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VOLUME 10

THE BAHÁ'Í STUDIES REVIEW

A PUBLICATION OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR BAHÁ'Í STUDIES
English-speaking Europe
2001/2002

Invited Commentary
ONLY ONE TRUE RELIGION?
John Hick

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ALAIN LOCKE
Christopher Buck

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ISSN 1354-8697
VOLUME 10, 2001/2002

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INVITED COMMENTARY

Can There Be Only One True Religion?

John Hick

It might seem obvious that there can only be one true—or at least fully true—religion, since on a number of very important matters the teachings of the religions are not only different but mutually incompatible, so that if one is true it would seem that the others must be false. This assumption pervades most discussions of the relation between religions. It's an assumption that is common to people of almost all traditions, the only obvious exceptions being the Bahá'ís and the Jains, plus of course some individuals within each of the other traditions. Let us refer to this assumption as the only-one-true-religion thesis. It is strongly held by a large majority within my own tradition, which is Christianity. I believe, however, that it is due for reconsideration.

The first thing to note about the only-one-true-religion thesis is that it is bad news for us all. It does not of course follow from this that it is false. Bad news can, alas, be true. But let us notice at this point just how bad the situation is if the only-one-true-religion thesis is true. And let us also note, as aggravated badness, that even if it is false, if people nevertheless believe it and act on it, it is still very harmful.

If there can be only one true religion, the big question becomes: which of the world's religions is the true one? On this view each claims to be the one and only Truth, so that they are all in competition with one another, each regarding the others as either false or, at best, less true.

One consequence of this has been that conflicts between nations or peoples of different religions have been heightened and intensified by each side's conviction that it is either defending, or conquering, in the name of the Truth. This in spite of the fact that the original cause of the conflict has not usually been religious, but ethnic, political and/or economic. But religion has been exploited to validate the opposing causes; and if you believe that your side alone has the Truth, this can justify whatever actions may seem necessary. As Pascal said, "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction." And so young men have been motivated by their religion to be ready both to kill and to be killed for their faith. Chaplains provided by the churches or mosques or synagogues have assured them that the cause for which they are fighting is righteous and just. And not only have innumerable young lives been lost as a result, but also vast numbers of civilians on all sides have been slaughtered or oppressed, discriminated against or exploited in the name of God.

In our own century major examples are the mutual Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh massacres in the Punjab after the partition of India in 1947; the violent repression of the black population of South Africa by white Calvinist Christians, who justified apartheid from the Bible; the generations of Catholic-Protestant conflict in Northern Ireland; the Orthodox Christian Serbian ethnic cleansing of Bosnia and Kosovo; the Jewish-Arab

conflicts in Israel, Palestine and Lebanon—and here I would quote the chilling use of the Hebrew Bible by Yigal Amir, the young Jewish man who assassinated Yitzak Rabin, the peace-making Prime Minister of Israel, in 1995. At his trial Yigal Amir said that he would have no problem killing babies and children as it is written in the Book of Joshua, in the name of conquering the land for Israel. In short, religion, with its aura of holiness, is exploited in every conflict and made to play a truly demonic role in world affairs.

That is one very negative consequence of the only-one-true-religion thesis. Another negative consequence, of a different kind, occurs in inter-faith dialogue. Suppose that, let us say, a Christian and a Muslim are engaging in religious discussion, and let us suppose that each is being personally courteous and friendly. But let us also suppose that each believes that there can only be one true religion which is—naturally—his or her own. Each is then speaking, he or she believes, from a religiously superior position—the position of one who has the full truth to one who has only a lesser truth. Each will politely refrain from saying this, but nevertheless that is the reality as each sees it. This is not, then, for either of them a discussion between equals. For each stands, in their own eyes, on a higher level than the other. That, to my mind, is a negative consequence of the only-one-true-religion thesis.

Now let us step back to take a world-wide and history-long view. Looking at the world as a whole we can see that there are different ways of being human, which we call the great cultures of the earth. The Chinese way of being human is different from the African way of being human, which is different from the Mediterranean way, and the Atlantic (or European-North American) way, and the Slavic way, and so on. Today these different cultures are overlapping more and more and merging towards a global culture. But this was not the case at the time when the great world religions began. That is why you cannot imagine, say, Jesus preaching his strongly Semitic and apocalyptic message in the China of Confucius's time, or Confucius teaching as he did in the Palestine of Jesus's time, or the Buddha teaching as he did in the Russia of his time. The whole ethos and the presuppositions of Jesus's teaching are Jewish. The whole ethos and the presuppositions of the Buddha's teaching are Indian. The whole ethos and the presuppositions of Muhammad's teaching are Arabic. For these great spiritual figures arose within particular cultures, and their outlook inevitably reflected those different cultures. And as the great traditions which they founded developed through the centuries, religion and culture have formed great organic wholes in which the religion pervades the culture and the culture infiltrates, and almost inevitably corrupts, the religion.

But now notice something that is very obvious when you think of it, but which greatly complicates matters. This is that the religion to which a person adheres, and which seems to him or her to be so obviously true, depends in perhaps 99% of cases on where they happen to have been born. Someone born into a Catholic family in Spain or Ireland is very likely to be Catholic Christian. Someone born into a Muslim family in Pakistan or Turkey is very likely to be a Muslim. Someone born into a Buddhist family in Thailand or Sri Lanka is very likely to be a Buddhist, and so on. It is of course true that there are individual conversions in all directions, to and from each of the religions. We probably all know, say, Muslims who have become Christians and Christians who have become Muslims, Sikhs who have become Christians and Christians who have become Sikhs, Jews who have become Buddhists, Buddhists who have become Hindus,

and so on. But these individual conversions, although very important to the individuals concerned, are statistically insignificant in comparison with the massive transmission of each faith from generation to generation within the same tradition.

So given that the religion to which people adhere, or against which they rebel, depends in the vast majority of cases on where they happen to have been born, what difference does this make? Is it a very significant fact, or something that we can properly ignore? Some will say that "No, it is not significant. It's just that we happen to be the fortunate ones to whom God has revealed His truth, and so we have the responsibility of proclaiming it to the rest of the world." This is the traditional missionary view. And it is an internally coherent position. But is it not a little troubling to notice that people within the other religions are saying, or thinking, exactly the same from the point of view of their own faith? An observer from outer space, visiting this planet, would see a number of religious communities, each believing that they are the chosen people to whom the Truth has been revealed, and each believing that the rest of the human race are in varying degrees of error. And that observer might well conclude that they are all thinking in much too small and restricted a way.

Now if there is only one true religion, which is my own, then must I as a Christian believe that there is an important spiritual advantage in being born into Christianity, and a corresponding spiritual disadvantage in being born into Judaism, or Islam, or Sikhism, or Hinduism, or Buddhism, or the Bahá'í Faith, and so on? How do I square this with the belief in a God who loves all God's human children with an equal and limitless love? On the other hand, if there is no such spiritual plus in being a Christian, and no such spiritual minus in following one of the other great world faiths, then what becomes of those Christian doctrines which imply the contrary? For the doctrine that Jesus of Nazareth was God incarnate (i.e. the second person of a divine Trinity incarnate) entails that Christianity is the only religion to have been founded by God in person, so that it is God's own religion, and must be uniquely superior to all the others. How could that fail to constitute a very significant spiritual plus?

However, at this point some Christians might simply say, "So what? We know that we are right, and that's that." This was the position of Karl Barth, who was probably the most influential Christian theologian of the twentieth century, when he said that "the Christian religion is true, because it has pleased God, who alone can be the judge in this matter, to affirm it to be the true religion… And it alone has the commission and the authority to be a missionary religion, i.e., to confront the world of religions as the one true religion, with absolute self-confidence to invite and challenge it to abandon its ways and to start on the Christian way."[1] But others of us today, and indeed I think a growing number of us, find this an extremely uncomfortable stance to take. Indeed not only uncomfortable, but implausible. For we know that there have been and there are Muslim and Jewish and Hindu and other Karl Barths, in the sense of Muslim, Jewish and Hindu and other religious thinkers who make the same exclusive claim for their own religion. And having realised this, the fact that I was born into Christianity, rather than into Islam or Judaism or Hinduism or Buddhism or Sikhism, and so on, does not, when looked at objectively, seem a good enough reason to hold that everyone born elsewhere is in error.

Incidentally, it is of interest that, unlike Karl Barth, his contemporary, Paul Tillich,

1 *Church Dogmatics* 1/2:350, 357.

took the trouble, fairly late in his career, to spend time in Japan in dialogue with Buddhist thinkers; and as a result he said in one of his last public lectures that if he could do his work over again he would do it on a multi-faith basis.

Now let us return to the only-one-true-religion thesis. I suggest that by a true religion we mean one that teaches truths and that is also an effective channel or context of salvation. For salvation, redemption, re-creation is really what the religions are all about. They are not primarily sets of doctrines, or philosophies, but ways or paths of salvation—salvation being our Christian term for a radical change from a profoundly wrong to a profoundly right and fulfilling relationship to the divine or the ultimate, issuing in a transformed life.

Let me at this point invoke a New Testament text. This is Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31–46, which is in effect summarised in another saying of Jesus's: "Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."[2] For our present purpose I want to equate saying Lord, Lord, with regarding Jesus as God incarnate, although (as modern new Testament studies have shown) this clearly cannot be what the historical Jesus himself meant. But nevertheless let us for the moment apply his saying to the church's incarnation doctrine. And, more securely, I shall equate doing the will of the heavenly Father with the sort of things of which Jesus spoke—feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, serving the sick and the prisoners, and so on, all of which I take to be simply instances of loving your neighbour in the concrete realities of life. And according to Jesus in this parable, it is this latter that matters in the long run, rather than the affirmation of any doctrine about himself.

This side of Jesus's teaching suggests to me that Christians should not equate salvation with, in the familiar evangelical phrase, taking Jesus as your lord and saviour, and but rather with doing God's will on earth. So let us consider the possibility of seeing salvation, not as the juridical event of being justified by the atoning death of Christ, but as an actual transformation of human beings, usually gradually, from natural self-centeredness to a new orientation centred in the divine, the ultimate, the eternally real, and expressing itself in love of one's neighbours—who are anyone and everyone. If salvation is thus something concrete that shows in varying degrees in people's lives, we can look about us to see where it is occurring. And when we do, do we find that it is taking place only within Christianity, or more effectively in Christianity than in other religions? I don't think that anyone who has got to know people of other religions could ever think that.

In Birmingham, where I live, about 10% of the population are Muslims, and there are large communities of Hindus and Sikhs, as well as a small but long-established Jewish community and a new and growing Buddhist presence, smaller Taoist and Bahá'í groups, all surrounded by the large majority Christian community. And so we are accustomed to having to do with people of other faiths in every walk of life. It is a common experience to have colleagues at work, or fellow parents of children in the same school, or neighbours in the same street, or shop keepers, dentists, doctors, solicitors, civil servants, taxi drivers and so on with whom we interact, who practice a different faith. There are of course good and bad individuals within every community, but

2 Matt. 7:21.

observation suggests that the mixture is much the same within them all, including the Christian population. Our fellow citizens of other faiths do not seem to be, in general, either better or worse human beings than our Christian fellow citizens in general. They do not seem to be less kindly and thoughtful for others, less honest, less law abiding, less good citizens, less devoted to the practice of their faith, less concerned for the education and welfare of their children, than the Christian majority. In short, they do not seem to be either better or worse human beings.

Another kind of observation is less common, because it depends on having travelled in the heartlands of other religions and having been lucky enough to encounter some of their saintly individuals. By saints I do not mean perfect men and women, for there are none, but people who are manifestly much more advanced than most of us in the salvific transformation. I have had the good fortune to get to know several such people, and whilst they include Christians they also include people of other faiths. And I do not find it possible to maintain that as a Christian I must be closer to God than them, because I am well aware that this is not the case.

But, we have to ask, is this what we would expect if the traditional Christian belief-system is literally and straight-forwardly true? Should not the fruits of the Spirit—which St Paul listed as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control—be more evident in the lives of Christians than in the lives of the rest of the world? And yet I do not think that they are. So it seems that either the special Christian relationship with God does not make any concrete difference, or that an equally close relationship to God is possible within the other world religions. And what follows from this? We have heard it in broad terms from some of the most respected spiritual leaders of this century. Thus Mahatma Gandhi said, “Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Jews, are convenient labels. But when I tear them down, I do not know which is which. We are all children of the same God.”[3] And the present Dalai Lama has said, “I maintain that every religion of the world—Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism—has similar ideas of love, the same goal of benefiting humanity through spiritual practices, and the same effects of making their followers into better human beings. Differences of dogma may be ascribed to differences of time and circumstances as well as cultural influences.”[4] To very many people today this kind of pluralistic outlook seems much more realistic and believable than the dogma of the unique superiority of one’s own religion, whichever that may be.

But now what about the conflicting truth-claims of the different religions? I want to suggest that in fact they do not conflict because they are claims about different manifestations of God within our human thought and experience. The kind of picture that seems to me most promising affirms an ultimate transcendent divine reality which is being differently conceived, and hence differently experienced, and hence differently responded to in life, within the different religions. It then follows that the incompatible belief systems of the different traditions refer to different manifestations to humanity of the one ultimate reality. As such, they do not conflict. That Christians are aware of the Ultimate as thought and experienced in terms of Christian concepts is not incompatible

[3] M. K. Gandhi, *What Jesus Means to Me*, ed. R. K. Prabhu (Abmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959) 31.

[4] The Dalai Lama, *A Human Approach to World Peace* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1984) 13.

with the fact that Muslims are aware of the Ultimate as thought and experienced in terms of Islamic concepts, and Buddhists in terms of Buddhist concepts, and so on.

For an immensely important epistemological truth applies to religious as well as to non-religious awareness. This is that the inner shape of our own minds, formed by the conceptual system in terms of which we think, always affects the way in which we become aware of anything. The basic principle was brilliantly stated by Thomas Aquinas when he said that "Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower."[5] He did not go on to apply this principle to religious plurality, where the mode of the knower is differently formed within the different traditions. But we find the same idea in the Muslim Sufi writer al-Junayd, who said, "The colour of the water is that of its container," which Ibn al-Arabi explicitly applied to the religions when he said, "If [one] knew Junayd's saying, 'The water takes its colour from the vessel containing it,' he would not interfere with other men's beliefs, but would perceive God in every form of belief."[6]

Considered as pictures of reality, the different religious belief-systems are somewhat like maps of the world drawn in different projections. Because the earth is a three-dimensional globe, any representation of it on the two-dimensional surface of a map has to distort it, and the various projections are different ways of doing this systematically. But that one map, drawn in one projection, is correct does not entail that another, drawn in a different projection, is incorrect. They may be equally correct, in spite of the fact that they are both systematic distortions. The test is whether they enable us to move successfully from A to B. And it may be that any representation of the infinite divine reality in our limited human terms is bound to be radically inadequate, and yet that a number of different such human representations may be equally successful in guiding us on our path through life.

But, finally, it is important to add, speaking as a Christian, that although Christianity is not, I'm suggesting, the one and only authentic context of salvation, there is nevertheless a sense in which, for Christians, Christianity is central, unique, normative; for they have been formed by it. Christianity has, so to speak, created them in its own image, so that it fits them, and they fit it, as no other religion can. So it should be lived to the full—that is the practical outcome of the pluralist view—but it should also be born in mind that exactly the same applies to our neighbours in this small world who have been formed by Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, the Bahá'í Faith, etc. For we must all rise to the realisation that objectively no religion is the one and only true religion, and that we must all become able to interact with people of other faiths on that basis.

[5] *Summae Theologia*, II/II, Q. 1, art 2.

[6] Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) 88.

Alain Locke: Bahá'í philosopher

CHRISTOPHER BUCK

Abstract

African American philosopher Alain Locke is arguably the most profound and important western Bahá'í philosopher to date. Except for Ernest Mason's 1979 World Order *article, scholarship on Locke has neither seriously taken into account his Bahá'í identity nor its influence on his work. The present study, based largely on archival sources, will contribute to research on this "missing" dimension of Locke's complex life and thought. This study examines Locke's worldview as a Bahá'í, his secular perspective as a philosopher, and the synergy between his confessional and professional essays. This study also argues that Locke had a fluid hierarchy of values—of loyalty, tolerance, reciprocity, cultural relativism and pluralism (the philosophical equivalent of "unity in diversity")—and that this hierarchy represents a progression and application of quintessentially Bahá'í ideals. Locke's distinction as a "Bahá'í philosopher" may therefore be justified on ideological as well as historical grounds. Locke "translated" Bahá'í ideals "into more secular terms" so that "a greater practical range will be opened up for the application and final vindication of the Bahá'í principles" in order to achieve "a positive multiplication of spiritual power."*[1]

> One can appreciate the deep-seated desire and the ever-recurrent but Utopian dream of the idealist that somehow a single faith, a common culture, an all-embracing institutional life and its confraternity should some day unite man by merging all his loyalties and culture values. But even with almost complete intercommunication within practical grasp, that day seems distant, especially since we have as great need for cultural pluralism in a single unit of society as in a nation as large and as composite as our own. [. . .] The pluralist way to unity

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[1] Alain Locke, "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume IV, April 1930-April 1932*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1933; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 372-74. Reprint in Leonard Harris (ed.), *The Philosophy of Alain Locke* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989) 133-38 [above quote from 137]. Harris' reference (133 n.) should be emended to read, Volume IV, 1930-1932 (not "V, 1932-1934").

