in many of his fragments. Human spirituality is based on this fact and founded in the Word of God.

Bahá'u'lláh clearly states that all knowledge of God is the knowledge of Him, the Manifestation of God, and that we have to look at Him in His Words and in His Writings, not with any other eyes or understanding, i.e., it is a personal knowledge gained in accepting the person of the Manifestation in word and deed.

If it be your wish, O people, to know God and to discover the greatness of His might, look, then, upon Me with Mine own eyes, and not with the eyes of any one besides Me.
(GWB 272)

The human spirit is, therefore, based on the “I – Thou” relationship, which is the starting point of any philosophizing. It needs to be noted that in this relationship, both the human I and the Thou are equal, there is no prevalence of the active over the passive, of the form over matter, of male over female, as in the perennial Philosophy; the “I” can only be in dialogue if there is a “Thou”, and vice versa.

Following Ebner's thoughts this writer would like to add these considerations. From this relationship one must understand the equality of man and women, which is the life giving “I” – “Thou” relationship, on which the physical unity of mankind is based. In all previous philosophical and biological understanding man was the active and woman was only the receiver, and these two were never equal. Aristotle has stated that clearly and it is still an understanding lurking in the psychological underground of our culture. Aristotle's main thrust was to explain the nature of things as they are seen to be. From the subject and low status of women he deduced their inferiority by nature. Caroline Whitbeck⁵³ stated:

The reason for women's inferiority lies in a defect. “*Women are defective by nature*” because they cannot reproduce *semen* which contains a full human being. When a man and a woman have intercourse, the man supplies the substance of a human being (the *soul*, i.e. the *form*), the woman only the nourishment (the *matter*).

It must be remembered that Bahá'u'lláh clearly states the equality of both, of form and matter or of the active and the passive principle of being, whom He calls different and the same, when He said:

That which hath been in existence had existed before, but not in the form thou seest today. The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different. (TB 140)

It is interesting to note that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh integrates many concepts and ideas of previous philosophies, but does this in a totally new way, creating a perspective that could not be seen before. This new perspective has found, at least in this writer's opinion, already some reflections in the philosophers who have lived since, even though they might never have heard the name of Bahá'u'lláh. This obviously is only the beginning of a process that will last a thousand years at least, as was predicted by Bahá'u'lláh.

The new dialogical thinking concludes in the fact that neither the human I nor the human Thou is able to fundamentally establish this relationship, which constitutes human spirituality, so it must have

been established originally by an eternal Thou, by the Divine Word, by the Creation of God. Consequently, Ferdinand Ebner⁵⁴ refers to the Prologue of the Gospel of John, to bring his philosophical thinking about the Word, and about man, as being given the word, to its apex.⁵⁵

The following example should illuminate this relationship and the astounding parallels between the Bahá'í Revelation and another dialogical thinker, Rosenzweig.

Compare this sentence from the *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (1819-1850):

I have known Thee by Thy making known unto me that Thou art unknowable to anyone save Thyself. (SWB 196)

with this statement of Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929):

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.⁵⁶

Referring to the word “the Fashioner” in the Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh continues to explain that “a true philosopher would never deny God nor His evidences, rather would He acknowledge His glory and overpowering majesty which overshadow all created things.”

He continues to explain that the true philosopher is not thinking independently and as an individual as stated in the “I think, therefore I am” proposition of Descartes, but that such a philosopher is aided and loved by the Prophet, indicating that He, Bahá'u'lláh, in His Revelation provides the essence and fundament of any true philosophy of today.

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)

What was stated above about the relationship between philosophy and Revelation is here repeated and applied to what Bahá'u'lláh calls the “true philosopher”. According to Bahá'u'lláh, a “true philosopher would never deny God” and “promote the best interest of humanity.” Additionally, we can recognize true philosophers if we can detect in their philosophy the fact that they were loved and aided by Bahá'u'lláh. This love and aid can be recognized by the Bahá'í scholars insofar as the findings of such a true philosopher, either in part or in total, demonstrate analogies and similarities to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

It is the opinion of this writer, that the philosophers quoted in this paper are falling into these categories of “true philosophers” according to Bahá'u'lláh. This seems true for a number of modern philosophers such as Teilhard de Chardin Ferdinand Ebner, Martin Buber and certainly others as well.⁵⁷

This statement again points to the spiritual connection of philosophy with the Revelation of the Prophet and is based on the potency of the Revelation and not necessarily on any literal connection or reference. So the statement mentioned above about the essence and fundamentals of philosophy is here based on the potency of the Revelation and the Purpose of the Manifestation of God.

In His final section of the Tablet Bahá'u'lláh again addresses Nabil, stating that this Tablet is an irrefutable and weighty exposition:

My Nabil! Let nothing grieve thee, rather rejoice with exceeding gladness inasmuch as I have mentioned thy name, have turned My heart and My face towards thee and have conversed with thee through this irrefutable and weighty exposition. Ponder in thy heart upon the tribulations I have sustained, the imprisonment and the captivity I have endured, the sufferings that have befallen Me and the accusations that the people have levelled against Me. Behold, they are truly wrapped in a grievous veil. (TB 151)

Concluding this Tablet Bahá'u'lláh reveals a prayer summarizing all the blessings of the Revelation and He let the faithful say:

Make me as a lamp shining throughout Thy lands that those in whose hearts the light of Thy knowledge gloweth and the yearning for Thy love lingereth may be guided by its radiance. (TB 151)

Conclusions

Some very tentative and preliminary conclusions are drawn from this paper and only sketched out here for further consideration, following the chapters of this paper.

1) Progressive Theology

The value of this concept for a Bahá'í theology needs to be further investigated and developed, especially in comparison with other scriptural texts,

2) Consequences of Philosophical Error

This consideration is based on a verse of this tablet and needs to be followed up throughout the Bahá'í Scripture. Any

philosophical school of thought that denies a hierarchical value system and that denies the difference between good and bad, seems to undermine civilization and therefore would be unacceptable for the consideration in the Bahá'í understanding of philosophy.

3) Form and Matter

The way how oppositional concepts are seen in the concrete world is of importance as the consequences of different philosophical solutions have demonstrable consequences for civilization. The logic of this new understanding needs to be developed and added to the traditional logical systems. The concept of Unity in Diversity can function as the watchword of this new conceptualization of reality.

4) Philosophy and Philosophers

Bahá'u'lláh has stated clearly the criteria of a true philosopher.

Two philosophical criteria

- i) True philosophers will never deny God the Creator
- ii) True philosophers will promote the best interest of Humanity

Two theological criteria

- i) True philosophers are loved by the Manifestation of God
- ii) True philosophers are aided through the potency of the Manifestation

In any evaluation of a philosopher or of any philosophical system these criteria can be applied and will give a sure footing for their evaluation. This applies to a whole system or an independent part of a philosophical system. It applies to all philosophers disregarding their specific religious affiliation.

5) Spiritual Materialism

This concept seems to be the touchstone of the evaluation of modern thinkers.

Any thinking that does make the human reason the “measure of all things” and does not accept anything that is above, or beyond, transcendent or hidden, will have missed the true human condition and therefore will have detrimental consequences, even if it is presented with a high level of “spirituality”.

The understanding of spirituality needs to be further researched in the writings of the Bahá'í Faith, the system of dialogical thinking may be of assistance in this effort.

6) Dialogical Thinking

This new understanding of human spirituality in the Word of God can be used to understand the seeming contradiction in the Bahá'í Revelation, where it is said that man is created to know God but yet God is defined as unknowable. The difference between substantial or third person understanding and personal or first and second person communication needs to be developed and might be useful in better understanding the solution to the above-mentioned apparent contradiction. The fact that all knowledge of God is manifest in God's Prophets, i.e. in a personal way and not in abstract and substantial thought processes seems to indicate the correctness of this distinction.

7) Final Thoughts

The most important conclusion of this paper is the obligation to look at modern philosophy and distinguish between the findings and statements of modern philosophers. There are philosophies that are words leading to words and thereby satisfying only the intellectual mind in a Spiritual Materialism dealing only with "that which they comprehend".

On the other hand, there are modern philosophers and theologians, philosophical ideas and visions of contemporary thinking, which are based on the essence and the fundamentals that have been revealed by and emanate from the Prophets of the past and by the Prophets of today, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. And there are certainly some philosophers who are in the middle, having only partially recognized this spirit of the Prophet.

In every case it is the task of the student of Bahá'í theology to use discrimination and apply it according to the Pauline statement: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."⁵⁸

The same truth has been expressed in the Tablet of Wisdom:

Forsake all evil and hold fast that which is good. (TB 138)

Establish the Word of Truth with eloquence and Wisdom (TB 139)

... When no man knoweth how to discern light and darkness or to distinguish guidance from error. (TB 138)

NOTES

- ¹ All quotes from Bahá'í Writings are from the "Ocean Personal Research Library" available at bahai-education.org
- ² It should be noted that these descriptions of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation are logically contradictory. Consequently it is called "Bewildering and Challenging." The meaning of these contradictions will be explained later in the paper.
- ³ The Covenant in the Bahá'í Faith is the adherence of all believers to the Prophet Founder, Bahá'u'lláh, to His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Master, and to His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as the Guardian of the Faith, and to the Universal House of Justice. After Shoghi Effendi's death the Universal House of Justice was established following the Instructions of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. This sequence was established in Their written testaments and is the guarantee of the unity of the Bahá'í Faith, which was upheld in spite of serious challenges.
- ⁴ Adib Taherzadeh: *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Volume four, George Ronald, Oxford, 1987, page 39. Taherzadeh has extracted this quote from the Tablet *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá*, see note 11, on page 447
- ⁵ All response to this paper can be made to the author at waklebel@msn.com and will be received with gratitude
- ⁶ This writer is not aware of ever finding this concept of Progressive Theology in other writings and presents this idea for the first time in this paper. If this concept has been used before, please give notice of this fact.
- ⁷ Only most recently are we finding out that even basic human concepts have undergone progressive development throughout history. The point is made by Mathew D. Lieberman and Naomi I. Eisenberger in their paper "Conflict and habit: A Social Cognitive Neuroscience approach to the Self." (In *Psychological Perspective on Self and Identity*, Vol. 4. available online at www.scn.ucla.edu/under4053_c004Lieberman.pdf) that the understanding of the self has made drastic changes during the last few hundred years, talking about historical changes in self concept formation, p.78. Carl Zimmer has summarized this new research in *Scientific American*, November 2005 p. 93 -101
- ⁸ This writer was rather surprised and yet excited by these events and needed time and consideration to understand their meaning. There is always the possibility of subjective opinions influencing such experiences and only a careful comparison with the Writings can assure their value. Nevertheless, if these experiences are true and correct they can provide a spiritual nourishment that cannot be communicated easily, but will promote and assist in further deepening in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

⁹ The comparison of the progress of civilization and the awakening of humanity with the flight of an arrow is a picture that is not found in the Bahá'í Scriptures (as compiled in Ocean). It needs to be noted that this comparison is presented in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, when he describes the evolution of humanity as an arrow (see *La Vision du Passé*, Paris 1957, p. 101) and in *L'Apparition de l'Homme*, (aris,1956, page 297) where Teilhard compares the goal directed evolution of humanity with an arrow. A similar use of a Teilhardian concept was presented by the Universal House of Justice in the statement "The Promise of World Peace" (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1985), where Teilhard is quoted as a "Great Thinker" and his term of "the planetarization of mankind" is directly quoted in that statement.

¹⁰ It needs to be noted here that this process is not simple and unilateral. Peter Terry, in an electronically transmitted comment to this concept has noted the following: "Abdu'l-Bahá reminds us that after the Manifestation of God departs from this world, during the interval between His passing and the advent of the next Manifestation of God, human understanding of His Message decreases and human beings become increasingly far-fetched in their doctrinal formulations, resulting in literalism, superstition, fragmentation among believers, and exclusion (sometimes persecution) of those who have alternate views." How these two processes interact and how they are related to each other, especially in the diverse historical religions, is a question certainly needing further consideration. It seems to me that it denotes the difference between the ossification and deterioration of the religion and a simultaneous progress of humanity. The history of modern times could certainly be understood that way.

¹¹ See footnote 6

¹² According to Adib Taherzadeh (ibid, volume 4 page 33) the Tablet of Wisdom was addressed to Nabil-i-Akbar, "a man of great knowledge and learning" on the occasion of his pilgrimage to 'Akká.

¹³ Stephane Courtois et al. in: *The Black Book of Communism, Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, London, England, 1999.

These are the "cold" statistics of the victims of communism as described in this book on page 4:

U.S.S.R	20 million deaths	Eastern Europe	1 million deaths
China	65 million deaths	Latin America	150,000 deaths
Vietnam	1 million deaths	Africa	1.7 million deaths
North Korea	2 million deaths	Afghanistan	1.5 million deaths
Cambodia	2 million deaths		

¹⁴ Adib Taherzadeh comments on this section more extensively, ibid, pp. 35-39.

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- ¹⁵ The reader is again referred to the lengthy commentary by Adib Taherzadeh on this topic, *ibid.* pp.39-46.
- ¹⁶ This preexistence of the world (as stated above: “*His creation has ever existed in His (God’s) shelter*”) is usually understood in Neoplatonic terms by Bahá’í scholars. It is this writer’s opinion that this understanding has some merits, but is by no means a full explanation of this view.
- ¹⁷ This term is used by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to indicate the philosophical tradition originated by Aristotle and Plato: “As for the second balance, which the Illuminati and the peripatetics (followers of Aristotle) rely upon, it is the balance of reason (*al-mízánu'l-'aql*). In like manner, the other schools of the first philosophers in the ancient and middle centuries depended upon it. They said that that which is judged by reason is firmly established, clear and indubitable, and that there is no doubt or defect either in its foundations or its outcomes.” (Quoted from a paper by Peter Terry, *Bahá’í Epistemology: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablet on the Inmost Heart*, provisional translation by Steven Phelps and William McCants, March 2000; Persian text in *Min Makatib ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 83-86)
- ¹⁸ It is noteworthy that this understanding of heat or energy as being the element that brings the world of existence together is not unlike the modern description of the origin of the world. An article by W. Wayt Gibbs, “Cosmic CATScan” (in *Scientific American*, August 2005, page 23) states for example: “In the beginning, the universe was a void full of energy but without form. And so it remained for millions of years – exactly how long is still a major mystery of cosmology – until the first stars condensed from the fog of matter and lit up with a blue nuclear flow.”
- ¹⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Towards the Future*, Harcourt Brace & Company, New York, London 1973, page 82
- ²⁰ This concept has been described by Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld in the article “Zur neueren Geschichte des integralen Gegensatzes von Einheit und Vielheit” (About the newer history of the integral polarity of unity and plurality) pages 434-445 in *Ursprüngliche Erfahrung und personales Sein*, (Original experience and personal being); Böhlau, Vienna 1997. This polar relationship has been elaborated in what is called integral philosophy as developed by Leo Gabriel, Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld and others in Austria, based on the view presented by Solovjev et al. Romano Guardini, the Catholic theologian, has described this polarity in *Der Gegensatz, Versuch zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten* (Polarity, Attempt towards a philosophy of the living-concrete) Mainz 1952
- ²¹ See below footnote 40 for Zubiri and the concept of “holon” by Ken Wilber, *passim*, especially in *Integral Psychology*, Shambhala, Boston and London, 2000, page 221, note 7
- ²² Sen McGlinn, *Church and State, a postmodern political theology*, published by the author, University of Leiden, the Netherlands;

distributed by Kalimát Press as Volume Nineteen of the series *Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*

- ²³ Mencius, Translated by David Hinton, Counterpoint, Washington, D.C., 1998, p.52
- ²⁴ Daniel Bell: *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism, Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, Basic Books; A Subsidiary of Perseus Books, L.L.C. New York, 1978, 1996, p. 253
- ²⁵ Karl Marx, *Karl Marx selected writings*. Edited by David McLellan, Oxford University Press, 1977, "The Communist Manifesto", page 238.
- ²⁶ Cf. the paper by this writer: "Towards a Criticism of Marx's Criticism of Religion in the Bahá'í Faith" Presently evaluated for publication, available on request at waklebel@msn.com.
- ²⁷ Sen McGlinn (ibid, p. 255) claims that this concept of unity in diversity is not a difference in essence but only a superficial difference like in race relations. He does not appreciate the statement of Bahá'u'lláh as quoted below, that indicate that this concept is the basis of the organic unity as described in McGlinn's book. Consequently this concept was called by the Guardian a bedrock of Bahá'í belief and the watchword of the Law of Bahá'u'lláh. (WOB p. 115 and p. 41 respectively)
- ²⁸ This verse was the topic of my presentation at Bosch in 2004, under the title "True of Thyself", which will be published in *Irfan Magazine*.
- ²⁹ At the Irfan Colloquium May 2004 at Bosch Bahá'í School in California. Published in *Lights of Irfan Book Six*
- ³⁰ The authors mentioned here are from a brief description of this way of thinking presented by Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld in *Ursprüngliche Erfahrung und personales Sein* (Original Experience and Personal Existence) Böhlau Verlag, Wien, Köln, Weimar, 1997, in "Zur neuern Geschichte des integralen Gegensatzes von Einheit und Vielheit" (About the new history of the integral Opposition of Unity and Plurality)
- ³¹ The fact that these authors were not knowledgeable of the Bahá'í faith at all can be proven in the case of Wucherer Huldenfeld, who is a personal friend of mine and we studied together theology. Only recently have I told him about the Bahá'í Faith, many years after he wrote about this philosophy of "Integral Opposition of Unity and Plurality,".
- ³² The concept of structure was philosophically developed by Xavier Zubiri in his book *Dynamic Structure of Reality*, Translated by Nelson R. Orringer, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2003, pages 35 and 82
- ³³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, Harcourt Brace & Company, New York, London, 1996, pp. 107-108
- ³⁴ See my paper in *Lights of 'Irfán Book Six*, ibid.

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- ³⁵ “The criticism of religion is the presupposition of all criticism.” Karl Marx, “Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” in “Karl Marx selected writings”. Edited by David McLellan, Oxford University Press, 1977, page 63
- ³⁶ In *Christianity and Evolution*, A Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace & Company; San Diego, New York, London, 1969, page 28; (Italics in the original)
- ³⁷ Chronological Issues in the Lawḥ-i-Hikmat of Bahá'u'lláh. by Peter Terry, Published in *Lights of Irfan: Papers Presented at the Irfan Colloquia and Seminars* Book 1, pages 121-142, Wilmette, IL: Irfan Colloquia, 2000
- ³⁸ Following Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, (SAQ 164) distinguishes as well between independent prophets and dependent prophets, whom He calls followers and promoters: *“For the independent Prophets are founders; They establish a new religion and make new creatures of men; They change the general morals, promote new customs and rules, renew the cycle and the Law. Their appearance is like the season of spring, which arrays all earthly beings in a new garment, and gives them a new life.*
- With regard to the second sort of Prophets who are followers, these also promote the Law of God, make known the Religion of God, and proclaim His word. Of themselves they have no power and might, except what they receive from the independent Prophets.”*
- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, (‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London, p. 42) stated that even Greek philosophy is dependent on the Prophets: *“God sends Prophets for the education of the people and the progress of mankind. Each such Manifestation of God has raised humanity. They serve the whole world by the bounty of God. The sure proof that they are the Manifestations of God is in the education and progress of the people. 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. Thus was the reign of Solomon brought about and science and art were made known to mankind. Even Greek philosophers became students of Solomon’s teaching. Thus was Moses proved to be a Prophet.”* This passage clearly indicates that the teaching of Solomon, which has even reached the Greek philosophers, did prove the prophethood of Moses, who was the independent Prophet for Israel.
- ³⁹ Teilhard, “How I believe” page 101 in *Christianity and Evolution*, Harcourt Brace & Company, San Diego, New York, London 1969,
- ⁴⁰ Confer Sion Cowell, *The Teilhard Lexicon*, Sussex Academic Press, Brighton, Portland, 2001, pages 27-28 and 30, which concept is as close to the Bahá’í understanding of the Divine Manifestation as Teilhard could come.
- ⁴¹ *Cutting through Spiritual Materialisms*, Shambhala, Boston, 1979
- ⁴² Johannes Toegel, *Eine Theologie des Zeitgeistes, Darstellung und Kritik am Beispiel der Transcendentalen Psychologie* (A theology of the

spirit of the time, a presentation and critique using the example of transcendental psychology). PhD Diss. (28,684) Univ. of Vienna, 1991, p. 170. (All quotes from Toegel translated by this writer). Toegel reports that for three years he had tried the same approach while living in a cave in Tibet, where he eventually met a true master and realized that true mystical experiences consist in trust and acceptance and not in striving to higher transpersonal techniques.

⁴³ Freely translated that means: when the religious authority has spoken, there is no more discussion and no question.

⁴⁴ Ibid., page 173

⁴⁵ The difference between Bahá'u'lláh's mystical writings and the Sufi understanding of the mystic travel was clearly pointed out by Nader Saiedi in *Logos and Civilization* in the Chapter "Theology or Revelation and Critique of the Unity of Existence", (University Press of Maryland; Maryland, 2000 pages 89-78.) and by Ghasem Bayat, in the article "A Journey through the Seven Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh" in *Lights of 'Irfán Book III*, Bahá'í National Center, 1233 Central Street, Evanston, IL 60201 USA, passim.

⁴⁶ Toegel, *ibid.*, pages 344-246

⁴⁷ Ken Wilber; *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality, The Spirit of Evolution*, Chapter: "The Unpacking of God", page 550

⁴⁸ In a footnote of the edition of the Tablets, the editor refers to another Tablet of Bahá'í and to the Qur'an, where the origin of philosophy is described and Iris, or Hermes, and their follower Balinus is mentioned. It appears that these passages indicate the origin of philosophy, indicating that these philosophies were based on the belief in God.

⁴⁹ This new philosophical thinking was comprehensively described by 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/B. 1967.

⁵⁰ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, Routledge Classics, London New York 2002

⁵¹ Simon Blackburn, the author of the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* has in his book *Think* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 1999) described in a very lucid and commonly understandable way this way of modern thinking. He gives the reader a sense of how "the great historical figures such as Descartes, Hume, Kant and Wittgenstein have approached its central themes." While describing the classical tradition in philosophy, he does not include philosophers such as Husserl and Heidegger in his treatise, and seems to be coming to conclusion about God and man, more in the tradition of Bertrand Russell than of the more modern thinkers. He follows, one could say, the substantial way of thinking.

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- ⁵² The brief explanation follows the introductory work to Ferdinand Ebner's thinking by Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld: *Personales Sein und Wort, Einführung in den Grundgedanken Ferdinand Ebners* (Personal Being and Word, Introduction into the basic principle of the thinking of Ferdinand Ebner); Böhlau, Vienna, Cologne, Graz 1985; pages. 23-32
- ⁵³ Caroline Whitbeck, 'Theories of Sex Difference', in Gould and Wartofsky (eds.), *Women and Philosophy*, New York 1976, pp. 54-80; M.Maloney, 'The Arguments for Women's Difference in Classical Philosophy and Early Christianity', pp. 41-49.
- ⁵⁴ The understanding of Ferdinand Ebner's philosophy is mainly based on the studies of Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld, *Der Grundgedanke Ferdinand Ebners*, (the basic thought of Ferdinand Ebner) 78-87; Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld, *Personales Sein und Wort. Einführung in den Grundgedanken Ferdinand Ebners*, Wien-Köln-Graz 1985;
- ⁵⁵ This relationship is here only briefly indicated and certainly would need a much longer exposition.
- ⁵⁶ Quoted in Bernard Casper *ibid.*, page 92
- ⁵⁷ Ian Kluge has made similar connections with the philosophies of Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, Teilhard. De Chardin, and Whitehead in several of his papers. See Ian Kluge, *Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance*; iankluge@netbistro.com,
- ⁵⁸ Thessalonians 5:21

Further Explorations in Bahá'í Ontology

Ian Kluge

Introduction

In this paper we shall continue the survey of Bahá'í ontology begun in “Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance.”* The subjects to be covered in this paper are becoming and change; substance, soul, self and identity; the nature of being and nothingness; social ontology and dialectic; and the order of knowledge and the order of being. Though some of these topics have been touched on in the “Initial Reconnaissance”, we shall subject them to deeper analysis in order to draw out their more subtle aspects.

Ontology is the study of being and what it means to say that something ‘is’ or ‘exists’. As a branch of metaphysics¹, the study of the most general principles of reality, ontology specifically concerns itself with the most fundamental questions about the nature of existence and existing things. It focuses on such issues as “why is there anything at all rather than nothing?”²; what is ‘being’?; how are ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ related? and the relationship between ‘being’ and ‘nothingness’.

The main value of studying Bahá'í ontology lies in the fact that an ontology operates like a constitution: it is the philosophical frame of reference or context within which various ideas take on meaning. Any exposition of the Writings or any Bahá'í-based philosophizing must be in harmony with this ontological ‘constitution’, or at least, be neutral and not offend against its general principles. Thus, like any other constitution, a Bahá'í ontology provides a particular philosophical identity that distinguishes the Writings from other sacred books or the foundational books of various philosophies and ideologies. Knowing this identity lays the foundations for detailed and in-depth dialogue with religious and secular belief systems from around the world.

One of the tasks of this paper is to show how the ontology embedded in the Writings charts a unique course between various contending philosophical schools.

* “Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance,” in *Lights of 'Irfán Book Six*, 2005.

The Ubiquity of Change

The first topic we shall examine is the issue of change. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

*Divine and all encompassing Wisdom hath ordained that motion be an inseparable concomitant of existence, whether inherently or accidentally, spiritually or materially.*³

It should be noted that “motion” in this statement refers not only to a change in space but also to a change in time, in condition, in relationship, in appearance, constitution or structure, intensity, color, size shape — indeed, any kind of attributional or essential difference between two moments in the existence of an entity. It is important to note that change does not just refer to the material but to the spiritual as well. Even our souls are subject to change, as evident in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that the soul is “*in motion and ever active*,” (TAF) something also apparent in the soul's continued evolution after death. As well, the doctrine of progressive revelation points to the fact that change is part of our collective spiritual existence. The foregoing quote also demonstrate that change is part of things either “*inherently or accidentally*.” (TAF) Change that belongs to something “inherently” belongs to the essence of something, is necessary part or aspect of its natural constitution in being the kind of thing it is. Change is, in that sense ‘internal’ to the thing. Such change is, in the immediate sense, self-caused, though ultimately, of course, all motion must be traced back to God.

Change and Unchangeable Essences

It might be objected that the concept of inherent change contradicts 'Abdul-Bahá's statement that “*It has been proved by exact science that the essence of things does not change*.” (SAQ 100) However, careful reflection shows that no such contradiction exists. If change is inherent in all created things, then it is an aspect of the essence of an entity — and nothing can, therefore, negate the fact of that change. The entity must change; it cannot not-change because it requires change to be itself. This constant change is ineradicably part of its essence. Any living creature is an example of this constancy through change as it moves from birth through growth to maturity to decline and death. The moment it ceases changing, it is no longer what it once was, a living being.

'Abdu'l-Bahá also says the change can be “accidental.” In philosophy, this term is used to indicate that something is not *necessarily* related to the essence of an entity. For example, having

pages is an inherent, essential attribute of a book, but the color of the pages is accidental — they need not necessarily be white. However, it is necessary for the pages to be *some* color. Thus, the necessity of having some color is essential, but the fact of being some particular color is accidental. Accidental features and changes are like the colors of the pages of a book — it is always possible for an alternative color to be chosen and they do not change one kind of thing into another kind of thing. A book with white pages is still a book, even if we change the color of its pages.

For a change to be accidental means that the change is not self-caused (in the immediate sense), but is externally caused by something else. The particular change is not necessary but the fact of some kind of change is, indeed, necessary since everything is in inter-action with its environment. Such change does not constitute the nature of the being as it is-in-itself, but does constitute its nature as it is-with-others, which is to say, how it interacts with others. These inter-actions constitute an entity’s ‘persona’, which is relative insofar as it may vary from one kind of inter-action to another.

Being-with-Others

The development of a ‘persona’ or thing as it with-others is inevitable because nothing in existence can escape the influence of others.

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. (SAQ 178-9)

It is important to note in this passage that the “*help, assistance and interaction*” (SAQ 178-9) refer to the “*properties of things*”, (SAQ 178-9) to their attributes and not their essences. These interactions influence the growth and development of the thing as it is with-others but they cannot change the essence, which is to say, they cannot change one kind of thing into another, though, of course, outward form may be changed as in the case of frogs or butterflies. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us, “*It has been proved by exact science that the essence of things does not change.*” (SAQ 100) From this it follows that the constant interaction among things does not alter the essence, or thing as it is in-itself even though such interaction is required for things to exist. Only their mode of being

with-others changes. The teaching that the human soul is immune to changes caused by illness or disability:

[T]he human spirit is in one condition. It neither becomes ill from the diseases of the body nor cured by its health; it does not become sick, nor weak, nor miserable, nor poor, nor light, nor small – that is to say, it will not be injured because of the infirmities of the body... (SAQ 229)

In other words, it is the body as it is with-others that shows the attributes of illness not the soul as it is in-itself. We may call this inviolability the principle of the integrity of essences – a principle to which there is only one exception, viz. the power of God or the Manifestation. On this score, the Writings say, for example, “*See how powerful is the influence exerted by the Day-Star of the world upon the inner essence of all created things!*” (SWAB 112) We also read how “*the power of the divine make[s] itself effective and the breath of the Holy Spirit penetrate[s] the essence of things.*” (PUP 110) Finally, Bahá'u'lláh says, that “*When He contemplates, however, the bright effulgences He hath been empowered to manifest, lo, that self is transfigured before Him into a sovereign Potency permeating the essence of all things visible and invisible.*” (GWB 102, emphasis added) Only the Divine can access the essence of things.

The Thing-As-It-Is-In-Itself

What this means, of course, is that the Writings implicitly recognise the distinction between a thing-as-it-is in itself and a thing-as-it-is with others, between a thing and its inter-actions. The importance of this distinction is easy to miss at first glance but we soon get a sharp awakening we recall that some philosophies deny the very existence of individuals-as-they-are in themselves and maintain that the individuals are entirely and essentially constituted by nothing but their relationships to the rest of the world. Individual things and humans are simply the nexus of their economic, social or political relationships, which is to say, are nothing in themselves⁴ Such philosophies have a deep ontological bias against individuality – a bias that can have profound, usually negative, social effects when transferred into practical application as we have seen in the various forms of 20th Century totalitarianism. The Bahá'í Writings on the other hand, have an ontological bias in favour of the independence and integrity of the individual essence which is not only a real thing in its own right, but is also safe-guarded against external action from anyone but God or the Manifestation.

A Middle Path Between Substantialism and Nonsubstantialism

At this point, it becomes evident that the Bahá’í Writings promulgate a view of essence — and, by extension, the human self — that falls between or steers a middle path between substantialist and non-substantialist views. According to substantialism, things, or entitative beings are the primary or fundamentally real things, and that they are autonomous and exist before processes. Processes and relationships occur between these real beings and that these ontologically separate, autonomous entities are the source or origin or ground of all mental or material phenomena. Non-substantialism, which is most famously represented by Buddhist philosophy, denies these claims.⁵ Buddhist philosophy denies the entitative nature of the “identity or individuality of the self is seen as a dynamic karmic continuity rather than as an essential ontological substantiality — as an ongoing *process* rather than an underlying *thing*.”⁶ According to this view, we must overcome the illusion of permanent entities to which we can become attached; there is only a series of ‘now’s’ or moments.⁷ Applied to humans, this becomes the teaching of “anatta” or no-self. Supporting these ideas is the doctrine of dependent origination or dependent arising according to which all things are interrelated and interdependent, which is to say, all things

exist in relation to each other; all things exist dependent on determinants; all things have no enduring existence, not even for a moment; all things have no intrinsic entity; all things are without First Cause, or Genesis.⁸

Reflection on this passage calls to mind ‘Abdul-Bahá’s assertion that

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. (SAQ 178-9)

This passage asserts that “*all beings*” (SAQ 178-9) depend immediately on their interactions for their “*existence, development and growth*,” (SAQ 178-9) all beings are “interrelated and interdependent”⁹ — which is in agreement with Buddhist philosophy. However, Buddhist philosophy also claims that that things have “no enduring existence,”¹⁰ an idea that bears obvious similarities to Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that the world of creation is “*being renewed and regenerated at all times*.” (TB 141) If things are being continuously “renewed and regenerated,” it follows that they have “no enduring existence” *in their old forms*, which is to say that their existence is “momentary,”¹¹ and that what we call ‘identity’ is the linking of these moments “not only in serial order [and] each

condition contiguous to the next, but each condition [] involved with the immediate past and present in a mutually penetrative sense.”¹² Close analysis reveals that Bahá'u'lláh's statement says much the same thing, albeit in a very concise manner. When things are “renewed”, *the old is reconstituted in a new form*, which means there is continuity not just in serial order but in condition, as the old is carried forward into or penetrates the new. In other words, entities – including the self – are “karmic,” they inherit from previous conditions and thereby ensure some form of continuity. This continuity or “continuum”¹³ among the members of a series of momentary ‘nows’ becomes the basis for the concept of a stable identity and is, according to Buddhism, falsely reified into a substantial entity or ‘self’. As the foregoing discussion shows, both the Bahá'í Writings and Buddhist philosophy view all ‘entities’ including the self as dynamic, as processes rather than as entities in the substantive sense. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “*nothing which exists remains in a state of repose.*” (BWF 330)

Two Interpretations of the Continuum

Already at this point we can discern two possible interpretations of the continuity or continuum in a series of momentary ‘nows’, in what is being “*renewed and regenerated at all times.*” (TB 141) We may, like Buddhist philosophy, emphasise the ‘nows’, the moments, and conclude that “all things have no intrinsic entity”¹⁴ since “all things have no enduring existence even for a moment.”¹⁵ On the other hand, we may choose to emphasise the continuity and the continuum, and conclude that something real does endure after all, a process connected by “karmic inheritance”¹⁶ from one moment to the next. While no single entity or moment endures, the karmically connected process does continue and when we refer to an entity or a self, we are really referring to this on-going process or pattern exemplified by the process. It is the contention of this paper that the ontology embedded in the Bahá'í Writings suggest this latter view which is not fully substantialist because it does not admit changeless particular things in creation, and which is not fully non-substantialist because it allows that there are enduring, i.e. continuing patterned processes. The continuity or repetition in each process functions like a traditional substance insofar as each process possesses particularising attributes. The continuum may be compared to a fractal in which self-similarity persists through seemingly infinite change.

Resolving an Apparent Contradiction

At this point a crucial question arises: what about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s claim that “*It has been proved by exact science that the essence of*

things does not change? (SAQ 100) Does this not contradict his own claim that “*nothing which exists remains in a state of repose*” (BWF 330) and Bahá'u'lláh's assertion that the contingent world of creation is “*being renewed and regenerated at all times*”? (TB 330) One way to resolve this apparent contradiction is to say that “the essence of things” is that which is karmically inherited and is apparent in the continuity or pattern of the process. Insofar as each process is particular and continues as that particular process, it has an unchanging essence, that is, an essence that is constantly “renewed and regenerated.” Thus, we may conclude that when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that “the essence of things does not change,” he can be understood to mean that the nature of a particular process cannot change into a different kind of process. The process has integrity, and inasmuch as it cannot change into something else, it has ontological independence from other created things. An example of these beliefs at work is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá's insistence that appearances notwithstanding, humankind's “*species and essence undergo no change*.” (SAQ 184; cf. 177) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá admits that we have been in a process of evolution but rejects the notion that alterations of outward form reflect any change in essence — which persists as a pattern of “karmic inheritance.”

Dependent Origination and the Writings

Let us now examine the issue of substantialist and non-substantialist views from the perspective of dependent origination. In the process of dependent origination, all entities are constituted and formed by the reciprocal influence of other entities, for which reason, they are compounded or mutually conditioned.¹⁷ Indeed, according to Alan Sponberg, “In the Buddhist view, [even] the self is nothing more or less than the dynamic aggregation [compounding] of a bundle of interrelated causal processes.”¹⁸ The compounded nature of created entities is — albeit with one exception — accepted by the Bahá'í Writings. It is implicit in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá's claim that the world of being is a chain of mutual interactions which cause things to come into existence, grow and develop. (SAQ 178-9) It also underlies His statement that

Each organism is a compound; each object is an expression of elemental affinity...Existence or the expression of being is, therefore, composition; and nonexistence is decomposition, division, disintegration. When elements have been brought together in a certain plan of combination, the result is the human organism; when these elements separate and disperse, the outcome is death and nonexistence. (PUP 56)

It is worth pointing out that Abdul-Bahá says that both organisms and non-living objects are compounds, and exist by virtue of “*elemental affinity*” (PUP 56) among the parts and, as noted above, by virtue of the dynamic inter-action among various entities. In other words, things do not have existence solely in and of themselves but arise dependently. In Buddhism, according to Alan Sponberg,

Perhaps the single most distinctive and radical of the Buddha's teachings was the notion of the non-substantiality of the self, the doctrine referred to in the Pali scriptures as *anatta* (Sanskrit: *anaatman*) and usually rendered in English as the view of “no-self” or “non-self.”[6] As a corollary of the principle of conditionality (*pratiity samutpaada*) [dependent origination] . . . the nonsubsantiality of the self lies at the very of heart of the Dharma.¹⁹

The preceding passage makes clear that Buddhist philosophers interpret the dynamic, process nature of the self, its impermanence and inter-dependence, as a sign that it has no substantial existence, existence of its own. The question is, whether the Bahá'í Writings can support such a view and the answer is that it all depends on how we interpret the term ‘substance.’ Substance is usually defined as an absolutely changeless substratum that is present in all things. Aristotle defines what he calls “first substance”²⁰ as that which possesses attributes but is not an attribute of anything else. It is also individual. His substance seems to be static.

A Dynamic Interpretation of Substance

If we interpret substance dynamically, that is, as a continuum or pattern of endlessly self-repeating ‘moments’ which are being “*renewed and regenerated at all times*,” (TB 141) then we have, in fact, a dynamic, process concept of substance that is impermanent in its continuous re-birth and passing away and at the same time permanent inasmuch as it is part of a particular and specific series or continuum or pattern. Such an interpretation of ‘substance’ in regards to creation harmonizes well with the Writings because it provides for both dynamic change and continuity; indeed, it provides for continuity *through* dynamic change. Furthermore, in this view, the continuity, continuum or pattern that persists through the individual moments of change functions as the substance, that is, as the bearer of attributes by which we may distinguish one ‘substance-pattern’ from another. It is vital to note that we did not claim that the continuum or pattern *is* a substance but rather that it

actively *functions* like one. It is a substance only in terms of function. It is not some kind of mysterious material.

Thus, from the point of view of process or dependent origination, it is clear that Bahá'í ontology is neither a pure ontology of substance, such as that of Spinoza, nor a purely non-substantial ontology such as we find in most understandings of Buddhism. For there can be no doubt that most Buddhist philosophers would reject the notion that the continuum or patterns caused by the process of dependent origination *functions* like a substance; nor, in the case of humankind, would they accept it as a self since that would violate the doctrine of anatta or no-self. However, as we have seen, the Bahá'í Writings seem to steer between the two alternatives by saying that the self is non-substantial inasmuch as it is a process but is substantial inasmuch it is a persisting pattern exhibited by a process.

We are left with a final question, namely, does an entity or self exist independently in its own right? According to Buddhist monk and philosopher P.A. Payuto,

if there were some real intrinsic self within that continuum there could be no true interdependent cause and effect process. The continuum of cause and effect which enables all things to exist as they do can only operate because such things are transient, ephemeral, constantly arising and ceasing and having no intrinsic entity of their own.²¹

The gist of this passage is clear: things have “no intrinsic entity,” that is, no independent existence and exist purely as functions or products of the process of independent arising. They have no other source or ground of being than the process of dependent origination. Payuto makes this clear when he says that because they are “so interrelated and interdependent ...they have no First Cause.”²²

Dependence and Independence

However, according to the Bahá'í Writings, things are both dependent on and independent from other created things. The changeless essence is obviously independent but the manifestation of that essence, the properties it exhibits while appearing are dependent on the relationship to other entities. Up to this point we have a substantialist view with a stable, that is, unchanging independent essence which needs nothing else to exist. (We shall deal with the issue of God shortly.) However, the Writings do not leave matters there since they tell us that “*nothing which exists remains in a state of repose, that is to say, all things are in motion.*” (BWF 330) How, then, can we resolve this apparent contradiction between changeless essences and all things being in motion? Non-substantialists achieve this can be done by getting rid of the enduring essence and retaining

the ever-changing properties.²³ The Bahá'í Writings refuse to carry out such an amputation and clearly recognise the existence of persisting essences. At the same time they recognise the ubiquity of change.

One way to resolve this apparent contradiction is to say that the essences exist by virtue of the changing properties they manifest. An essence is real only if it manifests or exhibits itself, that is to say, an essence is real only if it engages in inter-action with its environment. Paradoxically, the changeless requires change to exist: being and becoming are absolute correlates, like two sides of a coin. This position is substantialist insofar as it recognizes the existence of enduring essences and non-substantialist insofar as the existence of these essences (persisting patterns) depends on the manifestation of changing properties.

To show how this is possible, we must re-examine 'Abdu'l-Bahá's quote about the chain of being:

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. (SAQ 178-9)

The interactions belong to "the properties of things," to their manifested qualities, not to their essence. Without these interactions and changes, the essence could not exist, for which reason 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that interaction causes "the existence" as well as the "development and growth" of things. The essence needs the interactions and, on the other hand, the interactions need the essence since nothing can exist without an essence or nature. Another way of expressing this is to say that the essence or self or soul has an independent existence formally but not actually. A formal distinction is an objectively real difference between things that cannot, in actuality, be separated from each other.²⁴ For example, we may formally distinguish one side of a coin from another, but we cannot actually separate them. The difference between the two sides is objectively real though we cannot separate the two. Similarly, we may formally distinguish the soul, self or essence from its interactions, but cannot actually separate them from their relationships to other entities. Both are always present, being absolutely correlated.

Having "Intrinsic Entity"

Thus, if we ask whether a self, soul or essence has "intrinsic entity," which is to say, whether it has any existence apart from its supporting factors in the process of dependent origination²⁵, the Bahá'í Writings would seem to answer both yes and no. Insofar as

the soul, essence or self is formally distinct, which is to say, insofar as it is formally objective and real, it possesses “intrinsic entity.” It is, in Aristotelian terms, a ‘substance’, something which does not exist as an attribute of something else, though in keeping with our process perspective, we would rather say the self, soul or essence act or function like a substance. On the other hand, insofar as it cannot actually be separated from its inter-actions, the self, soul or essence lacks “intrinsic entity.” Once again, we observe how the Bahá’í Writings carve out a middle way between substantialism and non-substantialism.

In contrast to Buddhist non-substantialism, we must also note that even though the soul or self exists by virtue of relating to others, it is, therefore, not compounded from what some Buddhists call their “supporting factors.”²⁶ As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “*The soul, not being a composition of elements, is, in character, as a simple element.*” (PT 91; cf. PUP 260) The fact that the soul is simple and not compounded lays the foundation for the soul’s ontological integrity, that is, for the fact that the soul is not entirely determined, shaped or governed by its “supporting factors.” In other words, it has free will, as noted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when He says,

Some things are subject to the free will of man, such as justice, equity, tyranny and injustice, in other words, good and evil actions; it is evident and clear that these actions are, for the most part, left to the will of man. But there are certain things to which man is forced and compelled, such as sleep, death, sickness, decline of power, injuries and misfortunes; these are not subject to the will of man. . .
(SAQ 248)

Here, too, we see the Bahá’í Writings taking a middle path between absolute determinism and absolute free will which recognizes no limitations on the human will. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, humankind is morally free, that is, morally and spiritually free and undetermined vis-à-vis the conditions of existence but determined by external life circumstances be they cultural, economic or political, or by internal circumstances such as physiological condition and general health. In non-substantialist philosophies such as many of the philosophies that grow out of the Buddha’s revelation, the issue of free will is not so clear. On one hand, if each momentary self is only a compound of its “supporting factors” — as the doctrine dependent origination teaches — then it is difficult to see how the momentarily existing self can be free, i.e. undetermined by others, or conversely, self-determined. At least some Buddhist are willing to accept this consequence: “Free will, in terms of an undetermined, unrelated, uncaused factor in human actions, cannot be admitted.”²⁷ On the other hand, this conflicts with the self-evident need for us to

be self-determined, that is, make choices conducive to our salvation. How these two positions can be reconciled is not entirely clear. Interestingly enough, some Buddhists argue that the whole problem of individual free will is a chimera, because no such stable entities as 'a man' and 'will' even exist.²⁸ Therefore, nothing contradictory can be said about them.

It might be objected that, given 'Abdu'l-Bahá's support for the idea of "*elemental atoms*," (PUP 284) the Bahá'í Writings clearly espouse substantialism. Such atoms may be understood as stable substances - but then we must remember that "*The elemental atoms which constitute all phenomenal existence and being in this illimitable universe are in perpetual motion, undergoing continuous degrees of progression.*" (FWU 57) Without motion, the atoms could not exist; their existence and motion are correlates and the atom only exists by virtue of its motion and change or "progression." As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "*Creation is the expression of motion*" (PUP 140) which is obviously an essential attribute of everything created by God. Because the "elemental atoms" have motion as an essential, ontologically constitutive attribute, it is untenable to argue that the Writings are purely substantialist. On the other hand, the belief that something such as a persistent pattern, (called an "elemental atom") endures through the cosmic process indicates that the view embedded in the Writings cannot be identified with non-substantialism either. Yet again we observe how the Writings take a middle path between these two positions.

The Aristotelian Substratum

Before passing on to our next subject, we must deal with an important question of interpretation, viz., does not this understanding of a middle path between substantialism and non-substantialism contradict the Aristotelian substratum of the Bahá'í Writings?²⁹ It might appear so, especially in regards to the concept of 'substance.' Rather than say that the Writings contradict or reject the notion of substance, it should be said that they keep the concept albeit in a new form, which is to say, they keep the essential meaning of a continuity and a bearer of attributes persisting through change. In other words, the Writings give their revised concept of substance all the meanings that have been associated with Aristotle's concept of substance.³⁰ Succinctly put, the Writings expand and up-date Aristotle's concept of substance into the direction of modern process philosophy.

Change and Order

Because everything in the created realm is in a state of essential motion or change, being and becoming are correlates, formally distinguishable but not actually separable. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*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.*" (SAQ 233) Furthermore, motion cannot be separated from being because "*an essential requirement cannot be separated from the thing itself.*" (SAQ 171) Thus, motion and being are "inseparable concomitants of existence,"³¹ each of the two existing by virtue of the other as we have already seen above.

As the Writings make clear, there is, however, more to change than mere endless alteration without any direction or purpose, pushed this way and that like a ship hopelessly adrift on the sea. Both at the microscopic level and the macroscopic level, becoming is teleological, it has direction: it is, in a word, teleological which means that change is orderly in regard to future developments. This means that change must be guided or restrained at both the macroscopic and microscopic level. At the macro level, the non-random nature of becoming is evident in the hierarchical structure of creation with the simple mineral kingdom at the bottom and the highly complex human kingdom as the fruit of creation at the top.³² It is also evident in the psychological, cultural and spiritual evolution of humankind under the guidance of successive Manifestations of God Who prevent us from merely changing aimlessly without direction. At both the macroscopic and microscopic level the non-random nature of change is evident in causality and the principle of sufficient reason (PSR), according to which "*we must realize that everything which happens is due to some wisdom and that nothing happens without a reason.*" (PUP 46) 'Abdu'l-Bahá implicitly asserts the PSR in His use of the First Mover argument to prove the existence of God. This argument says that physical motion requires a first cause that is sufficient to set universal motion into action and that if we follow any sequence of change to its source, we come to "*Him who is the Ever-Living, the All-Powerful, who is Self-Dependent and the Ultimate Cause.*" (BWF 343) The non-random nature of change is also evident in the Writings' insistence on the principle of causality. Bahá'u'lláh says that "*All that is created, however, is preceded by a cause,*" (GWB 162) to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá adds that "*the existence of everything depends upon four causes.*" (SAQ 162³³) It only take a little reflection to realise that if events and things are preceded by a cause, then random, uncaused 'spontaneous' unprompted, action is not possible. If it were, the universe could not be an orderly place as the Writings assert it is.³⁴

There is one further source of order in the ubiquity of change and that is the potentials that exist in all things. These potentials limit the development or change in each thing or process to a certain range or spectrum of possibilities which can be realized, thereby keeping change orderly. A raincoat does not change into a living crocodile because it lacks the potentials to develop lungs and other organs. The Writings clearly affirm the existence of potentials, speaking of the virtues "*potential in the seed*," (PUP 91) of the sun awakening "*all that is potential in the earth*," (PUP 74) of the "*virtues potential in mankind*", (PUP 70) of the inventions "*potential in the world of nature*"³⁵ and of the embryo progressing until "*that which was potential in it – namely, the human image – appears*." (PUP 359) Of similar import are the passages referring to the "*mysteries latent in nature*" (PUP 51) which are actualized by humankind, the "*latent talents*" (PUP 52) hidden in human beings, the "*divine perfections latent in the heart of man*," (PUP 53) the "*latent realities within the bosom of the earth*," (FWU 70) and the "*the greater world, the macrocosm...latent and miniature in the lesser world, or microcosm, of man*." (PUP 69-70) The same idea is implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's statement that we are to "[r]egard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value," (GWB 260) which is to say that humankind possesses invaluable potentials that must be actualized through education.

The Existence of Potentials

The ontological necessity for the existence of potentials is supported by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assertion that "*nonexistence is only relative and absolute nonexistence inconceivable*" (PUP 88) and that "*no sign can come from a nonexisting thing*" (SAQ 255) lead to the conclusion that in Bahá'í ontology there is another kind of non-being – 'being- not-yet.' If "[a] thing which does not exist, can... give no sign of its existence," (PT 91) then it follows that everything which has come into existence must have existed as a potential, as a 'being-not-yet' or potential before it is actualized. Otherwise it would have come from absolute nothing – and that is not allowed.

The existence of potentials within all things (processes) has a number of significant implications for Bahá'í ontology. First, it suggests that there is a conceptual distinction between a thing or process and its potentials which are the aspects of an entity that express both possibilities and limitations to which it is subject. They define it, both in relationship to itself and in relationship to others. However, albeit it only conceptually and not actually, the reality of potentials also suggests that every entity or process is di-polar in regards to its present state of actualized potentials and its future state of unactualized potentials. Moreover, insofar as all things

strive to actualize their future potentials, all things are subject to a dynamic tension, which, in effect, defines them as they entity they are. This dynamic tension reflects the fact that

Everything is either growing or declining, all things are either coming from non-existence into being, or going from existence into non-existence. (BWF 330)

Both in growing and declining things are actualizing new, hitherto unrealised, possibilities. (Lest there be any confusion, it should be noted that “non-existence” and “existence” are relative terms and must not be understood as absolutes. (PUP 88)) It is worth noting that inasmuch as all things strive to actualise their potentials, they strive, in effect, to be more, which is to say, they endeavour to be other or not-themselves as they currently are. They seek self-transcendence. This, too, creates, tensions within them because they are always involved, to one extent or another, in a struggle against themselves as they are. In short, they are making themselves new at all times. This leads to the conclusion that they are characterized by what Hegel calls an “inherent unrest”³⁶; in other words, self-dissatisfaction is a universal metaphysical principle inherent in all things, although only humankind is consciously aware of it.

The Ultimate “Object of Desire”

It should be noted however, that potentials, the future identity, is only the proximate motive for an entity to struggle forward. The ultimate motive is, of course, the return to God, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes clear in the following quotation: “*From this same God all creation sprang into existence, and He is the one goal, towards which everything in nature yearns.*” (PT 51) God, as Aristotle said, God is “the object of desire”³⁷ of all things. Insofar as God is the ultimate motive for cosmic restlessness, we cannot help but conclude that return to God which all things desire is one of the principles according to which the cosmos is organised.

To emphasise the ubiquitous influence of this motive principle, we draw attention to the fact that even matter is not exempt from it. Although apparently ‘dead’ or unchanging to us, such is not really the case as noted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

As to the existence of spirit in the mineral, it is indubitable that minerals are endowed with a spirit and life according to the requirements of that stage. (TAF)

Elsewhere He says,

This world is full of seeming contradictions; in each of these kingdoms [mineral, vegetable and animal] life exists

in its degree; though when compared to the life in a man, the earth appears to be dead, yet she, too, lives and has a life of her own. (PT 66)

The fact that all things are alive to their own degree supports the view that all things without exception strive to actualize their potentials and to return to God.

Hegel, Dialectic and the Writings

One more aspect of the nature of change needs to be covered, namely whether or not the process undergone by every thing or process is a dialectic in the Hegelian sense. In other words, we must determine whether or not the transformative process which constitutes the being of every thing and process, is driven by the power of negation or contradiction. As Hegel says, "Contradiction is the moving principle of the world."³⁸ According to Hegel, negation or contradiction is the means by which the static identity of things is dissolved and they take on a new identity as a dynamic entities striving towards completion or 'wholeness.' As Hegel writes,

by Dialectic is meant the indwelling tendency outwards by which the one-sidedness and limitation of the predicates of understanding is seen in its true light, and shown to be the negation of them. For anything to be finite is just to suppress itself and put itself aside.³⁹

In other words, by means of dialectic, things or our understanding of things overcome their own limitations or "one-sidedness," as they struggle to become more complete or comprehensive. In Hegel's view, nothing that can be grasped by human understanding is exempt from this dialectical process: "Dialectic is the very nature and essence of everything predicated by mere understanding — the law of things and of the finite as a whole."⁴⁰ As Hegel puts it, "Wherever there is movement, wherever there is life, wherever anything is carried into effect in the actual world, there Dialectic is at work."⁴¹ This means that nothing is exempt from dialectic and that dialectic occurs in every moment so that there is, in fact, no time at which a thing is not involved in dialectical change in which it strives to complete and transcend itself. (One might think of this self-transcending as the 'return' to God mentioned in the Writings.) The dissolution of the static identity of things is inevitable because each thing contains its own 'contradictory', that is, its own 'other', opposite or differentiation or antithesis within itself, thereby continuously undermining or negating its identity. In the words of Hegel,

Everything finite, instead of being stable and ultimate, is rather changeable and transient; and this is exactly what we mean by that Dialectic of the finite, by which the finite, as implicitly other than what it is, is forced beyond its own immediate or natural being to turn suddenly into its opposite.⁴²

Each thing strives to overcome this opposition by including the opposite in a new, more expansive version of itself — a process often described as the triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis.⁴³ In this change an entity becomes something new, that is, something that it was not, or as Hegel says, “its opposite.” Consequently, identity is never something static but rather dynamic:

Identity, instead of being in its own self-truth and absolute truth is consequently they very opposite: instead of being the unmoved simple, *it is the passage beyond itself* into the dissolution of itself.⁴⁴

However, this transcendence or “passage beyond itself” does not mean that an entity ceases to be or loses itself; indeed, the exact opposite is the case according to Hegel who writes, “the finite in its ceasing-to-be, in this negation of itself has attained its being-in-itself, is *united with itself* . . . in going beyond itself, therefore, it equally unites with itself.”⁴⁵

Dialectic in the Writings

Let us now examine which aspects of Hegel’s work are confirmed by the Bahá’í Writings, which contradict the Writings and which can be harmonized with them and to what degree. The key to understanding any possible similarity is the concept of potentials, which, as we have already seen, are inherent in all things. We may permit ourselves one quotation to refresh our memories: “*But the whole of the great tree is potentially latent and hidden in the little seed. When this seed is planted and cultivated, the tree is revealed.*” (PUP 69) What this means is that when the potentials are actualized — “planted and cultivated” — the tree comes into existence or is “revealed” to the world. In other words, there is a transition from potential to actual, a view with which Aristotle and Hegel would also agree.

Actuality and Potentiality

This means in effect, that according to the Writings, all things are constituted by a formal distinction between an entity’s actuality and its potentiality. The difference between actuality and potentiality is objectively real, but the two cannot really be separated from one another: they are absolute correlates which is to say that

wherever we find one, we find the other as with two sides of a coin. The formal distinction between an entity's present actuality or state and its potentials suggests that according to the Writings, all entities have a complementary nature, with two real, but absolutely correlated aspects. They are wholes, but differentiated wholes, not undifferentiated wholes. From this it follows that only God is a perfect unity or one, which is perhaps why 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to God as the "*Lord of Unity*." (SAQ 146) Only God is, ontologically speaking, really and completely one. In other words, God has no potentials for future development because the possession of such potentials indicates the imperfection of incompleteness. This cannot be because "*God is pure perfection*." (SAQ 113)

Self-Transcendence

Let us now examine the concept of potentials more closely. To say that a thing has a particular potential is, in effect, to say that it is, relative to what it could be, incomplete and unfinished, that it has a transitional perfection but no final perfection. It is not yet fully itself inasmuch as there is, in Hegel's language, an internal contradiction between its actual existence and its essence which is all of its potentials. The fact that human evolution is endless and continues after death suggests that this internal contradiction is constitutional: as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "*human perfections are infinite*." (BWF 333) However, from the perspective of the Writings, all things are in the condition of changing, growing and declining, so that in effect, this internal contradiction between what they are and what they could be constitutes all things. They are all striving to transcend themselves. However, only humankind is conscious of this fact as a part of its experience of existence.

Potentials and Contradiction

In any case, the infinity of potentials or possible perfections means that neither humankind nor any other entities can ever actualise all their potentials; unrealised potentials will always remain and this means that no thing is ever completely and fully itself although it continuously struggles to attain this completed state. Actualising one potential means only to be confronted by another, which is to say, that all entities, including humankind, are constantly confronted by a new possibility, an 'other', a negation of themselves as they currently are, a not-self or antithesis.⁴⁶ By virtue of their potentials, things are not self-identical relative to what — theoretically or ideally — they could be. In Hegel's terminology, all entities including humankind are constitutionally alienated or estranged from themselves, suffering an internal contradiction which they must strive to overcome. In the case of humankind,

Hegel calls this condition the “Unhappy Consciousness [which] is the consciousness of self as a dual natured, merely contradictory being.”⁴⁷ Because it desires to more than a “merely contradictory being”, the unhappy consciousness seeks to overcome this situation. Once again we see how “Contradiction is the very moving principle of the world.”⁴⁸

Hegel, the Unhappy Consciousness and Manifestations

Of particular interest to Bahá'í ontology is that according to Hegel, the Unhappy Consciousness can only overcome its alienated condition by surrendering its will to an intermediary with God, that is, a minister or priest. For Bahá'ís, of course, this is impossible since the Faith has no clergy of any sort, but no great effort is required to replace a clergyman with the Manifestation of God. Once this change is made, what Hegel writes harmonizes well with the Writings. For example, before the Manifestation, the self “renounces its will.”⁴⁹

Through these moments of surrender, first of its right to decide for itself, then of its property [sacrificial giving] and enjoyment, and finally of practicing what it does not understand, it truly and completely deprives itself of the consciousness of inner and outer freedom, of the actuality in which consciousness exists for itself. It has the certainty of having truly divested itself of its ‘I’...Only through this *actual* sacrifice could it demonstrate this self-renunciation.⁵⁰

Only with such complete renunciation of everything pertaining to self and the illusion of independence from God can the self “obtain[] relief from its misery”⁵¹ because it has positively put its will at the disposal of the “universal will.”⁵² What this renunciation demonstrates is that the individual understands that, in the words of the Writings, “*the existence of beings in comparison with the existence of God is but illusion and nothingness.*” (SAQ 278)

At this point it is important to draw special attention to an important difference between the Bahá'í Writings and Hegel: the Writings could never agree to such a complete surrender of self to anyone but a Manifestation of God and certainly not to any clergyman, priest, monk, mulláh or rabbi. This concern for our dignity before other human beings is reflected in the prohibition of confession of sins either to a priest or in public because “*such confession before people results in one's humiliation and abasement.*” (KA 194) This surrender of self can be made only to God.

How, it may be asked, can the surrender of one's will to God alleviate the "unhappy consciousness"? Certainly it will not suddenly lose all its inherent potentials and thus will still suffer contradiction and alienation. However, at least from the Bahá'í perspective, those contradictions will be re-contextualised as a "healing medicine":

O Thou Whose tests are a healing medicine to such as are nigh unto Thee, Whose sword is the ardent desire of all them that love Thee, Whose dart is the dearest wish of those hearts that yearn after Thee, Whose decree is the sole hope of them that have recognized Thy Truth! (PM 220-1)

By re-contextualizing the challenges of alienation and internal contradictions as part of our healing or becoming whole, the Bahá'í Writings show us that these contradictions need not necessarily be emiserating since they are necessary to our healing. Seen in this way, the Writings put a positive light on Hegel's theory of alienation because alienation is necessary for growth and development.

The Nature of Things

Let us now take time for further reflection on what the Writings explicitly say and suggest about the nature of 'things' that make up the world. In studying this question, we must first differentiate between perceptual and conceptual things, in other words, objects of perception and objects of conception or thought because perceptual objects exist independently of human perception and conceptual objects do not.⁵³ It is obvious that unicorns require a thinker in order to be but that roan stallions do not. Our discussion will concern itself with perceptual objects or things. This is not to say that we are only concerned with material things or substances, since the Writings recognise the existence of non-material substances such as the soul, whose existence is evident through their effects. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that "*the rational soul is the substance and the body depends upon it*" (SAQ 239) and that "*the soul . . . [is] one indivisible substance.*" (PT 91) Now, we cannot perceive the soul directly but we can observe its effects and deduce its existence from them.

A thing or substance must satisfy several requirements. In the first place, it must have qualities by which it acquires ontological existence; it must, as Aristotle says, be a bearer of attributes. These attributes may be their particular effects upon other things. There are two subgroups of these qualities: essential attributes which it absolutely requires to be the thing and kind of thing it is and accidental attributes which may be different from one instantiation of a substance to the next. Second, any substance or thing must have

differentia, that is, it must have attributes that distinguish it from other kinds and from other members of its own kind. No thing is merely a complete duplicate of another, a principle alluded to when 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of "*the law of creation in its endless forms and infinite variety of expression.*" (PUP 56) Finally, it must have relationship to other things that exist, a view explicitly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá when He says "*For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction.*" (SAQ 178, emphases added) Anything of which we can say "It is" must be able to meet these three criteria. Even God — *as presented in the Writings* not necessarily as He is in Himself which no one can know — meets these criteria. Consider, for example, the following quotation:

Know that the Reality of Divinity or the substance of the Essence of Oneness is pure sanctity and absolute holiness — that is to say, it is sanctified and exempt from all praise.
(SAQ 146)

We observe that God is described as a substance — obviously not material — that is, as possessing attributes of "pure sanctity and absolute holiness" and being "sanctified and exempt from all praise", and as having differentia, such as those just mentioned. While God has no direct relationship with creation⁵⁴ the fact remains that He does relate to creation through His Manifestations. However, we should not be misled into thinking that God is a 'thing like the others', because it would be difficult if not impossible to conceive of accidental, that is, non-essential attributes in God. In this, and in other ways, God is exceptional.

As we have already seen, the Writings present each thing — except of course God — as having a two fold aspect: the thing as it currently is, and its potentials, or the thing as it could be. The two are correlated and the latter is a contradiction to or negation of the former which must be dissolved in order to actualize its future identity. However, existing in this state of contradiction is not tenable for a thing, which seeks to become fully one with itself by actualizing all of its potentials. In other words, for a thing to actualise a potential is, in effect, for the thing to negate itself as it is, and to find itself again, a new form, by means of uniting with the previously contradictory other whether that 'other' be internal or external. In either case the thing is a being that actively maintains its identity and in that sense *is*, by the paradoxical act of becoming another: it is what it is by always leaving its old identity behind.