This paper will appear in the forthcoming book, *Lights of the Spirit: Black Bahá'ís—A Reader*, co-edited by Richard W. Thomas and Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis. Use was made of archival sources in the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center (MSRC), Howard University, courtesy of Ms. Ida Jones, manuscript librarian, who assistance is gratefully acknowledged; and the National Bahá'í Archives (NBA), US Bahá'í National Center, courtesy of Roger M. Dahl, archivist, whose assistance is also gratefully acknowledged. My research trip to the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University (6-9 August 2001) and to the Washington, D.C. Bahá'í Center (10 August 2001) was made possible through the generous support of Kalimát Press, and also with the assistance of the Department of American Thought and Language, Michigan State University. I am also indebted to Gayle Morrison for her careful reading and critical comments on a previous version of this manuscript, which is part of a work-in-progress, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, forthcoming).

seems by far the most practicable.

– Alain Locke, "Pluralism and Ideological Peace" (1947).[2]

Background

Recent scholarship on the African American philosopher and aesthete, Alain LeRoy Locke (d. 1954), has brought his work "back to influential life."[3] Locke is arguably the most profound and important western Bahá'í philosopher to date. Gayle Morrison rightly calls him "the outstanding black intellectual"[4] among the early Bahá'ís. He embraced the Bahá'í Faith in 1918, the very year he received his PhD in philosophy from Harvard. In what sense, therefore, is Locke a "Bahá'í philosopher"? After all, there is no formal discipline of Bahá'í philosophy as such. However, while the term "Bahá'í philosophy" may appear to be an oxymoron, Bahá'í philosophy is expected to evolve over time. A close comparison of Locke's Bahá'í essays with his philosophical essays discloses some striking resonances between the two, from shared vocabulary to parallel concepts. The present study will fill a lacuna in the literature on Locke, in which his worldview as a Bahá'í is given passing mention at best, or, at worst, is altogether ignored. By further developing Ernest Mason's initial work on Locke's Bahá'í identity and its presumed interaction with his thinking as a philosopher,[5] this study hopes fill in this "missing" dimension of Locke that has all-too-often been glossed over in the literature. While we will never know if Locke himself would have been comfortable with that label, certainly he would have acknowledged the impact of his Bahá'í experience on his life in general and probably on his philosophy in particular. As will be shown, the converse holds true as well, in that much of Locke's formal philosophical thinking informed his Bahá'í perspective.

In a popular publication, *The Black 100*, Alain Locke ranks as the 36th most influential African American ever, past or present.[6] Distinguished as the first African American Rhodes Scholar, Locke was the philosophical architect—indeed, the "Dean"[7]—of the Harlem Renaissance, a period of cultural efflorescence connected with the "New Negro" movement of the mid-1920s to mid-1930s (not to be confused with the "American Renaissance" just preceding the Civil War). This was a watershed period in African American history for psychological revalorisation and race vindication.

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[2] Alain Locke, "Pluralism and Ideological Peace," in Sidney Hook and Milton R. Konvitz, eds. *Freedom and Experience: Essays presented to Horace M. Kallen* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1947) 67.

[3] Judith Green, "Cosmopolitan Unity Amidst Valued Diversity: Alain Locke's Vision of Deeply Democratic Transformation," in *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 132.

[4] Gayle Morrison, *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), 4, note.

[5] Ernest Mason, "Alain Locke's Social Philosophy," *World Order* 13.2 (1979): 25-34. See also idem, "Alain Locke on Race and Race Relations," *Phylon* 40.4 (1979): 342-50. Cf. Yvonne Ochillo, "The Race-Consciousness of Alain Locke," *Phylon* 47.3 (1986): 173-81.

[6] Columbus Salley, *The Black 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential African-Americans, Past and Present*. Revised and Updated (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1999 [1993]) 137.

[7] George Hutchison, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995) 390.

"Arguably Locke was the first black American," writes Winston Napier, "seeking to challenge European cultural imperialism through the formal articulation of a black aesthetics."[8] Among his other roles, Locke was the first African American president of the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE), a predominantly white, national education association.[9] He helped found the prestigious Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, which he chaired in 1945. Locke served on the editorial board of the *American Scholar* and was a regular contributor to national journals and magazines.[10] By universal acclamation, Locke has achieved immortality as a great African American. Yet his identity and contributions as a Bahá'í remain relatively obscure by comparison.

Augmented by his fame and prestige in wider American society, his role as a contributor to the first five volumes of the *Bahá'í World* invites a closer examination of Locke's significance as a Bahá'í writer during the early years of the American Bahá'í community. Except for Ernest Mason's article,[11] which exists in splendid isolation, there is a dearth of literature on the topic. As interest in Locke intensifies and new documents come to light, this essay will complement prior scholarship by taking a closer look at the Bahá'í dimension of Locke's life and thought, and exploring how the synergy between Locke's Bahá'í essays and philosophical essays permit one to speak of an inchoate "Bahá'í philosophy" in embryonic form.

The present study is based, in part, on Locke's autobiographical note that prefaced his first formal philosophical essay, "Values and Imperatives,"[12] published when he was fifty years old (1935). Locke refers to this self-narrative as his "psychograph." In it, Locke does not directly mention the fact that he was a Bahá'í. But he does allude to it, calling himself a "universalist in religion."[13] As a methodological control and anchor of authenticity, periodic references to Locke's psychograph will be made throughout this essay.

Locke begins his psychograph so: "I should like to claim as life-motto the good Greek principle,—'*Nothing in excess*,' but I have probably worn instead as the badge of

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8 Winston Napier, "Affirming Critical Conceptualism: Harlem Renaissance Aesthetics and the Formation of Alain Locke's Social Philosophy," *The Massachusetts Review* 39.1 (Spring).

9 Rudolph A. Cain, "Alain Leroy Locke: Crusader and Advocate for the Education of African American Adults," *Journal of Negro Education* 64.1 (1995): 87; Michael R. Winston, "Locke, Alain LeRoy," in Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, eds. *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1982) 403. See also Tommy Lee Lott, "Alain LeRoy Locke," in Michael P. Kelly (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 160-65; and Sandra L. Quinn-Musgrove, "Lost in Blackness: Alain LeRoy Locke," *Ethnic Forum* 12.2 (1992): 48-68. The present writer has not yet accessed Jeffrey Stewart, *A Biography of Alain Locke, Philosopher of the Harlem Renaissance, 1886-1930* (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1979). Abstracted in *Dissertation Abstracts International* 1981 42.4: 1696-1697-A.

10 Winston, op. cit., 403.

11 Mason, "Alain Locke's Social Philosophy."

12 Alain Locke, "Values and Imperatives" in Sidney Hook and Horace M. Kallen, eds. *American Philosophy, Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Lee Furman, 1935) 313-33.

13 Locke, *ibid*.

circumstance,—'*All things with a reservation*.'"[14] While a Bahá'í for most of his adult life, Locke had some reservations about ways in which the Bahá'í Faith was understood and applied by some of his fellow Bahá'ís. His reservations may contribute to a richer understanding of Bahá'í principles as he interpreted them through his unique perspective as both a race leader ("perforce an advocate of cultural racialism") as well as a "cultural cosmopolitan" steeped in the "philosophy of value," allied with "cultural pluralism and value relativism."[15] This study will thus situate Locke within the context of those intellectual formations—value theory, pragmatism, Boasian anthropology, and cultural pluralism, as well as Bahá'í principles—that deeply influenced him.

Early life

An African American ("Negro") child of Northern Reconstruction with an enlightened upbringing, Locke was the only son of Pliny Locke and Mary (Hawkins) Locke, who had been engaged for sixteen years before they married.[16] Alain LeRoy Locke was born on 13 September 1885 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, not in 1886, as commonly thought.[17] For reasons that have eluded historians, Locke always represented his year of birth as 1886—*not* 1885.[18] At birth, although his name was recorded as "Arthur," his parents may have actually named him "Alan." From the age of sixteen, Locke later adopted the French spelling, "Alain" (close to the American pronunciation of "Allen") and added the middle name "LeRoy" (probably because he was called "Roy" as a child).[19]

In his psychograph, Locke reflects on his childhood: "Philadelphia, with her birthright of provincialism flavoured by urbanity and her petty bourgeois psyche with the Tory slant, at the start set the key of paradox; circumstance compounded it by decreeing me as a Negro a dubious and doubting sort of American and by reason of racial inheritance making me more of a pagan than a Puritan, more of a humanist than a pragmatist."[20] While Locke himself did not explicate what he meant by the "key of paradox," further in his psychograph, "paradox" appears to be a reference to twists of fate and to tensions as well as harmonics between his cultural nationalism and

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14 Cited by Horace M. Kallen, "Alain Locke and Cultural Pluralism." *Journal of Philosophy* 54.5 (28 February 1957): 121.

15 Kallen, op. cit., 122.

16 Winston, op. cit., 398.

17 For verification of Locke's birthdate, I obtained a document issued by the "Department of Public Health and Charities, Bureau of Health" (City Hall, Philadelphia), Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-1, Folder 1, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. See note by Leonard Harris, "Rendering the Text," in idem (ed.) *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989)

18 As was the case when Locke filled out his "Bahá'í Historical Record" card. Under "Birthdate," Locke had entered "September 13, 1886." Bahá'í Historical Record Cards Collection, and Biographical Information Collection, NBA.

19 Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-1, Folder 2 (Autobiographical statements). Although his middle name was formally spelled "LeRoy," in full signature he would write "Leroy," as evident on his "Bahá'í Historical Record" card signature. Bahá'í Historical Record Cards Collection, and Biographical Information Collection, NBA.

20 Kallen, op. cit., 122.

integrationist universalism—perhaps never fully resolving the ideological paradox. In Philadelphia, Locke led a privileged (relative to the lives of the vast majority of other black Americans at the turn of the last century) and somewhat sheltered life.[21] A biographer notes that Locke was a "child of privilege in a black household whose ancestors on both sides had been free before 1865."[22]

Locke's family background shows how nature and nurture combined to provide him with rare educational advantages. Locke's paternal grandfather, Ishmael Locke (1820-1852), attended Cambridge University with support from the Society of Friends. Ishmael was employed as a teacher in Salem, New Jersey, and, over four years, established schools in Liberia, where he met and married Alain Locke's paternal grandmother, Sarah Shorter Hawkins, who was from Kentucky. Ishmael Locke later served as principal of the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia, following his tenure as headmaster of a school in Providence, Rhode Island.[23]

Locke's father, Pliny Locke, graduated from the Institute in 1867, and taught mathematics there for two years, after which he taught freedmen in North Carolina during the early years of Reconstruction. He also held a position as an accountant in the Freedman's Bureau and the Freedman's Bank, and was private secretary to General O. O. Howard. He was accepted to the Howard University Law Department (later called the School of Law), and graduated in 1874. That year, Pliny returned to Philadelphia as a clerk in the US Post Office. He died in 1891.[24]

Locke's mother, Mary (Hawkins) Locke, was from a family of free blacks, among whom were soldiers who had fought with valour during the Civil War and missionaries to Africa under the Society of Friends. Mary Hawkins was a descendant of Charles Shorter, a free Negro who had fought in the War of 1812.[25] She was educated at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia. Mary Locke supported herself and her family as a teacher in Camden and Camden County. She was a disciple of the humanist and rabbi, Felix Adler (d. 1933), who believed that all religions had a common ethical basis, and who proposed the First Universal Races Congress held in 1911, to the American section of which he and W. E. B. Du Bois were elected co-secretaries.[26] She joined the Society for Ethical Culture, which Adler founded in 1876. It was liberal on racial matters. Adler invited Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois to lecture at the Society, and encouraged black students to enrol in his own school.[27] His mother's role as both a teacher and a humanist likely left its imprint on Locke, who, in his

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[21] Late in life, Locke reminisced about some of his childhood experiences. See Douglas K. Stafford, "Alain Locke: The Child, the Man, and the People," *Journal of Negro Education* 30.1 (Winter 1961): 25-34.

[22] M. Anthony Fitchue, "Locke and Du Bois: Two Major Black Voices Muzzled by Philanthropic Organizations," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, Issue 14 (Winter 1996-1997): 111. Online. JSTOR. Accessed 5 Mar 2001.

[23] Winston, op. cit., 398.

[24] Winston, *ibid*.

[25] Winston, *ibid*.

[26] Hutchison, *op. cit.*, 40.

[27] Hutchison, *op. cit.*, 39-40.

psychograph, described himself as "more of a humanist than a pragmatist."[28]

Locke had an Episcopal upbringing, and during his youth, he was enamoured of Greek philosophy.[29] Later he found, as Leonard Harris puts it, a "spiritual home" in the Bahá'í Faith.[30] Mary Locke died on 23 April 1922.[31] In a letter dated 28 June 1922 to Agnes Parsons, Locke disclosed that his mother had been favourably disposed to the Bahá'í Faith: "Mother's feeling toward the cause [the Bahá'í Faith], and the friends [Bahá'ís] who exemplify it, was unusually receptive and cordial for one who had reached conservative years,—it was her wish that I identify myself more closely with it." At the end of the letter, Locke speaks of the Bahá'í Faith as "this movement for human brotherhood."[32] To the best of his ability—given the extraordinary demands placed upon him as an academic, lecturer, cultural critic, and educator—Locke lived up to his mother's wish over the next two decades.

University education

Locke had a black middle class upbringing, but with an unusual education. In his infancy, Locke was stricken with rheumatic fever, which permanently damaged his heart (an inhibitive factor in Locke's later activities as a Bahá'í). After the episode of rheumatic fever, Locke dealt with his "rheumatic heart" by seeking "compensatory satisfactions" in books, piano, and violin.[33] Only six years old when his father died, Locke was sent by his mother to one of the Ethical Culture schools, which was a pioneer, experimental program of Froebelian pedagogy (after Friedrich Froebel [d. 1852], who opened the first kindergarten). By the time he enrolled in Central High School of Philadelphia (1898-1902), Locke was already an accomplished pianist and violinist. From 1902 to 1904, Locke attended the Philadelphia School of Pedagogy.[34] Locke graduated second in his class in 1904. That year, Locke entered Harvard College as an honour student, where he was one of only a few African American undergraduates.

As a philosophy major, Locke studied under George Herbert Palmer, Josiah Royce, Hugo Münsterberg, and Ralph Barton Perry.[35] Remarkably, Locke completed his four-year program in only three years. During this time, he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. In 1907, Locke won the Bowdoin Prize—Harvard's most prestigious academic award—for an essay he wrote. Locke also passed a qualifying examination in Latin, Greek, and mathematics for the Rhodes Scholarship, which had just been established in 1904.[36] Locke made history and headlines in May 1907 as America's first—and last, until 1960—African American Rhodes Scholar. He graduated *magna cum laude* with his

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28 Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

29 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 5.

30 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 3-5.

31 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 4 and 293.

32 Locke to Parsons, 28 June 1922, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA.

33 Winston, *op. cit.*, 398.

34 Mason, *Locke's Social Philosophy*, 25.

35 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 4.

36 Winston, *op. cit.*, 398.

bachelor's degree in philosophy that same year.[37] On his Rhodes Scholarship, Locke studied at Oxford from 1907 to 1910. "At Oxford," Locke found himself "once more intrigued by the twilight of aestheticism."[38] An account of Locke's experiences at Oxford is given by Jeffrey Stewart.[39] Rejected by five Oxford colleges, Locke was finally admitted to Hertford College.

As a Harvard senior in 1905, Locke had met Horace Kallen, a German-born Jew who was a graduate teaching assistant in a course on Greek philosophy—taught by George Santayana—in which Locke had enrolled.[40] This was the beginning of an association that lasted for many years. Kallen recorded some personal observations about Locke as a young man. Locke was "very sensitive, very easily hurt." Recalling a conversation at Harvard, Kallen writes that Locke would strenuously insist that, "I am a human being," that, "We are all alike Americans," and that his "color ought not to make any difference."[41] This is corroborated by a letter Locke wrote to his mother, Mary Locke, shortly after having been awarded his Rhodes scholarship, in which he insists: "I am not a race problem. I am Alain LeRoy Locke."[42] Unfortunately, in that era, colour made all the difference. The prevailing social reality was that Locke's self-image was really a wish-image. Two years later, on a Sheldon travelling fellowship, Kallen ended up at Oxford at the same time as Locke.

At Oxford, recommencing their earlier conversation at Harvard, Locke asked Kallen, "[W]hat difference does the difference [of race] make?" "In arguing out those questions," Kallen recounts, "the phrase 'cultural pluralism' was born."[43] While the term itself was thus coined by Kallen in this historic conversation with Locke,[44] it was really Locke who developed the concept into a full-blown philosophical framework for the melioration of African Americans. Although distancing himself from Kallen's purist and separatist conception of it, Locke was part of the cultural pluralist movement that flourished between the 1920s and the 1940s.