The Quest for Unity

It does so because all things seek completion — the only way they can achieve the one-ness or unity which they desire not only because “*disunity and inharmony spell death*” (SWAB 31) but also because they are naturally attracted to God, the universal “object of desire.”⁵⁵ Thus, the evolution of things is impelled or motivated by three reasons: first, the need to change and, thereby, to stay in existence; second, the desire to escape disunity and the ‘death’ of incompleteness and third, the desire to reach the Source of all being. Internal contradiction and alienation are the means by which these three goals — continued existence, actualization of potentials, and closeness to God — are achieved. This, however, marks a departure from Hegel insofar as the Writings do not see contradiction by itself as sufficient to explain motion and change; rather, a transcendent Attractor, or God, is needed to explain why things desire the return to God and therefore, move on the “*arc of ascent*.” (SAQ 284)

As we have seen, focussing on the internal constitution of a thing, reveals that it is always doing two things at once: changing its identity yet maintaining it. To do one requires the other. This means that every thing is constituted by a double-movement that highlights the paradoxical nature of its existence: to be itself it must actively cease being itself. Only by such relentless self-overcoming can a thing be itself, as, indeed, it is written in the Bible: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”⁵⁶ Christ’s statement seems to apply not only to human beings but to all things in creation.

The Nothingness Within

The fact that all things are continuously changing points out another aspect characterizing all created things: they are constituted by mixture of being and nothingness which is to say, they both are and, vis-à-vis their future unactualized potentials, are not. Without this nothingness in their constitution, they could not be because they could not change, and without change or motion, being is not possible according to the Writings. Further analysis permits us to add that since growth and movement are necessary for being, the potentials inherent in a thing, in effect, amount to an internal imperative, an internal “ought” for which it must strive or suffer the consequent diminishment of being. Actualisation is an “inner necessity” for things. We must also note that through these potentials, or ‘oughts’, things transcend their limitations.⁵⁷ This means that all things have a self-transcendent aspect, always ‘desiring’ to be more than they currently are. Paradoxically, in doing so, they become themselves more completely than ever before, or, as Hegel says, “the finite in its ceasing-to-be, in this negation of itself

has attained its being-in-itself, is *united with itself*.”⁵⁸ In this seeking to be more, the finite thing reaches out towards infinity – or, in Bahá’í terms, desires God – and thereby more truly becomes itself. According to Hegel, “In the ought the transcendence of finitude, that is, infinity begins.”⁵⁹ (It is plain at this point that Bahá’í ontology is evolutionary to its very foundations inasmuch as growth and transformation are an integral part of all things.)

The foregoing are some of the paradoxical consequences of the Bahá’í teaching that “*that existence and nonexistence are both relative*.” (SAQ 281) In other words, among created things, they are not absolute, a fact emphasised by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when He says, “*Therefore non-existence is only relative and absolute non-existence inconceivable*.” (BWF 264) When we inquire as to what non-existence is relative to, we can answer, firstly, relative to its future existence as latent potentials and second, relative to God, the sole possessor of absolute, non-relative existence. All things are as nothing *relative*, or compared, to Him. This too emphasises that created things are a mixture of being (relative to themselves and on their ontological plane) and non-being relative to God. Moreover, it also shows that created things are a paradoxical unity of one and many – one thing with many potential variations and many identities through many phases.

The PSR and Its Idealist Consequences

Another aspect of being a thing concerns the principle of sufficient reason (PSR) according to which everything to which everything that happens or exists does so for a reason.⁶⁰ The PSR is also known as the “final cause” which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says is necessary for all existing things:

for the existence of everything depends upon four causes – the efficient cause, the matter, the form and the final cause. For example, this chair has a maker who is a carpenter, a substance which is wood, a form which is that of a chair, and a purpose... (SAQ 280)

A purpose, of course, is an idea, or, in language more suitable to the PSR, a reason. Now it is important to realise that while in the order of time, the final cause is realized last, in the order of thought it is actually the first: we start by conceiving a thing’s purpose and then we build it to meet that purpose. The final purpose, or sufficient reason is already implicit in the efficient and formal cause and in the selection of the material cause. The ontological significance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement is that it shows the things are grounded in an idea, a thought, a reason, that what we call a ‘thing’ is, in effect, the outer expression of an idea. To generalise, we might say that

reality and reason are not opponents, nor even indifferent to one another, but rather, that reality is grounded in and grows out of or instantiates reason or thought. This is in harmony with the idealist aspects we have already noted in a previous study of Bahá'í ontology.⁶¹ We are, thereby encouraged to conclude that the universe is the expression of a divine concept, a suggestion which complements 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "*The first thing which emanated from God is that universal reality, which the ancient philosophers termed the 'First Mind,' and which the people of Bahá call the 'First Will.'*" (SAQ 203) This statement implies a form of idealism because it indicates that creation – which came into being after the First Mind or First Will – is the product of a thought or act of will. In either case, matter is not ontologically fundamental but is grounded in or dependent on something else that is not material.

(There may be some question as to why 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentions that the "the people of Bahá" refer to the First Mind as the First Will. The difference is one of emphasis rather than content because God is a supreme unity, in Whom no division can be found: "*He, verily, is one and indivisible; one in His essence, one in His attributes.*" (GWB 187) However, putting emphasis on the Will does not deny the mind – since that would be to say that God acts thoughtlessly and capriciously, in effect, denying God's perfection. Thus, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's emphasis on God's Will does not negate the observation that reality is the expression of a divine concept.)

We have now come to a critical juncture in our study of the philosophy embedded in the Bahá'í Writings, namely, how are we to interpret the fact that an idea or concept underlies reality, indeed, that reality as a whole is the outer expression of an idea or concept and that all things are instantiations of a reason? Are we to understand this as evidence that Bahá'í ontology is fundamentally idealist? We have already seen evidence strongly suggesting an affirmative answer and we have even more in Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "*Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being.*" (HW #13, 7) In other words, human existence is dependent on "the essence of knowledge," a fact that makes this "essence of knowledge" logically prior to human existence, since the knowledge is the immediate source. The belief that things depend in some way on an idea or knowledge for their existence is a hallmark of philosophical idealism. There is still more evidence suggesting the idealist nature of Bahá'í ontology available, such as the following statement by Bahá'u'lláh:

...From that which hath been said it becometh evident that all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation

of the names and attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, indicateth, and is expressive of, the knowledge of God. (GWB 178⁶²)

To see the idealist implications of this statement requires us to ask ourselves a single question: could things (including humankind) exist if they did not “*testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them,*” if things were not “*expressive of the knowledge of God*”? (GWB 178) The answer to this question is given by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, for He states, “*Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation [of God's names, signs and attributes] no being could ever exist.*” (GWB 177, emphasis added) In other words, a thing exists only by virtue of being transmitter or expresser or symbol of knowledge of whichever of God's Names and signs it has the capacity to pass on. It exists as the embodiment or instantiation of an idea or concept, as a concrete symbol of something higher, as the instantiation of an idea – as also indicated by the PSR.

At this point, the evidence from various perspectives strongly suggests that the Bahá'í Writings espouse an idealist ontology. In other words, they promulgate the primacy of spirit over matter and see matter as ultimately grounded in something non-material, variously identified as God, the Absolute, Spirit, Mind, Ideas, divine Names and so on. While the differences in this choice of terms are by no means insignificant, they all share a common feature, namely, that material creation is an outcome, consequence or expression of the non-material which is usually associated with thought and/or a conscious being.

Varieties of Idealism

There are, of course, various kinds of philosophical idealism not all of which are consistent with the Writings. For example, the Writings do not support Berkeley's subjective idealism according to which the seemingly objective world only exists as a phenomenon, appearance or idea within the mind of each individual. There are only mental events and minds to perceive them which means that there is no underlying substance or matter but only clusters of attributes. The ultimate Perceiver is God, Who perceives all the things we cannot and thereby ensures their existence. The Bahá'í Writings cannot agree with Berkeley that things are only conceptions in the mind and that matter does not exist. According to the Writings, matter is only relatively real vis-à-vis God, but is real in its own right, and, we perceive realities that are distinctly different and independent from us as shown by its adherence to the correspondence theory of truth.⁶³

Neither do the Writings espouse a Kantian transcendental idealism by which the categories of human understanding constitute an unknowable 'raw material' (termed the thing-in-itself) and shape it into nature as we experience it. We never, according to Kant, perceive the world as it actually is but only as we have constructed it in accordance with the pre-existing categories in our minds. While there are Kantian elements in the Writings – most notably the idea that we cannot directly know the essence of things – there is nothing in them to suggest that humans actually constitute nature in the manner surmised by Kant. We discover truths and do not invent them. Nor do the Writings accept – despite many Hegelian features – Hegel's absolute idealism in which God or Absolute Consciousness comes to know Itself by means of its creations – and specifically through humankind – which unfold in a fully logical order whose dialectic was laid bare by Hegel's philosophy. It is a monistic philosophy that vitiates the distinction between humankind and God (the Absolute) and even allows direct knowledge of God. Because it denies any ontologically real distinction between thought and absolute reality⁶⁴, even matter is just another idea, albeit an idea of the Absolute. In Bahá'í terms, this means that absolute idealism or at least Hegel's version of it, denies the ontological difference between the station of the mineral or matter, and the station of the rational soul or thought.⁶⁵ This is not tenable because the Bahá'í Writings insist that the various stations of which God has decreed – mineral, vegetable, animal and human – are ontologically real and invested with distinct powers.⁶⁶

The idealism that comes closest to the Writings is that of Plato: both see the material as being grounded in and expressing the non-material, that is, the Divine Names, signs and attributes, or, in Plato's case, Ideas. Reinforcing this conclusion are statements such as the following:

The spiritual world is like unto the phenomenal world. They are the exact counterpart of each other. Whatever objects appear in this world of existence are the outer pictures of the world of heaven. (PUP 10; cf. ABL 46)

For physical things are signs and imprints of spiritual things; every *lower* thing is an *image* and *counterpart* of a higher thing.⁶⁷

These, combined with statements that "*the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out*" (SWAB 178) and that the Kingdom is a more perfect world, (PUP 4, 90) – much like Plato's world of Ideas – shows that Bahá'í ontology has strong Platonic features.

The First Major Difference with Plato

In what way, we may ask, does Bahá'í ontology distinguish itself from Platonic idealism? There are at least two major differences that are apparent. First, is the fact that Plato never recognized the existence of a personal God, but looked rather to a principle, a supreme Form, the Good, the One as the source of all being.⁶⁸ We hasten to add that Plato's Demiurge who shapes the world — but does not bring creation into being — in the *Timaeus* is a craftsman, supreme artisan or architect, a god if we desire to call him such but he is not God the foundation of all being. Rather, the Demiurge uses pre-existing forms or Ideas and pre-existing but formless matter to impose form on chaos and to create specific 'things.' In other words, the Demiurge is not the ultimate foundation or ground of all being, as is the Good or the One. Still more to the point, however, is that Plato's Good or One does not have a personal aspect whereas God as portrayed in the Bahá'í Writings does. Although we cannot know how God is in His essence, we do know that the Writings describe Him as having many of the attributes of a concerned personality: compassion, (BP 99) a sense of justice, (HW #2) generosity, (BP 99) kindness, (BP 101) and wisdom. (BP 118) He is also a conscious being Who can hear our prayers⁶⁹ and Who can take action of various kinds since He has a will. The ontological significance of God possessing the attributes of personality is readily apparent: it means that the attributes of personality are part of the ontological foundations of all things. These attributes are cosmically foundational. That is why 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

We declare that love is the cause of the existence of all phenomena and that the absence of love is the cause of disintegration or nonexistence. Love is the conscious bestowal of God, the bond of affiliation in all phenomena.
(PUP 255)

As the rest of the passage makes clear, 'Abdu'l-Bahá expects us to read this statement as an ontological truth about the composition of the universe. Love — which expresses itself differently at the various levels of existence — is an actual cosmic force, an “*elemental attraction*” (PUP 255) and “*selective affinity*” (PUP 255) which is grounded in the nature of God. Even stones manifest it in their simple cohesiveness: “*This power of attraction in the mineral world is love, the only expression of love the stone can manifest.*” (PUP 269)

Natural Theology and Natural Law

The fact that the attributes of personality are part of the ontological foundations of all existing things means that we have

another basis for a Bahá'í natural theology⁷⁰ and its concomitant notion of natural law. The fundamental premise of natural theology is that that created universe reflects the perfections of its Creator from which we may conclude that by reasoning about these signs, we can reason out way to from natural phenomena to the existence of God and other spiritual truths. Bahá'u'lláh clearly establishes the first when He says that the things created by God “*can be regarded in no other light except as evidences that proclaim the excellence and perfection of their author.*” (GWB 337) This very statement which establishes the perfection of God by the perfection of His creation is itself an example of natural theological reasoning, as is 'Abdul-Bahá's rhetorical question on the same issue: “*Can the creation be perfect and the creator imperfect? Can a picture be a masterpiece and the painter imperfect in his art?*” (SAQ 5)

There are numerous other examples of natural theological arguments in the Writings. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's contention that we can deduce the existence of God from the existence of motion (BWF 343) and His arguments for the immortality of the soul (SAQ ch. 61), the existence of final causes (SAQ 208) and the principle of sufficient reason (PUP 46⁷¹), the creation of things by emanation (SAQ 202), and the evolution of humankind. (SAQ 183) However, at no point does 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggest that the knowledge of natural theology is sufficient for our complete well-being either as an individual or as a species. Divine revelation from Manifestations is still needed to provide complete knowledge of what we need to know in order to actualize our physical, intellectual and spiritual potentials. It is clear, therefore, that Bahá'í ontology lays the foundation for a Bahá'í natural theology

There is also reason to believe that the idealist ontology embedded in the Writings lays the foundation for a doctrine of natural law according to which at least some standards of behaviour are based on the order of nature in general and/or the specific nature of the creature under discussion. In other words, each kind of creature has its own divinely appointed ends – its principle of sufficient reason or final cause – towards which it acts, or at least, should act. Morals or proper behaviour are not merely a matter of convention and something we should change at will since negative consequences will, sooner or later, follow any violations. Natural law most emphatically does not refer to whatever individual creatures happen to do. Because each kind of being or species has an inherent, essence or nature (ultimately bestowed by God) certain behaviours are – or, are not - appropriate to it. According to the Writings, in the case of man this means that we recognise to “know [God] and to worship Him” as stated in the Noonday prayer. Whatever acts and thoughts are not in harmony with our essential nature, which is to

say, is in violation of what is natural law for human beings. In short, our essential nature obligates us to behave to a higher standard than animals. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says,

Man is the highest species because he is the possessor of the perfections of all the classes – that is, he has a body which grows and which feels. As well as having the perfections of the mineral, of the vegetable and of the animal, he also possesses an especial excellence which the other beings are without – that is, the intellectual perfections. (SAQ 235)

As a mere matter of interest, we may note that vis-à-vis the importance of the intellect, this statement is not far removed from Aquinas’ view that “the rule and measure of human acts is the reason, which is the first principle of human acts.”⁷² However, at this point we cannot delve further into the complexities of natural law theory, except to draw attention once again to the main conclusion which is that Bahá’í ontology supports the concept of natural law.

The Second Major Difference with Plato

A second major difference is that Plato’s ontology is static, not only in regards to the Ideas themselves but also in regards to their earthly counter-parts or shadows. While Plato’s Ideas do not change, evolve or progress in any way, the earthly images change – but this change is not a progress or development but rather mere change without any final goal or purpose. It is not the “*growing or declining*” (SAQ 233) that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says characterizes all things. Indeed, according to Plato, mutability is the sign of their imperfection. This is precisely the point at which Bahá’í ontology differs significantly from Platonic ontology and confirms an Aristotelian insight, viz. that all things are in process, that all things actualise their various potentials and that all things exist by virtue of their motion or change. Being real and being immutable are no longer inter-changeable concepts as they are for Plato. However, the Writings do not entirely reject Plato because They do confirm his insight that the Ideas are immutable – except that in the Writings, the Platonic Ideas become the Names of God of which all created things are symbols or signs. These Names cannot change – a logical consequence of the fact that “*The Sun of Reality has always been in one condition; it has no change, no alteration, no transformation and no vicissitude*” (SAQ 207) and that God “*is one and indivisible; one in His essence, one in His attributes.*” (GWB 187) If God is one with His attributes and God cannot change, then the attributes cannot change either. Thus, we can see that the Writings confirm part of Plato’s ontology and a part of Aristotle’s – and, in regards to

the concept of all things desiring to return to God – They confirm part of Plotinus' ontology as well.⁷³

The Unknowability of God

The subject of God as the ultimate “object of desire”⁷⁴ brings us to the important – and very difficult – question about the nature of this ‘object.’ What can we know about it - if anything? For Bahá'is, what comes to mind first is that according to the Writings, God is, in Himself, unknowable, for as ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says, “*That which we imagine, is not the Reality of God; He, the Unknowable, the Unthinkable, is far beyond the highest conception of man.*” (PT 25) Further, He says,

That Essence of the Divine Entity and the Unseen of the unseen is holy above imagination and is beyond thought. Consciousness doth not reach It. Within the capacity of comprehension of a produced reality that Ancient Reality cannot be contained. (BWF 382)

Still elsewhere He says, “*The way is closed and seeking is forbidden.*” (SAQ 146) According to the Writings, God can only be known about through His Manifestation “*who is the image and likeness of God*” (PUP 70) in a spiritual sense since He reveals the attributes and bounties of the Divine to us. (SAQ 222)

The Nothingness of God

It is clear, therefore, that while we can say nothing about God as He is-in-Himself, we can, however, say something about God as He is to us – which is to say, unknowable. What does that mean in philosophic terms? It means above all that God is beyond any attributes that humans can apply to Him because attributes are determinations that limit whatever they describe. Since God has no limitations, He cannot, logically speaking, have attributes. As ‘Abdu'l-Bahá points out,

The purpose [of ascribing attributes to God] is to show that these attributes and perfections that we recount for that Universal Reality are only in order to deny imperfections, rather than to assert the perfections that the human mind can conceive. Thus we say His attributes are unknowable. (BWF 343)

However, if God's “attributes are unknowable,” it follows that we cannot assign any attributes to God, and, since we cannot reason about or imagine things without any attributes, we are left with nothing. We humans simply cannot think about or imagine anything without attributes. Even if we describe God as ‘pure Being’ the

situation does not change because pure being itself is without attributes and/or limitations, and is, thereby, also nothing. As Hegel says, "Nothing is ... the same determination, or rather absence of determination, and thus altogether the same as, *pure being*."⁷⁵ To us, there is no distinction between "pure being" and nothingness: both have no attributes that can be ascribed to them; no human intellectual framework is capable of comprehending them. However, this 'nothing' we call God or 'pure being' is – paradoxically – not the same as ontological non-being, but rather a nothing that (somehow) *is*. If to us God has no attributes – or, as is said in Buddhism, "marks"⁷⁶ – then for us, God may also be described as a 'void', as 'emptiness', provided that we remember the Dalai Lama's warning "You might think that emptiness means nothingness, but it does not."⁷⁷ Therefore, from this point of view, it would be correct to say that the ultimate reality in the Bahá'í Writings is describable in terms that are strongly similar used by some Buddhists to describe 'ultimate reality.' It is permanent, which is to say, it is the one 'thing' not dependent on dependent arising, while, at the same time, all other things depend on it. In other words, it is absolutely unconditioned by others while conditioning everything else. This means that the ultimate reality is non-relative, or absolute. Moreover, it is impersonal, supersensuous, extra-temporal, indeterminate and not accessible to reason beyond establishing the fact of its 'presence.'⁷⁸

An important question remains with us: is Hegel's 'nothing' – which is equivalent to pure being – psychological or ontological in nature? In other words, is it an artefact of our limited human point of view for which the lack of all attributes is equivalent to nothing, or is it or does it refer to something real?⁷⁹ The answer for Hegel is that, in the last analysis, there is no ultimate distinction between the psychological and the ontological for the nature of the entire world-process is epistemological, which is to say, the Absolute Spirit comes to recognise itself through evolution and especially through the evolution of human consciousness.⁸⁰ In Bahá'í ontology matters stand differently. From the human station or point of view, this identity of God's 'nothingness' and His 'pure being' is absolutely real: that consequence cannot be logically escaped once we recognise the complete unknowability of God. As the Writings say, even "*existence and non-existence are both relative.*" (SAQ 281) From this we may conclude that things are real or unreal depending on the station from which they are viewed:⁸¹

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... Then it is evident that although beings in relation to the existence of God have no

existence, but are like the mirage or the reflections in the mirror, yet in their own degree they exist. (SAQ 278)

Humankind thus has a double nature: vis-à-vis God, humankind is nothingness, but vis-à-vis itself, "in [its] own degree," humankind exists. It is our contention that a similar situation prevails in regards to the 'nothingness' of God in regard to His unknowability. From the human station, God's unknowability logically leads to our understanding of His 'nothingness' or emptiness, voidness, or even open-ness. However, we must remind ourselves that emptiness is not absolutely nothing; rather, it is the condition that allows all other things to exist in the same way that space conditions and allows a sculpture to exist. It permeates all things even as the Writings say, "*No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it.*" (GWB 178) Indeed, He is closer to us than our life-vein though He is at the same time, infinitely far or 'other' from us.⁸² However, the God Who is thus 'perceived' is the God Whose essential unknowability causes human being to perceive Him as an emptiness or nothingness that at the same time, somehow *is*. Thus, a Hegelian, that is, dialectical analysis of God's unknowability allows us to narrow the distance between God as presented in the Bahá'í Writings and the Buddhist, specifically Mahayana concept of the ultimate reality as emptiness or void.

A Cautionary Note

At this point several remarks are in order. First, a cautionary note that we do not intend to claim that the Bahá'í Writings somehow reflect the entire dialectical ontology of Hegel. They do not. For example, the Bahá'í Writings cannot accept Hegel's belief that God, or Spirit, becomes conscious of Itself through natural and human history. Second, the Writings do not present us with a fully developed dialectical ontology such as we see in Hegel. However, they do, in fact, provide the basis for a dialectical ontology through the philosophy of potentials and the necessity of change and motion. Third, the Writings provide a corrective to Hegel because they see the love of God, not contradiction or negativity, as the ultimate motive power for cosmic evolution. Internal contradiction and alienation are only the means by which the love of God makes itself felt within creation; they are only the conditions that make possible the eternal movement of love towards God. Thus, they are a necessary but not sufficient condition for the evolution of nature and human consciousness. A greater, all-transcendent positive Attractor is needed to motivate things to overcome their internal contradictions in order to reach It. Moreover, by the same token, there must be an innate desire for God in all things – which makes

desire an important aspect of the dialectic. Of course, this desire is only conscious in humankind.

Social Dialectic

There is one other place where a dialectical ontology appears in the Bahá'í Writings. According to Abdu'l-Bahá,

all souls [must] become as one soul, and all hearts as one heart. Let all be set free from the multiple identities that were born of passion and desire, and in the oneness of their love for God find a new way of life. (SWAB 76)

Bahá'u'lláh writes,

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. (GWB 214)

Here, too, we see the outlines of a dialectical philosophy at work. In this dialectic, the self encounters the other, the stranger, as a negation or contradiction to its own being. In order to overcome this estrangement, the self may 'incorporate' the other in some way such as by having power over it — a strategy which risks unleashing a power struggle — and, according to Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, inevitably does.⁸³ Either by incorporating or being incorporated, either by being a master or a slave, a new synthesis is formed. However, neither Hegel nor the Writings regard this situation as desirable, so there is a third option, which, according to the Writings involves the sacrifice of one's various Attributes or identities "*born of passion and desire*" (SWAB 76) and seek a higher unity — and, through that, a higher identity — in "*their love for God.*" (SWAB 76) In effect, this refocusing on God, short-circuits the earthly dialectic of self and other, of master and slave⁸⁴ or self and contradiction, by setting up the love for God as the catalyst for a spiritual synthesis in which the self would be recontextualised by God's love and sublimated or reconstituted in a higher form.

It is important to emphasise that the individual is not lost in this higher synthesis, but rather maintains his identity in a higher form by overcoming the otherness of his negation, which is to say, by seeing the light of the one-ness of God, or the Manifestation in the other person as suggested by the following:

If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and overlook the faults of one another for My name's sake and as a token of your love for My manifest and resplendent Cause. (GWB 315)

In this way, the individual also re-discovers himself in the other, he discovers his own spiritual potentials in another and thus, by

uniting with the other in the higher synthesis of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation and its community, regains himself in a higher, sublimated form. Paradoxically he retains his identity at a higher level by losing it at a lower level: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."⁸⁵ Because the process we have described is, goes on continuously it also challenges us to take our identity at least in part from this very process of constantly re-discovering ourselves through others in the higher synthesis of the Bahá'í revelation and its community. To put it succinctly, our identity is not a destination but a journey.

This concludes the second instalment of our initial reconnaissance of Bahá'í ontology.

NOTES

¹ *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy; Oxford Companion to Philosophy.*

² Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* 1.

³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet of the Universe*. Original Tablet in *Makatib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1, pp 13-32. Anonymous Translation. http://bahai-library.com/?file=abdulbaha_lawh_aflakiyyih

⁴ In the language of the Plato-Aristotle-Plotinus (P-A-P) tradition found throughout the Writings, the individual has no substance. Substance does not refer to matter but to intrinsic identity distinct from an entity's relationship to its surroundings.

⁴ In regards to the non-substantialist nature of Buddhism, see for example "A Review of Pali Buddhism", ed. by Hoffmann and Mahinda, reviewed by Anne Blackburn in "The Journal of Buddhist Ethics" Vol. 5, 1998 at <http://jbe.gold.ac.uk/5/blackburn1.html>; David Edward Shaner see also the "Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism: A Phenomenological Study of Kuukai and Doogen", in *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.39 (1989.01) <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-PHIL/ew033311.htm>

⁶ Alan Sponberg, "The Buddhist Conception of an Ecological Self," in *The Western Buddhist Review*, Vol. 2, http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol2/ecological_self.html

⁷ Inada, "The Range of Buddhist Ontology," in *Philosophy East and West*, 38:3 (7/1988), p. 264. <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-PHIL/inada4.htm>

⁸ P.A Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*, <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/9280/coarise.htm>

⁹ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.

¹⁰ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.

¹¹ Inada, "The Range of Buddhist Ontology."

¹² Inada, "The Range of Buddhist Ontology."

¹³ Sponberg, "The Buddhist Conception of an Ecological Self,"

¹⁴ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.

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- ¹⁵ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.
- ¹⁶ Jones, "Buddhism and Social Action: An Exploration" in "The Wheel", No. 285/286 1981 available at <http://accesstoinight.org/lib/bps/wheels/wheel285.html>
- ¹⁷ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.
- ¹⁸ Sponberg, "The Buddhist Conception of an Ecological Self."
- ¹⁹ Sponberg, "The Buddhist Conception of an Ecological Self."
- ²⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII, I, 1028a-b.
- ²¹ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.
- ²² Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.
- ²³ This often leads to phenomenism, the position that all we can know are phenomena or appearances.
- ²⁴ By contrast we have (a) a real distinction, between two separable things – such as the two parts of a scissor and (b) a purely mental or conceptual distinction such as between Socrates' animality and his humanity, or between a painting as a formal arrangement of color and as a social document reflecting its time. Some see mental distinctions as applying only to objects of thought such as the moral, economic and psychological aspects of money. There is a long-standing controversy about the formal distinction.
- ²⁵ "Intrinsic identity" in Aristotelian terms is 'substance,' that is, an object with "intrinsic identity" possesses attributes but is not itself a property of anything else.
- ²⁶ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.
- ²⁷ "Rebirth," by Percy Nanayakkara <http://sibv.org/bv15.htm>. Cf. "Lastly a word about 'free will': will is not something static. It is not a positive entity, or a self-existent thing. Will is quite momentary like any other mental state; there is, therefore, no 'will' as a 'thing' to be either free or not free. The truth is that 'will' is conditioned and a passing phenomenon" in Piyadassi Thera, "The Law of Cause and Effect." http://buddhistinformation.com/law_of_cause_and_effect.htm
- ²⁸ "Paticcasamuppada" in Nyanatiloka, *A Buddhist Dictionary*, http://palikanon.com/english/wtb/n_r/paticca_samuppaada.htm
- ²⁹ See my "The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings" in "Lights of Irfan IV."
- ³⁰ A similar situation exists with Whitehead's Aristotle-based process philosophy. See William A Christian *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics* 115-116.
- ³¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet of the Universe*.
- ³² *Some Answered Questions* 69, 201; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 77; *Paris Talks* 17.
- ³³ *Some Answered Questions* 162. The four causes given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirm Aristotle's material, efficient, final and formal cause.
- ³⁴ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 79; *Some Answered Questions* 129; *Bahá'í World Faith* 344.

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- ³⁵ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 309.
- ³⁶ Hegel, *Encyclopedia* Para.88, (4).
- ³⁷ *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072a.
- ³⁸ Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, Para. 119.
- ³⁹ Hegel, *Encyclopedia* Para.81 (2).
- ⁴⁰ Hegel, *Encyclopedia* Para.81 (2).
- ⁴¹ Hegel, *Encyclopedia* Note to Para.81 (1).
- ⁴² Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, Note to Para 81, (1).
- ⁴³ Although this triad is used to describe Hegel's dialectic, he never actually used 'synthesis' and 'thesis' himself, though he did refer to a triad in the dialectic.
- ⁴⁴ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Bk II, "The Doctrine of Essence", 414; emphasis added.
- ⁴⁵ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Bk I, "The Doctrine of Being", 136-137.
- ⁴⁶ Hegel's term, see for example, *Encyclopedia*, Para. 204.
- ⁴⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para 206, p. 126.
- ⁴⁸ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Para.119.
- ⁴⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para.228, p.137.
- ⁵⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para 229, 137; emphasis in original.
- ⁵¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para 229, 137.
- ⁵² Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para 229, 138.
- ⁵³ See my "*Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance*" for evidence for the realist nature of the philosophy embedded in the Writings.
- ⁵⁴ *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVII, 66.
- ⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 7, 1072a, b.
- ⁵⁶ Luke 9:24.
- ⁵⁷ Hegel, *The Science of Logic* 133.
- ⁵⁸ *Science of Logic* 136.
- ⁵⁹ *Science of Logic* 134.
- ⁶⁰ See above page 14 and also my "*Reason and Faith in the Bahá'í Writings*" for a detailed exposition of this topic.
- ⁶¹ See section 10 of "*Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance*" at http://geocities.com/iankluge/ontology_complete.html or *Lights of Irfan, Book Six*.
- ⁶² The last sentence is repeated in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 102.
- ⁶³ See Kluge, "*The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings*" Section 4.2. in "*Lights of Irfan* IV" and at <http://www.geocities.com/iankluge/aristotle.html>
- ⁶⁴ Copelston, SJ, *A History of Philosophy* Vol. 7, Pt. 1, 230.
- ⁶⁵ *Some Answered Questions* 129.
- ⁶⁶ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 240.