Kallen describes a racial incident over a Thanksgiving Day dinner hosted at the American Club at Oxford. Locke was not invited, because of "gentlemen from Dixie who could not possibly associate with Negroes."[45] Elsewhere, Kallen is more blunt: "[W]e had a race problem because the Rhodes scholars from the South were bastards. So they had a Thanksgiving dinner which I refused to attend because they refused to have

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37 Nancy Fraser, "Another Pragmatism: Alain Locke, Critical 'Race' Theory, and the Politics of Culture," in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 6.

38 Kallen, *op. cit.*, 121.

39 Jeffrey C. Stewart, "A Black Aesthete at Oxford." *Massachusetts Review* 34.3 (1993): 411-28.

40 Kallen, op. cit., 119.

41 Hutchison, *op. cit.*, 85. See also Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998) 191.

42 Menand, *op. cit.*, 391.

43 Posnock, *op. cit.*, 192.

44 Kallen, *op. cit.*, 119.

45 Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

Locke."[46] In fact, even before they left for Oxford, these Southern Rhodes Scholars had "formally appealed to the Rhodes trustees to overturn Locke's award"[47]—but to no avail. "What got Kallen particularly upset, however," according to Louis Menand, "was the insult to Harvard."[48]

In support of this, Menand cites a letter to Harvard English professor Barrett Wendell, in which Kallen speaks of overcoming his admitted aversion to blacks through his loyalty to Harvard and by virtue of his personal respect for Locke as well. After having invited Locke, as his guest, to tea in lieu of the Thanksgiving dinner, Kallen writes that, "tho' it is personally repugnant to me to eat with him [...] but then, Locke is a Harvard man and as such he has a definite claim on me."[49] The irony is that Kallen harboured some of the very same prejudices as the Southern Rhodes Scholars who shunned Locke, but not to the same degree. "As you know, I have neither respect nor liking for his race," Kallen writes, "—but individually they have to be taken, each on his own merits and value, and if ever a Negro was worthy, this boy is."[50] Locke was deeply wounded: "Now, the impact of that kind of experience left scars," remarks Kallen.[51] And it wasn't just the prejudice of his fellow American peers that so disaffected Locke, for he was almost as critical of British condescension as he was of American racism. In 1909, Locke published a critique of Oxford ("Oxford Contrasts"),[52] particularly of its aristocratic pretensions.[53]

He found social acceptance elsewhere. He belonged to the "Oxford Cosmopolitan Club," which attracted a number of international students ("colonials"). According to Posnock, "This group soon became Locke's intimate circle."[54] For years to come, Locke nurtured these contacts through extensive correspondence. While "socially Anglophile" as he says in his psychograph, Locke found himself increasingly drawn to his sense of "race loyalty."[55] As evidence of this, Locke helped establish the African Union Society, and served as its secretary. Its constitution stated the society's purpose was to cultivate "thought and social intercourse between its members as prospective leaders of the African Race."[56] Indeed, it was at Oxford that a crucial transformation took place: At entrance, Locke saw himself as a cultural cosmopolitan; on exit, Locke resolved to be

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46 Hutchison, *op. cit.*, 85.

47 Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001) 390.

48 Menand, *ibid.*

49 Menand, *op. cit.*, 391.

50 Menand, *op. cit.*, 391.

51 Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

52 Alain Locke, "Oxford Contrasts," *Independent* 67 (July 1909): 139-42. See also *idem*, "The American Temperament," *North American Review* 194 (August 1911): 262-70.

53 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 294.

54 Posnock, *op. cit.*, 194.

55 Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

56 Winston, *op. cit.*, 399.

a race leader.[57] Hence, in his psychograph, Locke describes himself as "a cultural cosmopolitan, but perforce an advocate of cultural racialism as a defensive countermove for the American Negro."[58] In a letter to his mother while he was at Oxford, Locke reflected: "Oxford is a training-school for the governing classes, and has taught your son its lesson."[59] The Oxford experience steeled Locke's sense of destiny as a non-chauvinistic "advocate of cultural racialism"[60] and as a race leader.

So acutely did the Thanksgiving Day dinner incident traumatize Locke that he left Oxford without taking a degree, and spent the next two years studying Kant at the University of Berlin and touring Eastern Europe as well.[61] Locke mentions in his psychograph that, while at Oxford, he became "but dimly aware of the new realism of the Austrian philosophy of value."[62] During his study at the University of Berlin in 1910-1911, where he earned a B.Litt., Locke became conversant with the "Austrian school" of anthropology, known as philosophical anthropology, under the tutelage of Franz Brentano, Alexius von Meinong, Christian Freiherr von Ehrenfels, Natorp and others. In Paris, he studied under Bergson and others. Locke preferred Europe to America. There were moments when Locke resolved never to return to the United States. Reluctantly, he did so in 1911. In 1912, with the help of Booker T. Washington, Locke joined the faculty of Howard University as a professor of English.[63]

In 1916-1917, Locke took a sabbatical as an Austin Teaching Fellow for one year at Harvard. During his graduate year there, Locke explored the ideas of such great thinkers as Hugo Münsterberg and von Ehrenfels, as well as Kant and Hegel.[64] In his psychograph, Locke writes: "Verily paradox has followed me the rest of my days: at Harvard [as an undergraduate], clinging to the genteel tradition of Palmer, Royce and Münsterberg, yet attracted by the disillusion of Santayana and the radical protest of James: again I returned [as a graduate student] to work under Royce but was destined to take my doctorate in value theory under Perry."[65] Here, Locke discloses important links in his intellectual pedigree, which included the value theorists of Europe and the pragmatists of America.[66]

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57 Stewart, *op. cit.*

58 Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

59 M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys, eds. *The History of the University of Oxford*, Vol. VII. *Nineteenth-Century Oxford*, Part 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 804, citing Jeffrey Green, *Black Edwardians* (1998) 154.

60 Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

61 Menand, *op. cit.*, 390.

62 Kallen, *op. cit.*, 121-22.

63 Menand, *op. cit.*, 390.

64 William B. Harvey, "The Philosophical Anthropology of Alain Locke," in Russell J. Linnemann (ed.) *Alain Locke: Reflections on a Modern Renaissance Man* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University, 1982) 18.

65 Kallen, op. cit., 122. For an analysis of Locke's dissertation on value theory, see Ernest Mason, "Alain Locke's Philosophy of Value," in Russell J. Linnemann (ed.) *Alain Locke: Reflections on a Modern Renaissance Man* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1982) 1-16. Locke had originally intended to study under Royce as his PhD supervisor, but Royce had died by the time Locke returned to Harvard.

66 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 10.

Locke's dissertation, "The Problem of Classification in Theory of Value," was an extension of a lengthy essay he had written at Oxford. It was Harvard mentor Josiah Royce who inspired Locke's interest in the philosophy of value.[67] Indeed, the underlying basis for Locke's philosophy was values theory. Value theory constituted the "pivot of Locke's thinking," which was "his belief that human values are central in determining the course of social life."[68] For Locke, there are five value-types, each with corresponding "feeling-modes" which are, respectively:

MODAL QUALITY	VALUE TYPE	VALUE PREDICATES	VALUE POLARITY	VALUE POLARITY
			Positive	*Negative*
EXALTATION (Awe–Worship)	**Religious**	Holy–Unholy Good–Evil	Holiness Salvation	Sin Damnation
TENSION (Conflict-Choice)	**Ethical**/ **Moral**	Good–Bad Right–Wrong	Conscience Right	Temptation Crime
ACCEPTANCE	**Logical**	Correct–Incorrect	Consistency	Contradiction
AGREEMENT	**Scientific**	True–False	Certainty	Error
REPOSE/ EQUILIBRIUM	**Aesthetic**/ **Artistic**	Beautiful–Ugly Fine– Unsatisfactory	Satisfaction Joy	Disgust Distress[69]

These value genres constitute Locke's typology of values. The five "value provinces"[70] are the battlefields of cultural conflicts and the common ground of mutual respect through value transposition. Values are "rooted in attitudes, not in reality and pertain to ourselves, not to the world."[71] Moreover, Locke favoured a "historical-comparative approach" as "the only proper […] way of understanding values, including particularly those of one's own culture and way of life."[72]

In 1918, Locke was awarded his PhD in philosophy from Harvard. That same year, Locke became a Bahá'í. In fine, Locke was "perhaps the most deeply and exquisitely educated African American of his generation."[73] This assessment is brought into even sharper relief in the sobering knowledge that, as late as 1935—a full generation after Locke—three-fourths of all blacks had not gone beyond a fourth-grade education.[74] His "exquisite" education had prepared Locke for his greatest historical role, which was—to cite his psychograph—to become "a philosophical mid-wife to a generation of younger

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67 Molesworth, op. cit., 176.

68 Mason, "Alain Locke's Social Philosophy," 28.

69 Locke, "Values and Imperatives," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 43.

70 Locke, op. cit., 45.

71 Locke, op. cit., 36.

72 Locke, "The Need for a New Organon in Education," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 272.

73 Charles Molesworth, "Alain Locke and Walt Whitman: Manifestos and National Identity," in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 175.

74 Fitchue, op. cit., 113.

Negro poets, writers, artists."[75]

Academic career

As previously mentioned, in 1912 Locke joined the faculty of the Teachers College at Howard University as Assistant Professor of the Teaching of English and Instructor in Philosophy and Education. There Locke taught literature, English, education, and ethics and, following president Lewis B. Moore's retirement in 1912, ethics and logic at Howard University itself. In the spring of 1915, Locke proposed a course on the scientific study of race and race relations. But the white ministers on Howard University's Board of Trustees rejected his petition. They opposed him because they felt that controversial subjects such as race had no place at a school whose mission was to educate black professionals. However, the Howard chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Social Science Club sponsored a two-year extension course of public lectures, which Locke called, "Race Contacts and Inter-Racial Relations: A Study in the Theory and Practice of Race."[76] As the focus of his lectures, Locke's social conception of race represented a further development of the thought of cultural anthropologist Franz Boas. Locke viewed Boas as a "major prophet of democracy."[77]

Boas, who had significant contacts with Bahá'ís, effectively deconstructed the so-called "scientific racism" so prevalent at that time. He was widely regarded by intellectual historians as one who "did more to combat race prejudice than any other person in history."[78] Boas convincingly exploded the myth that race had any real basis in scientific fact. Racism was biological nonsense. Cultural anthropology sought to establish "culture"—as opposed to pseudo-scientific fictions of race—as a "central social science paradigm."[79] Locke began his lectures by asserting Boas's distinction between racial difference and racial inequality. Racial difference is biological; racial inequality is social.[80]

Locke himself had a three-tiered conception of race: (1) theoretical; (2) practical; (3) social.[81] Like Boas, Locke held that race has no biological significance. At best, it is a social construct that can serve to enhance group identity. At worst, race can be used as a tool of oppression. Indeed, Locke foresaw the "ultimate biological destiny of the

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75 Kallen, op. cit., 122.

76 Menand, op. cit., 396 and Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 205. These lectures were later edited and published: Alain Locke, *Race Contacts and Interracial Relations*, edited by Jeffery C. Stewart (Washington: Howard University Press, 1992).

77 See Alain Locke, "Major Prophet of Democracy." Review of *Race and Democratic Society* by Franz Boas. *Journal of Negro Education* 15.2 (Spring 1946): 191-92. See also Mark Helbling, "Feeling Universality and Thinking Particularistically: Alain Locke, Franz Boas, Melville Herkskovits, and the Harlem Renaissance," *Prospects* 19 (1994): 289-314.

78 Cited by Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of 'Race' in Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 83.1 (June 1996): 53, n. 23.

79 Pascoe, *op. cit.*, 53.

80 Menand, *op. cit.*, 396-97.

81 Fraser, *op. cit.*, 7.

human stock" as mulatto, or mixed, "like rum in the punch."[82] Sadly, Locke's lectures had no influence on his philosophical contemporaries.[83]

In June 1925, Locke was fired. He did not return to Howard University until 1928, under its first black president, Mordecai Johnson.[84] Locke was subsequently promoted to chair of the philosophy department. He is credited with having first introduced the study of anthropology, along with philosophy and aesthetics, into the curriculum at Howard.[85]

In 1943, Locke was on leave as Inter-American exchange Professor to Haiti under the joint auspices of the American Committee for Inter-American Artistic and Intellectual Relations and the Haitian Ministry of Education. Towards the end of his stay there, Haitian President Lescot personally decorated Locke with the National Order of Honor and Merit, grade of Commandeur.[86] During the 1945-1946 academic year, Locke was Visiting Professor at the University of Wisconsin and in 1947 as Visiting Professor at the New School for Social Research. One of Locke's former students at Wisconsin, Beth Singer, described her professor as follows: "Locke was a quiet, extremely scholarly, and well organized lecturer; I do not recall his speaking from notes."[87] After mentioning the fact that Locke was a Bahá'í, Singer recalls that "Dr. Locke seemed somehow aloof, and my friends and I were pretty much in awe of him."[88]

On 28 May 1946, Locke gave a commencement address at University of Wisconsin High School. Beth Singer notes the subsequent newspaper story, "Dr. Locke Pleads for World Culture," having quoted Locke as saying: "[W]e are fast approaching a stage in which culture will have to be international. This culture must have courtesy and reciprocity and must be aided by religious tolerance. […] And in order to have tolerance, we must have every person intelligently aware of the common denominators of basic ideas and basic moral issues. That is necessary for basic unity."[89] Interpreted through a journalist's ear, this report of Locke's lecture is a way to understand Locke in more practical, mundane terms. The text of that speech is extant, to which the newspaper

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82 "The Negro's Contribution to American Culture," *Journal of Negro Education* 8 (July 1939): 521-39, reprinted in Jeffrey C. Stewart (ed.), *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke: A Selection of His Essays on Art and Culture* (New York: Garland, 1983) and quoted in Tommy Lee Lott, "Nationalism and Pluralism in Alain Locke's Social Philosophy," in Lawrence Foster and Patricia Herzog (eds.) *Defending Diversity: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives on Pluralism and Multiculturalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994): 106.

83 Fraser, *op. cit.*, 17.

84 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 296-97.

85 Harvey, *op. cit.*, 21.

86 Alain Locke, "The Negro in the Three Americas," *Journal of Negro Education* 14 (Winter 1944): 7 (editorial note).

87 Beth J. Singer 1999. "Alain Locke Remembered," in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader in Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 328.

88 Singer, *op. cit.*, 329.

89 Singer, *op. cit.*, 329-30.

account may be compared.[90]

From 1948-1952, Locke taught at City College of New York as well as continuing to teach at Howard University. In June 1953, Locke retired, and was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. He moved to New York in July.

The Harlem Renaissance

As "philosophical mid-wife to a generation of younger Negro poets, writers, [and] artists,"[91] Alain Locke was the ideological mastermind behind the Harlem Renaissance, "an artistic explosion in the decade following World War I."[92] In its mythic and utopian sense, Harlem was the "race capital" and the largest "Negro American" community in the world. The Harlem Renaissance, consequently, presented itself as a microcosm or "self-portraiture" of black culture to America and to the world. The movement was an effusion of art borne of the experience of "even ordinary living" that has "epic depth and lyric intensity."[93] As editor of the anthology known as *The New Negro*, published in December 1925,[94] Locke contributed the title essay, which served as a manifesto.

For Locke, art ought to contribute to the improvement of life—a pragmatist aesthetic principle Richard Shusterman calls "meliorism."[95] The Harlem Renaissance—known also as the "New Negro Movement"—sought to advance freedom and equality for blacks through art. It was "not just a great creative outburst in the stimulating atmosphere of the 1920s," it was "actually a highly self-conscious modern artistic movement."[96] Locke himself spoke of a "race pride," "race genius" and the "race-gift."[97] This "race pride" was to be cultivated through developing a distinctive culture, a hybrid of African and African American elements.[98] Locke had hoped the Harlem Renaissance would provide "an emancipating vision to America" and would advance "a new democracy in American culture."[99] But the Harlem Renaissance was more of an "aristocratic" than democratic

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90 The present writer has requested—but not yet received—the text of this speech, archived in the Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-123, Folder 8 ("On Becoming World Citizens." Commencement Address at University of Wisconsin High School, 28 May 1946. [typescript]).

91 Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

92 See Verner D. Mitchell, "Alain Locke: Philosophical 'Midwife' of the Harlem Renaissance," in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 192.

93 Locke, *The New Negro*, 6 and 47, quoted in Franke, *op. cit.*, 23 and 26.

94 Alain Locke (ed.), *The New Negro* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, Inc., 1925). Reprinted, with a new preface by Robert Hayden (New York: Atheneum, 1969).

95 Shusterman, *op. cit.*, 102 and 109, n. 8.

96 Astrid Franke, "Struggling with Stereotypes: The Problems of Representing a Collective Identity," in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 22.

97 Locke, *The New Negro* 11, 47, 99, quoted in Shusterman, *op. cit.*, 105.

98 Fraser, *op. cit.*, 15-17.

99 Alain Locke, *The New Negro*, 52-3 and 9, quoted in Richard J. Shusterman, "Pragmatist Aesthetics: Roots and Radicalism," in Leonard Harris (ed.), *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader in Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 102 and 104.

approach to culture.[100] In principle, Locke was an avowed supporter of W. E. B. Du Bois' idea of a cultural elite (the "Talented Tenth"[101]), but differed from Du Bois's insistence that art serve as propaganda.[102]

Much criticized by other African Americans, Locke himself came to regret the Harlem Renaissance's excesses of exhibitionism, after it had dissolved just a few years later.[103] While the dazzling success of the movement was short-lived, it is said to have had a more subtle, yet enduring influence. According to Johnny Washington, the civil rights movement actually had its roots, in a subterranean way, in the Harlem Renaissance: "Locke was to the Harlem Renaissance what Martin Luther King, Jr., was to the civil rights movement of the 1960s."[104] In the end, however, the efflorescence of Black culture failed to lead to civil and political rights for African Americans. It would take a Martin Luther King, Jr. to spearhead a movement that would achieve that goal.[105]

Eventually, as Posnock points out, "Locke enunciated his theory of cosmopolitanism *post facto*, after the Harlem Renaissance, his principal site of engagement, had largely run its course."[106] As Locke matured in his philosophical thinking, he favoured open identities over closed social identities.

Locke as a Bahá'í

Prior to the Harlem Renaissance, Locke had become a Bahá'í. As stated earlier, Locke embraced the Bahá'í Faith in 1918, the very same year that he received his doctorate from Harvard There is thus a certain synchronicity between Locke's religion and his philosophy and, as I shall argue, a synergy between the two acted as a dynamic intensifier. Indeed, around the same time as he had launched the Harlem Renaissance, Locke had both made a pilgrimage to the Bahá'í world centre in Haifa, Israel (then Palestine), and travelled throughout the American South on a Bahá'í-sponsored lecture tour.

In his psychograph, Locke had described himself as a "universalist in religion."[107] In a private communication, one leading authority on Locke recently expressed doubts as to his formal affiliation with the Bahá'í Faith. So, the question has to be asked: What direct proof, beyond circumstantial evidence, establishes Locke's actual status as a

[100] Molesworth, *op. cit.*, 185.

[101] Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 6. Locke expressed his enthusiastic support for Du Bois's concept in an essay, "The Talented Tenth," *Howard University Record* 12.7 (December 1918): 15-18, but locked antlers with Du Bois over the latter's insistence that art be propaganda, in a later essay, "Art or Propaganda?" *Harlem* 1 (November 1928): 12-13. See discussion in Richard Keaveny, "Aesthetics and the Isuue of Identity," in Leonard Harris (ed.), *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader in Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 127-40.

[102] See Alain Locke, "Art or Propaganda?" *Harlem* 1 (November 1928): 12-13.

[103] Molesworth, *op. cit.*, 176.

[104] Johnny Washington, *Alain Locke and Philosophy: A Quest for Cultural Pluralism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986) xxv.

[105] Fraser, *op. cit.*, 16.

[106] Posnock, *op. cit.*, 198.

[107] Kallen, *op. cit.*, 121.

Bahá'í? While he certainly associated with Bahá'ís and participated in Bahá'í events—over a number of years, in fact—was Locke ever formally on record as a declared Bahá'í? Moreover, did Locke's involvement in the Bahá'í Faith influence his vocation as a philosopher? To address these questions, I will discuss Locke's involvement in the Bahá'í Faith on the basis of archival as well as published documents.

Since formal enrollment procedures did not exist at that time, no archival record of the exact date of Locke's conversion has yet been found. The academic and religious literature on Locke could, at best, speculate as to the date of his conversion, which had, in itself, been the source of some doubt (outside of Bahá'í circles). In the course of my research and at my request, archivist Roger Dahl, searching the National Bahá'í Archives for documents relating to Locke, discovered the evidence scholars had been looking for: Dahl found a "Bahá'í Historical Record"[108] card that Locke had filled out in 1935, at the request of the National spiritual assembly, which, in conducting its Bahá'í census, had mailed the forms in triplicate to all Bahá'ís through their local spiritual assemblies and other channels.[109] Locke was one of seven black respondents from the Washington, DC, Bahá'í community to complete the card.[110] In "Place of acceptance of Bahá'í Faith" is entered "Washington, DC." Locke personally completed and signed the card, "Alain Leroy Locke" (in the space designated, "19. Signature"). Under item #13, "Date of acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith," Locke entered the year "1918."[111] This date is significant in that it predates previous estimates that placed Locke's conversion in the early 1920s.[112]

The discovery of Locke's Bahá'í Historical Record card confirms what was already evident from a host of other sources. (Those sources, however, failed to pinpoint the date of Locke's conversion.) The card does not, however, shed any light on the precise circumstances surrounding his conversion. It is quite possible that Locke came into contact with the Faith through W. E. B. Du Bois, who had personally met 'Abdu'l-Bahá and had lectured at Green Acre (a Bahá'í school in southern Maine) as well. It is just as likely that Locke encountered the Faith through Louis Gregory, or through one of the other Bahá'ís or friends of the Faith from among the circle of educated African Americans in Washington, DC. After all, 1918 was just six years after 'Abdu'l-Bahá had

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108 A facsimile of Louis Gregory's "Bahá'í Historical Record" card is reproduced in Morrison, *op. cit.*, between pp. 208 and 209.

109 On the Bahá'í Historical Record cards, see Robert Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, 1900-1912* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995) 412; and "Bahá'í Historical Record," *Bahá'í News*, No. 94 (August 1935): 2. The Historical Record Cards have been available to researchers for some time, but they gave no clues about Locke because his card has only recently been discovered.

110 Gayle Morrison, *op. cit.*, "Table. Information about 99 black respondents among 1,1813 Bahá'ís surveyed, 1935-c. 1937, from Bahá'í Historical Record Cards in the National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois," 204.

111 Bahá'í Historical Record Cards Collection, and Biographical Information Collection, NBA. The date, "1918," given in the table compiled by Morrison (ibid.) is certainly based on the personal data Locke provided.

112 See Charlotte Linfoot, "Alain LeRoy Locke, 1886-1954," in *The Bahá'í World: An International Record*, Volume XIII, 1954-1963 (Haifa: Universal House of Justice, [1970] 1980) 894-5. In this obituary, Linfoot states: "In the early 1920's Dr. Locke came into contact with the Bahá'í Faith in Washington, DC" (895).

lectured at Howard University and at the NAACP convention in Chicago. In short, the Faith was widely known among the black intelligentsia, and Locke could have been introduced to it by any number of people.[113]

Curiously, Locke's name does not appear on an October 1920 list of the Washington, DC, Bahá'ís. But his name does appear in at least twenty subsequent lists,[114] from March 1922 to 1951, showing a Bahá'í affiliation of at least thirty consecutive years, or thirty-four years dating back to 1918, and probably thirty-seven years, assuming Locke maintained his affiliation until his death in 1954. But the nature of his relationship to the Bahá'í Faith at the end of his life is also unknown, since in July 1953 Locke moved to New York, where there is no record of his contact with the Bahá'í community there. Locke died on 9 June 1954, in Washington, DC. On June 11th at Benta's Chapel, Brooklyn, Locke's memorial was presided over by Dr. Channing Tobias, with cremation following at Fresh Pond Crematory in Little Village, Long Island.[115] The brief notice that appeared in the *Baha'i News* in 1954 (No. 282, p. 11) states that: "Quotations from the Baha'i Writings and Baha'i Prayers were read at Dr. Locke's funeral." This shows that Locke remained a committed Bahá'í to the end of his life.

To date, no systematic effort has been undertaken to reconstruct Locke's life as a Bahá'í. A provisional chronology of Alain Locke's Bahá'í activities may be outlined as follows:

1915 Locke attends his first Bahá'í fireside (Washington, DC).[116]
1918 Locke accepts the Bahá'í Faith (Washington, DC).[117]

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113 My thanks to Gayle Morrison for suggesting these possibilities.

114 Office of the Secretary Records, Bahá'í Membership Lists Files, Bahá'í National Center. These lists include: March 1922; September 1925; 1928-1929 (appears to be updated by hand and written over the typewritten 1927-1928 list); 14 January 1934; 22 January 1936; 1937; January 1938; 11 January 1939; 1940; 1941; 1942; 15 January 1943; 1944; 1945; 1946; 1947; 1948; 1949; 1950; 1951. Courtesy of Roger M. Dahl, Archivist, National Bahá'í Archives.

115 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 300. Locke instructed that his remains be cremated. See Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-1, Folder 6 (Will and instructions in case of death); and Folder 7 (Last will and testament, 1943). Along with many other Bahá'ís at that time, Locke was probably unaware of the Bahá'í proscription against cremation.

116 This may be deduced from a letter written by Mariam Haney to "My dear Mr. Locke," in which she urges Locke to attend his first Bahá'í fireside (evidently, at the home of the Obers) for not only his sake, but for her sake and for the sake of other Bahá'ís as well: "My friends write me that you have never been to see them. I really was quite surprised, for my first thought about it all was that you would be rendering them a service. If you ever go once, I know you will want to go again, even if this first time I should ask you to go just to please me! I have your interests at heart and theirs as well, so you can gather why I should be anxious for a meeting between you. Through Mr. and Mrs. Ober, you would meet— (if you cared to) some very lovely people, and I should feel proud to have them know you." Haney to Locke, February 1915, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-33, Folder 49 (Haney, Mariam).

117 Bahá'í Historical Record Cards Collection, and Biographical Information Collection, NBA. Locke received three copies of this form from Joseph F. Harley, III, secretary of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Washington, DC. Harley to Locke, 27 August 1935, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith).

1921 Session Chair on Friday evening, 20 May 1921 (Washington, DC). Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races.[118]

1922 Visits Bahá'ís of England.[119]

1923 Service to youth (Washington, DC).[120]

1923 or 1924 (?) Pilgrimage to Haifa (Israel).[121]

1924 Speaker at Third Racial Amity Convention, 28-30 March 1924 (New York), along with Franz Boas, James Weldon Johnson, and Jane Addams, among others.[122] Appointment by NSA to Interracial Amity Committee, 19 May 1924.[123] Speaker at Fourth Racial Amity Convention, 22-23 October 1924. Second session, Locke presented, "Negro Art and Culture" (Philadelphia).[124]

1925 Reappointment by NSA to Interracial Amity Committee.[125]
Speaker, "Universal Peace," 5 July 1925, Bahá'í Congress, Green Acre (New York).[126]

1925-1926 Lecture tour throughout the American South.[127]

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[118] Louis Gregory, "Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races." In *Star of the West* 12.6 (24 June 1921): 117-18. Reprinted as vol. 7 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1978). See also idem, "Inter-Racial Amity," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume Two, 1926-1928*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1929; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 281; and idem, "Racial Amity in America." In *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record*, Volume VII, 1936-1938 (National spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, 1939; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 655; Mariam Haney (secretary, The Teaching Committee of Nineteen), "A Compilation of the Story of the Convention for Amity," 31 May 1921, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith).

[119] Of that meeting, Locke writes: "Through a miscarriage of plans, due to necessity of taking some [heart] treatment, I could not manage to meet the group of friends in Stuttgart. I did, however, have some very appreciated hours with the friends in England, especially Miss Rosenberg." Locke to Parsons, 21 October 1922, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA. See also Remey to Locke, 10 February 1923, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-80, Folder 1 (Remey, Charles Mason).

[120] "It is certain that the youth for whom you are now doing so much will[,] to a greater and greater degree, as the years pass, appreciate your service." Gregory to Locke, 12 March 1923, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-32, Folder 50 (Gregory, Louis G.)

[121] On his passport issued 26 June 1922, Locke, while in Berlin, was granted a visa, dated 25 August 1923, to "Egypt, Palestine & United Kingdom." Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-2, Folder 2 (Passports 1922, 1924).

[122] Morrison, *op. cit.*, 146; Gregory, "Inter-Racial Amity," 283; idem, "Racial Amity in America.," 657; Locke to Parsons, 21 October 1922, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA. Members of the committee included Agnes Parsons, Elizabeth Greenleaf, Mariam Haney, Alain Locke, Mabel Ives, Louise Waite, Louise Boyle, Roy Williams, Philip R. Seville, and Mrs. Atwater.

[123] Morrison, *op. cit.*, 147. Locke's response to his appointment was enthusiastic: "I received word today of the appointment on the Inter-Amity Committee, and am especially anxious to be able to contribute my share to its conferences and findings." Locke to Parsons, 22 May 1924, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA.

[124] Morrison, *op. cit.*, 149; Gregory, "Racial Amity in America.," 658.

[125] This committee had "essentially the same membership for the period 1925-26." Morrison, *op. cit.*, 155.

[126] "The Seventeenth Annual Convention and Bahá'í Congress," *Bahá'í News Letter*, No. 6 (1925): 3. Holley to Locke, 1 June 1925; Holley to Locke, undated ("Sunday P.M." [*sic*]); Holley to Locke, 23 June 1925, western Union Cablegram, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace).

[127] "News of the Cause," *Bahá'í News Letter*, No. 10 (Feb. 1926): 6.

"Impressions of Haifa" published in the *Bahá'í Year Book*.[128]
Special consultation with NSA on race relations (November, Chicago).[129]

1927 Speaker, "Cultural Reciprocity," World Unity Conference, 27 March 1927 (New Haven).[130]
Lends name as contributing editor, *World Unity: A Monthly Magazine Interpreting the Spirit of the New Age* (New York).[131]
Appointed to first National Inter-Racial Amity Committee (8 January 1927).[132]
Progress report on interracial work (December).[133]

1927-1928 Appointed to second National Inter-Racial Amity Committee.[134]

1928-1929 Appointed to third National Inter-Racial Amity Committee.

1929 "Impressions of Haifa" reprinted in the *Bahá'í World 1926-1928*.[135]

1929-1930 Appointed to fourth National Inter-Racial Amity Committee.[136]

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128 Alaine [*sic*] Locke, "Impressions of Haifa," in *Bahá'í Year Book, Volume One, April 1925-April 1926*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1926) 81, 83. Morrison, *op. cit.*, 151 and 343, n. 18. Holley to Locke, 29 December 1925; Holley to Locke, 28 January 1926, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace). "Impressions of Haifa" was first published in *Star of the West* 15, 13-14. In probable reference to this article, Shoghi Effendi wrote: "The article by Prof. Locke is very good and sufficient." (From a letter dated 12 March 1996 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada Publishing Committee). Courtesy of The Universal House of Justice, enclosure to letter dated 16 July 2001 to the present writer.

129 Morrison, *op. cit.*, 164.

130 Holley to Locke, 17 March 1927; Holley to Locke, 20 March 1927; Holley to Locke, 30 March 1927, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace); and Box 164-112, Folder 21 ("Cultural Reciprocity").

131 Holley to Locke, 20 April 1927; Holley to Locke, 16 June 1927; Holley to Locke, 13 February 1930, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace).

132 "National Committee on Race Amity Appointed," *Bahá'í News Letter*, No. 16 (March 1927): 5. Committee members: Agnes Parsons ("Chairman"), Louis Gregory (Executive Secretary), Louise Boyle, Mariam Haney, Coralie Cook, Dr. Zia M. Bagdadi, Dr. Alain Locke. Morrison, *op. cit.*, 166 and 344, n. 4.

133 Louis Gregory, National Committee on Inter-Racial Unity, Gregory to National spiritual assembly and all Local Spiritual Assemblies of the United States and Canada, 23 February 1927, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith). This report was praised by Shoghi Effendi as a "splendid document [...] so admirable in its conception, so sound and sober in its language" and which "has struck a responsive chord in my heart" (Morrison, *op. cit.*, 173 and 347, n. 20). Excerpts published in "Inter-Racial Amity Conferences," *Bahá'í News Letter*, no. 22 (March 1928).

134 "Committees of the National spiritual assembly 1927-1928," *Bahá'í News Letter*, No. 19 (August 1927): 4. Members of this new committee: Agnes Parsons, Louis Gregory, Coralie Cook, Miss Elizabeth Hopper, Dr. Zia M. Bagdadi, Dr. Alain Locke, Miss Isabel Rives.

135 Alaine [*sic*] Locke, "Impressions of Haifa," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume II, April 1926-April 1928*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1928; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 125, 127. Original manuscript in Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-115, Folder 29 ("Impressions of Haifa" [typescript]).

136 "Committees of the national spiritual assembly 1929-1930," *Bahá'í News Letter*, No. 32 (May 1929): 4. Members: Louis Gregory (Chairman), Shelley Parker (Secretary), Agnes Parsons, Louise Boyle, Mariam Haney, Dr. Zia Bagdadi, Dr. Alain Locke, Loulie Mathews, Miss Alice Higginbotham.