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- ⁶⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet of the Universe*; emphasis added. Original Tablet in *Makatib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1, pp 13-32. Anonymous translation. http://bahai-library.com/?file=abdulbaha_lawh_aflakiyyih
- ⁶⁸ Plato, *The Republic* VI 507b – 509c.
- ⁶⁹ Otherwise, why would Bahá'u'lláh reveal petitionary prayers? Why bother if God can't hear or answer?
- ⁷⁰ See for example John Cobb Jr.'s *A Christian Natural Theology* based on Whitehead; also Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.
- ⁷¹ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 46. See my article "Reason and Faith in the Bahá'í Writings."
- ⁷² *Summa Theologica* I-II, Q.90, A.I.
- ⁷³ Plotinus, *The Enneads* VI, 8, Sec.7; see also Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072a.
- ⁷⁴ Plotinus, *The Enneads* VI, 8, Sec.7; see also Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072a.
- ⁷⁵ *Science of Logic* 82.
- ⁷⁶ "Barry D. Smith, "The Philosophical Basis of Mahayana Buddhism," <http://www.abu.nb.ca/Courses/GrPhil/EPhil/Ephind.htm>
- ⁷⁷ "Emptiness and Existence" by Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. <http://www.katinkahesselink.net/tibet/dalai2.html>
- ⁷⁸ See T R V Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* and David Kalupahana *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* for two strong and clear contrasting statements about the idea of ultimate reality in Buddhism.
- ⁷⁹ See again, the Dalai Lama's statement that emptiness is not nothing. See footnote 184.
- ⁸⁰ *A History of Philosophy* 227; 208, 205.
- ⁸¹ This should not be confused with a free-wheeling relativism which mistakes the recognition of various stations or perspectives with the assertion that all viewpoints are equally correct.
- ⁸² *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XCIII 185.
- ⁸³ See the struggle as to who will become master and who is to be slave in Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para. 178 ff. Baillie and Miller translate this as the "lordship-bondage" struggle.
- ⁸⁴ *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para 178ff.
- ⁸⁵ Luke 9:24.
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“The newly born babe of that Day”

Mysticism in the Age of the Maturity of Humankind

Julio Savi

One of the sundry classifications of mysticism suggested by Western scholars describes a mysticism of nascent religions, and a mysticism of periods of spiritual decline.¹ The former is characterized by “an emotion which no one could escape,” in a time when “all were so deeply concerned with religion that we should say: all were mystic” (Sudbrack 13). The latter is born from “the awareness that beliefs have lost their meanings” (Beaude 37) and from the resulting “intense tension between faith in the Ineffable and the instruments offered by religion” (Beaude 98). In both cases mysticism seemingly characterizes souls endowed with a greater capacity to receive spiritual influences than others. In the former case, mystics are the first to perceive the earliest signs of the new spiritual springtime; in the latter case, they suffer more than the others because of the deadening harshness of the spiritual winter.

The transition from the former form of mysticism, widely shared by the whole religious community, which is the first outward fruit of the teachings of each Manifestation of God, to the second one, an elite that is often viewed as a “denial of the religious component” (Beaude 102) of spirituality, seemingly depends on a gradual departure of religious communities from the spirit of the original teachings that has characterized in various degrees and in different ages the history of all great religions. This departure appears to cause the souls endowed with greater spiritual capacities to become isolated. The most evident reasons of this departure and isolation are four: the intrinsic human imperfection, the progressive maturation of humankind, the relativity of Revelation, and the cyclicity of the spiritual evolution of humankind.

The intrinsic human imperfection

‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that “*self-love is kneaded into the very clay of man*” (SDC 96). Therefore man “*can flutter along for some short distance, into the endless vast; but he can never soar upward to the Sun in the high heavens*” (SWAB 47). This imperfection implies that human beings may apprehend God’s “*purpose only to the extent of their station and spiritual capacity*” (GWB 77). This limited

understanding, in its turn, leads, in the course of time, to an unavoidable gap between Religion in its spiritual or metaphysical essence, and religion in its historical or physical manifestation, that is, what human beings did with the original message of that Religion. Being endowed with a greater capacity for understanding the spiritual reality of religion than others, mystics cannot adapt themselves to the flaws of the historical reality of religion, during those times when those flaws are fundamental.

The progressive maturation of humankind

Humankind as a whole is often compared by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to an individual human being, who goes through different ages, from “protoplasm” (PUP 359) to adulthood (SWAB 285). These words seemingly imply that, although humankind is intrinsically imperfect, still it is going through an ongoing perfecting process.² Therefore, since “human beings are, by their very nature, different one from the other,” and their diversity is due to both “differences of degree which are innate” (CC 1:258) and capacities that have been developed through personal efforts, in a period of spiritual decline a mystic, who has greater spiritual capacities than most of her fellow persons, may be projected towards spiritual goals that seem incomprehensible to her contemporaries.

The relativity of Revelation

Although the Manifestation of God is omniscient, yet He reveals a body of teachings adequate to the maturity of those human beings he has come to educate. But since Revelation is relative, in the course of time the revealed teachings that are specifically related to contingent circumstances of time and place become obsolete, because in the meantime humankind has developed. And thus those teachings do not satisfy the mystics, endowed as they are with greater spiritual capacities than the others. For these reasons, in a period of spiritual decline, when the teachings of the Manifestation of God have already given their fruits, a mystic may be endowed with spiritual capacities that project him towards spiritual goals which his organized religion cannot even conceive.

The cyclicity of the spiritual evolution of humankind

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains:

In this material world time has cycles; places change through alternating seasons...At one time it is the season of spring; at another it is the season of autumn; and again it is the season of summer or the season of winter...It is the same with the spiritual cycles of the Prophets...they are always revolving and being renewed. (SAQ 73, 74, 76; cf. PUP 94-5)

Each spiritual springtime has therefore its winter. Bahá'u'lláh seemingly describes this spiritual winter as a time of "oppression." He writes: "*What 'oppression' is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?*" (KI 31) Joseph Beaudé, a researcher at the French CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) who specialized in studies of the 16th and 17th centuries, describes the experiences of the European mystics of the 16th and 17th centuries, which he considers a time of "neglect by the Christian institution" (93), as "experiences of upset and dispossessed souls, tried by an absence, that is, the loss of what in former days has been seen as the foundation of all certitudes" (92), souls that "regard exile as their country, and endeavor to translate their language of exiled peoples into the language of the surrender to the Other" (93). He writes that they "speak the language of the night," which they "draw and accept from the cultural and religious conditions of their world" (98).

Features of the ancient Dispensations

If we keep in mind these considerations, we may more easily understand a number of historical facts of the ancient Dispensations. First, none of the ancient Manifestations clearly conferred the infallibility to a successor and an interpreter, to whom the community of believers would be expected to turn. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that in the past

many of the holy beings who were not dawning-points of the Most Great Infallibility, were yet kept and preserved from error under the shadow of the protection and guardianship of God, for they were the mediators of grace between God and men. If God did not protect them from error, their error would cause believing souls to fall into error, and thus the foundation of the Religion of God would be overturned, which would not be fitting nor worthy of God. (SAQ 172)

But the "acquired" or "conferred" (SAQ 173, 174) infallibility of those "holy beings" was not openly proclaimed by the Manifestation of God in front of everyone. This fact was conducive to early divisions within the ancient religions and thus to a departure from the spirit of the original teachings. Shoghi Effendi said, as to the succession in Christianity:

The real reason why Christ did not make some explicit statement regarding His succession is not known, and cannot be known ... The utmost we can do is to give some

explanations, but these must necessarily fail to give the fundamental reason to the problem we seek to solve.”³

Therefore, we can only hypothesize that one of the reasons of this uncertainty as to the succession in the ancient Dispensations is the characteristics of those remote ages, and that this fact may have something to do with the concept of the relativity of Revelation.

Second, the ancient Manifestations of God have revealed teachings that *a posteriori* seem to deny a concept explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, that is, that “*every universal cause is divine and every particular one is temporal*,” and thus the teachings of the Manifestations of God are always “*all-universal and all-inclusive*” and “*in the service of universal education*” (SWAB 68-9). For example, the position of women has always been, although partially, subordinated to that of men. For another example, a relentless fight against idolaters has been prescribed, especially in the two primary monotheisms, that is, Judaism and Islam. In the light of the concept of progressive Revelation, the prescriptions that today seem a discrimination against women may have been in reality a protection of their lesser physical strength in front of men, in a society ruthlessly ruled by the struggle for existence. And the unrelenting fight against idolaters may be justified by the need to inculcate the concept of monotheism, in a world in which this idea was not yet part of a shared cultural legacy.

The progressive maturation of humankind is thus conducive to an increasing gap between the spiritual potentialities of human beings and the social teachings of the Manifestations of God. Moreover the exploitation of the religious message by people subjected to the dictates of their lower selves, in the absence of a centre of authority clearly appointed by the Manifestation of God, is conducive to a chasm between the spiritual understanding of the teachings of the Manifestations of God by people endowed with greater spiritual capacities, like the mystics, and the understanding shared by the majority of people. Therefore the mystics of the periods of spiritual decline become estranged from the human, outward aspect of religion and turn towards its spiritual, inward aspect.

The mystics of the times of spiritual decline manifest this estrangement from the masses in several ways. In their relation with the Manifestation of God, they prefer his union with God, rather than his relations with human beings. Moreover, since the mystics perceive the flaws of organized religion, they are inclined to dispense with its function as an intermediary. Therefore, as Beaudé puts it, on the one hand mysticism has been viewed as a “denial of the religious component” and of its claim to bestow “the means

whereby one may be 'reconnected with'" (102) God, and on the other, "the harshest blame put on the mystics came from the devoted" (100).

Prevented from expressing themselves freely in a world, dominated by ideas they do not approve and critical against them, mystics take refuge in the secret of their hearts. Thus they adopt initiatory and occult attitudes, to protect themselves from the official religion, usually entrenched in exclusivist and absolutist positions. Mystics also devote themselves to the quest for impossible inner experiences, and unlikely descriptions, of transcendence, in the hope to find there a comfort for their loneliness and a balm for the bitterness of their spiritually oppressed souls. This is the origin of certain mystic theologies, sometimes conflicting with the official ones, and of the search after a consolatory ecstatic union, in times when very few outer traces of the presence of God can be detected in the religious community.

Mysticism in the history of the Bahá'í Faith

As to the history of the Bahá'í Faith, the mysticism of nascent religions can be easily identified in the narratives of its early days. Shoghi Effendi said that "the true mysticism, and the secret, inner meaning of life which humanity has at present, drifted so far from" may be found in the communion with "the Souls of the Manifestations," achieved by the martyrs, that "brought them such ecstasy of joy that life became nothing."⁴ And the Bahá'í martyrology is particularly rich and documented, and it is not yet concluded. Mystical episodes are referred in *God Passes By* (cf. 152-5) and in the *Dawn-Breakers*. The ongoing persecutions against the Bahá'ís in Iran and the recent martyrdoms in that country, as well as the numberless episodes of sacrifice and selflessness characterizing Bahá'í service throughout the world, confirm that nascent mysticism is still alive in the Bahá'í community.

If we want to attain a better understanding of the present and future developments of Bahá'í mysticism, it may be useful trying to hypothesize which are the implications of the above mentioned concepts for those developments. And thus we should remember some of the fundamental differences between the Bahá'í and the past dispensations. Whereas the ancient Manifestations appeared in archaic epochs, Bahá'u'lláh has been defined as "the Prophet of civilization" (Martin). Whereas the ancient Manifestations addressed a humankind in its "long ages of infancy and childhood" (WOB 202), Bahá'u'lláh announces "the coming of age of the human race" (WOB 206) and addresses a humankind in "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" (WOB 202). We cannot yet fully understand what this incipient maturity implies for the development of the Bahá'í civilization, and thus of its mysticism. We can only suggest a few hypotheses.

The intrinsic human imperfection will certainly persist, because "Peter cannot become Christ" (SAQ 231). But undoubtedly, since humankind's perfecting process will continue, the level of perfection accessible to human beings in the new Era will be higher and higher. In this vein, Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "*The station which he who hath truly recognized this Revelation will attain is the same as the one ordained for such prophets of the house of Israel as are not regarded as Manifestations 'endowed with constancy'*" (WOB 111). And the Báb said: "*The newly born babe of that Day excels the wisest and most venerable men of this time, and the lowliest and most unlearned of that period shall surpass in understanding the most erudite and accomplished divines of this age*" (DB 93).

Progressive revelation and the cycles of humankind's spiritual evolution imply that the Bahá'í Faith will also have its winter. To presume that the Bahá'í world will not experience any decline is seemingly tantamount to stating that the Bahá'í Faith is also perfect for a future humankind. This statement seems to be in conflict with the concepts of the ongoing perfecting process of humankind and of the relativity of Revelation taught by the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'u'lláh may allude to this concept when He writes that the "oppression" of spiritual winter is "*the essential feature of every Revelation. Unless it cometh to pass, the Sun of Truth will not be made manifest. For the break of the morn of divine guidance must needs follow the darkness of the night of error*" (KI 31). Happily this feature of each Revelation is our concern only because we want to attain a better understanding of the great present opportunities, because the Bahá'í winter seems to be still very far off. Of the Manifestation that will come after Him, Bahá'u'lláh writes: "*I am not apprehensive for My own self...My fears are for Him Who will be sent down unto you after Me*" (WOB 117).⁵ That is, He seemingly foresees that the Manifestation who will come after Him will be persecuted by humankind, like those who came before Him. But the Universal House of Justice has been ordained by God "*as the source of all good and freed from all error*" (WT 14), as a fulfillment of the promise of "*the Day which shall not be followed by night*" (SLH 34), and thus described as "*a continuing centre of divine guidance in the world.*"⁶ In the opinion of the writer, these words imply that the Universal House of Justice will be infallible in the guidance of the Bahá'í community for the entire course of the Bahá'í dispensation, and deny the hypothesis that it will loose its "infallibility" as soon as

the next Manifestation exists on earth, otherwise its “Day” would indeed be followed by “night.” Then who will persecute the future Manifestation? The hypothesis may be suggested that the Universal House of Justice will recognize and accept the next Manifestation. This hypothesis is seemingly supported by the following statement by the Supreme Body itself in its *Constitution*:

The provenance, the authority, the duties, the sphere of action of the Universal House of Justice all derive from the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh which, together with the interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and of the Guardian of the Cause ... constitute the binding terms of reference of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation. The authority of these Texts is absolute and immutable until such time as Almighty God shall reveal His new Manifestation to Whom will belong all authority and power. (CUHJ 4)

And thus the mystics of the Bahá'í winter will seemingly always find a comfort for their loneliness and a balm for the bitterness of their spiritually oppressed souls in their Supreme Body, that in that far off “Day of Judgment” will commit them into the hands of the new Manifestation, together with their own spiritual mandate. And, the persecutions against that future Manifestation – and almost certainly against the mystics who will follow it – will be perpetrated by an unspiritual society that will disregard the guidance of the infallible Universal House of Justice. As to us today, whatever may be the conditions of society at large, or the level of maturity of our specific Bahá'í communities, we still have the great privilege of living in days of full springtime, when the Sun of Truth shines in its full splendor and the whole community does its best to follow the Centre of the Covenant infallibly guiding it towards that Sun. All that is required is the spiritual capacity to perceive the great opportunities of the present day.

The Bahá'í Revelation “*vouchsafed unto men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity*” (GWB 87), which is today the capacity of an incipient maturity, is free from many of the flaws that in the past religions implied an early departure from the reality of religion and the development of spiritually unacceptable outward attitudes, like dogmatism, ritualism, exclusivism and, most of all, sectarianism. In particular, the authenticity of the Covenant regarding the succession and the interpretation of Scripture; the proscription of “*such ordinances as holy war, destruction of books, the ban on association and companionship with other peoples or on reading certain books,*” which in the ancient religions “*had been laid down and affirmed according to the exigencies of the time*” (TB 28); the fact that “Bahá'u'lláh has reduced all ritual and form to an

absolute minimum in His Faith,”⁷ and the concept that “rigidity and rituals should be strictly avoided”;⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s authoritative interpretations of the spiritual topics of divine philosophy; Shoghi Effendi’s authoritative interpretations of institutional and “political” issues; and last but not least the “clear distinction...drawn in the Bahá’í Writings between authoritative interpretation and the understanding that each individual arrives at from a study of its Teachings” (KA note #130) — all these features of the Bahá’í Revelation are brand new in the history of religion. The power of the Covenant and the warnings against rituals exclude any dichotomy between mystical and institutional aspects of religion, typical of dogmatism and ritualism. The proscription of the above mentioned ancient ordinances and the proclamation of the oneness of humankind imply that any feeling of superiority or hostility against any sector of the human family, typical of exclusivism, is delegitimized. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s and Shoghi Effendi’s authoritative interpretations of theological and institutional issues, a perennial guidance for present and future students and scholars, as well as the distinction between authoritative and personal interpretations, exclude any possibility of sectarianism.

These aspects of the Bahá’í Revelation were mentioned only to gain a clearer understanding of the present opportunities for individual mystical seekers, who may feel free and assured, because they are protected from some of the traps into which past mystics fell, provided they abide by the revealed teachings.

The refusal of any mediator between God and themselves

A number of mystics refused, and refuse, any mediator between God and themselves, not even the Manifestation of God. The Bahá’í position on this issue is very clear. Bahá’u’lláh unambiguously explains that “*the door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days*” is “*closed in the face of all beings*” (KI 99), and that “*by ‘attainment unto the divine Presence’ is meant attainment unto the presence of His Beauty in the person of His Manifestation*” (KI 169). However, when Bahá’u’lláh abolished the institution of the clergy, He excluded any intermediary between God and human beings beside the Manifestation of God and the Centre of the Covenant. It is not a surprise, then, that Bahá’u’lláh writes: “*whereas in days past every lover besought and searched after his Beloved, it is the Beloved Himself Who now is calling His lovers and is inviting them to attain His presence.*” In this Day “*the anguish of...separation from Him*” that afflicted past mystics during periods of decline may be turned “*into the joy of an everlasting reunion*” and “*the bitterness of...remoteness from His court*” may be dissolved by “*the sweetness of*

His presence" (GWB 319). And there is other good news. The Manifestation of God has clearly conferred the infallibility to the Centre of his Covenant and the line is indisputably uninterrupted, albeit in different forms, through 'Abdul-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, as well as through the Universal House of Justice. The Pole towards which human being should orientate their practical efforts is not a hidden pole, as it was the case, for example, with the Muslim mystics, who were thus brought to search for an inward, occult, relation with their Pole. Shoghi Effendi may have pointed out the importance of the physical presence on the earth of the Centre of the Covenant, when he made clear to a believer

that it is best to assume that generally speaking when people claim they are receiving messages or communications from the Master or Bahá'u'lláh, etc., it is a psychic experience or their imagination, and that they are not in real contact with them. These Holy Beings have the channels of the Cause through which to guide us. They do not need to go outside these and send individual revelations;⁹

or when he informed the Bahá'ís that

he never secretly, or inwardly, communicates his instructions to any believer ... about the affairs of the Cause; his instrument in these matters is the N.S.A. [National Spiritual Assembly, the governing body of Bahá'í national communities] ... any one who thinks that he is being directed by him in the inner plane is just deluding himself and others ... he answers ... [the believers] in writing, not psychically, whenever he wishes to do so.¹⁰

The issue becomes more difficult when, beside the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, that were incontrovertibly endowed with the gift of the infallibility, other Institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order that were not endowed with that gift, and that are squarely recognized as imperfect and capable of becoming more perfect, are mentioned. Shoghi Effendi said that the Bahá'í World Order is "still embryonic, and as yet improperly understood"¹¹ and that "its institutions are not yet functioning perfectly."¹² However, he underlined the great importance of upholding "the principle of authority invested in our elected bodies."¹³ In this case, the imperfect yet perfectible Institutions are not to be obeyed as if they were mediators between God and oneself. Only the Manifestation and the Centre of the Covenant are mediators between God and the believers. The Bahá'ís are called to abide by the teaching that the unity of the community is more important than any other consideration. This teaching was emphasized by Bahá'u'lláh himself

when he said to two groups, arguing about His station, as mentioned by Shoghi Effendi, “that if they were united both sides were right and if they were divided both were wrong.”¹⁴ The same teaching was emphasized by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, when He wrote:

If they agree upon a subject, even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree and be in the right, for this difference will produce the demolition of the divine foundation. Though one of the parties may be in the right and they disagree that will be the cause of a thousand wrongs, but if they agree and both parties are in the wrong, as it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right. (BWF 411)

The Bahá’ís are required “to master and follow the principles of their divinely laid down Administrative Order.”¹⁵ This attitude is strictly connected with a typical Bahá’í teaching: that the believers “should endeavor to learn about Bahá’í laws and principles and should, as a matter of conscience, endeavor to practice these to the best of their ability.”¹⁶ The “Prophet of civilization” expects his followers to have a high sense of their personal responsibility, a sense of responsibility that is part of Bahá’í mysticism.

Heretical doctrines

The vigilance over the purity of the doctrine exercised by the clergy, lest heresy should arise, in the past Dispensations may be compared to the vigilance exercised by the Bahá’í Institutions lest Covenant-breakers should impair the unity of the community. But whereas in the past many heresies could flourish, today Covenant-breakers have little hope to survive for very long, as history has demonstrated. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ascribes this fact to “*the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past . . . [that is] the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant,*” which safeguards and protects “*the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief*” (PUP 455-6). Moreover, the teaching that human understanding of the teachings of the Manifestation of God is relative denies an undue importance to be ascribed to any interpretation suggested by any human being, as esteemed and honored he may be. In the synthetic words of the Universal House of Justice: “Unity of doctrine is maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and the voluminous interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, together with the absolute prohibition against anyone propounding ‘authoritative’ or ‘inspired’ interpretations or usurping the function of Guardian” (MUHJ63 56).

If we add the prohibition of monasticism, with its specific rules, we may come to the conclusion that the emergence of rigid mystical schools, with their more or less unorthodox doctrines and specific rituals, similar to those who appeared in the past, is quite unlikely in a Bahá'í context.

A distinction between the kernel and the shell

Muslim mystics distinguished between the kernel and the shell of religion, that is, between the outer aspects, related to the laws, and the inner aspects, related to non ritual prayer, meditation and contemplation. The concept whereby the inward aspects of religion are superior to its outward aspects is present also in the Christian world, as it is evident in the Pauline theology's criticism against the law. Bahá'u'lláh clarifies the importance of the law not only in the *Seven Valleys*, when He states that the Law "*is indeed the secret of the 'Path' and the fruit of the Tree of 'Truth'*" (SV 40), but also in the first paragraph of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, where He states that the duties of recognizing the Manifestation of God and observing His ordinances are "*inseparable*," and that "*neither is acceptable without the other*" (SV 19). The mystical path recommended by Bahá'u'lláh consists thus in obeying the law for the love of God and using the law as an instrument of inner purification, spiritual upliftment and nearness to God, that is, as the main instrument for advancing on the spiritual path. The seeker becomes purified through the grace of God attracted by the efforts exerted to comply with the outward law. Purification implies the development of spiritual capacities of whose development the seeker may be wholly unaware (cf. GWB 295). The development of spiritual capacities leads the seeker to draw nearer to God, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained: "*nearness is likeness*" (PUP 148). It is unlikely that future mystics may undervalue the importance of abiding by the laws. They will certainly do their best to keep alive the spirit of the obedience to the law, that is, for the love of God, so that any externalism may be avoided.

Unduly speculative flights while attempting to understand metaphysical issues

In the past the mystics of periods of spiritual decline produced complicated, sometimes fanciful and unclear, theologies and cosmologies, perhaps because their human imperfection and the ineffability of the experiences which inspired them were not sufficiently assisted by the words of the Revelation, conceived as they were for an infant humankind. Bahá'u'lláh warn us to avoid those kinds of speculations, when He recommends to study those sciences that "*can profit the peoples of the earth*" and to keep away

from “those which begin with words and end with words” (TB 51-2). And Shoghi Effendi explains that the “fruitless sciences” mentioned by Bahá’u’lláh are “metaphysical hair-splittings, and other abstract things carried to the extreme,”¹⁷ as well as those “those theological treatises and commentaries that encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth.”¹⁸ Moreover, the contemplation of the themes of transcendence were often viewed as the apex of mysticism, whereas Bahá’u’lláh writes: “*The conceptions of the devoutest of mystics, the attainments of the most accomplished amongst men, the highest praise which human tongue or pen can render are all the product of man’s finite mind and are conditioned by its limitations*” (GWB 62). And yet He exhorted over and over His followers to meditate on Scripture, revealed a number of deep meditations on the topics of the ancient mysticism – as for example *Prayers and Meditations*, nos. 38 and 178 – and revealed Tablets on those topics, as for example the “Lawh-i-Kullu Ta‘am.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá advised spiritual seekers to study metaphysical questions, and suggested a list of the important ones that should be studied.¹⁹ He also said: “*You cannot apply the name ‘man’ to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts*” (PT 54.10). He Himself wrote several Tablets explaining metaphysical matters, as for example His “Commentary on the Tradition: “I Was a Hidden Treasure (*Tafsír-i-Kuntu Kanzan Makhfíyyan*),” His “Commentary on the Qur’anic Verses Concerning the Overthrow of the Byzantines” (cf. Momen), or His “Tablet of the Universe (*Lawh-i-Aflakiyyih*).”

Apparently the Bahá’ís are not discouraged to study and meditate on metaphysical problems in themselves. They are discouraged to do it adopting the methods and the aims of the ancient mystics. And the Bahá’í Writings suggest new methods and different aims: the Faith of civilization differs from past religions in this respect as well. In the theoretical perspective, Bahá’í Scripture encourages the seekers to pursue the mystical path. But the “steed” and the goal of the mystical journey, that is annihilation in God, is service, described as the highest way of life on earth: gradually overcoming the limitations of the self through one’s submission to His law for the love of God. And His law prescribes that the collective wellbeing of humankind should be promoted. Therefore Bahá’í mystics are active Bahá’ís, who “love all the world...love humanity and try to serve it...work for universal peace and universal brotherhood.”²⁰ In a practical perspective, the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh on these issues and the authoritative interpretations by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offer a method and an orientation that are precious for the lovers of this kind of study. And it seems that more and more Bahá’ís will devote themselves to this kind of study and activity as time goes by. Last but not least, the explanations of institutional and “political” issues by Shoghi Effendi

and the infallible guidance of the Universal House of Justice seem a sufficient guarantee against the useless verbosity and inconclusiveness of the past.

Aristocratic and initiatory attitudes

Mystical quest has always been an elite, aristocratic activity. The reasons of this fact seem to be fundamentally two. On the one hand, in the past, because of the inferior collective maturity of humankind, only a few had the capacity to follow the difficult path of the mystical quest, so much so in its theological and philosophical aspects. On the other, the elitist selection of the mystics was favored by the initiatory methods they were obliged to adopt, if the secrecy of the results of their quest had to be preserved in their dangerous religio-social milieu — a milieu in which the physical absence of a spiritual Centre clearly appointed by the Manifestation and the power seized by individuals who were more interested in power itself than in the spiritual guidance of the community implied a blind conformism, that was in conflict with the aspirations of the mystics. It is unlikely that these conditions may ever prevail in the new Dispensation. Bahá'u'lláh proclaims: *“The mystic and wondrous Bride, hidden ere this beneath the veiling of utterance, hath now, by the grace of God and His divine favor, been made manifest even as the resplendent light shed by the beauty of the Beloved”* (HW 51-2).

These words by Bahá'u'lláh imply at least three important facts: first, all people “that are in heaven and on earth” have received the “divine favor”; second, the interpretive key of the mystical language used by the ancient Manifestations has been revealed by the Prophet of civilization, in such precious books and Tablets as the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*; and third, the new religious Institutions have such a clear divinely-revealed foundation, that there cannot be doubt as to their legitimate authority to guide the human “endeavors in the path of detachment.” The Administrative Order of the new Dispensation, with its perfect fusion of the best aspects of the three forms of government described by Aristotle as well as of theocracy, “cannot ever degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagoguery which must sooner or later corrupt the machinery of all man-made and essentially defective political institutions” (WOB 154). The mystical path is opened in front of all human beings and its Pole, the Centre of the Covenant, will remain visible and intact for the whole course of the Dispensation. Obviously this does not mean that all Bahá'ís will achieve the same level of spirituality. In this vein, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has reportedly said: *“even in this great cycle it is not possible for all to attain the highest”* (ADP 55).

The search for mystical experiences

Many experts have described mysticism in terms of mystical experience, an experience that, by definition, “defies expression,” because “no adequate report of its contents can be given in words” (James 367). Shoghi Effendi has given a new meaning and value to these so called mystical experiences. He said that they are very rare and independent of the human will, and discouraged anyone from seeking them. In other words, the goal of the mystical quest described in the Writings is not having a mystical experience in its traditional meaning, but coming closer to God, in one’s “likeness” to Him. In other words, the goal of the mystical quest is the development of one’s spiritual capacities through, and in view of, service. Bausani quotes a Tablet by Bahá’u’lláh, translated by himself:

*Open thy spiritual wings and soar through all the spiritual kingdoms with the swiftness of a lightning. Fling wide open the vision of the eyes and regard the grace of the invisible world. If thou throwest mud into the water it sinks, but if thou depositest a rose into it, it remains like a crown floating upon it: i.e., *ẓáhir* and *baqá* (exteriority and permanence) are better than *báṭin* and *faná’* (interiority and annihilation). In other words weight is the cause of sinking, therefore thou must free thyself from the weight of possessions and, like a rose, in this very bodily frame float through eternity upon the surface of earthly dominions. (5)²¹*

Bausani interprets this passage as “a very fine criticism of that system or those systems of religious mysticism (so frequent in oriental countries and often a cause of decay for those peoples), which assume that sinking into oneself, shutting one’s eyes to every exterior reality” and as “a religious indication of exotericism and activity against the exaggerated importance given by almost all religions to meditation and annihilation.” Bausani remarks that ““too often pseudoreligious persons, imagining they are deeply sinking into unheard of spiritual abysses, do nothing more than mix up their own subconscious and unconscious zones . . . Only God . . . speaking through his Manifestations can inspire humanity with creative thoughts, which result in creative action” (5).

The search for so called charismas

Another aspect of traditional mysticism, strictly related to the previous one, and typical of Christian mysticism, is the undue importance ascribed to the so called charismas, that is, those special powers, as for example thaumaturgical powers, ascribed to the

saints, that should be the quintessence of mysticism. The Bahá'í position on this issue is serenely rational, and it is expounded in a Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh, "The Book of the River (*Saḥífiy-i-Shaṭṭíyyih*)," Nader Saiedi, who published a provisional translation of this Tablet, writes that this Tablet explains that

human reason is incapable of comprehending any phenomenon independent of experience and observation. If it were not for that actual experience and observation, human reason would not believe in the existence of any phenomenon. If the rationalist argument for the rejection of miracles attributed to the former Prophets were true, then the reality of all natural phenomena must be rejected as well. (31)

Obviously, the possibility that God, and His Manifestation, may perform miracles is not denied, but miracles are not considered the usual method whereby God bestows His grace upon human beings, because "the miracles desired by people would involve an unnatural interruption in the natural course of divine revelation...and far more negative consequences would result" (32-3). Each person receives the grace bestowed by God in proportion to her capacities. In this vein, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "*man must seek capacity and develop readiness. As long as he lacks susceptibility to divine influences, he is incapable of reflecting the light and assimilating its benefits*" (PUP 148). The Manifestations of God guide human beings towards the development of spiritual capacities through the usual method of exposing them to the trials of everyday life, while bestowing upon them the guidance of their teachings and the assistance of spiritual powers attracted by the efforts exerted by human beings while trying to follow the divine guidance. Bahá'u'lláh promises the development of great capacities to any seeker who make sincere efforts in His way. For example in the *Seven Valleys* He writes on the results of a sincere spiritual quest:

...yearning would...draw thee from the earthly homeland to the first, heavenly abode in the Center of Realities, and lift thee to a plane wherein thou wouldst soar in the air even as thou walkest upon the earth, and move over the water as thou runnest on the land... (SV 3-4).