1930 "Impressions of Haifa" reprinted in the *Bahá'í World 1928-1930*.[137]
Annual progress report on interracial work, 1929-1930.[138]
Invited by Shoghi Effendi to comment on working translation of Kitáb-i-Íqán.[139]

1931-1932 Accepts appointment by NSA to fifth National Inter-Racial Amity Committee.[140]

1932 Speaker, Racial Amity Convention, 10 December 1932 (New York).
Planned in cooperation with the National Urban League.[141]

1933 "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle" published in *Bahá'í World 1930-1932*.[142]

1935 Appointed to Teaching Committee (Washington, DC).[143]
Reports on "stagnation" in the racial amity work (18 April 1935).[144]
Speaker, "Abdul-Baha on World Peace," 26 November 1935 (Washington, DC).[145]

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137 Alain Locke, "Impressions of Haifa," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume III, April 1928-April 1930*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 280, 282.

138 Louis Gregory, "Interracial Amity Committee" [1929-1930 Annual Report], *Bahá'í News Letter*, no. 40 (April 1930) 10-12. The committee members were: Louis G. Gregory (chairman), Shelley N. Parker (secretary), Agnes Parsons, Mariam Haney, Louise D. Boyle, Zia M. Bagdadi, Alain Locke, Alice Higgenbotham, Loulie A. Matthews. In reference to a draft letter (requested by the NSA) to Mrs. Herbert Hoover, who held a reception for black Congressman Oscar DePriest, the committee "pointed out that interracial amity is the basis of universal peace" (*ibid.*, 12).

139 Ruhi Afnan (on behalf of Shoghi Effendi) to Locke, 15 February 1930; Afnan (on behalf of Shoghi Effendi) to Locke, 5 July 1930; Shoghi Effendi to Locke, 5 July 1930, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-10, Folder 2 (Afnan, Ruhi). See appendix.

140 "National Bahá'í Committees 1931-1932," *Bahá'í News Letter*, No. 53 (July 1931): 2. Members: Loulie Mathews (chairman), Louis G. Gregory (secretary), Dr. Zia M. Bagdadi, Mabelle L. Davis, Frances Fales, Sara L. Witt, Alain L. Locke, Shelley N. Parker, Annie K. Lewis. Of his acceptance, Locke writes: "Your letter about the Interracial committee was welcome and enheartening. I have written Mr. Lunt my acceptance, and hope next year to participate more actively in the Amity conferences and consultations." Locke to Gregory, 6 June 1931, Louis Gregory Papers, NBA. Louis Gregory, "The Annual Convention," *Bahá'í News*, no. 52 (May 1931): 3. See Morrison, *op. cit.*, 349, n. 29.

141 Locke spoke at the second session. Louis Gregory (on behalf of the National Bahá'í Committee for Racial Amity), "Inter-Racial Amity Activities," *Bahá'í News*, No. 72 (April 1933): 6. See also Morrison, *op. cit.*, 194, citing "Committee Reports: Committee on Inter-Racial Amity," *Bahá'í News*, No. 74 (May 1933): 13 as well.

142 See note 1 *supra*.

143 Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Washington, DC, untitled report, 1935, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith). Members of the Teaching Committee: Stanwood Cobb (chairman), Charles Mason Remey (vice-chairman), Mrs. John Stewart (secretary), Clarence Baker, Louise Boyle, William Gibson, Alain Locke, George Miller, Ethel Murray.

144 Locke to Holley, 18 April 1935, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace).

145 Held at the Tea House of the Dodge Hotel. Official program, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith). In a note to Locke written on an announcement of this event sent out by the local spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of Washington, DC, Joseph Harley III wrote: "Your Bahá'í record cards have not been received– Bring them Monday, please." (From the Washington, DC Bahá'í Archives.)

Resigns from Teaching Committee, 10 December 1935 (Washington, DC).[146]

1936 "The Orientation of Hope" published in *Bahá'í World 1932-1934*.[147]

1943 Speaker, 24 October 1943, Bahá'í Center/Youth Rally (Washington, DC).[148]

1944 Speaker, Thirty-Sixth Racial Amity Convention (New York).[149]
Sends message to 20th anniversary of the passing of Woodrow Wilson (New York).[150]

1945 "Lessons in World Crisis" published in *Bahá'í World 1940-1944*.[151]

1946 Speaker, "Democracy in Human Relations," Rhode Island School of Design. (Jointly sponsored by Negro College Club and Providence, Rhode Island Bahá'ís.)[152]

1949 Name appears on list of Bahá'í eligible voters, 6 April 1949.[153]

1949 Louis Gregory appeals to Locke to identify more fully with Faith.[154]

1951 Louis Gregory again appeals to Locke to identify more fully with Faith.[155]

1952 Locke invited to submit ideas for the "Centenary of Universal Religion."[156]
Picture appears in article on Faith in October 1952 issue of *Ebony*.

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146 Locke to Cobb, 10 December 1935, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-21, Folder 16 (Stanwood Cobb).

147 Alain Locke, "The Orientation of Hope," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume V, April 1932-April 1934*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1936; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 527-28. Reprint in Leonard Harris (ed.), *The Philosophy of Alain Locke* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989) 129-132. Leonard Harris' reference (129 n.) should be emended to read, "Volume V, 1932-1934" (not "Volume IV, 1930-1932"). Original manuscript in Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-123, Folder 11 ("The Orientation of Hope." 1934 [typescript]).

148 "I understand from Miss Juliet Thompson that you are going to speak at the Bahá'í center on the afternoon of October 24th." Gulick to Locke, 11 October 1943, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-33, Folder 17 (Gulick, Robert L. Jr.).

149 Morrison, *op. cit.*, 285.

150 Gulick to Locke, 28 January 1944; Gulick to Locke, "25" [February 1944], Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-33, Folder 17 (Gulick, Robert L. Jr.).

151 Alain Locke, "Lessons in World Crisis," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume IX, April 1940-April 1944*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1945; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981) 745-47.

152 "Local Communities," *Bahá'í News*, No. 182 (April 1946): 6.

153 "Voting Members of the Washington, DC Bahá'í Community, 6 April 1949, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith).

154 Gregory to Locke, 6 April 1949, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-32, Folder 50 (Gregory, Louis G.): "Although your Bahá'í spirit has been admirably shown by so many traits and activities, yet I have the deepest longing that you will see the wisdom of wholly identifying yourself with the Faith, thereby increasing your joys and usefulness, perhaps twenty-fold."

155 Gregory to Locke, 21 January 1951, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-32, Folder 50 (Gregory, Louis G.): "... my longing is, that your identify yourself fully with it" [the Bahá'í Faith] ... My most earnest hope is that you will see clearly the way to unite with the Bahá'ís in either Washington or New York, in the latter of which, I am told, you maintain a residence."

156 Nina Matthisen to Locke, 5 September 1952; and press release (1953), Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith).

1954 Bahá'í writings and prayers read at his funeral.

From various indications in his unpublished correspondence, it seems that Locke's Bahá'í activities were intense but sporadic. This is not to say that Locke's engagement with the Faith was in any way superficial. His most profound experience as a Bahá'í was probably the event of his pilgrimage. It likely took place in 1923 or 1924. Locke travelled to the Holy Land and met Shoghi Effendi in the Bahá'í world centre on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Palestine (now Israel). In his reminiscences of that experience, published as "Impressions of Haifa" (1926, 1929, 1930),[157] Locke stressed the importance of being able to see a religion in its human incarnation, "without the mediation of symbols."[158] In Locke's eyes, Shoghi Effendi was the living embodiment of all Bahá'í virtues: "For after all the only enlightened symbol of a religious or moral principle is the figure of a personality endowed to perfection with its qualities and necessary attributes."[159] Describing Shoghi Effendi as a "gifted personality," Locke was privileged to see the Guardian's "[r]efreshingly human"[160] side as well. The two enjoyed a long walk and conversation in the Bahá'í gardens. For Locke, his "Impressions of Haifa" were deep and lasting.

Locke's universalism included social demonstrations of interracial unity, as exemplified by his participation in a "Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races" which took place in Washington, DC, 19-21 May 1921. This gathering was organized by Agnes S. Parsons (a white woman prominent in Washington high society) at the instruction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá who, during her second pilgrimage to Haifa (1920), said to her: "I want you to arrange in Washington a convention for unity between the white and colored people."[161] 'Abdul-Bahá considered this meeting to have had paramount symbolic and social importance.[162]

The conference was a spectacular success. As Leonard Harris notes: "The Bahá'í belief in the unity of humanity was expressed in practical terms by inter-racial meetings (then a fairly unusual situation in Christian America)."[163] Retrospectively, in its 1929-1930 annual report, the nine-member Interracial Amity Committee, of which Locke was an active participant, assessed the significance of the first Amity Convention in 1921, Washington, DC: "The convention of the colored and white was in reality a great work, because if the question of the colored and white should not be resolved[,] it will be

157 Locke, "Impressions of Haifa" (1926, 1929, 1930).

158 Locke, "Impressions" (1930) 280.

159 Locke, *ibid*.

160 Locke, *ibid*.

161 Gregory, "Inter-racial Amity," 281. See Morrison, *op. cit.*, 134-43.

162 In a message conveyed by Mountfort Mills (an American Bahá'í recently returned from a visit to Palestine), 'Abdu'l-Bahá was reported to have said: "Say to this convention that never since the beginning of time has a convention of more importance been held. This convention stands for the oneness of humanity. It will become the cause of the removal of hostilities between the races. It will become the cause of the enlightenment of America. It will, if wisely managed and continued, check the deadly struggle between these races, which otherwise will inevitably break out" (Gregory, "Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races," 115).

163 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 5.

productive of great dangers in [the] future for America. Therefore the Confirmations [*sic*] of the Kingdom of Abha shall continually reach any person who strives after the conciliation of the colored and the white."[164] 'Abdu'l-Bahá subsequently praised Agnes Parsons as "the first person to raise the banner of the unity of the white and the colored."[165]

Locke saw considerable value in these race amity conferences. Despite his delicate heart and the considerable demands on him as a lecturer, the committee work and participation in these gatherings was worth his time and effort. According to archivist Roger Dahl, "Locke was a member of the national Race amity committee for at least five years between 1925 and 1932."[166] In 1931, Locke expressed his "hope next year to be called upon to participate more actively in the Amity conferences and consultations" and registered confidence that "the work is gradually reaching wider and wider circles."[167]

On a sombre note, it appears that Locke became somewhat pessimistic over the future prospects of interracial unity in the Washington, DC, Bahá'í community. In a letter dated 18 April 1935 to Horace Holley, Secretary-General of the national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, Locke wrote:

> Since I last saw you, I have had two occasions to meet with the local friends, and have very effectively renewed my contacts with them. This has also given me occasion to make some comparisons between the work as I knew it rather intimately before and as it seems to be going now. I regret to have to call your attention to what seems to me to be something approaching stagnation in the inter-racial work at Washington. This but confirms a feeling that I have had all along for several years that unfortunate personality influences have crept into the situation and decidedly hampered the development of this very important practical phase of the Cause. For a considerable while I thought this was my own personal bias concerning Mrs. Haney and Mrs. Cook who have pioneered so much in this field and have now for a long while exerted a control in it which threatens to become a monopolistic and hampering one.[168]

Mariam Haney (Mary Ida Haney [Parkhurst]) was mother of future Hand of the Cause Paul Haney. She adopted "Mariam" as her name when 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed her so in a tablet. Active for many years in the Washington, DC, Bahá'í community, she served on various national committees and was an editor of *The Bahá'í World*.[169] There

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164 Gregory, "Interracial Amity Committee" (1930) 10. (Note that this text differs from the translation given in another report (Gregory, "Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races," 115), but the gist is the same. In all likelihood, both translations were taken from the same Persian original.)

165 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Parsons, 26 July 1921 and 27 September 1921. See Morrison, *op. cit.*, 143 and 342, n. 34.

166 Dahl to Buck, 16 February 2001.

167 Locke to Gregory, 6 June 1931, Louis Gregory Papers, NBA.

168 Locke to Holley, 18 April 1935, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace).

169 Robert Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, 1900-1912* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995) 189.

are indications that Locke's estimate of Mariam Haney was initially positive. In a letter to Agnes Parsons, Locke writes: "I learned with great satisfaction from Mrs. Haney of the plans for the Amity Conference in New York. I shall most certainly attend, and if I can in any way be of further assistance, please feel free to call upon me."[170] Assuming that Haney was centrally involved in planning the event, Locke's enthusiasm may be construed as an oblique endorsement of her role. Coralie F. Cook was a Washingtonian Bahá'í whose husband was a professor at Howard University.[171] In November 1926, the national spiritual assembly invited a group of black and white Bahá'ís for a special consultation on race. Mariam Haney and Coralie F. Cook and were both in that group, as was Alain Locke himself. How and why Locke became disaffected with these two mainstays of the race amity movement is not clear.

Locke was critical of other leading Washingtonian Bahá'í figures as well. By 1931, Locke had complained of "the deceptive platitudes of some of our friends, including even Dr. Leslie P. Hill."[172] This is a particularly stunning statement, as "Professor" Leslie Pickney Hill, who was the black principal of the Cheyney Institute (a teacher training school) had spoken at the Philadelphia convention of 22-23 October 1924 and was among those invited by the national spiritual assembly in November 1926 to a special consultation on race.[173]

Another dismaying development for Locke may have been the appointment of a predominantly white amity committee for the 1933-1934 Bahá'í year—an appointment that, evidently, excluded Locke himself.[174] It was around this time that the race amity initiatives went into decline, as chronicled by Gayle Morrison.[175] The last race amity committee was appointed in 1935-1936. In July 1936, the committee, in the words of Morrison, "unknowingly wrote its own epitaph" in stating: "The National Assembly has appointed no race amity committee this year. Its view is that race unity activities have sometimes resulted in emphasizing race differences rather than their unity and reconciliation within the Cause."[176] With the demise of the race amity committees, it would seem that Locke's special services were no longer needed. Finally, in 1941, Locke requested that the local spiritual assembly should henceforth regard him as an "isolated believer," explaining:

> I naturally am reluctant to sever a spiritual bond with the Bahai [*sic*] community, for I still hold to a firm belief in the truth of the Bahai principles. However, I am not in a position, and haven[']t been for years, to participate

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170 Locke to Parsons, 21 October 1922, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA.

171 Morrison, *op. cit.*, 140. See Alain Locke, "Obituary of George Cook," *Star of the West* 18, 254. Mariam Haney had solicited this obituary. Haney to Locke, 25 September 1931, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-33, Folder 49 ("Haney, Mariam").

172 Locke to Gregory, 6 June 1931, Louis Gregory Papers, NBA.

173 Morrison, *op. cit.*, 148-49, 164 and 182.

174 Agnes Parsons, who once again served as the chair of that committee, was struck by a car and killed in January 1934. She was seventy-three years old at her death. Morrison, op. cit, 198.

175 Morrison, *op. cit.*, 194-213.

176 Morrison, *op. cit.*, 213.

> very practically or even with the fullest enthusiasm, in the collective activities of the local friends. One of my reservations is, of course, the seeming impossibility of any really crusading attack on the practises of racial prejudice in spite of the good will and fair principles of the local believers. They are not to blame perhaps for their ineffectualness any more than we, who are in more practical movements[,] are for our absorption of time and energy in what we regard as more immediately important.[177]

The brightest moments in Alain Locke's public Bahá'í life were three: (1) the first Race Amity Conference, in which Locke presided as a session chair on 20 May 1921; (2) his presentation at the Racial Amity Convention in Harlem, 10 December 1932; and (3) his lecture, "Democracy in Human Relations" at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1946. In his 1933 report on behalf of the National Bahá'í Committee for Racial Amity, Louis Gregory was delighted with Locke's public declaration of his Bahá'í identity and his open endorsement of its principles:

> For a number of years, in fact since the first amity convention in Washington, Dr. Alain Locke has during the years been a contributor to the work of the Cause, without formally identifying himself with it. Perhaps the most significant feature of this conference was his strong, eloquent and beautiful address, in which he took a decided and definite stand within the ranks of the Cause. This attitude we believe will increasingly with the years influence people of capacity to investigate the mines of spiritual wealth to be found in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. It will also make what has long been a grandly useful life more glorious, serviceable and influential than ever before. It is to be hoped that the friends both locally and nationally, will largely make use of the great powers of Dr. Locke both in the teaching and administrative fields of the Cause. He has made the pilgrimage to Haifa. The Master in a Tablet praised him highly and it is known that the Guardian shares his love for our able brother.[178]

Louis Gregory's disclosure that the illustrious philosopher had received a "tablet" (letter) from 'Abdu'l-Bahá—presumably in response to a letter that Locke had sent—is yet another important piece of the puzzle in reconstructing this lesser known dimension of Locke's life. During the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it was customary for new converts to write directly to "the Master" as a testimony of faith. This was more of a precedent than a protocol, yet the practice was widespread enough to warrant the probability that Locke wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1918, the year Locke indicated that he had become a Bahá'í. Another bright moment in Locke's public life as a Bahá'í took place in 1946 during a visit to Rhode Island:

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177 Locke to Mariam Haney (corresponding secretary of the Washington, DC LSA), 30 March 1941, MSRC, Box 164-33, Folder 49 ("Haney, Mariam").