And 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes to a spiritual seeker:

I now assure thee, O servant of God, that, if thy mind become empty and pure from every mention and thought and thy heart attracted wholly to the Kingdom of God, forget all else besides God and come in communion with the Spirit of God, then the Holy Spirit will assist thee with a power which will enable thee to penetrate all things, and

a Dazzling Spark which enlightens all sides, a Brilliant Flame in the zenith of the heavens, will teach thee that which thou dost not know of the facts of the universe and of the divine doctrine. (TAB 3:706-7)

But these capacities are acquired through sacrifice and according to the usual divine method. Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Know ye that trials and tribulations have, from time immemorial, been the lot of the chosen Ones of God and His beloved, and such of His servants as are detached from all else but Him....Such is God's method carried into effect of old, and such will it remain in the future. (GWB 129)

Withdrawing from the world

One the innovations of the Bahá'í Faith is that spiritual confirmation has been bestowed upon issues that the modern world can hardly recognize as spiritual concerns, and views as social topics. The so called twelve principles of the Faith are not mere social statements, they are spiritual principles, that is, descriptions of the spiritual reality of human relations. Abiding by these principles is as important as observing the laws of prayer, fast, meditation and daily reading of the Holy Texts. If these principles are not complied with, there is no progress in the mystical path. They are not part of the shell, but of the kernel, of the Faith. In the light of these remarks, evidently withdrawing from the world, if not just for very short periods, as Bahá'u'lláh did in Sulaymaníyyih and Shoghi Effendi in Switzerland, is not part of the Bahá'í mystical path, whose fundamental part is the journey of return from God to one's fellow-beings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has reportedly said: "*That which is truly spiritual must light the path to God, and must result in deeds. We cannot believe the call to be spiritual when there is no result*" (ABL 107).

If we add the obligation of giving a spiritual education to our children since their early infancy, we may suppose that the future mystics will begin their journey on higher and higher mystical levels. Therefore it is difficult envisioning which spiritual goals will be gradually attained and which fruits will be reaped in the Bahá'í summer and early autumn. As for today, it is enough to understand that the divine springtime is well advanced, that we are all encompassed by the divine grace and that the greater spiritual capacities we will be able to develop through our mystical efforts in the path of service, the greater will be our practical results in our foremost task: promoting the oneness of humankind. And perhaps we may see the realization of the words written by the Báb:

God hath, according to that which is revealed in the Book, taken upon Himself the task of ensuring the ascendancy of any one of the followers of the Truth, over and above one hundred other souls, and the supremacy of one hundred believers over one thousand non-believers and the domination of one thousand of the faithful over all the peoples and kindreds of the earth; inasmuch as God calleth into being whatsoever He willeth by virtue of His behest. (SWB 153)

NOTES

- ¹ To paraphrase Shoghi Effendi, mysticism is a state of communion between a spiritual seeker and the Soul of the Manifestation of God that conveys the Spirit of God unto her bringing "such ecstasy of joy that life becomes nothing". (Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 28 July 1950.) For this definition of mysticism, cf. Savi, "The Bahá'í Faith."
- ² Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, sections 62 and 63.
- ³ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 28 December 1936.
- ⁴ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 28 July 1950.
- ⁵ Shoghi Effendi quotes these words when he states that the Bahá'í Revelation "repudiates the claim to be regarded as the final revelation of God's will and purpose for mankind" (*World Order* 115).
- ⁶ Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 14 January 1979.
- ⁷ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 24 June 1949.
- ⁸ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 30 October 1936, postscript in his handwriting.
- ⁹ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 22 December 1947.
- ¹⁰ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 May 1947.
- ¹¹ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 9 May 1947.
- ¹² Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 27 February 1943.
- ¹³ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 30 June 1949.
- ¹⁴ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 20 April 1931.
- ¹⁵ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 8 May 1948.
- ¹⁶ Letter of the Universal House of Justice, 19 April 1989.
- ¹⁷ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 30 July 1956.
- ¹⁸ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 30 November 1932.
- ¹⁹ For a provisional list of these questions cf. Savi "Towards a definition" 63-4.
- ²⁰ Words by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Esslemont 71.

²¹ The original Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh is published in *Majmú'iy-i-Alváḥ-i-Mubárah* 345 (courtesy of Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir).

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Religion and Exclusivism: a Bahá'í Perspective¹

Julio Savi

The term 'exclusivism' has been adopted in interfaith dialogue to denote the attitude of those who maintain that only their religion is true and that the others are false. In the past almost all organized religions were mostly exclusivist, and even today several people maintain that exclusivism is an intrinsic feature of religion. However, a number of factors have created serious doubts about the rational and moral legitimacy of exclusivism. In a Bahá'í perspective, exclusivist ideas "today raise walls of separation and conflict in an age when the earth has literally become one homeland and human beings must learn to see themselves as its citizens." (OCF 29) We offer a preliminary examination of the Bahá'í teachings bearing on exclusivism, according to our understanding of the open letter addressed by the Universal House of Justice "To the World's Religious Leaders," and of the commentary of this letter commissioned by the Universal House of Justice itself published as a booklet entitled *One Common Faith*.

Oneness of religion: a pivot of the Bahá'í Faith

Despite those who maintain that exclusivism is an intrinsic feature of religion, Bahá'í Scriptures convey the opposite. Shoghi Effendi summarizes the Bahá'í attitude towards other religions as follows:

...religious truth is not absolute but relative ... Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process ... all the great religions of the world are divine in origin ... their basic principles are in complete harmony ... their aims and purposes are one and the same ... their teachings are but facets of one truth ... their functions are complementary ... they differ only in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines and ... their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society. (OCF 6)

This statement recapitulates the basic components of the Bahá'í conception of the oneness of religions. Before examining each of them we will suggest a provisional definition of religion in the light of the Bahá'í teachings. Religion is the body of "*the teachings of the Lord God*" (SWAB 52) revealed to humankind through a "Perfect Man," whom Bahá'í Scriptures call a Manifestation of God, because as a "*clear and polished mirror*" he manifests the "*Essence of Divinity*" (SAQ 114). Those teachings, mainly expounded in a body

of Scripture, are both old and new. They are old because they are connected with other messages previously sent by God. They are new, because they signalize the beginning of a new age in the Divine Revelation. On the one hand, they describe “*the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things*” (SAQ 158) and therefore they are “*the essence and the fundamentals of philosophy*” (TB 145) and “*in conformity with science and reason*” (SAQ 299). On the other, they are “*a reflection of ... [God’s] Will*” (GWB 338), whose “*fundamental basis is love*” (TAB 3:729-30), and therefore they are “*the channel of love unto all peoples*” (SWAB 36). At the personal level, those teachings have the power to guide whoever puts in practice them to the acquisition and praxis of the divine virtues, especially that of love with its consequences of unity, fellowship and peace among human beings. Therefore they lead any sincere believer to the highest possible level of spirituality² in that period of human collective development. At the collective level, they are “*the cause of oneness among men, and the means of unity and love*” (SWAB 28). Therefore they also are “*the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquility amongst its peoples*” (TB 63-4). *One Common Faith* synthetically states that religion is “*the principal force impelling the development of consciousness*” (OCF 23), “*discerns and articulates the values unfolding progressively through Divine revelation ... [and] defines goals that serve the evolutionary process*” (OCF 33).

This definition underlines three basic elements of religion: a foundational Figure, characterized by a special relation with the Divine; his teachings, which creatively generate spirituality in human beings, with its consequences of unity and peace among human beings; and Scripture, that is, one or more Books containing those teachings. It is offered only as a possible description, in the light of the Bahá’í teachings, of “all the great religions of the world” (OCF 6), giving to the word “great” not certainly worldly connotations of numerical strength, geographical diffusion or earthly power, but a connotation of spiritual greatness worthy of a teaching capable of leading human beings to spirituality. According to the Bahá’í teachings these religions are “Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the religion of the Sabeans,” as well as the Bahá’í and the Bábí religions.³ The foundational Figures of these religions may be best described, in the words of *One Common Faith*, “as the spiritual Educators of history, as the animating forces in the rise of the civilizations through which consciousness has flowered” (OCF 34).

I. “Religious truth is not absolute but relative”

This proposition does not imply that the Manifestations of God are not endowed with “omniscience,” but that they reveal to humankind only that part of their knowledge which humankind is able to

understand in that stage of its evolution on earth. It can be put into perspective in the light of two fundamental Bahá'í conceptions. The first is that conception whereby "*[w]hatsoever in the contingent world can either be expressed or apprehended, can never transgress the limits which, by its inherent nature, have been imposed upon it*" (SLH 35). The second is Bahá'u'lláh's principle of "*the continuity of Divine Revelation*" (GWB 151) and "*the progressiveness of religious experience*" (PDC 108), which will be now explained.

II. "Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process"

This concept is known among the Bahá'ís as "progressive Revelation" (GWB 75). Bahá'í Scriptures mention a pre-eternal Covenant between God and humankind, established by God Himself out of His bounty. This Covenant provides that God pledge to look after the spiritual development of human beings and human beings pledge to do His will on earth. Therefore God periodically reveals His will through His Manifestations. They reveal to humankind "an ever-increasing measure of His truth, of His inscrutable will and Divine guidance" (WOB 118), according to ever-evolving human capacities of understanding and accomplishment. Human beings are required to make a good use of their "*understanding*," which has been given to them so that they may "*discern the truth in all things*," be lead "*to that which is right*" and "*discover the secrets of creation*" (GWB 194). They will thus be enabled to recognize the divine station of the Manifestations of God, to understand and accept their divine verities, to abide by their divine guidance and to accomplish the divine will as they manifest it. Thus they obtain personal and collective spirituality.

The concept of progressive revelation explains the multiplicity of religions and of their teachings. It is in contradiction with the claims of "uniqueness" or "finality" of other religions, but it does not "dwarf the admitted magnitude of their colossal achievements," nor "detract one jot or one tittle from the influence they exert or the loyalty they inspire." On the contrary, it contributes to "widen their basis ... [and] to reconcile their aims" (WOB 114), in the awareness that their followers abide by the teachings of historically different Personages, who are, however, all united to one another in their common mission as "*Educator[s] of mankind*" (KI 58). The concept of progressive revelation also implies that the content of the verities revealed by each Manifestation depends on the maturity which humankind has attained through the education it received from all past Manifestations and because of passing time, and not on any intrinsic superiority of any one among the Manifestations over the other. Therefore this concept implies that no religion has "a superior merit" (WOB 60) than the other ones, because its features only depend on the receptivity of the age in which it was revealed. *One*

Common Faith warns: "To presume to judge among the Messengers of God, exalting one above the other, would be to give in to the delusion that the Eternal and All-Embracing is subject to the vagaries of human preference" (OCF 20).

III. "All the great religions of the world are divine in origin"

This concept could be wrongly interpreted as a forerunner of pluralism, as formulated by John H. Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and others. On the contrary, paraphrasing Hick's definition of pluralism, this proposition states that the great religious traditions of the world represent different human perceptions of and response to the revelation sent, in different forms in different historical ages, by the same infinite divine Reality. And thus the two propositions are virtual opposites: pluralist philosophers, who adopt the humanistic point of view, stress the different human responses to "the same infinite divine Reality." Bahá'í Scriptures, with their spiritual conception of the nature of reality, also stress the different forms of the various revelations sent by "the same infinite divine Reality."

The Universal House of Justice remarks in its message "To the World's religious Leaders" that the concept that "the truth underlying all religions is in its essence one" is accepted in the world by many people "as an intuitive awareness born from the ever widening experience of others and from a dawning acceptance of the oneness of the human family itself," and augurs that "this diffuse and still tentative perception" may "consolidate itself and contribute effectively to the building of a peaceful world" through "the wholehearted confirmation of those to whom, even at this late hour, masses of the earth's population look for guidance" (4). *One Common Faith* points out the responsibility of the Bahá'ís of bringing the "recognition of this reality" to "operate at the heart of religious discourse" (OCF ii) and thus the importance of reflecting on this issue. The Bahá'í teachings offer a number of reflections from which one may deduce that all the "great" religions are divine in origin. The most important are: their capacity for creating spirituality in their sincere followers; their capacity for creating civilization; their capacity for becoming established in the world notwithstanding the initial opposition that most of them must face; their capacity, once established, for surviving and enduring far into the future; and the universality of their basic principles. The first two reflections are shared by some modern thinkers. For example, Hick writes that all "the great traditions ... seem to be more or less equally productive of the outstanding individuals whom we call saints" (7). And Arnold J. Toynbee writes that the "higher religions" are "the chrysalis from which a new civilization eventually emerges" (13). As to the capacity of becoming established and enduring far into the future, it has been anticipated by Jesus, who said: "Every

plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13). As to the universality of their basic principles, this concept will be now explained.

IV. "Their basic principles are in complete harmony"

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains the reasons for this proposition. Given that the Founders of the "great" religions are Manifestations of God and that God is "the Truth" (TB 3:704), then "*whatever emanates from Them is identical with the truth, and conformable to reality*" (SAQ 173). Since "*reality is one and cannot admit of multiplicity*" (SWAB 298), we may conclude that the "*foundations of the Religion of God . . . are irremovable and eternal*" (SAQ 48). 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentions a number of "*all-universal and all-inclusive*" "*principles*" (SWAB 69), which He defines as the "*foundations of the Religion of God*" (SAQ 48). These principles may be listed under at least five different categories.⁴

1. Knowledge

Religions teach a particular kind of "knowledge ('*irfán*),"⁵ which is an experiential mystical knowledge. This knowledge comprises "*the knowledge (ma'rifat) of God*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Mufávaḍát* 209, SAQ 300), "*the knowledge (ma'rifat) of the Manifestations of God*" (*Mufávaḍát* 106, SAQ 222), and the discovery of "inner truths and mysteries" (SWAB 271). Bahá'u'lláh states that God is unknowable and that to know God, which is the purpose of human life (GWB 70), means "*to recognize (ma'rifat) His Manifestation.*" (KI 145) As to the meaning of this "knowledge" or "recognition" of the Manifestation of God, it also is intended as the experiential knowledge of one's potential divine qualities and of "*inner truths and mysteries*" (SWAB 271) attained through one's obedience to the divine will, as revealed by His Manifestation, because of one's love for Him (cf. KI 100-2). 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that the teachings revealed by the Manifestations of God "*are the reflex [reflections] on this plane of the divine laws, and they become the medium for transmuting the thought of man into his reality*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá on Christ and Christianity, 10). And thus we come to another basic principle of religions.

2. Spiritual awakening

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that "*the knowledge of God*" (SAQ 300) and the discovery of "*inner truths and mysteries*" (SWAB 271) — attained through one's obedience to the will of God, as revealed by His Manifestation, because of one's love for Him — awaken, through "*the breaths of the Holy Spirit*" (SWAB 10), the "*spiritual perfections*" (SAQ 194) of human beings, and their "*intuitive knowledge*" (SAQ 157). This spiritual awakening brings about their

"*second birth*" (TDP 95), or detachment "*from the world of nature*" (SWAB 304), that is, "*spirituality*" (SAQ 235), or "*spiritual progress*" (SAQ 300), which implies the acquisition of "the virtues and perfections which adorn the reality of man" (SAQ 223).

3. Love and oneness, faith and certitude

These qualities stand out among the virtues acquired by human beings through their spiritual awakening. As to love, it becomes manifest as "*love of God*" (SAQ 47) and "*love of all mankind*" (TB 138). Its highest expression is "*universal love*" (SWAB 20), typical of those who have recognized the oneness of humankind. As to oneness, 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* several "*collective centers*," conducive to "*association and unity between the children of men*" (TDP 93). He lists as first "*patriotism... nationalism... identity of interests... political alliance... the union of ideals... the cultural and intellectual collective center*" (93). Although they may produce "*prosperity of the world of humanity*," they are "*temporary and not everlasting*" (93). The greatest "*collective center*" is that "*of the sacred religions*" (97), that is, "*the body of the divine teachings, which include all the degrees and embrace all the universal relations and necessary laws of humanity*" (94). This "*Divine Collective Center*" (97), which is "*eternal*," "*overcomes and includes all the other collective centers*" (93), because, through "*the celestial potency of the Word of God*" (95), it "*organizes the oneness of the world of humanity, and destroys the foundation of differences*" (93). In one of His talks, dealing with "the subject of unity," 'Abdu'l-Bahá also described two higher "*expressions of unity*," mentioned in the Bahá'í Scriptures: "*the oneness of the Manifestations of God*" and "*the divine unity or entity*" (PUP 192). As to the former Bahá'u'lláh writes that the Manifestations of God "*are all sent down from the heaven of the Will of God*," and therefore they "*are regarded as one soul and the same person*" (KI 152). As to the latter, He writes that its "*true meaning*" is not to "*be tempted to make any distinction between any of the Manifestations of His Cause*" (GWB 59). The understanding of these "*expressions of unity*" is an important component of "*unity in religion*," which 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes as "*the corner-stone of the foundation*" of "*the unity of all mankind*" (SWAB 32). As to faith and certitude, faith is intended as "*the love that flows from man to God*" (PT 58.5), "*conscious knowledge, and... the practice of good deeds*" (TAB 3:549); and certitude is the capacity "*to remain steadfast*" (GWB 338) in one's faith.

4. Moral development

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that spiritual awakening and the acquisition of "*the virtues and perfections which adorn the reality of*

man" (SAQ 223) are both caused by and result in "*the expansion of consciousness*" (SWAB 126). This expansion promotes "*the ethical development and spiritual progress of mankind*" (PUP 97) through the development of "the moral relations between the hearts" (Christ 11).

5. The progress of humankind

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes "*material*" (SWAB 285) and "*spiritual progress*" (SAQ 300). The former "*promoteth the principles of material achievement*" (SWAB 283) and its "*propagator and executive power*" is a "*just government*" (SWAB 283). It is conducive to the development of material civilization which is laudable, but insufficient, because it brings into being at the same time, on the one hand, an "*orderly pattern of kingdoms . . . ease of . . . means of travel . . . noble discoveries and scientific researches*" and, on the other, "*the development of forces of demolition and the invention of fiery implements*" (SWAB 283). Spiritual progress produces the development of divine civilization, characterized by a balance between material and spiritual progress. The founders of divine civilization are the Manifestations of God, "*teachers, wondrous and without peer,*" who educate humankind "*according to teachings from God*" (SWAB 283).

'Abdu'l-Bahá defines these basic principles of religions as "*spiritual teachings*" (SWAB 285) and says that they are "*the essence of the Law*" (SAQ 47) of all the Manifestations of God and "*are renewed in the cycle of every Prophet*" (SAQ 48).⁶ Therefore "*the basis of the religions of God is one*" (TDP 32) and any difference among them in this aspect depends only on the expanding of "*the horizon of man*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá on Christ 10).

A resemblance has been noted between this concept and Perennialism.⁷ But whereas Perennialism refers to an intrinsic feature of the human spirit, to be cultivated through mystical efforts, the "one religion, Divine and indivisible" of Bahá'í Scriptures is a divine knowledge progressively revealed by God to humankind, available to whosoever is willing to follow the path provided by that same knowledge. This knowledge leads to spirituality.

V. "Their aims and purposes are one and the same"

All the basic principles of religions may be summarized into a single purpose: "*to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men*" (TB 168). This purpose is "*the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion*" (ESW 13). It is so important that 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes that should a religion "*lead to malice, spite, and hate, it is of no value at all. For religion is a remedy, and if the remedy bring on disease, then put it aside*" (SWAB 249).

VI. "Their teachings are but facets of one truth"

Bahá'u'lláh writes that "*the words and utterances*" of the Manifestations of God differ from one another "*because of ... [a] difference in ... [the Manifestations'] station and mission,*" but they "*are in reality but the expressions of one Truth*" (KI 177). The verities explained by the various Scriptures of the world seem to be different from one another, because they describe the same Reality, in conformity with the needs of the people for whom they were intended. They are the various phenomenal expressions of the one Noumenon, that is, the one divine Reality. This statement is reminiscent of Perspectivism, typical of Hick's pluralistic thought.⁸ But, as has been said, whereas Hick emphasizes the different human responses to the same divine Reality, Bahá'í Scriptures also emphasize the fact that the same divine Reality gradually reveals itself to humankind in the course of the ages.

VII. "Their functions are complementary"

Bahá'u'lláh writes that

each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined revelation, and specially designated limitations. Each one of them is known by a different name, is characterized by a special attribute, fulfils a definite mission, and is entrusted with a particular Revelation (KI 52)

From the concept of the existence of God and the awareness of good and evil taught by Adam, to the concept of the unity of God inculcated by Abraham, from the concept of the due observance of the "*fundamental law of God,*" which Moses "*revealed ... [as] the real ethical basis of the civilization and progress of humanity*" (PUP 368), to the "*special way of life which constitutes the highest type of action on earth*" (SDC 82) emphasized by Christ, to the union of a people and the founding of a nation upon the divine law taught by Muḥammad, humankind, guided by these "agents of one civilizing process" (The Universal House of Justice, "Promise" 685) has passed through various phases in its knowledge of spiritual reality and in its manifesting this knowledge through its actions and undertakings (cf. PDC 119-21). Bahá'í Scriptures honor all the Manifestations of God, because each of them manifests, in different ways, the same God and bestows his own precious legacy upon all humankind.

VIII. "They differ only in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines"

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that the "*inessential*" aspects of religious doctrines are the "*material Law*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá on Christ 10). Whereas "*the spiritual Law*" is "*the essence of the Law,*" "*material Law*" is its

"form" (SAQ 47-8). "*Material Law*" deals, on the one hand, with "*practical life...transactions and business*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá on Christ 10) and, on the other, with "*exterior forms and ceremonies*" (PT 44.11). The outer forms of "*fasting, prayer, and worship,*" the rules of "*marriage and divorce,*" issues regarding "*the abolition of slavery, legal processes, transactions, indemnities for murder, violence, theft and injuries*" (SAQ 48) as well as the ordinances regarding food, all fall under this category (cf. PUP 365, 404). These teachings are "*modified . . . in each prophetic cycle in accordance with the necessities of the times*" (SAQ 48). However, "[t]he essential thing is the spiritual law – the outer material law is of small moment, because material life has natural laws to protect it, but humanity lacks spiritual education and needs instruction on the divine qualities" (ADP 64-5).

'Abdu'l-Bahá may have considered the spiritual teachings of religions as essential and the material teachings as non-essential on the ground of the concept, explained by Bahá'u'lláh, that every Revelation is intended "*to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions*" (KI 40-1). In fact, the teachings which 'Abdu'l-Bahá defined as essential are teachings whose enforcement changes the character of humankind. The teachings he defined as non-essential "*refer to material things*" (SAQ 48), which exert their influence on the transformation of human character only through the spirit that should animate the believers in their compliance with those laws, that is, their love for God, independently from the form of those laws in the various religions.

'Abdu'l-Bahá also includes among the non-essential aspects of religions those "*human interpretations and dogmatic imitations of ancestral beliefs*" (PUP 354) that have gradually encrusted all regions, in such a subtle and pervasive way that they have come to be considered as an intrinsic aspect of religions. Since they "*differ widely, religious strife and disagreement have arisen among mankind*" (PUP 141). This issue will be later illustrated.

IX. "Their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society"

The "great" religions are "different stages in the eternal history and constant evolution of one religion, Divine and indivisible" (WOB 114), in the progressive unfoldment of one "*Grand Redemptive Scheme of God*" (GPB 139), and their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society. *One Common Faith* explains: "The declared purpose of history's series of prophetic revelations . . . has been not only to guide the individual

seeker on the path of personal salvation, but to prepare the whole of the human family for the great eschatological Event lying ahead, through which the life of the world will itself be entirely transformed" (OCF 54). The theoretical foundations of this concept have already been explained. Its consequences on the Bahá'í attitude towards the "great" religions are that "one cannot call one ... Faith superior to another, as they all come from God; they are progressive, each suited to certain needs of the times."⁹ A number of scholars have given to this concept an inclusivistic meaning, because in their opinion it presents the Bahá'í Faith as the synthesis of all previous religions.¹⁰ As a matter of fact 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that "[t]he teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are such that all the communities of the world, whether religious, political or ethical, ancient or modern, find in them the expression of their highest wish" (SWAB 304). This statement certainly implies that the Bahá'í Faith is inclusive in the sense of being "enclosing, encompassing" (*Webster*). But the Bahá'í conception of the oneness of religion is not inclusivistic, because it does not deny, but on the contrary upholds, "the ultimate validity" (Rowe 178) of all the "great" religions, as salvific agents, which have the power "to bring about happiness in the after life and civilization and the refinement of character in this" (SDC 46). In this vein *One Common Faith* states that the "heroes and saints" of any religion "are the heroes and saints of all" the other religions, the "successes" of any religion are "the successes of all" (OCF 23) the others.

The "God-given authority and correlative character" of Scriptures

These propositions have two corollaries. The first is that the Scriptures of all religions, which are the repositories of the teachings of each religion, have a "God-given authority" (PDC 111) and are mutually correlated. The Bahá'í teachings do not confirm an "exact word-for-word authenticity" of all Scriptures, which recent studies seem to ascribe to very few, if any, of them. They only uphold the validity of their "substance or spiritual message" (Sours 96). "The scriptures have not changed; the moral principles they contain have lost none of their validity," remarks *One Common Faith* (23). As to the correlations among Scriptures, these correlations may depend on the fact that, as has been said, all the Manifestations of God take part in the progressive unfoldment of one "Grand Redemptive Scheme of God" (GPB 139).

All "great" religions are "continuous in their purpose and indispensable in their value to mankind"

The second corollary is that all "great" religions are "continuous in their purpose, indispensable in their value to mankind" (WOB 58). Since each "great" religion is united to all the others in a

“continuous purpose,” that is, “to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men” (TB 168), today each “great” religion may become more effective in achieving that purpose, if it is willing to cooperate with all its sister religions in its attainment. And this purpose is clearly pointed out in *One Common Faith*, when it states that “the texts speak with one voice: religion’s goal is humanity’s attainment” (OCF 53) of a golden age, “an age utterly beyond anything humanity will have experienced, the mind conceived or language as yet encompassed” (54).

How is exclusivism born?

‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes: “Every universal cause is divine and every particular one is temporal. The principles of the...Manifestations of God were, therefore, all-universal and all-inclusive . . . The . . . Manifestations of God . . . engaged in the service of universal education” (SWAB 68-9). The idea that Scriptures may include statements requesting the believers to assume exclusivist attitudes is, in a Bahá’í perspective, tantamount to saying that Scriptures are not universal, which is at variance with the ultimate purpose — educating all humankind to love, unity and peace — wherefore the Manifestations of God come to the world. And yet some sentences of each of those Scriptures are used to defend exclusivist attitudes. In the light of Bahá’í teachings it seems that this happened because of misinterpretations of those words. The Bahá’í International Community wrote in this regard: “Indeed, human beings have a tendency to view their own beliefs as right, and all others as wrong. They have, we suggest, erroneously interpreted the tenets of their own faiths as advocating . . . exclusivity” (*Eliminating Religious Intolerance*). Our misinterpretations of Scriptures drive us to think that God has not observed the fundamental clause of His Own Covenant with all religions — loving everybody without excluding anyone — revealing Himself only to a people, to an age, at the exclusion of anyone else, or wholly abandoning a people after having revealed Himself to them through one of His Manifestations.

Bahá’u’lláh assures us that “the generality of mankind hath been endued with the capacity to hearken unto God’s most exalted Word” (TB 89) and warns that in some people “this faculty hath remained undeveloped and hath, indeed, degenerated” (TB 53). He explains moreover that whosoever wants to discover the meanings of Scripture needs “purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit” (KI 211). He also explains that his heart should be “assured,” his soul should have “found favour with God,” his mind should be “detached from all else but Him” (KI 255). These words describe at least two conditions. The first is the capacity of transcending the promptings

of the “ego,” intended as the consciousness of his body and its instincts which each human being acquires and preserves during his earthly life, and which, if it is not properly curbed, is responsible for self-centered behaviors, which are unworthy of a human being. Whosoever tries to interpret Scriptures, without having achieved a relative inner freedom from his “ego,” does not discover their real, implicit meanings, but rather he simply finds a reflection of his own desires in them, that is, those meanings which he may use for his own purposes, as for example demeaning the identity of others and bolstering his own. On the contrary, while interpreting Scriptures one should remember that “*religion must be the cause of fellowship and love*” (SWAB 299) and one should also keep in mind that “*self-love...is a strange trait and the means of the destruction of many important souls in the world*” (TAB 1:136). The second condition is avoiding to regard “*the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets*” (KI 4) and seeking “*enlightenment from them who are the recognized Expounders*” of Scripture (KI 256), that is, “*the divine Manifestations,*” Who are “*the only ones who can comprehend its manifold wisdom*” (GWB 75). Bahá’í Scriptures mention at least five major mistakes in the interpretation of Scriptures which may lead to exclusivist readings.

One mistake is pointed out by Bahá’u’lláh when He says, referring to certain allegorical verses of Scripture, that religious leaders “*have literally interpreted the Word of God,*” depriving “*themselves and all their people of the bountiful showers of the grace and mercies of God*” (KI 82).¹¹ The importance of avoiding literal interpretations of Scriptures, whenever “*the reality of spirit – its condition, its station...spiritual qualities...[or] spiritual states*” (SAQ 84) are described, becomes even more evident if one considers that “modern scholarship has disproved many old beliefs about the inerrancy of scriptural documents” (Sours 95).

A second mistake is that some passages of Scripture have been over-emphasized, while other pertinent passages have been ignored. Bahá’u’lláh condemns those people who “*with one hand cling to those verses of the Qur’án [Koran] and those traditions... which they have found to accord with their inclinations and interests, and with the other reject those which are contrary to their selfish desires*” (KI 168).¹² In this sense the Bahá’ís are recommended to avoid the tendency “to cling tenaciously to one Text or one understanding of the Texts and to overlook the significance of other passages of the Writings”¹³ and to always keep in mind the overall meaning of Scriptures, because the teachings which Scriptures convey are “a great, balanced whole,”¹⁴ similar to “a

sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them.”¹⁵

A third mistake consists in interpreting a statement of Scriptures while ignoring their overall meaning in the light of the specific mission of the Manifestation of God Who revealed them. In this sense Shoghi Effendi says: “The severe laws and injunctions revealed by the Báb can be properly appreciated and understood only when interpreted in the light of His own statements regarding the nature, purpose and character of His own Dispensation.”¹⁶ Likewise, *One Common Faith* explains such teachings of the ancient religion as “the inferior social status most sacred texts assign to women” (OCF 34) and exclusivist teachings pertaining “relations between societies,” which seem unacceptable today, on the ground of the fact that “[a]t the stages of social development at which all of the major faiths came into existence, scriptural guidance sought primarily to civilize, to the extent possible, relationships resulting from intractable historical circumstances” (35).

A fourth mistake comes from renouncing rationality, in the name of a blind faith in tradition, which implies the perpetuation of past mistakes. Bahá'u'lláh states that God has “*conferred upon man...the gift of understanding,*” so that he may be able “*to discern the truth in all things*” (GWB 194). And thus He encourages people to read Scriptures “*in the spirit of search, not in blind imitation*” (SV 24). As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes: “*blind imitation of the past will stunt the mind*” (SWAB 248).

A fifth mistake comes when, paraphrasing *One Common Faith*, “followers of one of the world’s faiths prove unable to distinguish between its eternal and transitory features,” and ascribe an absolute value to scriptural passages prescribing “rules of behaviour that have long since accomplished their purpose” (37).

Scriptures may also be misinterpreted because of the complexity of their language. Bahá'u'lláh quotes a Muslim tradition to explain that the words of Scriptures have many meanings: “*We speak one word, and by it we intend one and seventy meanings*” (KI 255).¹⁷ He writes moreover that all the Manifestations of God “*speak a twofold language. One . . . the outward language, is devoid of allusions, is unconcealed and unveiled . . . the other language is veiled and concealed*” (KI 254-5). Elsewhere He explains that He Himself has adopted “*the language of the law-giver*” and “*that of the truth-seeker and the mystic*” (ESW 14). He also writes that He has revealed His “*verses in nine different modes*” (SLH 27). Since Scriptures are written in so many different modes, it is important to read each of their statements in its own context and in the light of the special

“mode” of its revelation, as well as keeping the fundamental verities of Scriptures as a whole in mind.¹⁸

Finally, five kinds of language have been recently described in Christian Scriptures: “survival language ... apocalyptic language ... confessional language ... action language ... hyperbolic language” (Fazel 248-58, 265-7). Survival language should strengthen the early believers’ identity, surrounded as they are, so much so at the beginning of a Dispensation, by indifference and even hostility. Apocalyptic language, “foreboding imminent disaster or final doom” (*Webster*) should help the believers face the catastrophic events that often mark the emergence of newborn religions and remain steadfast in their faith. Confessional language has been described as “the language ... of enthusiastic believers ... of lovers” (Knitter 185). Action language should inspire the believers to make the necessary sacrifices so that they may put in practice the will of God. Hyperbolic language, typical of the mystical literature of all ages and regions, should describe abstruse metaphysical concepts and spiritual experiences that are quite different from any other kind of experience. A sixth language could be added, that is, the prophetic or eschatological language, a particular form of apocalyptic language which sometimes sets the obscurity of present days against the bliss of future achievements. Scriptures admonish that this language is difficult and that it will be understood only after the predicted events will have been realized. These six kinds of language are often expressed in powerful utterances, which, if they are interpreted literally, or taken out of their context, and invested with a doctrinal meaning, can give rise to exclusivist interpretations.

These considerations could raise a number of objections. Someone could object that they may imply that only the learned ones are able to understand Scripture. Others could object that the analytical reading which these considerations seem to encourage may invalidate the inspiring purpose of Scriptures. It is like coldly analyzing a poem without yielding to its beauty. Others could observe that an excess of rational, allegorical interpretation could nullify the practical aspects of religions. Bahá’í Scriptures appear to explain that all these risks can be avoided when the above mentioned spiritual conditions for whomsoever wants to discover the meanings of Scripture are realized and an attitude of wisdom and moderation is adopted.

The mistakes made by theologians and religious leaders in their interpretations of Scripture are therefore understandable. Nonetheless they have had grievous consequences, because they have grown into dogmas, that is, enunciations of man-made doctrines, whose acceptance is required to be numbered among the followers of a religion.

Bahá'í Scriptures deny that man-made dogmas may be included among the basic principles of religions for at least four reasons. First, dogmas are the fruit of human minds that, as excellent as they may have been, cannot be infallible, since essential infallibility is an exclusive attribute of the Manifestations of God. Second, since human beings cannot have a complete understanding of reality, each dogma, as a man-made enunciation of spiritual truth, is in itself limited and thus it remains a hypothesis. Third, dogmas sometimes "*are contrary to science*" (PT 44.15). But "*the religion of God is the promoter of truth, the founder of science ('ilm) and knowledge (ma'rifat)*" and "*knowledge ('ilm) ... is ... identical with guidance*" (*Mufávaḍát* 99, SAQ 137).¹⁹ Therefore there cannot be contradiction between the two. And thus an interpretation of a Scriptural sentence might have a widely accepted meaning in a certain time, but later it becomes obvious that what was "widely accepted" is in conflict with scientific findings, thus throwing into question the veracity of the widely accepted scriptural interpretation. Last but not least, a number of dogmas "*are at variance with the foundations established by the Prophets of God*" (PUP 354) and thus they are conducive to strife and disagreement, whereas the purpose of religion is to create love and harmony among human beings.

The growth of the body of dogmas throughout the centuries has introduced into "tradition" a number of concepts at variance with the overall intentions of the divine message of Scripture, and yet considered as absolute verities by religious leaders and their followers, giving "*rise to discord, hatred and disunion*" (SAQ 298). In the light of Bahá'í Scriptures these elements that have been added to the original teachings of the Manifestations of God are considered as "non-essential and spurious" (PDC 109). Therefore the Bahá'ís "distinguish, for instance, between Christianity, which is the divine message given by Jesus of Nazareth, and the development of Christendom, which is the history of what men did with that message in subsequent centuries, a distinction which has become blurred if not entirely obscured" (Comments 389) in the eyes of modern scholars of religion. In this regard 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: "*There was no disagreement or variance in the reality of...the teaching and mission [of religions]. Discord has arisen among their followers, who have lost sight of reality and hold fast to imitations*" (PUP 234). *One Common Faith* remarks in this regard: "Over time, theology succeeded in constructing in the heart of each one of the great faiths an authority parallel with, and even inimical in spirit to, the revealed teachings on which the tradition was based" (28).

Towards the oneness of religions

The following words uttered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1912 both summarize what has been said in this paper and suggest a way towards the abandonment of dangerous claims to exclusivity or finality:

The strife between religions . . . arises from misunderstanding. If we investigate the religions to discover the principles underlying their foundations, we will find they agree; for the fundamental reality of them is one and not multiple. By this means the religionists of the world will reach their point of unity and reconciliation. They will ascertain the truth that the purpose of religion is the acquisition of praiseworthy virtues, the betterment of morals, the spiritual development of mankind, the real life and divine bestowals . . . We must look at the reality of the Prophets and Their teachings in order that we may agree.
(PUP 152, 153)

NOTES

- ¹ I would like to thank Prof. Rhett Diessner, Mrs. Lucia Ricco and Mr. Peter Terry, for their precious suggestions. The ideas expressed in this paper are the result of a personal study and are not intended as either a final word or an official Bahá’í position on the issue.
- ² Spirituality may be defined, in the light of the Bahá’í teachings, as the gradual acquisition of the required capacities to fulfill the twofold purpose of one’s life, that is, inwardly, knowing and worshipping God (cf. Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* 314, no. CLXXXI), intended as following — out of one’s love of God — the precepts of one’s religion, whose divine origin one has recognized, and, outwardly, playing one’s part “to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 215). This concept may be offered as a Bahá’í equivalent of the Christian concept of salvation.
- ³ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 28 July 1936.
- ⁴ Since religious teachings are so complex and various, our list is undoubtedly incomplete (cf. letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 10 July 1939). I am grateful to Mr. Peter Terry for his suggestion of this arrangement of religious teachings into categories.
- ⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Mufávaḍát* 36, English translation: *Some Answered Questions* 47. Whenever this kind of knowledge is intended, Bahá’í Scriptures use the Arabic and Persian words ‘*irfán* and *ma’rifat*, denoting the experiential knowledge typical of mystical experience.
- ⁶ Sometimes in the Bahá’í Scriptures the Manifestations of God are also called Prophets of God.
- ⁷ Perennialism is a doctrine whereby “a fundamental core of truth (is) to be found at the heart of all religions, no matter how diverse their external appearance and practice may be” (*Oxford Dictionary of*

World Religions 750), upheld by a number of philosophers as the French René Guénon (1886-1951), the Indian Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) and the German Swiss born Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), as well as by the English novelist and critic Aldous Huxley (1894-1963).

⁸ Perspectivism is "(t)he theory that knowledge of a subject is inevitably partial and limited by the individual perspective from which it is viewed . . ." (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

⁹ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 19 November 1945.

¹⁰ Cf. for example Fisher and Luyster 345 and Smith 385.

¹¹ Cf. "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

¹² Cf. "Believe ye then part of the Book, and deny part?" (Koran 2:79, Rodwell).

¹³ Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 24 May 1992.

¹⁴ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 19 March 1945.

¹⁵ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 July 1947.

¹⁶ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 17 February 1946.

¹⁷ This tradition is ascribed to Imám Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq (the sixth Imám, c609-c765) in *Biháru'l-Anvár* (Seas of Lights), the collection of *Shi'ih* traditions compiled by Muḥammad Baqíru'l-Majlisí at the end of the sixteenth century CE.

¹⁸ Cf. "Notes" 221, note 130. For a preliminary study of these nine modes cf. Taherzadeh 42.

¹⁹ The Arabic and Persian word *'ilm* does not mean only "knowledge," but also "science."

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Seeds of Revelation and the Mystic Bond between The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh

An Exposition on Excerpts from the Persian Bayán

James B. Thomas

Introduction

In this paper a series of spiritual concepts are explored through the eyes of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh that show a remarkable continuity and harmony of meaning yet are expressed in many different ways. The Persian Bayán offers a rich array of verses that captured the hearts of the early Bábís. It is through these writings that one may peer into the remarkable mind of the young charismatic Báb. His eloquence in espousing the truths of the Creator enabled His followers to achieve unimaginable deeds of heroism for the Cause of God in the most difficult of circumstances. Then the majestic figure of Bahá'u'lláh emerged to carry forth an even greater world embracing revelation that will in the fullness of time sweep away the heartbreak, the pain and endless iniquities of bygone generations. Their relationship begins with the most basic, the most essential and the most enduring qualities that are attainable in human life.

Inner Temple

For religion to have any meaning it must touch the emotions of the human heart, otherwise it will simply become an intellectual exercise devoid of conviction. This lack of emotional content is in fact one of the barriers to faith. How to open the door of the soul is mystifying. Some forms of art, especially music can do this but we have to know where to take it from there. Certain individuals accept unconditionally the precepts of revelation once the heart is moved by the eloquence of a Great Prophet while others spend countless years investigating "The Word" without true comprehension. In other words, logic alone cannot evoke emotional response while passion without rationale cannot achieve lasting certitude. So what is the nature of our soul, of our inner life, of the heart of hearts of our deepest sense of personal reality? The resplendent Herald of a new cycle in human history, the Báb is the first to address the subject.

In the Persian Bayán, the holy book of the Bábí Dispensation, the Báb refers to the physical frame as being the throne of the inner temple. He explains that, though the body may experience pain, it is the inner temple of the body, not the body itself that takes delight in joy or is saddened by pain. For this reason the body should be treated with utmost honor and respect for, by doing so is to honor the inner reality. (SWB 95)

Bahá'u'lláh expands the analogy to encompass the world in terms of a human temple. He compares the need that a human being has for clothing to the need that the body of mankind has for the mantle of justice and wisdom. He identified His robe to be the Revelation given to us by God and that when its purpose is fulfilled it shall be renewed when new circumstances require a fresh measure of the light of God. (GWB 81)

Purity

The above descriptions of the inner temple of the individual and the human temple of the body of mankind mandate that certain conditions are required in order for them to flourish in a state of joy where justice prevails and where we conduct ourselves with wisdom. The Báb points out the first and foremost condition that we must achieve in everyday life, purity. *“GOD loveth those who are pure. Naught in the Bayán and in the sight of God is more loved than purity and immaculate cleanliness . . .”* (SWB 80) He goes on to state that God does not want to see any soul in the Bayán deprived of joy and radiance. He does desire that all be inwardly and outwardly adorned with purity under all conditions and that no repugnance be caused to them.

Bahá'u'lláh speaks at length on virtues and attributes that pertain to God and He ranks some among the highest of qualities such as *“trustworthiness, truthfulness, purity of heart while communing with God, forbearance, resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed, ...”* (GWB 290) He further expands on the Báb's comments about purity and admonishes the friends to strive to find favor in the sight of God and adds:

O CHILDREN OF ADAM! Holy words and pure and goodly deeds ascend unto the heaven of celestial glory. Strive that your deeds may be cleansed from the dust of self and hypocrisy and find favor at the court of glory; for ere long the assayers of mankind shall, in the holy presence of the Adored One, accept naught but absolute virtue and deeds of stainless purity...(HW 69)

Veils

But there are man-made barriers so severe that they may offer difficult but subtle tests that inhibit one's spiritual progress. These are veils that are opposite to purity. They are derived from corrupted religious beliefs that ironically result in heinous actions. From the Báb we have:

HOW veiled are ye, O My creatures, ... who, without any right, have consigned Him unto a mountain [Máh-Kú], not one of whose inhabitants is worthy of mention ... With Him, which is with Me, there is no one except him who is one of the Letters of the Living of My Book. (SWB 87)

The Báb explains that, for Him “*there is not at night even a lighted lamp!*” However, in places of worship there are unnumbered lamps shining for Him (the Promised One) that is in reality the Báb. Moreover, all receive His benefits but are so veiled as “*to refuse Him even a lamp.*” And Bahá'u'lláh issues a warning about veils.

It behoveth us, therefore, to make the utmost endeavor, that, by God's invisible assistance, these dark veils, these clouds of Heaven-sent trials, may not hinder us from beholding the beauty of His shining Countenance, and that we may recognize Him only by His own Self. (GWB 27)

In another tablet He says “*Verily, I say: The Cause of God hath never had, nor hath it now, any peer or equal. Rend asunder the veils of idle fancies.*” (ESW 114)

Love

At the innermost heart of faith, as extolled by the Báb in the Bayán, is love of and for God. He reveals that “*The path to guidance is one of love and compassion, not of force and coercion.*” (SWB 77) He states “*He hath cherished and will ever cherish the desire that all men may attain His gardens of Paradise with utmost love, that no one should sadden another, not even for a moment ...*” (SWB 86)

Bahá'u'lláh also places love at the core of faith. He mentions this word over four thousand times throughout His numerous writings.

Blessed the man who hath sought enlightenment from the Day-Star of My Word. Blessed he who hath attired his head with the diadem of My love. (TB 17)

O SON OF MAN! Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty. (HW 3-7)

Speaking with the voice of God, He says that we should “*Seclude ourselves in the stronghold of His love.*” (ESW 49) And He exclaims “*Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship.*” (ESW 14)

Prayer

Of all the activities of which man may participate, the most important in the final analysis must be the act of prayer; for with it “*man holdeth communion with God...*” (KA Notes 166) As such, the intonement of prayer brings one closer to God than any other means within the material world. The Báb emphasized the importance of sincerity in the act of prayer. He said that motive should not be the expectation of God’s reward, though true worship opens the door to the paradise of God’s pleasure. He further stated:

The most acceptable prayer is the one offered with the utmost spirituality and radiance; its prolongation hath not been and is not beloved by God. The more detached and the purer the prayer, the more acceptable is it in the presence of God. (SWB 79)

In the same vein, Bahá'u'lláh gives the great hope that when the heart accepts the Divine Messenger of God, His light shines through the soul and body. He becomes the hearing ear of the one drawn to Him in prayer. And He infers that when we pray in a state of communion we may receive assistance from Holy Souls. He warns, on the other hand, that we are not to confuse our station with the essence of God, that His utterances are not to be construed as anthropomorphism, that is, the ascribing of human characteristics to inanimate objects, animals, or natural phenomena. (*Websters*) Also we should not “*see in them the descent of the worlds of God into the grades of the creatures.*” (SV 22-3)

Resurrection

There may not be another subject so controversial as resurrection. It has been expounded in so many ways that most are utterly confused about its true meaning. The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh have expressed collectively what has to be the clearest vision of what resurrection means. The Báb compares the day of resurrection to any regular day when the sun rises at dawn and falls at sunset. But when a new Revelation dawns the people remain oblivious to the rising in the land where it occurs. The appearance of Muḥammad went unnoticed at first and He was silent because He knew that the unbelievers could not bear such news. And when He did announce the new Day, the people considered Him to be like them and did not even think of Him as a believer. The Báb further compares His own

Dispensation to that of Muḥammad in the way that He was rejected by the people and incarcerated not knowing that their own belief existed because of Him, i.e. the Qá'im. (SWB 79) He said "that all should dwell within His cradle of protection and security until the Day of Resurrection which marketh the dayspring of the Revelation of Him Whom God will make manifest. (SWB 79)

Thus, resurrection in this context refers to the dawn of a new Revelation with the emergence of a Manifestation of God in human form. In other words a new cycle in the spiritual life of man is born on the wings of spiritual insight from a great Prophet in order to help mankind deal with the exigencies of a new age. Expanding on this, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of Muḥammad as an example of fulfillment of prophecy with respect to our spiritual identity and its relationship to the human body:

Nay, by "trumpet" is meant the trumpet-call of Muḥammad's Revelation, which was sounded in the heart of the universe, and by "resurrection" is meant His own rise to proclaim the Cause of God. He bade the erring and wayward arise and speed out of the sepulchres of their bodies, arrayed them with the beauteous robe of faith, and quickened them with the breath of a new and wondrous life. (KI 116-7)

Bahá'u'lláh writes also that anyone who attains the presence of a Divine Messenger attains the "Presence of God" and enters the state of immortal life but that this is only possible in the Day of Resurrection, which is the rise of God in "His all-embracing Revelation." He expounds upon the importance of this phenomenon and then asks

can a more precious, a mightier, and more glorious day than this be conceived, so that man should willingly forego its grace, and deprive himself of its bounties, which like unto vernal showers are raining from the heaven of mercy upon all mankind? (KI 142-4)

The Báb, in His statement describes the Day of Resurrection in this age to be marked by "the Revelation of He Whom God will make manifest" the One we now know to be Bahá'u'lláh. Through this new Revelation we discover the answers to deeper and deeper mysteries that are related to the writings of the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh expounds upon the inner mysteries of rebirth, of return and of resurrection for example and then explains how those believers in previous Dispensations who embrace the Faith of God and who reached the sublime state of certitude can be regarded as the "return" of those in former Dispensations who had reached the same point of faith.

For whatsoever the people of a former Dispensation have manifested, the same hath been shown by the people of this latter generation. Consider the rose: whether it blossometh in the East or in the West, it is none the less a rose. For what mattereth in this respect is not the outward shape and form of the rose, but rather the smell and fragrance which it doth impart. (KI 158-9)

He further states

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...

Bahá'u'lláh declares that “*they have foolishly clung to the term ‘seal,’ and remained utterly deprived of the recognition of Him Who is the Revealer of both the Seal and the Beginning, in the day of His presence.*” (KI 170) Finally His comment about the word “seal” is born out in the Old and New Testament of the Holy Bible.

But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased...(Daniel 12:4)

And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. (Daniel 12:9)

Six centuries later St. John wrote of the sealed book at the time of the end:

And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon ... (Revelation 5:4)

And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. (Revelation 5:5)

Bahá'u'lláh's ancestry does in fact include Jesse, the forerunner of David. He refers to “the time of the end” as the closing of the Adamic cycle with the declaration of the Báb in confluence with His own rising that would introduce a whole new cycle for the maturity of humankind. (SAQ 62)

Paradise

There are perhaps as many perceptions of paradise as there are people in the world. And each one no doubt mixes worldly elements within their ideal of what constitutes an idyllic state of being. Even the most devout followers of religion are not free of human limitations with regard to the paradigms of paradise. However we may be freed from these limitations when we perceive through the eyes of a Messenger of God by viewing the intertwining descriptive elements of this elusive goal as presented by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

There is no paradise, in the estimation of the believers in the Divine Unity, more exalted than to obey God's commandments, and there is no fire in the eyes of those who have known God and His signs, fiercer than to transgress His laws and to oppress another soul, even to the extent of a mustard seed... (SWB 79)

The sanctity of divine obedience and the repercussion of disobedience is enhanced by Bahá'u'lláh with an uplifting characterization of paradise:

O DWELLERS OF MY PARADISE! With the hands of loving-kindness I have planted in the holy garden of paradise the young tree of your love and friendship, and have watered it with the goodly showers of My tender grace; now that the hour of its fruiting is come, strive that it may be protected, and be not consumed with the flame of desire and passion. (HW 33-4)

The Báb, speaking as a mouthpiece of God, carries the meaning of paradise even further away from the material world and adds “*I affirm that no Paradise is more sublime for My creatures than to stand before My face and to believe in My holy Words...*” And He further states that “*no fire hath been or will be fiercer for them than to be veiled from the Manifestation of My exalted Self and to disbelieve in My Words.*” (SWB 87) Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Báb as He addresses the Bábís and transcends the former Dispensation to His Own as an element of paradise. “*Wherefore, hath My Forerunner, as a sign of submissiveness and humility, said: ‘The whole of the Bayán is only a leaf amongst the leaves of His Paradise.’*” (ESW 158-9) The beauty of the realm of God within the context of the Báb’s Holy Book is thus retained within a much broader perception of paradise in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. The Báb, on the other hand, clarifies the individual uniqueness of paradise with respect to the perfection of the individual. He states “*No created thing shall ever*

attain its paradise unless it appeareth in its highest prescribed degree of perfection.” (SWB 88)

So paradise is not necessarily infinite but relative depending upon the kingdom or level of existence. But it is the reality of the spiritual realm and it's paradise that reaches the highest level of perfection as attested by Bahá'u'lláh:

O OFFSPRING OF DUST! Be not content with the ease of a passing day, and deprive not thyself of everlasting rest. Barter not the garden of eternal delight for the dust-heap of a mortal world. Up from thy prison ascend unto the glorious meads above, and from thy mortal cage wing thy flight unto the paradise of the Placeless. (HW 39)

From this it may be said that whatever perfections have been achieved in mankind's evolution, we are neither to linger in the past nor to cling to material perfections on the pathway of the soul. The Báb expresses this same theme in a totally different way:

Man's highest station, however, is attained through faith in God in every Dispensation and by acceptance of what hath been revealed by Him, and not through learning; inasmuch as in every nation there are learned men who are versed in divers sciences . . . (SWB 89)

Finally, paradise is defined by Bahá'u'lláh regarding this “highest station” as He returns full circle to the basic requirement for one to enter paradise when He says

Empower me, then, O my God, to be reckoned among them that have clung to Thy laws and precepts for the sake of Thee alone, their eyes fixed on Thy face...These, indeed, are they...whose Paradise is entrance into Thy presence and reunion with Thee. (PM 299)

Covenant

Perhaps it is the Covenant between a Messenger of God and His followers that is the most important aspect of faith. Without the Covenant, faith may not be sustained nor is it likely to pass the test of certitude. The explanation by the Báb defines what Bahá'u'lláh refers to as the ‘Greater Covenant’:

The Lord of the universe hath never raised up a prophet nor hath He sent down a Book unless He hath established His covenant with all men, calling for their acceptance of the next Revelation and of the next Book; inasmuch as the out-pourings of His bounty are ceaseless and without limit. (SWB 87)

Bahá'u'lláh invokes the words of the Báb in establishing His own validity:

Glorified art Thou, O My God! Bear Thou witness that, through this Book, I have covenanted with all created things concerning the Mission of Him Whom Thou shalt make manifest, ere the covenant concerning Mine own Mission had been established...(ESW 160)

The Covenant then is the anchor that holds everything together in the life of a Bahá'í. It follows that the whole of society in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh will be likewise held together in the fullness of time.

Say: 'The light hath shone forth from the horizon of Revelation, and the whole earth hath been illumined at the coming of Him Who is the Lord of the Day of the Covenant!' The doubters have perished, whilst he that turned, guided by the light of assurance, unto the Dayspring of Certitude hath prospered. (TB 119)

Progressive Revelation

In the Bayán the Báb reveals how the process of continuing cycles of revelation brings new depths of spiritual knowledge and understanding to the world of man. He explains that each new dispensation is introduced by a Manifestation of God and that this is like the rising of the sun each day. At the same time there is only one sun regardless of the number of risings. Thus God is constant while His Manifestations on earth are distinguished in Their human form. The Truth that They bring is relevant to the time in which They appear and to the capacity of the people in Their day. They may be seen as outwardly different but in reality are fundamentally the same. His writing during the time of His incarceration points out the relationship between Divine Messengers using the example of Muḥammad:

It is clear and evident that the object of all preceding Dispensations hath been to pave the way for the advent of Muḥammad, the Apostle of God. These, including the Muḥammadan Dispensation, have had, in their turn, as their objective the Revelation proclaimed by the Qá'im. The purpose underlying this Revelation, as well as those that preceded it, has, in like manner, been to announce the advent of the Faith of Him Whom God will make manifest. And this Faith - the Faith of Him Whom God will make manifest - in its turn, together with all the Revelations gone before it, have as their object the Manifestation destined to succeed it. (SWB 105-6)

Bahá'u'lláh again connects to the Báb by enlarging upon His basic principle of Progressive Revelation in mystical terms that are pregnant with mysteries yet to be discovered:

The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace, according to His saying, "His grace hath transcended all things; My grace hath encompassed them all," hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence. (GWB 47)

Bahá'u'lláh revealed His Laws some twenty years after His Revelation burst forth in the dark pit of Tihiran and were purposely held back until a propitious time even though His followers were pressing with petitions for Him to reveal the new laws. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas there is a most interesting observation regarding Progressive Revelation.

This divinely purposed delay in the revelation of the basic laws of God for this age, and the subsequent gradual implementation of their provisions, illustrate the principle of progressive revelation which applies even within the ministry of each Prophet. (KA Notes 219-20)

Proof

Of all the types of proof verifying the validity of a Manifestation of God it is unquestionably the words as written by Him that stand as the most convincing notwithstanding the numerous instances of prophetic fulfillment. The Báb revealed thousands upon thousands of verses that were disseminated among the populace. They included His Epistles, His Prayers and philosophical treatises. He wrote a thousand verses in the span of five hours without pause, and His commentaries dealt with the lofty themes of the "*true understanding of God and of the oneness of His Being . . .*" (SWB 109) He did this in a way that astounded the doctors and philosophers of the time. He summarized:

The evidence set forth by God can never be compared with the evidences produced by any one of the peoples and kindreds of the earth; and beyond a shadow of doubt no evidence is set forth by God save through the One Who is appointed as His supreme Testimony. Moreover, the proof of revealed verses doth, alone and of itself, conclusively demonstrate the utter impotence of all created things on

earth, for this is a proof which hath proceeded from God and shall endure until the Day of Resurrection. (SWB 109)

Bahá'u'lláh completely embraces the claim of the Báb regarding the Word of God as proof of His Truth:

And if thou dwellest in the land of testimony, content thyself with that which He, Himself, hath revealed: "Is it not enough for them that We have sent down unto Thee the Book?" This is the testimony which He, Himself, hath ordained; greater proof than this there is none, nor ever will be: "This proof is His Word; His own Self, the testimony of His truth." (KI 91-2)

Unknowable Essence

The Báb made a statement that will forever stand the test of scientific scrutiny no matter how far advanced it may become when he says, in so many words, that God has always existed and will continue to do so ad infinitum. Though we praise God, He is still exalted above any mention and is not to be the subject of any comparison. He further describes the unique condition of God as being "inscrutable to all men" as He is the Creator of all that exists. In the words of modern logicians, He is the only "uncaused cause" in existence.¹ Even when referring to Manifestations of God, He makes an astonishing statement:

No created thing comprehendeth Him, while He in truth comprehendeth all things. Even when it is said 'no created thing comprehendeth Him', this refers to the Mirror of His Revelation, that is Him Whom God shall make manifest. Indeed too high and exalted is He for anyone to allude unto Him. (SWB 113)

The very subject of the Báb's commentary, Bahá'u'lláh, completely embraces His concept of limitation in the relationship between God and His Messengers when He describes Him as *"the unknowable Essence...exalted beyond every human attribute..."* He further states:

Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men. "No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision; He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving..." (GWB 46-8)

Sign of God in All Things

This subtitle is absolutely not meant to be confused with pantheism, “the doctrine that the universe conceived of as a whole is God and, conversely, that there is no God but the combined substance, forces, and laws that are manifested in the existing universe. The cognate doctrine of pantheism asserts that God includes the universe as a part though not the whole of his being.”² The Báb clearly defines the signs of God with this comment:

He hath moreover deposited within the realities of all created things the emblem of His recognition, that everyone may know of a certainty that He is the Beginning and the End, the Manifest and the Hidden, the Maker and the Sustainer, the Omnipotent and the All-Knowing, the One Who heareth and perceiveth all things, He Who is invincible in His power and standeth supreme in His Own identity... (SWB 112)

Bahá'u'lláh takes these thoughts to a deeper level when He refers to the soul as a sign of God and then characterizes the soul as a forerunner or preparer that proclaims the reality of all the worlds of God. (GWB 160-1) He then augments the Báb's commentary.

Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light...(GWB 177-8)

Eternity

In the Persian Bayán the Báb introduced an aspect of religion that would characterize one of the fundamental principles of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. He wrote, “*The revelation of the Divine Reality hath everlastingly been identical with its concealment and its concealment identical with its revelation...*” What did He mean? His explanation introduced a deeper question:

That which is intended by 'Revelation of God' is the Tree of divine Truth that betokeneth none but Him, and it is this divine Tree that hath raised and will raise up Messengers, and hath revealed and will ever reveal Scriptures. From eternity unto eternity this Tree of divine Truth hath served and will ever serve as the throne of the revelation and concealment of God among His creatures, and in every age is made manifest through whomsoever He pleaseth. (SWB 112)

From this we are assured that a Revelation from God is concealed until a propitious time in accordance with His Will and that only through the agency of His chosen Messenger can His Revelation be revealed. The Báb's comment thus plants the seed for the principle of progressive revelation as enunciated by the Beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi:

in accordance with the principle of progressive revelation every Manifestation of God must needs vouchsafe to the peoples of His day a measure of divine guidance ampler than any which a preceding and less receptive age could have received or appreciated. (WOB 102-3)

The mystery of concealment then is clarified when it is related to the current level of civilization as inferred by Christ when He said to His followers "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." But what did His comment "from eternity unto eternity" mean? Was He just using a figure of speech to emphasize a point? From the candor and tone of His writings it does not seem likely that He would trivialize any cosmological notation with a mere figure of speech. So what does eternity mean in the context of His passage?

Eternity is defined as an endless or immeasurable time, that is, of infinite duration. But time is called the period when something occurs or it is the period during which an action, process, etc, continues; it is of measured or measurable duration. Time is therefore finite in contrast with infinite duration. (*Webster's*) This apparent contradiction reveals the ambiguous nature of word meanings due perhaps to the subjective aspect of their origins when compared to mathematical notations that are inherently rigorous. Yet words are indispensable without which communication would be impossible.

If eternity is intrinsic to the concept of time then it must be relegated to the phenomenal world, the world of action, momentum, energy and relativity. But what about that world without time or place, the spiritual world that we are destined to enter once we've given up the physical garment? Interactions that occur in that state are completely devoid of physical limitation. Eternity in that Kingdom has no real meaning; it could either be a moment or forever when put in terms of our limited understanding.

There is an analogy to this in the theory of relativity when, according to the Lorenz transformation that Einstein implemented in his theory, an entity moves with the speed of light it literally stands still within its relative time frame by virtue of the dilation of time or distance primarily because the speed of light has a finite limit. For example, if an individual on earth could view a clock

mounted on a space ship that is moving away close to the speed of light he would observe that the hands of the clock were moving very slowly while a passenger inside would see them moving at a normal rate! Thus the observer would see a moment of time lasting for a very long time while the passenger inside would see a specific beginning and end to each passing second. The relative nature of time then allows the coexistence of a beginning and no beginning depending upon the observer and likewise of an end without an ending. In other words it allows for finite periods within eternal duration on a cosmic scale. In any event the Báb infers that by eternity is meant time in the phenomenal sense with endless cycles in which God provides divine guidance. But how can there be more than one eternity?

First, the seed of thought about eternity planted by the Báb is brought into focus by Bahá'u'lláh when He states:

A sprinkling from the unfathomed deep of His sovereign and all-pervasive Will hath, out of utter nothingness, called into being a creation which is infinite in its range and deathless in its duration. The wonders of His bounty can never cease, and the stream of His merciful grace can never be arrested. The process of His creation hath had no beginning, and can have no end. (GWB 61)

The mystery deepens. If we have eternity followed by another eternity inferred by the Báb how can we have a creation with no beginning and no end as stated by Bahá'u'lláh? For one thing, talking about limits versus non-limits in this way quickly becomes redundant due to limitations of language, so a different approach is necessary. Too, we are treading the deep water of cosmological questions that are beyond one's individual capacity to solve. Moreover, the process of creation takes many forms and is God ordained as attested by Bahá'u'lláh: "*In every age and cycle He hath, through the splendorous light shed by the Manifestations of His wondrous Essence, recreated all things ...*" (GWB 61) Second, to put the question to rest we may further appeal to Bahá'u'lláh where He writes in the Seven Valleys:

Although the divine worlds be never ending, yet some refer to them as four: The world of time (zaman), which is the one that hath both a beginning and an end; the world of duration (dahr), which hath a beginning, but whose end is not revealed; the world of perpetuity (sarmad), whose beginning is not to be seen but which is known to have an end; and the world of eternity (azal), neither a beginning nor an end of which is visible. (SV 45)

Finally, to validate the Báb's meaning regarding eternity, Bahá'u'lláh's Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá reinforces His Father's statements.