178 Louis Gregory (on behalf of the National Bahá'í Committee for Racial Amity), "Inter-Racial Amity Activities," *Bahá'í News*, No. 72 (April 1933): 6.

> When Dr. Alain Locke was scheduled as a speaker for the Rhode Island School of Design's exhibition of Negro art, the Negro College Club and the Providence Bahá'ís held a joint meeting for which Dr. Locke talked on "Democracy in Human Relations" and spoke of being a Bahá'í. There were twenty non-Bahá'ís present in spite of bad weather. His talk was reported and the next Sunday's program was announced in both the Urban League Bulletin and the Providence *Chronicle*.[179]

Of Locke's travel teaching tour in the southern USA, we know relatively little. This lecture tour took place at some point between October 1925 and spring 1926. This can be inferred from a statement that appeared in the *Bahá'í News Letter*: "Dr. Alain Locke of Washington, DC, who delivered one of the notable addresses at the 1925 Convention in Green Acre, is now making an extensive teaching journey into the Southern States which will bring him in touch with the most influential audiences and individuals. Reports of this journey will be published from time to time."[180] The description of Locke's address at the seventeenth annual convention and Baha'i Congress deserves notice:

> Dr. Alain LeRoy Locke of Washington, DC, delivered a polished address, portraying the great part which America can play in the establishment of world peace, if alive to its opportunity. The working out of social democracy can be accomplished here. To this end we should not think in little arcs of experience, but in the big, comprehensive way. Let our country reform its own heart and life. Needed reforms cannot be worked out by the action of any one group, but a fine sense of cooperation must secure universal fellowship. He praised Green Acre, which he declared to be an oasis in the desert of materiality. He urged all who were favored by this glorious experience to carry forth its glorious message and thus awaken humanity. In final analysis, peace cannot exist anywhere without existing everywhere.[181]

Whether due to Locke's disinclination to have such publicity or for some other reason, only one other report of Locke's trip appear to have been published in the Baha'i News

[179] "Local Communities," *Bahá'í News*, No. 182 (April 1946): 6.

[180] "News of the Cause," Baha'i News Letter, No. 10 (Feb. 1926): 6. Cf. Morrison, *op. cit.*, 151, who states that this tour occurred in 1925. However, Horace Holley indicates 1926: "I am delighted that the plans have worked out so well for your southern trip. I hope you will keep in touch with me during this trip and send me little memorandums of your public talks and any other news that might be of interest to the friends in the *Baha'i News Letter*. You understand, of course, that I will present the story of your trip in an impersonal way and not refer to you as the source of the news. Consequently, please do not be so modest that you lean backward, because trips of this kind are most inspiring to all the friends and I feel that they have a right to know the details of what I am sure is going to be a remarkable speaking journey." Holley to Locke, 28 January 1926, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace). In a later letter, it is clear that this trip must have taken place prior to August, as Locke was in Paris at that time. Holley to Locke, 17 August 1926, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace).

[181] "The Seventeenth Annual Convention and Baha'i Congress," *Baha'i News Letter*, No. 6 (1925): 3.

Letter. After referring to the publication of *The New Negro* "by Dr. Alain Locke, our brilliant Baha'i brother of Washington, DC and New York City," the article simply states: "Altogether inadequate has been the mention in previous issues of the News Letter of the remarkable work carried on throughout the South during the winter by Mr. Louis Gregory, Mr. Howard MacNutt, Dr. Locke and Mrs. Louise Boyle. These teachers, in cooperation with the Spiritual Assembly of Miami and many Baha'i groups and isolated believers, held an astounding number of meetings from autumn to spring, in churches, schools clubs [*sic*] and private homes, with the result that a powerful concentration of spiritual forces was focussed on this great and important territory."[182] According to Gayle Morrison, this travel teaching trip began in October 1925. There were seven Baha'i groups in Florida at that time. Morrison notes that "successful meetings" were held in Miami, Jacksonville and St. Augustine. Evidently, a new spiritual assembly was formed in Miami as one of the signal outcomes of this teaching trip, through the combined efforts of white Baha'i "homefront pioneers" and the itinerant teachers. One can thus say that Alain Locke was instrumental in helping to establish the Miami Baha'i council, which may well have been the first spiritual assembly in the South.[183] How far into the spring of 1926 the trip lasted is not certain.

One of the most surprising and rewarding outcomes of my archival research was the discovery of yet another contribution Locke had made to the Faith—one that, in fact, had no connection with race relations whatever. Among the Alain Locke Papers, preserved in the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, were found two letters to Locke, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi by his secretary at that time, Ruhi Afnan. These letters are dated 15 February and 5 July 1930. The first begins: "Dear Dr. Locke: Shoghi Effendi has been lately spending his leisure hours translating the Book of Iqan for he considers it to be the key to a true understanding of the Holy Scriptures, and can easily rank as one of the most, if not the most, important thing that Bahá'u'lláh revealed explaining the basic beliefs of the Cause. He who fully grasps the purport of that Book can claim to have understood the Cause."

The "Book of Iqan" is better known in English as the *Book of Certitude* (*Kitáb-i Íqán*), and has achieved distinction as Bahá'u'lláh's preeminent doctrinal text.[184] This reference to Shoghi Effendi's translation work as having been undertaken during "leisure hours" reinforces the magnitude of the Guardian's work load. In efforts to perfect his working translation of the *Íqán* from Persian to English, the Guardian called upon Locke as the person "best fitted to render him [Shoghi Effendi] an assistance" in giving critical feedback on the translation itself. The Guardian requested that Locke "go over it [the translation] carefully, studying every sentence—its structure as well as choice of words—and giving him your [Locke's] criticism as well as constructive suggestions that would make it more lucid, English [*sic*] and forceful." He adds, "Shoghi Effendi is fully aware of the many duties you have and how pressing your time is, and had he known of

182 "News of the Cause," *Baha'i News Letter*, No. 10 (Feb. 1926): 6-7.

183 Morrison, *op. cit.*, 124. See entry in index on 387, which says that Louis Gregory "helps form first Spiritual Assembly in South."

184 See Christopher Buck, *Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i Íqán*. Studies in the Babi and Bahá'í Religions, vol. 7 (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1995). Republished online as an electronic book at: <http://www.bahai-library.org/books/symbol.secret>.

an equally fitting person he would surely have saved you the trouble. Yet he finds himself to be compelled.” The first letter accompanied the first half of the translation which Shoghi Effendi decided to send to Locke. The second half was mailed later.

Locke did as the Guardian requested. The second letter (5 July 1930) was sent to Locke to acknowledge his editorial assistance: “Though they were not so many, he [Shoghi Effendi] found the suggestions you gave most helpful.” Moreover, Ruhi Afnan reported that: “Shoghi Effendi has already incorporated your suggestions and sent his manuscript to the national spiritual assembly of the United States and Canada] for publication.” A most interesting comment follows: “It naturally depends upon that body and the reviewing and publishing committees to decide whether it should come out immediately or not.” The potential value of reaching the western intelligentsia was noted as well: “The most important service that can now be rendered to the Cause is to put the writings of Bahá’u’lláh in a form that would be presentable to the intellectual minds of the west. Shoghi Effendi’s hope in this work has been to encourage others along this line.” At the end of the letter, Shoghi Effendi wrote, in his own hand, the following:

> My dear co-worker:
> I wish to add a few words expressing my deep appreciation of your valued suggestions in connexion with the translation of the Iqan. I wish also to express the hope that you may be able to lend increasing assistance to the work of the Cause, as I have always greatly admired your exceptional abilities and capacity to render distinguished services to the Faith. I grieve to hear of the weakness of your heart which I trust may through treatment be completely restored. I often remember you in my prayers and ever cherish the hope of welcoming you again in the Master’s home.
> Your true brother,
> Shoghi.

Locke wrote four essays published in six volumes of *The Bahá’í World*, which was not only a record of the development of the Faith internationally, but was its official international voice as well (prior to the establishment of the Bahá’í International Community). Leonard Harris is currently the world’s leading authority on Alain Locke. In his collection of Locke’s philosophical writings, two of Locke’s *Bahá’í World* essays are anthologized: “The Orientation of Hope” (1936)[185] and “Unity through Diversity: A Bahá’í Principle” (1933).[186] “‘The Orientation of Hope’,” according to Harris, “is a definitive expression of Locke’s belief in the Bahá’í Faith and its focus on the universal principles definitive of spiritual faiths.”[187] Locke’s other two *Bahá’í World* essays were: “Impressions of Haifa” (1926, 1929, 1930) and“Lessons in World Crisis” (1945). These essays profile Locke’s perspective as a Bahá’í, even though we have such sketchy details about his Bahá’í activities. How he came to write these essays, which evidently were invited, is an important consideration. Although Shoghi Effendi certainly supervised its

185 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 129-32.

186 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 133-38.

187 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 129.

publication and approved its contents, normally the editors of *The Bahá'í World* issued invitations to write articles. However, Shoghi Effendi personally contacted Locke by cable, inviting him to contribute his final *Bahá'í World* essay: "WOULD GREATLY APPRECIATE ARTICLE FROM YOUR PEN ON ANY ASPECT FAITH FOR CENTENARY ISSUE BAHÁ'Í WORLD VOLUME NINE LOVING GREETINGS SHOGHI RABBANI."[188]

In his essay, "The Orientation of Hope," Locke gives some fraternal advice to Bahá'ís. This statement serves as eloquent testimony to the strength of his own convictions as a Bahá'í:

> Must we not as true Bahá'í believers in these times embrace our principles more positively, more realistically, and point everywhere possible our assertion of the teachings with a direct challenge? […] Especially does it seem to me to be the opportunity to bring the Bahá'í principles again forcefully to the attention of statesmen and men of practical affairs […]. Is it not reasonably clear to us that now is the time for a world-wide, confident and determined offensive of peaceful propaganda for the basic principles of the Cause of brotherhood, peace and social justice? […] And to do that powerfully, effectively, the Bahá'í teaching needs an inspired extension of the potent realism of 'Abdu'l-Bahá by which he crowned and fulfilled the basic idealism of Bahá'u'lláh.[189]

A proper understanding of Locke's *Bahá'í World* essays—especially "The Orientation of Hope" and "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle"—requires a background in Locke's philosophical thought, which is outlined briefly in the next section.

Locke as philosopher

Locke was deeply influenced by pragmatism, a contemporary philosophical movement that countered both idealism and realism. "Pragmatism is an account of the way people think," according to Menand, "the way they come up with ideas, form beliefs, and reach decisions."[190] It correlates truth and experience, self and world. Experience is real. It is no mere mental phenomenon. It is a dynamic interaction between self and world. Knowledge derives from experience. Truth is transformed by experience.

Pragmatism is process. It advocates a method. Ideas are relative to time and place. The truth of a proposition depends on its practical value, not on any intrinsic meaning. Like the scientific method, knowledge can be tested. How? Ideas must be tested by experience. This has profound cultural implications. Truth is judged by its consequences.

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[188] Shoghi Effendi to Locke, Western Union cablegram, 17 January 1944; Mabel Paine to Locke, 3 February 1944. See also Holley to Locke, 1 February 1944, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace), and Paine to Locke, 4 March 1944, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-12, Folder 3 (Bahá'í World). Original manuscript in Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-106, Folder 22 ([re: Bahá'í revelation of principles.])

[189] Locke, "The Orientation of Hope," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 130, 132.

[190] Menand, *op. cit.*, 351.

It cannot be divorced from the practical and moral. America, it follows, is accountable to itself.

The originators of pragmatism include the trinity of Charles Sanders Peirce (d. 1914), who claimed to have "invented" pragmatism and expounded its theory of meaning; William James (d. 1910) who developed pragmatism's theory of truth, and John Dewey (d. 1952), who contributed his notion of "instrumentalism" to the movement.[191] The renown W. E. B. Du Bois had been a student of James.[192] Locke had a passion for William James,[193] although he rejected James' radical empiricism. Both Du Bois and Locke read James' Oxford lectures, *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), as a philosophical allegory for making a "vital connection between pluralism and democracy."[194]

Pragmatists put a premium on "experience." They sought to test the truth of ideas in actual experience as a "pragmatic" indicator. They also felt that their philosophical ideas had ethical and political consequences.[195] Moreover, John Dewey felt that pragmatism provided a philosophical basis for democracy, which he viewed as an ethical principle that extended beyond politics to economics and social interactions as well.[196] Despite his influences, Locke pursued an independent course by deforming a master code of symbols and reforming them by means of what Houston Baker, Jr. called a "*radical marronage*"[197] or independent restructuring.

Pragmatism gave birth to cultural pluralism, which Locke espoused with almost religious zeal. During the 1920s, the question as to what constitutes American identity was "a national preoccupation."[198] Posnock states that "pragmatism's answer" was "cultural pluralism," as opposed to the coercions of assimilation—the pressure to conform—in the American paradigm of the "melting pot."[199] "American democracy for Locke," writes Leonard Harris, "was hardly a finished social experiment, especially since it excluded most of the population from participation."[200] For Locke, cultural pluralism

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[191] James T. Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?" *Journal of American History* 83.1 (June 1996): 102, n. 3.

[192] Posnock, *op. cit.*, 184.

[193] Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 4.

[194] Alain Locke, "Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy," in *Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, Second Symposium* (New York: Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, 1942). Reprinted in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989) 53.

[195] Kloppenberg, *op. cit.*, 101.

[196] Kloppenberg, *op. cit.*, 120.

[197] Houston Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 75, quoted by Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 12. See Ernest Mason, "Deconstruction in the Philosophy of Alain Locke," *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society* 24 (Winter 1988): 85-106.

[198] Posnock, *op. cit.*, 187.

[199] Posnock, *op. cit.*, 187.

[200] Leonard Harris, "Preface," in idem (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader in Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) xi.

provided *the* social philosophy most needed by democracy,[201] not just in America, but across the world. Cultural pluralism was thus "the philosophic faith that Alain Locke became a notable spokesman for."[202] As his primary philosophical framework, cultural pluralism would make possible a general theory of "unity in diversity."[203]

Locke's philosophy is really a fusion of pluralism and relativism, as seen in the synonyms he uses for it. "Cultural pluralism" is variously referred to in Locke's writings as "cultural relativism," "critical relativism" as well as "value relativism."[204] Locke's use of technical terms is not, however, always consistent. As Winston Napier points out, Locke's "semantic inconsistency clouds his argument."[205] Strictly speaking, pluralism is a distinctive concept, while relativism is a normative one.[206] As Mason observes: "It is precisely the separation between pluralism and relativism that explains much of America's intolerance. For a plurality of ethnic groups simply cannot exist within a society that refuses to recognize the relative and functional nature of values and institutions. Locke's critique of democracy centers around democracy's need to develop a relativistic perspective to fit its pluralistic society."[207] Cultural pluralism has since evolved into what is now known as "multiculturalism."[208] Recently, Locke has been acknowledged as "the father of multiculturalism."[209]

While his formal training in philosophy was followed by a long and distinguished teaching career as an academic, with numerous publications to his credit, Locke did not publish a single article on philosophy until he was fifty years old,[210] seventeen years after he had become a Bahá'í. This significant fact accords with Locke's psychograph in which he disclaims having ever been "a professional philosopher."[211] Notwithstanding, his work during this later period articulates his mature thinking as both a professor of philosophy as well as a philosopher by training. Locke's first formal philosophical essay, "Values and Imperatives," appeared in 1935. This marked the year that saw his "reentry into the doing of philosophy directly"[212] and thus back into the world of grand theory.

What role did philosophy play in Locke's life? What was its purpose? What had Locke hoped to accomplish through the vehicle of philosophy? In a retrospective look at his career in Howard University, Locke wrote that his "main objectives" had been "to

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201 Mason, "Social Philosophy of Alain Locke," 26.

202 Kallen, *op. cit.*, 127.

203 Green, "Alain Locke's Multicultural Philosophy of Value," 87.

204 Judith Green, "Alain Locke's Multicultural Philosophy of Value," in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 87.

205 Napier, *op. cit.*

206 Mason, "Social Philosophy of Alain Locke," 34.

207 *Ibid.*

208 Posnock, *op. cit.*, 192.

209 Molesworth, *op. cit.*, 175-76.

210 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Lock*e, 8, 10.