Briefly, there were many universal cycles preceding this one in which we are living. They were consummated, completed and their traces obliterated. The divine and creative purpose in them was the evolution of spiritual man, just as it is in this cycle. The circle of existence is the same circle; it returns. The tree of life has ever borne the same heavenly fruit. (PUP 220)

The forgoing discussion provides an interesting example of Bahá'u'lláh's principle that there must be harmony between science and religion. For current theory holds that the universe was born in a point of 'singularity', which exploded in The Big Bang, from which it has expanded for the last 13.7 billion years.³ It remains to prove if it will ultimately collapse and recycle in the far distant future or continue on an endless journey. The important thing to note is that whereas science struggles to explain how things happen, religion explains why they happen as mentioned above by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The 'why' or purpose behind phenomena is further confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh when He said that God has "*recreated all things so that whatsoever reflecteth in the heavens and on the earth the signs of His glory may not be deprived of the outpourings of His mercy, nor despair of the showers of His favors.*" (GWB 61-2) He further states:

Just as the conception of faith hath existed from the beginning that hath no beginning, and will endure till the end that hath no end, in like manner will the true believer eternally live and endure. His spirit will everlastingly circle round the Will of God. (GWB 141)

The fascinating way that the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh transcend the physical and spiritual worlds in such seamless fashion with their use of language obliterates apparent contradictions in both spiritual and physical terms. Yet they leave us with the tantalizing prospect of deeper meanings that only a humble approach can hope to unravel.

He Whom God Shall Make Manifest

One aspect of the mystic bond between the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh is dramatically reflected in His frequent repetition of the words "He Whom God Shall make manifest." Prophet Founders of the great religions of the past have always told their followers about another one to come in the fullness of time. Of course significant spans of time separated them but in the case of the Báb, the one to follow Him was contemporary in time and place. This is unprecedented in the annals of religion and one might be tempted to ask the question as to why two Manifestations of God were simultaneously necessary

in the mid-nineteenth century, but that is not in our purview to consider because God can do whatever He chooses. On the other hand if one reflects upon the enormity of the mission of unifying mankind in 1844 it becomes obvious that people in the world then were not prepared to accept universal unity in a single moment with all the quake like social readjustments that it would entail. Stages of change are therefore required.

Thus, progress comes in incremental steps that may at times be very large. Such was the situation when the Báb declared His mission. With each new cycle of Revelation a new Divine Messenger must abrogate the laws of the immediate previous dispensation. Islam was the last before the Báb in the line of prophetic dispensations and had an enormous following. It had seen its birth with Muḥammad and rose to its zenith in the first few centuries of growth then tragically fell into a long sunset of corruption as prophetically depicted in the book of Revelations. (SAQ 45-61) The great sacrifices needed to abrogate the laws of Islam included the martyrdom of a most precious being in the person of the Báb. Immediately, from the time of that brutal event forward, the unification of the religions and peoples of the world would require the efforts of a new Manifestation of God. From this we can see that there were two stages in the closing of the "Adamic cycle" and the birth of a whole new cycle in the spiritual evolution of humankind. And the Báb, Who initiated the process, was very clear about admonishing His followers to accept Bahá'u'lláh. He said:

Know thou of a certainty that whenever thou makest mention of Him Whom God shall make manifest, only then art thou making mention of God... (SWB 80)

And know thou of a certainty that by Paradise is meant recognition of and submission unto Him Whom God shall make manifest, and by the fire the company of such souls as would fail to submit unto Him or to be resigned to His good-pleasure. (SWB 82)

Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Báb's admonition that one should look upon the Messenger to come with the eyes of that Messenger otherwise one would be veiled from Him. This infers that one must detach from any preconceived notions about a Divine Messenger at the time of His rising. Our own eyes are too closely connected with human limitations to be able to see with spiritual clarity unless and until we open our hearts and minds to a new reality. (ESW 154-5)

Stage of Seed

So far, we have examined a number of basic concepts in religion that were introduced by the Báb and reverently embraced by

Bahá'u'lláh. The ramifications of these concepts were clarified with deeper meanings by the Blessed Beauty concurrently with His Revelation regarding new laws for the spiritual unification of mankind. Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Báb as He characterizes this fascinating process:

Ere nine will have elapsed from the inception of this Cause, the realities of the created things will not be made manifest. All that thou hast as yet seen is but the stage from the moist germ until We clothed it with flesh. Be patient, until thou beholdest a new creation... (ESW 152)

It was in fact nine years after the declaration of the Báb that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh became full blown in the dark pit of Tihiran. The Báb had also commented earlier regarding the consummation of Islam and His statement categorically identified what is now taken as a key point in this essay, the idea that the Bayán is the beginning or the “seed” for a new dispensation to follow.

The Resurrection of the Bayán will occur at the time of the appearance of Him Whom God shall make manifest. For today the Bayán is in the stage of seed; at the beginning of the manifestation of Him Whom God shall make manifest its ultimate perfection will become apparent.

He continues to explain that a new Manifestation will be brought into being for the purpose of “gathering the fruits” of His own, the Báb's Revelation in a manner similar to the transition from Muḥammad to the Qá'im. He further states: “*The fruits of Islam cannot be gathered except through allegiance unto Him [the Qá'im] and by believing in Him.*” (SWB 107-8) A deep spiritual intimacy between the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh is thus revealed here though they never actually met. It further shows the powerful sense of continuity of the Word of God as expressed through the agency of these two Divine Manifestations and by extrapolation, between all Manifestations of God. When viewed in this light it makes the divisiveness of world religion seem utterly absurd.

Sadly, the very One that the people should have embraced for the gathering of the fruits of Islam was imprisoned by them in the Mountain of Máh-Kú. As He explained, the Qur'án promised a day of resurrection for all and that all would be brought before the presence of God but since it would be impossible “*to appear before the Most Holy Essence of God*” then the only feasibility “*is attainment unto the Primal Tree.*” (SWB 108)

Station of Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh is the Manifestation of God in this Day. His dispensation will last at least a full millennium and the new cycle in His name will span a myriad of new dispensations to come that will cover a half million years. (WOB 101-2) These are bold statements but when taken in the context of religious evolution their validity becomes self evident. From the beginning of the Adamic cycle through the conclusion of the dispensation of Muḥammad there has been an ever-widening aspect of spiritual needs in the life of man. From the individual relationship of man to God in the days of Adam. Then the first to acknowledge God, through the family as a sanctified unit occurred in the days of Noah, wherein the process of deepening awareness of a Creator became integral to the human conscience. This advanced to the tribal unit of Abraham and then to unified governance based on explicit laws in the days of Moses. When Christ came, the city state of Hellenic culture was the primary basis for governance especially Rome, and He conquered her vast domain by the fourth century. Then by the sixth century the concept of unity of nationhood became dominant with the advent of Muḥammad. Now the world of nations is in dire need of global spiritual unity. The social and moral crises in the modern world demands a Divine physician, and that physician, Bahá'u'lláh, was introduced and exalted by the Báb through His own brief Dispensation.

Better is it for a person to write down but one of His verses than to transcribe the whole of the Bayán and all the books, which have been written in the Dispensation of the Bayán. For everything shall be set aside except His Writings, which will endure until the following Revelation. And should anyone inscribe with true faith but one letter of that Revelation, his recompense would be greater than for inscribing all the heavenly Writings of the past and all that has been written during previous Dispensations. Likewise continue thou to ascend through one Revelation after another, knowing that thy progress in the Knowledge of God shall never come to an end, even as it can have no beginning. (SWB 91)

Bahá'u'lláh characterizes the new Day and His own emergence:

O thou that hast fixed thine eyes upon My countenance! The Day Spring of Glory hath, in this Day, manifested its radiance, and the Voice of the Most High is calling. We have formerly uttered these words: "This is not the day for any man to question his Lord. It behoveth whosoever hath hearkened to the Call of God, as voiced by Him Who is the

Day Spring of Glory, to arise and cry out: 'Here am I, here am I, O Lord of all Names; here am I, here am I, O Maker of the heavens! I testify that, through Thy Revelation, the things hidden in the Books of God have been revealed, and that whatsoever hath been recorded by Thy Messengers in the sacred Scriptures hath been fulfilled.'" (GWB 163-5)

In His last major work He harks back to a comment by the Báb that draws into bold relief His enormous respect for Bahá'u'lláh:

Lawful is it for Him Whom God will make manifest to reject him who is greatest on earth, inasmuch as such a one is but a creature in His grasp, and all things adore Him. After Him a Cause shall be given unto you which ye shall come to know. (ESW 152)

Station of the Báb

The Báb was a Manifestation of God Whose Ministry occurred at the confluence of the closing of the Adamic cycle and the Birth of the Bahá'í era. The Primal point fulfilled an absolutely critical mission as the Herald of a new age that would hearken the beginning of maturity for humankind. Bahá'u'lláh extols the importance of the Báb in most exalted terms:

Magnify Thou, O Lord my God, Him Who is the Primal Point, the Divine Mystery, the Unseen Essence, the Day-Spring of Divinity, and the Manifestation of Thy Lordship, through Whom all the knowledge of the past and all the knowledge of the future were made plain, through Whom the pearls of Thy hidden wisdom were uncovered, and the mystery of Thy treasured name disclosed, Whom Thou hast appointed as the Announcer of the One through Whose name the letter B and the letter E have been joined and united, through Whom Thy majesty, Thy sovereignty and Thy might were made known, through Whom Thy words have been sent down, and Thy laws set forth with clearness, and Thy signs spread abroad, and Thy Word established, through Whom the hearts of Thy chosen ones were laid bare... (PM 84-6)

The Báb constantly reminded His followers of "Him Whom God shall make manifest" but never seemed to mention Him by name. It has often been said that Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí "took" the name of Bahá'u'lláh and He surely became designated by that title at the conference of Badasht which occurred in June of 1848. In early April of that year the Báb was removed from Máh-Kú to Chihriq. (DB 259) However, well before that conference, there was an instance during the Báb's nine months of incarceration in the prison

castle of Máh-Kú when He wrote a definitive statement in the Bayán regarding the Glory of God as described by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith.

It should be noted, in this connection, that in the third Vahid of this Book there occurs a passage which, alike in its explicit reference to the name of the Promised One, and in its anticipation of the Order which, in a later age, was to be identified with His Revelation, deserves to rank as one of the most significant statements recorded in any of the Báb's writings. "*Well is it with him,*" is His prophetic announcement, "*who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and rendereth thanks unto his Lord. For He will assuredly be made manifest. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the Bayán.*" (GPB 25-6)

But until the Promised One were to appear, the Báb in reference to His Own Dispensation maintained:

In this Revelation the Lord of the universe hath deigned to bestow His mighty utterances and resplendent signs upon the Point of the Bayán, and hath ordained them as His matchless testimony for all created things. Were all the people that dwell on earth to assemble together, they would be unable to produce a single verse like unto the ones which God hath caused to stream forth from the tongue of the Point of the Bayán. Indeed, if any living creature were to pause to meditate he would undoubtedly realize that these verses are not the work of man, but are solely to be ascribed unto God, the One, the Peerless, Who causeth them to flow forth from the tongue of whomsoever He willeth, and hath not revealed nor will He reveal them save through the Focal Point of God's Primal Will. (SWB 104-5)

Conclusion

The Báb introduced concepts regarding faith and human relations that were revolutionary for the time and place in which they were uttered. The proof of His station and the truth of His Revelation were so profound, so powerful that He was brutally martyred by the Persian leaders out of abject fear of His charismatic popularity. This happened six short years after His declaration in 1844. Three years later, in fulfillment of the Báb's prophecy, a new Dispensation was born in the dark pit of Teheran through a new Messenger of God, Bahá'u'lláh. He and the Báb were contemporaries but never physically met, yet an extraordinary relationship emerged that would forever tie Them together as the

Twin Manifestations of the Bahá'í Dispensation. The Báb introduced new concepts in religion as He addressed the Shiite world by abrogating the laws of Islam. Bahá'u'lláh introduced a great number of new concepts as He addressed the world by abrogating many laws of the world's great religions and, in fact by utterly disenfranchising the sanctity of priesthood. He also enlarged upon a number of the Báb's concepts and permanently made some of them part of the foundation of His own Faith. The mystical bond between them and their spiritual reality that intertwines in mysterious ways that far exceed intelligence or the senses is confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh when He refers to the Báb's explication "*I am the first to adore Him, and pride Myself on My kinship with Him.*" (ESW 158-9) What does this intriguing relationship between these two Divine Messengers of God mean in its finality? What impetus does it hold for the third millennium? At the very least we are in the early stages of implementing the Divine Plan as envisioned in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh that began with the seeds planted by the Báb. And now, the fire of light is blazing, the call has echoed through all the halls of knowledge and the heart of every soul on earth has been touched if only they knew it. The resurrection has occurred and it is the destiny of this generation's believers to arise to help others awaken and to make way for that "Kingdom of God on Earth" that has been so long in waiting.

NOTES

¹ *Love, Power and Justice*, 82.

² Encyclopedia Britannica 2005 Delux CD-ROM, *Pantheism*.

³ *L.A. Times*, 03-10-04, sec A20, Associated Press.

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The Bahá'í Faith in the Arabic Speaking Middle East

Part 1 (1753-1863)

by Ramsey Zeine

Introduction

The population of Arab¹ countries extending from the Gulf States to the Atlantic Ocean is about 280 million people². The few among them who have heard about the Bahá'í Faith tend to have a distorted view characterized by misconceptions³. In the current environment of acrimonious accelerated change, growing open-mindedness, interest in knowing about “the other”, and as human-rights take on a more meaningful application, opportunities will eventually enable Bahá'ís to publicly present a true picture of the history and teachings of the Faith⁴.

Upon learning about the existence of the Bahá'í Faith, religious communities around the world normally express an interest related to specific issues. They want to know something about its history and teachings. Understandably, they also tend to question the relationship between selected verses in their own scriptures, such as those related to finality of revelation and prophecy, with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

In the predominantly Persian Moslem Shí'ah environment, these issues have been addressed by the Bahá'í community which gradually came into being about 150 years ago in Iran. As a result of the ongoing dialogue between Bahá'ís and their Shí'ah compatriots a considerable body of Bahá'í literature developed addressing certain verses in the Holy Qur'án and Shí'ah traditions. Over the years a growing segment of the Iranian population heard about the Faith from authorities and clergy, albeit in a heavily distorted manner, often as a result of widely publicized waves of persecution. As a result, one of the major challenges facing Persian Bahá'ís is to simultaneously correct widely spread misconceptions and to present a comprehensive true picture of the teachings and history of the Bahá'í Faith.

In the predominantly Arab Moslem Sunni environment, the same challenges related to certain verses of the Qur'án and tradition exist, but in some instances they need to be addressed from a Sunni perspective. A body of Bahá'í literature in Arabic developed over

the years for this purpose⁵. However in Arab lands additional challenges may well face those who would set out to provide a true picture of the Cause and to correct misconceptions. One of these challenges could be an incorrect perception of the identity of the Faith.

Occasionally, during dialogue, Moslems of Arab culture question the origin of the Bahá'í Faith. It is understandable that Moslems in general, especially those of Arabic culture, have a great love for the Arabic Language, the fact that the Qur'án is in Arabic and that the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) was an Arab⁶. With its origins in the Bábí religion in Persia, the Bahá'í Faith may be misconstrued from an Arab perspective as being a 'foreign Persian' religion. This would constitute for some a divide between the Arabs and the Bahá'í Faith. It is therefore a formidable challenge to be addressed.

In an effort to address this possible misconception and generate an environment where constructive dialogue prevails, this paper proposes presenting the history of the Faith with the intent of identifying commonalities that are of interest to Arabs. The premise of this paper suggests that by highlighting certain historical facts, the Faith will be seen in a light which is neither foreign nor distant from that which is of value to people of Arabic culture.

The focus of this paper on matters of interest to people of Arab culture may create an impression of bias towards giving the Bahá'í Faith some level of Arab identity. To avoid this impression, it is important to keep in mind the points mentioned below concerning the supra-national identity of world religions, as well as the contributions of peoples amongst whom they first appeared.

1. Bahá'u'lláh identifies the Faith He heralds as “. . . *the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future.*” (GWB 136) Sacred texts of other religions also affirm the changeless eternal aspect of the Cause of God.⁷ Therefore identities of origin, whenever mentioned, should be seen simply as pointers to a launching stage in the unfolding destiny of the “*changeless Faith of God*”. In its essence, religion transcends the identity of geography, nationality and people. The fact that God reveals the various stages of His *Changeless Faith* through chosen Individuals, at certain times, in certain geographical locations, amongst certain people, does not imply that a religion belongs to – is owned by – those people and is limited to its geographical location. Thus for example, Islam, born in Arabia, is not an Arab religion; It is universal.

2. During His lifetime and multiple exiles, Bahá'u'lláh dwelt amongst Persians, Arabs, Kurds and Turks, and interacted with peoples of Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian and Moslem religions. A comprehensive balanced history of the Faith would need to highlight matters of importance related to the interactions of Bahá'u'lláh with these ethnic identities and religions.
3. In the same way that early Christian believers arose from the shores of Galilee, and early Moslem believers arose from the tribe of Quraysh, early Bahá'í believers arose from Iran. Common factors shared between such early believers include the fact that they had to simultaneously face the brunt of persecution while striving to spread their new Faiths. The sacrificial contribution of the Persian Bahá'ís is unequaled in Bahá'í history. The tribulations, often blood-drenched, they suffered have not abated since the inception of the Faith over a century and a half ago. Among the accolades of distinction born by the Persian Bahá'í community are the following:
 - With all due admiration and respect for pioneers from a number of countries, during the first Bahá'í century, the Bahá'ís of Iran were by far the ones who left their country in relatively considerable numbers to spread the Message of Bahá'u'lláh in many lands. As such, they have a most outstanding record of pioneering around the world.
 - They continue to be the most developed Bahá'í community despite the continuous challenges they face.⁸

Nevertheless, neither the Persian Bahá'ís, nor their fellow believers, nor in fact any serious student of religion can, in the light of the teachings of the Faith and Its world-wide spread, consider It as either belonging to Iran, or of being a Persian religion. Similarly, facts of interest to Arabs, or to any of the several other cultures within which the Faith grew, are not in any way intended to give any identity to *the changeless Faith of God*. Rather, such facts, as they gradually come to light through research, serve to reinforce the concept that from the very beginning, the Bahá'í Faith had a broad multi-national, multi-cultural foundation.

With this understanding, we return to the focus of this paper which touches briefly on a few occurrences within a limited early period of history (1753-1863), and which are of interest to people of Arab culture. More research is needed across a longer period⁹ to uncover important milestones of the Cause in the Arabic speaking Middle East. Consequently, this paper puts out an appeal to scholars who understand the needs of this critical time of upheaval and

change, and who are far more professionally qualified than the author, to arise and shoulder the responsibility of uncovering milestones of bonding value between Arabs and the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Subjects of interest to Arabs are outlined under the following main headings: Matters of Identity; Early Arab believers; Bahá'u'lláh - Milestones in Arab Lands, and Surat Al-A'ráb,¹⁰ a Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in the prison of 'Akká, addressed to Arab believers in Baghdad and its surroundings. It is with sincere appreciation that I offer my gratitude to a distinguished Persian Bahá'í friend, who pointed out the importance of researching matters relating the Bahá'í Faith to peoples of Arab culture, and inspired this humble research effort.

Matters of Identity

Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í

Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í (1753-1831) is identified in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as the one "...who was the founder of the Shaykhi School and the first of the 'twin luminaries that heralded the advent of the Faith of the Báb.'" (KA Note 171, p. 239)

Shoghi Effendi¹¹, quoting A.L.M. Nicolas, lists the genealogy of Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í. It consists of a series of Arab names.

His genealogy, according to his son Shaykh Abdu'lláh, is the following: "Shaykh Ahmad-ibn-i-Zaynu'd-Din-ibn-i-Ibrahim-ibn-i-Sakhr-ibn-i-Ibrahim-ibn-i-Zahir-ibn-i-Ramadan-ibn-i-Rashid-ibn-i-Dahim-ibn-i-Shimrukh-ibn-i-Sulih." (*Essai sur le Shaykhisme*, p. 1)

In another note from the same source, we have the birthplace of Shaykh Ahmad, as well as the origin of his religious persuasion. "Born Rajab, 1166 A.H., 24th of April-24th of May, 1753, in (the) town of Ahsa in district of Ahsa, northeast of Arabian peninsula." (*Essai sur le Shaykhisme* 1) "Born a Shi'ah, though his ancestors were Sunnis." (*Ibid.*, 2)

Hand of the Cause of God Ḥasan Balyuzi, identifies the Arab tribe of Sheikh Ahmad.

Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í . . . the founder of the Shaykhi school, belonged to the ancient tribe of Banu-Sakhr, and his family originated from the region of Ahsa on the Arabian mainland. His father's name was Shaykh Zayni'd-Din, and Bahrayn had been their home.¹²

In other words, Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í, the first individual to herald the dawn of the new Revelation, was an Arab from the ancient Arab tribe of Banu-Sakhr, as can be further observe from his name, Ahsá'í. He arose from Al-Ahsa' Northeast of the Arabian Peninsula, an Arab territory within the Ottoman Empire, and proceeded to commence his mission in another Arab part of the Empire, Najaf and Karbala¹³ in Iraq.

The Bá b

Historic identity by descent

The Bá b was born in Shiraz and therefore had a Persian identity by birth. However, Mr. Balyuzi informs us of His historic identity.

Siyyid (or Mírzá) 'Alí-Muḥammad, known to history as the Bá b, was the son of Siyyid (or Mir) Muḥammad-Rida, a mercer of Shiraz. He was born on October 20th 1819 (Muharram 1st, 1235 A.H.). Through both His father and His mother He was descended from Imam Ḥusayn the third Imam.¹⁴ Thus He stood in direct line of descent from the Prophet Muḥammad.¹⁵

“This Arabian Youth”

The Bá b mentions His historic identity in His Writings by referring to Himself on occasion as “*This Arabian Youth*”. For example:

O peoples of the earth! Give ear unto God's holy Voice proclaimed by this Arabian Youth Whom the Almighty hath graciously chosen for His Own Self. He is indeed none other than the True One, Whom God hath entrusted with this Mission from the midst of the Burning Bush.
(SWB 50)

It should be noted that the Bá b also referred to Himself as Persian Youth. In an epistle sent to Muḥammad Shah from Bushihr, the Bá b wrote (provisional translation) “Know thou O King that I am a Persian Youth (Fata A'jamii) from the merchant class...”¹⁶

First Action – Pilgrimage to Mecca

The first formal action the Bá b undertook after declaring His mission and receiving a letter from Mullá Ḥusayn, was a pilgrimage to Mecca¹⁷. There, in the heartland of both Islam and the Arab world, He, in an Epistle conveyed by Quddus, called upon the Sherif of Mecca to embrace the truth of the new Revelation.

Writings in Arabic

The first Tablet revealed by the Báb on the eve of His declaration to Mullá Ḥusayn, the Súrih of Muluk, was in Arabic. It is the first chapter of "the Qayyum-i-Asma", His celebrated commentary on the Surih of Joseph, revealed in the first year of His Mission, and characterized by Bahá'u'lláh as 'the first, the greatest, and mightiest of all books' in the Bábí Dispensation ..." (PDC 27) A considerable volume of the Writings of the Báb is in Arabic, including another major work known as the "Arabic Bayán".

In brief, the Báb, a Manifestation of God and forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh, was of Persian origin by birth and of Arab historic origin by descent from the House of the Prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon Him. His revealed Word was both in the Persian and Arabic languages, and He, in some Tablets, referred to Himself as "*This Arabian Youth*". The first mission He undertook was to Mecca, the heartland of Islam and the Arab world.

Early Arab Believers

Fruits of the Steadfastness of Mullá Alí Bastámí

After the Báb declared His Revelation to the Letters of the Living, and instructed Mullá Ḥusayn to proceed on a mission which eventually brought him into indirect contact with Bahá'u'lláh, Nabil, in his "The Dawn-Breakers", informs us that:

The Báb then summoned to His presence Mullá Alíy-i-Bastámí, and addressed to him words of cheer and loving-kindness. He instructed him to proceed directly to Najaf and Karbila, alluded to the severe trials and afflictions that would befall him, and enjoined him to be steadfast till the end. "Your faith," He told him, "must be immovable as the rock, must weather every storm and survive every calamity. Suffer not the denunciations of the foolish and the calumnies of the clergy to afflict you, or to turn you from your purpose. For you are called to partake of the celestial banquet prepared for you in the immortal Realm. You are the first to leave the House of God, and to suffer for His sake. If you be slain in His path, remember that great will be your reward, and goodly the gift which will be bestowed upon you. (DB 85)

After a series of further developments, we read,

Mullá Alíy-i-Bastámí, though the first to fall a victim to the relentless hate of the enemy, underwent his persecution in Iraq, which lay beyond the confines of Persia. (DB 146)

Shaykh Muḥammad-i-Shibl

When Mullá Alíy-i-Bastámí was imprisoned in Baghdad, the governor appointed a number of clergy to study his case. One of them was an Arab named Shaykh Muḥammad Shibl. Hand of the Cause Mr. Ḥasan Balyuzi provides two outstanding facts, one relating Muḥammad Shibl to the Shaykhi movement through *Siyyid Kazim-i-Rashti* the successor of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsá'í. The other is about Muḥammad Shibl himself, embracing the Faith of Mullá 'Alíy-i-Bastámí, the investigated. Balyuzi wrote:

...Shaykh Muḥammad Shibl, was a distinguished follower of the Shaykhi leader, Siyyid Kazim-i-Rashti, and was indeed his personal representative in Baghdad . . . When Mullá 'Alíy-i-Bastámí, the Letter of the Living, was brought to Baghdad and imprisoned, Shaykh Muḥammad Shibl visited him in prison, learnt of the claim of the Báb and became a believer.¹⁸

A fourth generation descendent of Shaykh Muḥammad Shibl, Dr. Kamran Ekbál, provides this interesting insight which puts a time scale on the period of investigation.

Shaykh Muḥammad Shibl was among the group of Ulama who, in accordance with an order issued by Najeeb Pasha, the Vali of Baghdad, were present during the three month period of the trial of Mullá 'Alíy-i-Bastámí.¹⁹

Shaykh Muḥammad Shibl was therefore either the first, or amongst the first, Arabs to believe in the Báb. He served the Faith with devotion and fortitude. Dr. Ekbál provides a comment of historic importance to women's liberation, involving the cooperation of a Persian believer with an Arab believer. He writes

At the home of Shaykh Muḥammad Shibl in Baghdad, long before the conference of Badasht, Qurrat Al-'Ain used to appear without a veil and address her students. Some of the students complained to the Báb. The Báb, in one of His Tablets, gave her the title of Tahirih.²⁰

Mírzá Muḥammad Mustafa Baghdadi

Mírzá Muḥammad Mustafa Baghdadi was the son of *Shaykh Muḥammad Shibl*. Mr. Balyuzi provides us with a synopsis of his life:

...Mírzá Mustafa, who was born in Baghdad in about 1837. During the period that Bahá'u'lláh was in Baghdad, Mírzá Mustafa became devoted to Him, although, of course, Bahá'u'lláh had not put forward a claim at this

time. In 1874 Mírzá Mustafá was arrested along with many others of the Bahá'ís of Baghdad, and after this he travelled to 'Akká and sought permission from Bahá'u'lláh to live in the vicinity of that city. Bahá'u'lláh instructed him to take up his residence in Beirut where he was frequently of service to those Bahá'ís travelling to 'Akká. After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, he moved to Alexandretta (Iskandarun), where he died in 1910.²¹

The love of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá for Mírzá Muḥammad Mustafá Baghdadi, and the magnitude of his services to the Faith can be appreciated by the fact that, as Dr Ekbal explains, he “was the recipient of more than 150 Tablets revealed for him by Bahá'u'lláh, and 250 Tablets revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.”²² Dr. Ekbal believes that “...Muḥammad Mustafá was probably the recipient of the highest number of Tablets, both from Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.”

It is therefore no wonder that 'Abdu'l-Bahá immortalized Muḥammad Mustafá in His “Memorials of the Faithful”. (MF 130) He described him as being a “*Blazing Light...The hostile were afraid to attack him*”. He “*attended upon Bahá'u'lláh after His return from Kurdistan...he was the leader among the friends in Iraq.*”²³ He “*became a believer prior to the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh*”.

After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá continues, Muḥammad Mustafá “*stood so firm against the waverers that they dared not draw a breath. He was like a shooting star...Not one of the violators so much as dared pass through the street where he lived ...*” (MF 130)

Dr. Zia Baghdadi

Mr. Balyuzi mentions two of the descendants of Mohammad Mustafá:

Throughout his life Aqa Muḥammad-Mustafá served the Faith which he had embraced, with zeal and distinction. He spent many years in Beirut where he attended to the needs and requirements of pilgrims. His son, Aqa Ḥusayn Iqbal, did the same in subsequent years, with great devotion. Another son, Dr. Zia Baghdadi (Dr. Diya Baghdadi) resided in the United States, where his services were inestimable.²⁴

The Gold Trowel

During the course of laying the corner stone for the House of Worship in Wilmette,

Irene Holmes handed 'Abdu'l-Bahá a small, gold trowel which she had ordered for this very purpose, and He dug the earth to lay the corner-stone, having chosen for this a fragment of rock brought by Mrs. Nettie Tobin as her offering. Having done so, He invited the delegates of various American communities to do likewise. Following them, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked a number of oriental Bahá'ís present to step forth and take part: Mihtar Ardishir Bahram Surush represented Bahá'ís of Zoroastrian background, Siyyid Asadu'lláh stood in for Bahá'ís of Muslim origin, Dr Zia (Diya) Baghdadi (Baghdadi) represented Arab Bahá'ís, and Ghodsieh (Qudsiyyih) Khanum-i-Ashraf the Bahá'í women of the Orient. Then the corner-stone was laid in place.²⁵

Sheikh Ja'afar Al-Tahhan

One of the most enduring services Sheikh Mohammad Mustafa Baghdadi rendered to present day Lebanon²⁶ was laying the foundation for the establishment of a Bahá'í community in the village of Mashghará, South of the Beka' valley, about 80 Km South East of Beirut. Mr. Sami Al-Tahhan, of the Bahá'ís of Mashghará, kindly provided the author with a hand-written note on which the following account is based:

Sometime in the late 1880's Sheikh Mohammad Mustafa Baghdadi taught the Faith to Sheikh Ja'afar Al-Tahhan in the town of Saida (Sidon), about 40 KM South of Beirut, probably giving him the distinction of being the first person to become a Bahá'í in what later became known as Lebanon. Sheikh Ja'afar, was born in 1843 to a prominent Shí'ah family. He came from Iraq in 1881 and settled in the predominantly Shí'ah village of Mashghará. His profound knowledge enabled him to become the Imam of Mashghará, a responsibility he carried for sometime after becoming a Bahá'í.

Through Mustafa Baghdadi, Sheikh Ja'afar attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and later attained the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá twice in Egypt.

The strong faith of Sheikh Ja'afar enabled him to withstand the considerable persecution of the villagers who, once his Faith became known, treated him with hostility. His steadfastness was passed on to his three boys who embraced the Faith and to the fourth boy who was a close friend of the Faith. The children of all four boys and their grandchildren embraced the Faith. When their

daughters married Shi'as, their husbands also embraced the faith. Thus a fully Lebanese Bahá'í community gradually came into being. Their Spiritual Assembly was formed in 1967. They have their own Bahá'í cemetery. The fortitude of this community in withstanding abuse and boycott is a shining example highly admired by all who know them.

Sheikh Ja'afar passed away in 1924 and was buried in the Moslem cemetery of the village. In the 1970's, his remains, with the approval of the Universal House of Justice, were moved to the Bahá'í cemetery of Mashghará.

These few sketchy glimpses, taken as a whole, weave an Arabian-Persian spiritual thread, arising from the desert of Arabia, flowering in Persia, mystically unfolding across more than a century of Bahá'í history, linking Shaykh Ahmad Ahsá'í, by the steadfastness of Mullá Alíy-i-Bastámí, through the descendants of Muḥammad Shibl to a golden trowel in the hand of Dr. Zia Baghdadi laying the foundation stone of the Mother Temple of the West at the feet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This thread shines with the brightness of emancipation as it touches on the impact of Ṭahirih addressing an audience without a veil in the home of Muḥammad Shibl. And finally, it also links Shaykh Ahmad to the formation of a Bahá'í community in Lebanon. Clearly far more remains to be uncovered that will acknowledge not only the contribution of early Arab believers to the growth of the Faith, but the fruits of the cooperation between Arab and Persian believers.

Bahá'u'lláh - Milestones In Arab Lands

Significant Dates

Bahá'u'lláh was born in Iran to a noble Persian family with long Persian ancestry²⁷. However, during the whole period of His Ministry, He was an exile and a prisoner in the Ottoman Empire. These are some significant dates:

1817-1892 75 years. Lifetime of Bahá'u'lláh

1853-1892²⁸ 39 years. The whole period of the Ministry on Bahá'u'lláh was outside Iran, in the Ottoman Empire (GPB 85)

1853-1863 10 years in Iraq, 8 of them among the predominantly Arabic speaking population of Baghdad²⁹, and two of them among the Kurds³⁰ in Sulaymányih

1863-1868 5 years in Istanbul-Adrianople

1868-1892 24 years among the predominantly Arab population of Palestine

Bahá'u'lláh spent the longest period of His Ministry in the Arabic speaking territories of the Ottoman Empire.

The Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh - Location, First Tablet and Its Language.

On a Wednesday afternoon, April 22, 1863, in Baghdad, an ancient city of Arabic culture and history, when "The muezzin had just raised the afternoon call to prayer, ... Bahá'u'lláh entered the Najibiyyih Garden, where He tarried twelve days before His final departure from the city." (GPB 148-52) "That historic day," Shoghi Effendi informs us, is "forever after designated as the first day of the Ridvan Festival." About the significance of this occasion he writes,

The arrival of Bahá'u'lláh in the Najibiyyih Garden, subsequently designated by His followers the Garden of Ridvan, signalizes the commencement of what has come to be recognized as the holiest and most significant of all Bahá'í festivals, the festival commemorating the Declaration of His Mission to His companions.

Furthermore Shoghi Effendi adds: "Of the exact circumstances attending that epoch-making Declaration we, alas, are but scantily informed." He goes on to inform us that, "The 'Suriy-i-Sabr' (Surih of Patience) (was) revealed on the first day of Ridvan." The Suriy-i-Sabr is in Arabic.

Bahá'u'lláh and the Arabic Language

The greater part of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is in the Arabic Language. The introduction to the Arabic edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas highlights certain implications related to choice of language (provisional translation):

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas was revealed completely in the Arabic language. The reader will not miss the implication of the choice of Bahá'u'lláh for Arabic to be the Language of the Obligatory Prayers, the language of the Mother Book of His Revelation, the language through which He set forth the foundations of the forthcoming world civilization, even though it was not the language of His people ... Furthermore, He expressed a preference for the choice of Arabic as a world language to be spoken by all mankind.³¹

In the introduction to the English edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, we are told that:

Bahá'u'lláh enjoyed a superb mastery of Arabic, and preferred to use it in those Tablets and other Writings where its precision of meaning was particularly appropriate to the exposition of basic principle. Beyond the choice of language itself, however, the style employed is of an exalted and emotive character, immensely compelling, particularly to those familiar with the great literary tradition out of which it arose. (KA intro, p. 10)

Bahá'u'lláh expressed His preference for the Arabic language by writing (provisional translation):

*That which is preferable to the Throne is that the entire world speaks the Arabic language because it is the greatest of all languages in its expansiveness. If the people were to inform themselves about the expanse of this language, they would undoubtedly select it. Although the Farsi language is very sweet, it does not have the expanse of the Arabic language. All languages in the world are limited in comparison with the Arabic Language. This is its distinction and the reason we have mentioned it.*³²

Bahá'u'lláh — “This Arabian Youth”

In several Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh refers to Himself as “... *this Arabian Youth*”. For example in a Tablet known as Súrih Al-Damm, addressed to “Muḥammad”³³, (this is a reference to the famous chronicler and poet³⁴, Nabil-i-Zarandi, author of the Dawn Breakers), Bahá'u'lláh writes, (provisional translation):

*Go to Ismulláh-Há, and inform him what the Spirit of God hath revealed unto thee ... Say O servant, We have revealed for thee Tablets and Epistles unknown to anyone except God. In them is that which will enable thee to be independent of all that was created in the realm of creation, and all that is in the heavens and the earth. But We did not send them to thee because We did not inhale from thee the fragrance of Those on High wafting from this Arabian Youth.*³⁵

A testimony of Bahá'u'lláh concerning Arabs in Baghdad

In a Tablet addressed to Hadrat Afnan Jinab-i- Aqa Mírzá Aqa³⁶ Bahá'u'lláh outlines several instances that highlight the level of affection, love and respect that the population of Baghdad, including prominent Sunni Arabs, had for Him before he left. He wrote that when He was in Baghdad, all people including the ‘ulamá, the ‘urfá (those with mystic knowledge), and others in Baghdad and

within its environs all the way to Basra, openly expressed the utmost humility and submission towards him.

Bahá'u'lláh said that one day Jinab-e-Siyyed Daoud³⁷, the mufti of Basra, attained the honor of coming into His presence with a group of others among them the famous Ibn-Alusi.³⁸ They sat outside until they received permission to come into His presence. The Mufti told those present that the reputation of Hadrat-e-Ishan³⁹ (a respectful reference to Bahá'u'lláh) has spread far and wide in those regions "*To the extent,*" The mufti said, "*that I do not think They⁴⁰ are aware how far it has gone*".

Bahá'u'lláh wrote that the Cause had reached such a station (of respect and prominence) that whenever He would leave the house, Arabs who saw Him would utter words (of praise) that surpassed their description of their own leaders.

After enumerating several such instances, Bahá'u'lláh continues His account by referring to the highly emotional time of His departure when "*crowds upon crowds of people came from the city, including the 'Ulama and others. All said they were confident that He would always remain with them ... but now suddenly He was leaving ... The Arabs, like the clouds of Spring, were crying and lamenting*". (GPB 34)

Bahá'u'lláh further describes, in His Tablet to the Afnán, the relationship He had with all types of people.

During the period of my stay in Iraq, the Ulama, the Urafa and the common people of all religious denominations would come to us and We would answer whatever question they asked.

Surat Al-A'ráb⁴¹ – A Tablet from Bahá'u'lláh to the Arabs

In this momentous Tablet, Surat Al-A'ráb, addressed by Bahá'u'lláh to the Arabs, He identifies those He is addressing by certain criteria, calls upon them to adhere to specific injunctions, guides them to thank God for certain reasons, exhorts them to steadfastness as He warns them about severe tests, explains why God chose them for Himself, informs them why they should "take pride upon all the peoples of the Earth", and admonishes them to acquire a number of divine attributes. Towards the end He warns them of dangers facing them, and describes His sufferings. Several times throughout the Tablet, which is about 6 pages in the Arabic script, He addresses them in such in words as, "O My Arabs!", "O friends of God from the Arabs", "O Pen of the Ancient, remind Our friends from the Arabs, whom God has chosen for Thyself...".

Significantly, Bahá'u'lláh follows every major statement He makes with an explanation of its purpose and/or provides the reasons for which He made it. It is also to be noted that the expressions of loftiness and praise Bahá'u'lláh lavishes on the Arabs in a sequence of phrases (here broken up into separate paragraphs), are then tempered by conditions they need to fulfill and by his expectation of them to acquire specific spiritual attributes. The following provisionally translated passages constitute the first two and a half pages of the Tablet, followed by a summary of the remaining three pages. Subtitles and comments have been added, and the text has been arranged and occasionally itemized for emphasis.

Opening Words:

In the opening words of the Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh announces that it is addressed to the Arabs.

This is Súrih A'ráb (the Súrih of the Arabs) which hath been revealed from the Ancient Revealer.

Criteria defining the Arabs addressed by Bahá'u'lláh

The source of the Tablet is mentioned in the following verses which also makes it clear that Bahá'u'lláh is addressing Arabs who have fulfilled certain criteria.

These are the verses of God revealed in truth from the Heaven of Glory. He hath made them to be a proof from Himself for all the world, and in them He mentions those who

- *knew God in Himself and*
- *were not veiled by the barking of those who seek partnership with God*
- *who entered beneath the shade of his care and*
- *resided in proximity to His mercy.*
- *Those are them upon whom the Concourse on High and the Angels of Nearness pray.*
- *They are the ones who, when the Sun of Eternity shone upon them another time, prostrated themselves before God the Almighty the Omnipotent.*

Calling the Arabs to Embrace His Cause:

Having identified the recipients of *Súrih A'ráb*, Bahá'u'lláh calls upon them to embrace His Cause in a series of injunctions starting

with Words such as: “*Listen to the call of God...make haste to the Tree of God...Seek ye shelter in Its shade...Turn ye unto It*” and “*nourish yourselves from Its fruits*”. He Wrote:

O friends of God from the Arabs

- *Listen to the call of God from this Tree that arose in truth, which every one of Its leaves declares upon all things, ‘Verily I am God, no God is there but Him the Most Holy, the Precious the Kind.’*
- *O people, make haste to the Tree of God*
- *Seek ye shelter in Its shade. By God, were ye to search the heavens and the earth ye wouldst not find safety except under the shade of this Tree that has arisen above mankind and from which wafts the gentle breeze that infuses life into every smoldering bone.*
- *Turn ye unto It and*
- *Nourish yourselves from Its fruits that your hearts may be purified from the signs of every notorious beguiler.*

Reasons for thanking God

Calling upon the Arabs to thank God, Bahá'u'lláh lists a number of reasons for doing so.

Thank ye God for

- *having protected you from the wilderness of self and passion,*
- *and saved you from the vain imaginings and blindness in the Day whence God brought the Kingdom of His might upon all who are in heavens and on earth,*
- *and made Himself known unto you*
- *and revealed to you His beauty*
- *and spoke with you visibly as witnessed*
- *and made you of His servants who have knowledge.*

A Warning and Call to Steadfastness

Bahá'u'lláh warns His Arab friends that a grave danger is already facing them, and exhorts them to be steadfast.

Be ye steadfast in this Cause because Satan hath appeared with his soldiers and orders you in every instance to deny God Who created you and made you of the victorious.

A Profound Pronouncement

Bahá'u'lláh then makes a profound pronouncement to the Arabs which has overtones reverberating throughout religious history. “God,” He says, has “*chosen you for Himself*”, and follows up immediately with reasons in support of this pronouncement.

Praise God for having chosen you for Himself, whereas

- *when the Ancient Sun set upon Its land, It rose from the horizon of Iraq — your land⁴² — this is naught but of His Grace upon you with which nothing in the heavens or upon the Earth can compare*
- *and the Face of God was shining brightly amongst you without a veil*
- *reciting upon you the verses of God for many months and years*
- *and the Ancient Beauty walked amongst you with the reverence and dignity of God*
- *revealing Himself upon you yet another time*
- *thus fulfilling the grace of God upon you that ye may be of those who are thankful.*

Consequences of the Pronouncement

Emphasizing the significance of His pronouncement, Bahá'u'lláh then instructs the Arabs to *take pride upon all the tribes of the world* and explains why they should do so.

It behooveth you to take pride upon all the tribes of the world inasmuch as none other than you have attained what ye have attained, if ye be of them who have knowledge.

Spiritual attributes

If we were to stop perusing *Surat Al-A'ráb* at this point, we might misunderstand the essence of the message of Bahá'u'lláh to the Arabs. All that has come before can only be correctly understood in terms of the Arabs arising to scale the spiritual pinnacles to which Bahá'u'lláh has set before them. That is, He has clearly held out a glorious station for the Arabs, but they can only achieve it by fulfilling the following conditions:

Therefore it behooveth you to

- *acquire the manners of God*

- *that from your hearts holy fragrances will burst upon all beings*
- *and from you the signs of the All-merciful God will appear.*
- *As God has chosen you from amongst his people,*
- *make ye an effort that from you may appear that which hath not appeared from others, that your being chosen by God will be proved amongst the people of the world.*
- *Be ye as the stars amongst the people of the world that through you those who have been veiled from the knowledge of God, and are of the ignorant, may be guided.*
- *Be ye trustworthy to yourselves and to the people, and their money, verily this is an attribute beloved by God before the creation of Adam from water and clay.*
- *But if you are not the trustworthy ones on earth, you will not trust your own selves neither will the people trust you, thus hath God advised you in the tongue of His Manifestation as an injunction for you and for all his creation.*
- *Purify your hearts from envy and hatred, and yourselves from inequity and mundane desires*
- *Obey ye the commandments of God verily He hath not commanded His servants except that which is better for them than the treasures of heavens and earth*
- *Beware lest ye contend about anything created on earth with anyone. Leave it to its people that your souls may find peace and ye be entirely devoted to the face of your Lord the Almighty the Great.*

In the remainder of the Tablet Bahá'u'lláh repeatedly addresses His audience in such terms as, “*O People . . . O My Arabs*” emphasizing some of the points already mentioned. He reiterates themes covered in other Tablets such as God entrusts the world to kings and wants only the hearts of His loved ones. (TB 220) He calls upon His “*friends from the Arabs*”:

O people, imbue yourselves with the attributes of God and shun the attributes of those who enjoin partnership with Him. God commands you to be chaste and pure. Hold unto the religion of God and do not commit inequity and vice. Be ye of those from whose faces the light of God is revealed, and from whose actions the signs of God and His

Dignity appear. Thus it beseemeth you to behave, O people of Bahá, in these days of great tribulation...

Dwelling upon His sorrows, Bahá'u'lláh provides a graphic description of their effect upon His Body.

O my Arabs! If you were to behold Me you would not know Me. From repeated tribulations My Hair has waxed white from Its black essence. From the onrush of adversity the 'Alef'⁴³ of this Cause has appeared in the shape of 'Dal'⁴⁴, and this Radiant Rosy Face has yellowed.

In closing this Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh calls upon the Arabs not to forget Him and laments the tribulations brought upon Him by the animosity of His half brother.

Thus it can be seen in general that Bahá'u'lláh declared His mission and established *the holiest and most significant of all Bahá'í festivals* in Baghdad an Arab territory of the Ottoman Empire, that the first Tablet He revealed on the first day of that momentous occasion was in Arabic, that He spent most of His Ministry in Arabic speaking territories of the Ottoman Empire, that the largest body of His Writings was in Arabic.

People of Arabic culture need to be invited to reflect on the implications of the fact that "*the language through which He (Bahá'u'lláh) set forth the foundations of the forthcoming world civilization*", was Arabic, and of His statement that "*If the people were to inform themselves about the expanse of this language, they would undoubtedly select it.*" Moreover Bahá'u'lláh's reference to Himself as *This Arabian Youth* could have several meanings, one of them would undoubtedly be His high respect and affinity with the Arab heritage.

All these facts combined with His own warm recollections of the times He spent with Arabs in Iraq, the tender praiseworthy tone with which He addressed them, and the expectations He has of them, are bound to enkindle an understanding of a deep spiritual connection, far more significant than cordial closeness, between Bahá'u'lláh and the Arabs.

Closing Remarks

This paper makes a preliminary attempt to correct a distorted view about an unfounded divide between the Bahá'í Faith and people of Arab heritage. By focusing on matters of identity, contributions of early Arab believers, milestones of interaction between Bahá'u'lláh with Arabs, and a Tablet to the Arabs, it seeks

to demonstrate not only the absence of any boundaries between the Faith and Arabs, but an intermingling of a considerable magnitude.

The need for further research covering the whole period of the Ministries of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá cannot be over emphasized. Its aim will be to uncover a comprehensive picture of interactions between the Faith and Arabs. Such a picture, will undoubtedly contribute towards mitigating their misgivings about the Faith, and will lay foundations for a greater respect and a sense of closeness towards the Founder and His Mission. However, in keeping with the concept of the *changeless faith of God* touched upon in the Introduction, such research needs to be seen in at least three levels.

At one level, Arabs with penetrating insight into the implication of these milestones, will realize that they have been called to a privileged destiny in shouldering the world-wide responsibilities of the Bahá'í Faith.

At a higher level, Arabs and Persians may wish to reflect on their common destiny in view of certain statements by Bahá'u'lláh, such as those in the following quotation from a Tablet addressed to Zaynu'l-Muqarribín, where He states:

*Convey greetings on behalf of God upon the faces of those Arabs and Persians who lived around His House, that they may rejoice in the glad tidings of the All-Merciful and be of those who are steadfast. Say, O friends, thank God for having enabled you to meet Him, and brought you nigh unto Himself, and informed you of that from which most of His servants remained veiled, and destined for you that which cannot be known by all of creation.*⁴⁵

As a footnote to the grand panorama of history, is there any mystical significance in the fact that the first Persian believer⁴⁶ to suffer for his Faith did so on Arab land, and the first Arab believer⁴⁷ to suffer for his Faith was martyred on Persian soil?

At the third and highest level, which is the essence of the true spirit of the Faith, every believer, no matter what privilege his culture may have received in the Bahá'í Writings, realizes that a prime objective in Bahá'í life is to unequivocally demonstrate the truth of the injunction of Bahá'u'lláh, "*Ye are all fruits of one tree, the leaves of one branch, the flowers of one garden.*"⁴⁸

NOTES

¹ The definition of the word "Arab" is not universally agreed upon. By and large the general connotation of the word "Arab" implies being

a Moslem. As such, some people from Arab countries who are not Moslems take issue when being identified as Arabs. However, In current political usage, accommodation has been made in the definition of "Arab" by focusing on language culture and history. Thus Lebanon, having a Christian President, and a considerable Christian population, is considered an Arab country. For the purpose of this paper, all references to the word "Arab" are intended primarily to refer to Arab Moslems.

- ² A Report by ESCWA entitled "Aging In The Arab Countries: Regional Variations, Policies And Programs" has the following citation: "At a regional level, the population rose from 76.5 million in 1950 to 284.4 million in 2000." <http://www.escwa.org.lb/information/publications/sdd/docs/04-wg-1-2.pdf>
- ³ With very few exceptions, Bahá'í literature is not available in bookstores and libraries in Arab lands. Media presentations have been negatively biased. Over a period of 24 months, July 2003 to July 2005, the number of Arabic websites carrying misconceptions about the Bahá'í Faith grew tenfold, from about 700 to over 7000. That is more than 260 new sites a month. However, faint glimmerings of change have begun to appear in few media outlets.
- ⁴ On July 1, 2005, Dr. Nabil Mustafa of the Bahá'í community of England, was invited by Al-Arabíyya to give an interview which was published on their website.
- ⁵ A comprehensive scholarly work in English is Moojan Momen's *Islam and the Bahá'í Faith*, George Ronald, Oxford, 2000. Another good book, brief and to the point, is *Bahá'u'lláh, The Great Announcement of the Qur'án* by Muḥammad Mustafá, Translated by Rowshan Mustafá, BPT, Dhaka, Bangladesh (circa 1993).
- ⁶ A number of verses in the Qur'an emphasize the fact that it was revealed in Arabic, for example *Sura 12, Yusuf v. 2*. In *The Emergence of Arab Nationalism* N. Zeine wrote. "*Islam was revealed by an Arabian Prophet, in the Arabic language, in Arabia. We read in the Qur'án: 'A Messenger has now come to you from among yourselves ...' (sura 3, Al-'Imran, v 106). There is a tradition that the Prophet said one day: "I am an Arab, the Qur'án is in Arabic, and the language of the denizens of Paradise is Arabic".* (Caravan Books, Delmar, New York. Third Edition 1973. p 130, 132-133).
- ⁷ The Bible, Mat. 24:35 "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*" The Qur'an (Yusuf Ali) tr, Surah 3) "*The Religion before Alláh is Islam (submission to His will)*"
- ⁸ The nurturing Hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá guided the Persian Bahá'ís towards "*the emergence of a culture ...unlike anything humanity had ever known*". This new culture distinguished itself by, "*taking into its own hands the responsibility for deciding its collective affairs through consultative action,*" and expressed its "*spiritual energies*" in "*the practical affairs of day-to-day life,*" such as establishing "*Bahá'í schools ...*" and, "*clinics and other medical facilities ...*", as well as "*a*

network of couriers reaching across the land", effectively, "the rudiments of a postal service" ... (See *Century of Light* commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, The Bahá'í Publishing Trust, New Delhi, India, April 2001, pp 10-11). Despite continuous intermittent atrocities, the Persian Bahá'ís went on developing such basic indicators of community identity comprising social, organizational, and practical aspects, up to the present.

- ⁹ The period to be researched should at least cover the whole of the Ministries of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who had considerable interaction with a number of prominent Arabs in Ottoman territories, mainly Palestine, Beirut and Egypt.
- ¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Athar-i-Qalam-e-Aala*, vol 4, *Mo'assayieh Milli Matbouaat Amri*, p. 215-220
- ¹¹ Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers*, (Ocean) p. 2
- ¹² H.M. Balyuzi, *The Báb - The Herald of the Day of Days*, p. xv
- ¹³ "Bereft of all earthly possessions, and detached from all save God, he, in the early days of the thirteenth century of the Hegira, when forty years of age, arose to dedicate the remaining days of his life to the task he felt impelled to shoulder. He first proceeded to Najaf and Karbila," Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers*, (Ocean) p. 2
- ¹⁴ Imam Ḥusayn was the son of Fatimih, the daughter of the Prophet, and 'Alī, His nephew.
- ¹⁵ Balyuzi, *The Báb*, p. 32
- ¹⁶ Quoted from the Tablet of the Báb to from 2 , unpublished.
- ¹⁷ Mullá Ḥusayn sent a letter to the Báb in which he reported on the mission He had sent him and referred to "Bahá'u'lláh's immediate response to the Divine Message." The letter, "cheered and gladdened the Báb, and reinforced His confidence in the ultimate victory of His Cause. He felt assured that if now He were to fall suddenly a victim to the tyranny of His foes and depart from this world, the Cause which He had revealed would live; would, under the direction of Bahá'u'lláh, continue to develop and flourish, and would yield eventually its choicest fruit ... The letter of Mullá Ḥusayn decided the Báb to undertake His contemplated pilgrimage to Hijaz". (Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 128)
- ¹⁸ H. M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Ocean) page 270
- ¹⁹ Transliterated from the Paper of Dr. Kamran Ekbal, "Murouri Bar Alvah Hadrat Bahá'u'lláh Khitáb beh Muḥammad Mustafa Baghdad", SAFINE-YE IRFAN...
- ²⁰ Email from "Dr. Kamran Ekbal" Kamran_Ekbal@web.de, 14 June 2005
- ²¹ Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís*, p. 270
- ²² Transliterated from the paper of Dr. Kamran Ekbal, SAFINE-YE IRFAN...

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- ²³ The transformation and reformation of the Bábí community in Baghdad, by Bahá'u'lláh after His return from Sulaymáníyyih, is graphically described by Shoghi Effendi (GPB, 127-150). That 'Abdu'l-Bahá should attribute to Muḥammad Mustafa Baghdadi the quality "leader among the friends in Iraq" is worth contemplating with respect to the contribution of an early Arab believer to the Faith.
- ²⁴ Balyuzi, *The Báb*, p. 232
- ²⁵ H.M. Balyuzi, *Abdu'l-Bahá - The Centre of the Covenant*, p. 417
- ²⁶ Lebanon, as we know it today, did not exist at that time. The whole area was part of the Ottoman Empire.
- ²⁷ "Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl asserts in his writings that the genealogy of Bahá'u'lláh can be traced back to the ancient Prophets of Persia as well as to its kings who ruled over the land prior to the Arab invasion." (Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 13)
- ²⁸ Shortly after the Divine intimations experienced by Bahá'u'lláh in the prison of Siyah Chal, He was released. One month later He set off to Iraq with some members of his family arriving in Baghdad on January 12, 1853. See GPB 107.
- ²⁹ While in Baghdad Bahá'u'lláh associated with peoples of four different language cultures and three different religions, i.e. "Within a few years after Bahá'u'lláh's return from Sulaymáníyyih the situation had been completely reversed. The house of Sulayman-i-Ghannam, on which the official designation of the Bayt-i-Azam (the Most Great House) was later conferred, known, at that time, as the house of Mírzá Musa, the Bábí, an extremely modest residence, situated in the Karkh quarter, in the neighborhood of the western bank of the river, to which Bahá'u'lláh's family had moved prior to His return from Kurdistan, had now become the focal center of a great number of seekers, visitors and pilgrims, including Kurds, Persians, Arabs and Turks, and derived from the Muslim, the Jewish and Christian Faiths." (GPB 129)
- ³⁰ The Kurds have their own Kurdish language and they also speak Arabic. The Qasídiy-i-'Izz-i-Varqá'íyyih, revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in Sulaymáníyyih at the request of His Kurdish hosts, is in Arabic. See *Athar-i-Qalam-i-A'ala*, p. 196
- ³¹ Provisional translation from the Arabic edition in of the Most Holy Book, *Al-Kitáb Al-Aqdas*, prepared by a special committee, Published by the Universal House of Justice, ISBN-0-99967-132-6, printed in Canada by Quebecor Jasper Printing, (no date).
- ³² Provisional translation of the Arabic text which is quoted in "Muntakhabat Min Kitáb Bahá'u'lláh Wal 'Asr Al-Jadid", J. Esslemont, 1995 ed. p. 222
- ³³ Ishraq Khavari, *Kanj-i-Shayegan*, Mo'assayieh Milli Matbouaat Amri, 124 Badí', p. 204
- ³⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, (Ocean) p. 381)

- ³⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Athar-i-Qalam-e-Aala*, vol 4, *Mo'assayieh Milli Matbouaat Amri*, p 66
- ³⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Athar-i-Qalam-e-Aala*, vol 6, *Mo'assayieh Milli Matbouaat Amri*, p 86. The Tablet is about 34 pages.
- ³⁷ Siyyid Dawudi is probably Siyyid Dawudi an-Naqshbandi al-Khalidi, who was one of the 'ulama and a shaykh of the Khalidiya section of the Sufi Naqshbandi order. He died in 1882. (H.M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh - The King of Glory*, p. 124)
- ³⁸ Ibn-Alusi - one of the five sons of the famous Shaykh Mahmud al-Alusi, who died in 1854. It is not clear which son is referred to here, but he is probably one of the three eldest, 'Abdu'lláh, Bahá'u'd-Din, 'Abdu'l-Baqi and Siyyid Na'man, Khayru'd-Din. (H.M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh - The King of Glory*, p. 124)
- ³⁹ a respectful reference to Bahá'u'lláh
- ⁴⁰ As a sign of respect, Bahá'u'lláh is addressed in the plural.
- ⁴¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Athar-i-Qalam-e-Aala*, vol 4, *Mo'assayieh Milli Matbouaat Amri*, p. 215-220 p. The text in italics below is a provisional translation. The author is aware that certain parts of this Tablet have a formal translation, but it was not available at the time of preparing this paper. "*A'ráb*" is the plural of "*arab*."
- ⁴² Note that Bahá'u'lláh is here identifying Iraq to be the Land of the Arabs.
- ⁴³ "Alef", the first letter of the Arabic alphabet resembles a straight vertical line.
- ⁴⁴ 'Dal', another letter of the Arabic alphabet, appears like a bent over 'alef'.
- ⁴⁵ Unpublished Tablet number 06136 at the Bahá'í World Archives.
- ⁴⁶ "Mullá Aliy-i-Bastámí, though the first to fall a victim to the relentless hate of the enemy, underwent his persecution in Iraq, which lay beyond the confines of Persia." (Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 146)
- ⁴⁷ "Among the men who in Karbila eagerly embraced, through the efforts of Tahirih, the Cause of the Báb, was a certain Shaykh Salih, an Arab resident of that city who was the first to shed his blood in the path of the Faith, in Tihran. She was so profuse in her praise of Shaykh Salih that a few suspected him of being equal in rank to Quddus." (Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 270) (The author wishes to express his gratitude to Dr. Moojan Momen for pointing this out.)
- ⁴⁸ Dr. J.E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, (Ocean), p. 209

Appendices

Appendix I

Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their abbreviations used in this book*

ABL	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>'Abdu'l-Bahá in London</i> , Commemorative ed. London, UK: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987
ADJ	Shoghi Effendi. <i>Advent of Divine Justice</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990
ADP	Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy</i> . Comp. Elizabeth Fraser Chamberlain. Boston, MA: Tudor Press, 1918
BP	compilation. <i>Bahá'í Prayers</i> .
BW	World Centre Publications. <i>Bahá'í World, The</i> , volumes I (1925) through XX (1986-92); new series 1993-2004. Haifa, Israel: World Centre Publications, 1925-2004
BWF	compilation. <i>Bahá'í World Faith</i> . Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976
CUHJ	The Constitution of The Universal House of Justice. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1972.
CC	<i>Compilation of Compilations</i> volumes I-3. World Centre Publications / Bahá'í Publications Australia. Vol. 1-2: 1991; Vol. 3: 1993.
ESW	Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi. <i>Epistle to the Son of the Wolf</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988
FWU	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Foundations of World Unity</i> . Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979
GPB	Shoghi Effendi. <i>God Passes By</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
GWB	Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi. <i>Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983
HW	Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Marzieh Gail. <i>Hidden Words</i> . Numerous editions.
KA	Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi and the Bahá'í World Centre. <i>Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
KI	Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi. <i>Kitáb-i-Íqán</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983
KJV	King James Version, The Bible. Numerous editions.
LG	compilation. <i>Lights of Guidance</i> . India: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
MUHJ63	Universal House of Justice, comp. Geoffry W. Marks. <i>Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-86: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age</i> . Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996
OCF	Bahá'u'lláh, comp. Research Department of the UHJ. <i>One Common Faith</i> . Bahá'í World Centre, 2005.
PM	Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi. <i>Prayers and Meditations</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987
PT	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Paris Talks</i> . Ontario: Nine Pines Publishing.
PUP	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Promulgation of Universal Peace</i> , 2nd ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í

	Publishing Trust, 1982
Q	Qur'án. Numerous editions.
SAQ	'Abdu'l-Bahá, comp. and trans. Laura Clifford Barney. <i>Some Answered Questions</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
SDC	'Abdu'l-Bahá, trans. Marzieh Gail. <i>Secret of Divine Civilization</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990
SLH	Bahá'u'lláh, trans. World Centre Publications. <i>Summons of the Lord of Hosts</i> . Australia: Bahá'í Publications Australia,
SV	Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Marzieh Gail. <i>Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys</i> , 4th ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991
SWAB	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá</i> . Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
SWB	Báb, The. <i>Selections from the Writings of the Báb</i> . Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
TAB	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Tablets of Abdul-Bahá Abbas</i> , volumes 1-3
TAF	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Tablet to Auguste Forel</i> .
TB	Bahá'u'lláh, comp. Research Department of the UHJ, trans. Habib Taherzadeh. <i>Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988
TN	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Traveller's Narrative</i> , A. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
WT	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá</i> . Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994.
WOB	Shoghi Effendi. <i>World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters</i> , 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.org/README/README-TREE.htm>. Those two have been combined. See more at <http://bahai-library.com/?file=abbreviations>

Appendix II

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Three Versions of Provisional English Translations
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Elucidations

Infallibility of the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith
Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

A Commentary on the Conclusion on True Mysticism
Enoch Tanyi

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.
- *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”)
- *Tajjاليyyih Barkhi Jilviah-háy-i Hayát-i Bahá’i dar Zindigáni-yi Hazrat-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, by Flower Sámi (Manifestations of Living a Bahá’i 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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