211 Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

212 Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 9.

use philosophy as an agent for stimulating critical mindedness in Negro youth, to help transform segregated educational missions into centers of cultural and social leadership, and to organize an advance guard of creative talent for cultural inspiration and prestige." Moreover, he wanted to link "the discussion of colonial problems with the American race situation, toward the internationalization of American Negro thought and action."[213] Indeed, as Michael Winston observes: "With the dramatic rise of racial consciousness in the former European colonies, Locke's influence became internationalized."[214]

It is clear that Locke wanted to make a contribution to world peace as well. If intellectuals were inspired with the same vision and could agree on a common paradigm, their leadership had the potential to further that aim. In his essay, "Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace,"[215] Locke states: "Cultural relativism may become an important source for ideological peace" and, indeed, may serve "as a possible ideological peacemaker."[216] "Cultural relativism" Locke believed, "can become a very constructive philosophy by way of integrating values and value systems."[217] "In looking for cultural agreements on a world scale," Locke further explained, "we shall probably have to content ourselves with agreement of the common-denominator type and with 'unity in diversity' discovered in the search for unities of a functional rather than a content character, and therefore of a pragmatic rather than an ideological sort."[218] In other words, Locke has proposed a formula for promoting cultural relativism as a"realistic instrument of social reorientation and cultural enlightenment."[219]

Locke gave specific reasons as to why this program might work. For Locke, cultural relativism had "constructive potentialities"[220] and offered new hope for ideological peace. For relativism to work, it first had to be implemented. Just how would one begin to carry out a program of cultural relativity? Locke had such a plan. Its rationale is developed alongside its strategy. There were three stages in his plan, each of which was intended to have a calculated, cumulative result. The three stages were: (1) cultural equivalence; (2) reciprocity; and (3) limited cultural convertibility. An explanation of these three stages is as follows:

"*Equivalence*": In his efforts to universalize philosophy, Locke sought to promote intercultural understanding, and thought that scholars (especially "cultural anthropologists") ought to lead the way—through a systematic process of conceptual translation based on formal comparison:

> The principle of *cultural equivalence*, under which we would more widely

[213] Private memorandum, Alain Locke Papers (MSRC), cited by Winston, *op. cit.*, 402.

[214] Winston, *op. cit.*, 404.

[215] Alain Locke, "Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace," in Lyman Bryson, Louis Finkelstein, and R. M. MacIver (eds.) *Approaches to World Peace* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944) 609-618. Reprinted in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 67-78.

[216] Locke, *op. cit.*, 70.

[217] *Ibid.*

[218] Locke, *op. cit.*, 75.

[219] Locke, *op. cit.*, 72.

[220] *Ibid.*

> press the search for functional similarities in our analyses and comparisons of human cultures; thus offsetting our traditional and excessive emphasis upon cultural difference. Such functional equivalences, which we might term '*culture-cognates*' or '*culture-correlates*,' discovered underneath deceptive but superficial institutional divergence, would provide objective but soundly neutral common denominators for intercultural understanding and cooperation.[221]

The search for cultural counterparts is, for Locke, a sound way of trying to make sense of the bewildering diversity of societal norms and mores that, upon investigation, reveal a recognizable logic. "Functional equivalence" for Locke, seems to be synonymous with "real basic similarity" in values.[222] Similarities are seen in function rather than form.

"*Reciprocity*": Beyond tolerance, but assuming notions of equivalence based on "loyalty to loyalty," is a second concept: reciprocity. Reciprocity approaches cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation. "Social reciprocity for value loyalties," writes Locke, "is but a new name for the old virtue of tolerance, yet it does bring the question of tolerance down from the lofty thin air of idealism and chivalry to the plane of enlightened self-interest and the practical possibilities of value-sharing."[223] This is an understatement, for reciprocity is something much more than mere toleration for the purpose of reducing intercommunal conflict:

> The principle of *cultural reciprocity*, which, by a general recognition of the reciprocal character of all contacts between cultures and the fact that all modern cultures are highly composite ones, would invalidate the lump estimating of cultures in terms of generalized, *en bloc* assumptions of superiority and inferiority, substituting scientific, point-by-point comparisons with their correspondingly limited, specific, and objectively verifiable superiorities or inferiorities.[224]

This is both a historical as well as procedural statement. Cultures are syncretistic. A simple realization of this fact should suffice to dispel pretensions of cultural superiority. This new virtue—reciprocity—is tolerance transformed into a real exchange of values. As Moses observes: "Locke's principle of reciprocity first emerges as a historical law that may be discerned through careful consideration of what has contributed to civilized progress in many an age."[225] Locke translates this historical law into a present-day ethic. In this part of Locke's plan, comparisons would become very specific. The "culture-correlates" would then be weighed, and even judged as to their relative superiority or inferiority. There would be particular cultural values that could be

221 Locke, *op. cit.*, 73.

222 Locke, "Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy," 60.

223 Locke, "Values and Imperatives," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 48.

224 Locke, "Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 73.

225 Moses, *op. cit.*, 166.

exported and taken up within other modern cultures, which are themselves composite anyway.

"Cultural convertibility": As a student of history, Locke foresaw the strong possibility that culture might selectively adopt a foreign cultural value. In assimilating that value to itself, the transplanted value would take root and become part of the new cultural landscape. An example of this might be seen in the import, popularization and eventual westernization of the eastern practice of meditation. Locke sees a third concept coming into play:

> The principle of *limited cultural convertibility*, that, since culture elements, though widely interchangeable, are so separable, the institutional forms from their values and the values from their institutional forms, the organic selectivity and assimilative capacity of a borrowing culture becomes a limiting criterion for cultural exchange. Conversely, pressure acculturation and the mass transplanting of culture, the stock procedure of groups with traditions of culture "superiority" and dominance, are counterindicated as against both the interests of cultural efficiency and the natural trends of cultural selectivity.[226]

Locke claims that these "three objectively grounded principles of culture relations" might, if properly implemented, "correct some of our basic culture dogmatism and progressively cure many of our most intolerant and prejudicial cultural attitudes and practices."[227] How? Discovery of cultural equivalences was supposed to result in an agenda for intercultural understanding, which would, in turn, provide a common foundation for intercultural cooperation.

Whom did Locke expect or hope to carry out this plan? Quite possibly his peers. He states: "There has never been a new age without a new scholarship or, to put it more accurately, without a profound realignment of scholarship."[228] "It is for this reason that one can so heartily concur in the suggestions of Professor Northrop's paper that a value analysis of our basic cultures in broadscale comparison is the philosophical, or rather the scholarly, task of the hour."[229]

Locke as Bahá'í thinker

In general terms, Locke regarded the Bahá'í Faith as a "movement for human brotherhood."[230] This is not to say that he reduced the religion to an amorphous universalism, for, in "The Orientation of Hope," Locke calls the Bahá'í Faith "a virile and truly prophetic spiritual revelation."[231]

What relationship, if any, exists between Locke's religion and his philosophy?

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226 Locke, "Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 73.

227 *Ibid.*

228 Locke, *op. cit.*, 70.

229 Locke, *op. cit.*, 75.

230 Locke to Parsons, 28 June 1922, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA.

231 Locke, "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 130.

Philosophy has traditionally served as the great systematiser of religious thinking. Locke's religious works (his *Bahá'í World* essays) were certainly informed by his philosophy, which served—as philosophy was supposed to in medieval times—as the "handmaid of theology." Indeed, the presence of key philosophical concepts in Locke's *Bahá'í World* essays accentuates the religio-philosophical (Bahá'í-cultural relativist) synergy. "What we need to learn most," writes Locke, "is how to discover unity and spiritual *equivalence* underneath the differences which at present so disunite and sunder us, and how to establish some basic spiritual *reciprocity* on the principle of unity in diversity."[232] "The purity of Bahá'í principles," Locke argues, "must be gauged by their universality on this practical plane."[233] Locke then poses a challenge in the form of a test of authenticity: "Do they [Bahá'í principles] fraternize and fuse with all their kindred expressions? Are they happy in their collaborations that advocate other sanctions but advance toward the same spiritual goal? Can they reduce themselves to the vital *common denominators* necessary to mediate between other partisan *loyalties*?" (emphasis added).[234] This is classic Lockean philosophy, transposed within a Bahá'í value system.

The reverse also held true, in that religion served as Locke's handmaid of philosophy. Bahá'í values suffuse Locke's philosophical thought. Judith Green observes that "Locke's work shows the influence of serious engagements with Marxism, with diverse religious and spiritual traditions including, among others, Christianity, Buddhism, and Bahá'í."[235] This appears to underestimate the relative importance of the Bahá'í influence on Locke. As Johnny Washington notes: "During the latter part of his career, he accepted the Bahá'í faith and attempted to integrate it into his own philosophy of values."[236] This statement suggests that Locke himself transposed Bahá'í principles of unity into his philosophy.

Locke stressed Bahá'í universality as its primary mission for the present: "But it is not the time for insisting on this side of the claim; the intelligent, loyal Bahá'í should stress not the source, but the importance of the idea, and rejoice not in the originality and uniqueness of the principle but rather in its prevalence and practicality."[237] Locke continues: "The idea has to be translated into every important province of modern life and thought, and in many of these must seem to be independently derived and justified."[238] Assuming that he practised what he preached, this statement signals Locke's intention and method: namely, that he would apply Bahá'í principles to his own "province of modern life and thought"—philosophy.

A closer comparison of Locke's essays reveals a synergy between the two. "For Locke, cultural pluralism and cultural relativism," Ernest Mason claims, "both have their

[232] Locke, "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 135.

[233] Locke, *op. cit.*, 136.

[234] *Ibid.*

[235] Green, *Deep Democracy*, 97.

[236] Washington, *Alain Locke and Philosophy*, xxv.

[237] Locke, *op. cit.*, 135.

[238] *Ibid.*

foundation in the Bahá'í principle of unity in diversity."[239] In demonstrating a thematic simultaneity in Locke's religious and philosophical writings, Mason declares: "In the following examination of Locke's social philosophy I hope to demonstrate fully that Locke was, theoretically and practically, concerned with the very social issues stressed in the Bahá'í Faith: justice, equality, nonviolence, tolerance, and racial and ideological peace."[240] Mason was not alone in making this assertion. Kenneth Stikkers observes:

> The Bahá'í religion provided Locke the concrete experience of unity in diversity, for a central teaching of that faith is that the Word of God is essentially one but is spoken differently through the prophets of the various religions of the world, in ways relative to unique sociohistorical conditions. Locke expressed the Bahá'í principle with this metaphor: "think of reality as a central fact and a white light broken up by the prism of human nature into a spectrum of values."[241]

This has implications for future Lockean studies in particular, and for African American and for mainstream American philosophy in general.

Unity in diversity is a Bahá'í principle that Locke transposed into his philosophy: "It is just at this juncture that the idea of unity in diversity seems to me to become relevant, and to offer a spiritual common denominator of both ideal and practical efficacy."[242] Locke wanted to replace absolutes with universalisms: "Even though it is not yet accepted as a general principle, as a general desire and an ideal goal, the demand for universality is beyond doubt the most characteristic modern thing in the realm of spiritual values, and in the world of the mind that reflects this realm."[243] Through the vehicle of philosophy, Locke replaced "identity" with "equivalence" and "difference" with "unity in diversity."[244] In so doing, Locke offered "a solution reconciling nationalism with internationalism, racialism with universalism."[245]

Both as a philosopher and as a Bahá'í, Locke, as a matter of principle, envisioned a series of "progressive integrations" that would take place "in due course" and "step by step, from an initial stage of cultural tolerance, mutual respect, reciprocal exchange, some specific communities of agreement and, finally, commonality of purpose and action." But since he was not a thoroughly systematic thinker, we cannot read this statement with full confidence in its sequence. Green calls this a "peacemaking democratic transformation […] by stage-wise progression."[246]

In my own reading, there is a progression in Locke's social philosophy in which

239 Mason, "Locke's Social Philosophy," 26.

240 Mason, "Locke's Social Philosophy," 28.

241 Stikkers, *op. cit.*, 214-15.

242 Locke, *op. cit.*, 135.

243 Locke, "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 134.

244 Posnock, *op. cit.*, 202.

245 Locke, "The Contribution of Race to Culture," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 203.

246 Green, *op. cit.*, 124.

tolerance leads to reciprocity which, in turn, culminates in "unity in diversity." Locke describes his own universalism as a "fluid and functional unity that begins in a basic progression of value pluralism, converts itself to value relativism, and then passes over into a ready and willing admission of both cultural relativism and pluralism."[247] Locke's hierarchy of loyalty, tolerance, reciprocity, and cultural relativism and pluralism (the philosophical equivalent of "unity in diversity") was a pragmatic application of quintessentially Bahá'í values. In its practical application, this hierarchy is formulaic:

"Loyalty" expresses group solidarity. Loyalty is related to the idea of tolerance. Loyalty is love of one's own race, ethnicity, culture. The concept of loyalty is connected with the notion of community. "Indeed," as Stikkers corroborates, "it was Royce's theories of loyalty and community and Locke's experience in the Bahá'í faith […] that provided the main intellectual influences on Locke's pluralism."[248] As mentioned, Josiah Royce was one of Locke's professors in Harvard's philosophy department.[249] Locke's attraction to Royce's ideas owes a great deal to the fact that Royce was "the only major American philosopher during the early 1900s to publish a book condemning racism."[250] Locke's cultural relativism was grounded in Royce's social ethic of "loyalty to loyalty," which values a people's loyalty to their own particular culture and value system, so long as respect is maintained for broadly humane values as well.[251]

"Tolerance" has both individual and social dimensions. Locke's concept of "tolerance" has its roots in the philosophy of John Locke (individualism), but goes far beyond. In his essay, "Two Lockes, Two Keys, Tolerance and Reciprocity in a Culture of Democracy," Greg Moses compares the philosophies of Alain Locke and John Locke. If not in theory then in practice, John Locke's ethic of toleration has been "poorly applied by liberal civilizations."[252] While John Locke stressed mutual tolerance in an exchange of ideas between individuals, Alain Locke advocated such tolerance between groups.[253] All too often, however, tolerance has proven to be little more than a thin veneer of acceptance, with an air of condescension and paternalism by the dominant group.

"Reciprocity"—as mentioned in the previous section—is really an extension of democracy in that it constrains group dominance through promoting the equality of groups, each having a place at the table, so to speak. Moses sums this up eloquently when he concludes his essay by saying: "Reciprocity—to shift figures in function and

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247 Alain Locke, "Pluralism and Ideological Peace," 65, cited by Harvey, *op. cit.*, 26.

248 Kenneth W. Stikkers, "Instrumental Relativism and Cultivated Pluralism: Alain Locke and Philosophy's Quest for a Common World," in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader in Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 214.

249 See Josiah Royce. *The Philosophy of Loyalty*. Republished with an introduction by John J. McDermott (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995 [1908]).

250 Leonard Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 4. See Josiah Royce, *Race Questions, Provincialism, and Other American Problems* (1908; reprint, Freeport: Books of Libraries Press 1967).

251 Green, "Alain Locke's Multicultural Philosophy of Value," 88. See also Royce, *Race Questions*.

252 Moses, *op. cit.*, 168.

253 Greg Moses, "Two Lockes, Two Keys: Tolerance and Reciprocity in a Culture of Democracy," in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 165.

form—would be key to the new Locke [Alain Locke], as tolerance had been key to the old [the philosopher John Locke]."[254]

"Cultural relativism and pluralism" are Locke's philosophical equivalents of the Bahá'í principle of "unity in diversity." The most recent and sophisticated treatment of Locke's philosophy of unity in diversity is that of Judith M. Green. In her book, *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation* (1999), Green devotes an entire chapter to Locke.[255] Green observes that a great deal of Locke's work remains unpublished, and that his contribution has been largely forgotten until recently. Due to the sudden and vigorous explosion of scholarly interest in Locke, his philosophical thought will no longer suffer a death by silence.

Green identifies two streams of thought and experience in Locke's life and work. One stream is an African American historical, cultural, and intellectual tradition—the specific loyalty that "links Locke with forebears in struggle like Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, with older contemporaries like Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois (who assisted his early career), with younger contemporaries like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm (X) Shabazz, and with our living generations of African American public intellectuals."[256] Speaking of America, Locke stated that "this ominous rainbow […] shows a wide diffusion of bias and prejudice in our social atmosphere and, unfortunately, presages not the passing, but the coming of a storm […] and unless America solves these minority issues constructively and achieves minority peace or minority tolerance, in less than half a generation she will be in the flaming predicament of Europe."[257]

The other stream is his cosmopolitan outlook, particularly his commitment to "cultural pluralism" (now known as multiculturalism). Locke's pluralism compensated for some of the deficiencies of liberalism. As Segun Gbadegesin rhetorically asks: "How, if at all, does liberalism differ from pluralism? Liberalism's emphasis is freedom: freedom is its battle cry. But there are other values, including justice […] and community."[258] Locke's cosmopolitan paradigm of unity is a "theoretical and praxical transformation of classical American pragmatism."[259] According to Green, Locke had precociously conceptualized "deep democracy" as "cosmopolitan unity amidst valued diversity."[260]

Education would play a transformative role in helping to bring about this world

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254 Moses, *op. cit.*, 173.

255 Green, "Cosmopolitan Unity Amidst Valued Diversity," 132.

256 Green, *op. cit.*, 97.

257 Alain Locke, "Minorities and the Social Mind," *Progressive Education* 12 (March 1935): 142.

258 Segun Gbadegesin, "Values, Imperatives, and the Imperative of Democratic Values," in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 288.

259 *Ibid.*

260 Green, *Deep Democracy*, 96.

culture—one characterized by a "race-transcending"[261] consciousness. Locke also spoke of the role of education in cultivating "international-mindedness."[262] Art, education, as well as philosophy were venues through which Locke sought to move the world.

Conclusions

If interracial unity, beyond racial justice, was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "dream" for America, it was Alain LeRoy Locke's vision for the world. Locke prized unity. He had a disdain for black "self-segregation"[263] as well as for Jim Crow segregation. In an unpublished essay that Johnny Washington titled, "The Paradox of Race," Locke not only advocated racial integration but encouraged interracial marriage as well.[264] It is quite clear that Locke's vision of interracial unity was inspired by his experience as a member of the early American Bahá'í community. Interracial unity, in Bahá'í parlance, is often described as "unity in diversity"—a term that encompasses the entire range of human differences.[265] This term appears in both Locke's philosophical as well as religious essays.

One can tentatively say that the Bahá'í principle of "unity in diversity" has indirectly influenced African American philosophy by way of Locke. This study has also suggested that Locke's religious works were informed by his philosophy, which served as the "handmaid of theology" while the Bahá'í Faith served as Locke's handmaid of philosophy. Not only was there a synergy between the two, but there was also a creative connection between Locke's Bahá'í values and philosophical commitments. For instance, in his essay, "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle," Locke praises Royce: "Josiah Royce, one of the greatest American philosophers[,] saw this problem more clearly than any other western thinker, which is nothing more or less than a vindication of the principle of unity and diversity carried out to a practical degree of spiritual reciprocity." Here, Locke directly correlates religious and philosophical principles. Locke's philosophy may be seen as an unique synthesis of the following thinkers:

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261 Rudolph V. Vanterpool, "Open-Textured Aesthetic Boundaries: Matters of Art, Race, and Culture," in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader in Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 141.

262 Alain Locke, "Lessons in World Crisis," 746.

263 Hutchison, *op. cit.*, 86.

264 Johnny Washington, *A Journey into the Philosophy of Alain Locke* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1994) 103.

265 It should be noted that Shoghi Effendi, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2nd rev. edn. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974 [1938]), used this term to refer to differences of ethnic origins, climate, history, language, tradition, thought and habit (41)—generally, in the sense of a lack of conformity except in essentials—as the bedrock of the Bahá'í administrative order. It is therefore misleading to represent "unity in diversity" as applying only to race. (I am indebted to Gayle Morrison for this important observation.)

VALUE THEORY	**IDEAS**
Christian Freiherr von Ehrenfel	values as intrinsic to cognition
Alexius Meinong	values as feelings
Wilbur Urban	value types/qualities
PRAGMATISM	**IDEAS**
Charles Sanders Peirce	theory of meaning
William James	theory of truth
John Dewey	pluralism and democracy
PHILOSOPHY OF LOYALTY	**IDEAS**
Josiah Royce	philosophy of loyalty
CULTURAL PLURALISM	**IDEAS**
Franz Boas	race and culture
Melville J. Herskovits	race and culture
CULTURAL NATIONALISM	**IDEAS**
W. E. B. Du Bois	the Talented Tenth
NATURALISM	**IDEAS**
George Santayana	pragmatist aesthetics[266]
BAHÁ'Í PRINCIPLES	**IDEAS**
Bahá'u'lláh	world unity
'Abdu'l-Bahá	interracial unity
Shoghi Effendi	unity in diversity

This list is by no means exhaustive. It should also be borne is mind that, despite his intense commitment to Bahá'í principles, Locke does not directly cite Bahá'í writings. Although he acknowledged that "there is no escaping the historical evidences of its [unity through diversity's] early advocacy and its uncompromising adoption by the Bahá'í prophets and teachers," Locke followed his own advice to Bahá'ís in that "the intelligent, loyal Bahá'í should stress not the source, but the importance of the idea, and rejoice not in the originality and uniqueness of the principle but rather in its prevalence and practicality."[267]

The salience of race remains a social fact. Synergized by Bahá'í values, Locke adroitly linked race progress with world peace. In one of his Bahá'í essays, "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle," Locke states: "Each period of a faith imposes a special new problem."[268] In a philosophical essay, "Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace," Locke expresses a similar conviction, hinting at what would today be called a paradigm shift: "There has never been a new age without a new scholarship, or, to put it more accurately, without a profound realignment of scholarship."[269] Locke's realignment of scholarship was to detoxify "race" of its biologism, to transform "race" into culture, to "convert parochial thinking into global thinking"[270] and to promote

266 See Jonathan Levin, "The Esthetics of Pragmatism," *American Literary History* 6 (1994): 658-83.

267 Locke, "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 135.

268 Locke, *op. cit.*, 137.

269 Locke, "Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 72.

270 Locke, "The Need for a New Organon in Education," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 268.

"progressive vistas of the new intercultural internationalism" with "passports of world citizenship good for safe ideological conduct anywhere."[271] "The intellectual core of the problems of peace," Locke maintains, "[...] will be the discovery of the necessary common denominators and the basic equivalences involved in a democratic world order or democracy on a world scale."[272]

As a religious personality, throughout his adult life, Locke vacillated and oscillated between Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith. Locke was always listed in biographies as an Episcopalian, the denomination in which he was raised. While his mother at first urged him to become a Methodist,[273] she later encouraged him to become a more fully committed Bahá'í.[274] In an unpublished autobiographical statement, Locke wrote: "I am really a Xtian [*sic*] without believing any of its dogma, because I am incapable of feeling hatred, revenge or jealously [...] I have always hoped to be big enough to have to justify myself not to my contemporaries but to posterity. Small men apologize to their neighbors, big men to posterity."[275] In an untitled manuscript in the Alain Locke papers, Locke expresses his appreciation of the Bahá'í Faith in these words:

> The gospel for the Twentieth Century rises out of the heart of its greatest problems—and few who are spiritually enlightened doubt the nature of that problem. [...] The redemption of society—social salvation, should have been sought after first [...] The fundamental problems of current America are materiality and prejudice. [...] And so we must say[,] with the acute actualities of America's race problem and the acute potentialities of her economic problem, [that] the land that is nearest to material democracy is furthest away from spiritual democracy [...] And we must begin heroically with the greatest apparent irreconcilables: the East and the west, the black man and the self-arrogating Anglo-Saxon, for unless these are reconciled, the salvation of society cannot be. If the world had believingly understood the full significance of Him [Jesus Christ] who taught it to pray and hope[,] "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven[,]" who also said[,] "In my Father's house are many mansions," already we should be further toward the realization of this great millen[n]ial vision. The word of God is still insistent, and more emphatic as the human redemption delays and becomes more crucial, and we have what Dr. Elsemont [Esslemont] rightly calls Baha'u'llah's "one great trumpet-call to humanity": "That all nations shall become one in faith, and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled... These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men

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271 Locke, "Pluralism and Ideological Peace," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 99.

272 Locke, "Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 62.

273 "You had better make up your mind to become a Methodist—They are certainly loyal to you—I heard your praises sung by several of them." Mary Locke to Alain Locke, 14 May 1916), Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-65, Folder 21 (page 5).

274 Locke to Parsons, 28 June 1922, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA.

275 Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-1, Folder 2 (Autobiographical statements).

be as one kindred and family.[”][276]

In that same essay, Locke speaks of the “Old South” as well as the “New Negro,” of “a New South” in a “new era.” Locke’s vision was world-embracing, as he was equally as concerned for “suppressed minorities the world over today.” Moreover, he believed that any real solution to these problems would have to come about through “a revolution within the soul.” Indeed, there were moments when, for various personal reasons,[277] Locke later withdrew from active involvement in the Washington, DC, Bahá’í community. But there were moments of courage and grandeur, when Locke publicly identified himself as a Bahá’í. As late in his life as 1952, it must have been with Locke’s permission that his photograph appeared (alongside a picture of a fellow Bahá’í, Robert S. Abbott, founder of the *Chicago Defender*) in an *Ebony* magazine article entitled, “Baha’i Faith: Only church in world that does not discriminate.”[278] Of Locke, Shoghi Effendi reportedly said that: “People as you, Mr Gregory, Dr Esslemont and some other dear souls are as rare as diamond.”[279]

Just as one cannot understand Locke without reference to his intellectual pedigree, the Bahá’í Faith was part and parcel of his spiritual pedigree. It was the dominant spiritual influence on Locke. In his application of Bahá’í principles and values, Locke’s life and work is a testament to William James’s dictum: “Beliefs, in short, are really rules for action; and the whole function of thinking is but one step in the production of habits of action.”[280] As in his advice to his fellow Bahá’ís, Locke imposed upon himself the “task of transposing the traditional Bahá’í reciprocity between religions into the social and cultural denominationalisms of nation, race and class, and vindicating anew upon this plane the precious legacy of the inspired teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Bahá’u’lláh[.]”[281] Although a formal discipline of Bahá’í philosophy has not yet evolved, whenever and in whatever form a distinctive Bahá’í philosophy emerges, it will look back, as one of its forebears, on Alain Locke, Bahá’í philosopher.

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276 Untitled essay, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-143, Folder 3 (Writings by Locke—Notes. Christianity, spirituality, religion).

277 Locke’s probable homosexual orientation may be relevant to this. See, e.g., Leonard Harris, “’Outing’ Alain Locke: Empowering the Silenced,” in *Sexual Identities, Queer Politics*, ed. Mark Blasius (Princeton University Press, 2001) 321-41. In my own research of the Alain Locke Papers at Howard University, I discovered an unpublished autobiographical statement in which Locke referred to his “Achilles heel of homosexuality” which he “kept in an armoured shell [?] of reserve & haughty caution” (Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-143, Folder 5 [Autobiographical writings]).

278 *Ebony* (October 1952) 39. Locke kept a copy of this article. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-147, Folder 12 (Articles, advertisements that mention Locke).

279 Bahadur to Locke, 27 February 1924, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-12, Folder 2 (Bahadur, Azizullah).

280 From his 1908 Berkeley lecture, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” quoted in Menand, *op. cit.*, 354.

281 Locke, “Unity through Diversity: A Bahá’í Principle,” in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 138.

APPENDIX
SHOGHI EFFENDI'S LETTERS TO ALAIN LOCKE
These letters are dated 15 February 1930 and 5 July 1930. The first begins:

Persian Colony, Haifa
15-II-30 [*sic*]

Dear Dr. Locke:

Shoghi Effendi has been lately spending his leisure hours translating the Book of Iqan for he considers it to be the key to a true understanding of the Holy Scriptures, & [*sic*] can easily rank as one of the most, if not the most, important thing that Baha'u'llah revealed explaining the basic beliefs of the Cause. He who fully grasps the purport of that Book can claim to have understood the Cause.

Yet, Shoghi Effendi believes that mere translation into English phrases is not sufficient. It is essential to make the idioms & expressions lively English, a thing which he alone cannot possibly achieve. Thinking, therefore, that you will be the best fitted to render him an assistance along that line, he is sending you the part that he has already completed. He would be most appreciative if you go over it carefully, studying every sentence—its structure as well as choice of words—& giving him your criticism as well as constructive suggestions that would make it more lucid, English [*sic*] & forceful. As it is a Holy Scripture, Shoghi Effendi has tried to put it in the English of the Bible, preferring its ways of expression better than any other.

What he sends you now is half of the book, the rest he will mail as it is translated. The form that it is in at present is far from being the last one. Yet he wishes to have all the possible suggestions before he puts it in its final form.

Shoghi Effendi is fully aware of the many duties you have & how pressing your time is, & had he known of an equally fitting person he would surely have saved you the trouble. Yet he finds himself to be compelled. He hopes, therefore, that you will give this work your close attention.

If the book is completed & rendered into a lucid & forceful language, the service it will render to the Cause will surely repay all your endeavours. In many places you will see the same idea expressed in other words & inserted in paranthesis [*sic*]. You can chose [*sic*] any of the two. In case you have any suggestions just mention in what page & line it is. You need not send him back the copy after going over it, for he may desire to refer to them later. He has enough copies here. Though he wishes you to give it all your attention he will be much obliged if you take it up immediately.

With deepest appreciation
Yours ever sincerely
Ruhi Afnan

The second letter (5 July 1930) was sent to Locke to acknowledge his editorial assistance:

Persian Colony
Haifa, Palestine
5-7-30

Dear Prof. Locke:

Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter as well as the mss. of the Iqan which you had so kindly gone over. Though they were not so many, he found the suggestions you gave most helpful. In translation work the greatest difficulty is to give the thought a lively English expression. This is most difficult for the person who gets absorbed into the original form & is charmed with its beauty. Shoghi Effendi has already incorporated your suggestions & sent his manuscript to the National Assembly for publication. It naturally depends upon that body & the reviewing & publishing committees to decide whether it should come out immediately or not.

The most important service that can now be rendered to the Cause is to put the writings of Baha'u'llah in a form that would be presentable to the intellectual minds of the west. Shoghi Effendi's hope in this work has been to encourage others along this line.

In closing may I express Shoghi Effendi's best wishes for your health as well as for the services you are rendering to the Cause.

Yours ever sincerely
Ruhi Afnan.

[Postscript in the Guardian's own hand:]

My dear co-worker:

I wish to add a few words expressing my deep appreciation of your valued suggestions in connexion with the translation of the Iqan. I wish also to express the hope that you may be able to lend increasing assistance to the work of the Cause, as I have always greatly admired your exceptional abilities & capacity to render distinguished services to the Faith. I grieve to hear of the weakness of your heart which I trust may through treatment be completely restored. I often remember you in my prayers and ever cherish the hope of welcoming you again in the Master's home.

Your true brother,
Shoghi

"First we must speak of logical proofs": discourses of knowledge in the Bahá'í writings

FRANKLIN LEWIS

Abstract
This paper first suggests that many statements in the Bahá'í writings are couched in the terms of a particular discourse, or intellectual tradition, of the text's immediate audience. As such, these statements may assume some of the premises of the addressee, passing over them without necessarily seeking to challenge or affirm those premises in an absolute sense, in order to make an argument which the addressee can accept. Such premises may sometimes be factually true, in an empirical sense, while sometimes they may not be propositionally true, but may rather be true in a metaphoric and symbolic sense. This being the case, recovering the nature of the discourse being employed, or the intellectual context of the statement, can help to evaluate whether a given statement is meant to convey a propositional fact or a rhetorical truth. 'Abdu'l-Bahá often adopted the particular parameters of western modernist discourse about knowledge, specifically in terms of the debate of science versus religion, and his statements are germane to contemporary questions about academic, or materialist, methodologies and the Bahá'í view toward these modes of knowledge. 'Abdu'l-Bahá often appears to give precedence to logical proofs and scientific method over traditional religious modes or explanations of reality, particularly in questions of fact and information, though not necessarily where ethics and morality are concerned. He would therefore seem to assert the validity of western academic, or materialist, methodologies.

"First we must speak of logical proofs"—'Abdu'l-Bahá (1904)

Modes of Discourse
In this paper, "discourse" refers to a conversation which unfolds over time, one that is governed by a particular set of premises and concepts in the context of which given arguments and inquiries are pursued.[1] A discourse often implies or delimits the type(s) of methodology that will be considered valid in investigating or "proving" questions or problems. In its broadest senses we might think of the entire intellectual tradition of the enlightenment as scientific or academic discourse. In a scientific discourse community,

[1] I have in mind not the linguistic term (discourse, discourse analysis), but rather the sense of "discourse" as it appears in theoretical discussions of the sociology of knowledge or the construction of the episteme, especially those informed by the arguments of Foucault. Wittgenstein's "language game," suggesting that a discussion can be true within a certain framework without necessarily pointing to external truths, reflects essentially the same notion, as do various other concepts such as Kuhn's "paradigm," etc. Not surprisingly, "discourse" has now entered academic Persian terminology (where it is variously rendered as *guyesh*, *goftmân*). While I suggest below that 'Abdu'l-Bahá discusses ideas that are similar to the concept of discourse as "school of thought" (i.e., Sufi discourse), nevertheless, 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not use the concept or term "discourse" in the technical sense that it is often used today.

when questions are posed or particular data considered, most parties to the discussion will proceed with certain assumptions about the primacy of empirical evidence, the positing of falsifiable hypotheses, and the need to verify data by experimentation. This does not mean that all participants in the discourse will come to the same conclusions about matters under discussion, or that they will necessarily interpret particular sets of data in the same way, or that these methods will be the only factors informing their decisions.[2] It does mean that participants in the discussion will implicitly acknowledge certain premises and certain rules of evidence and argument.

A discourse need not be of a purely scientific nature, however. We might conceive of the Abrahamic religious traditions as belonging to a particular discourse. Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith all agree on the divine missions of Abraham and Moses, and acknowledge the general principle of a personal God beyond history who intrudes into history to "reveal" itself to humankind through designated intermediaries. We might distinguish this discourse of the Abrahamic religious traditions from the Buddhist or Hindu traditions, which conceive of salvation history and of the numinous in substantially different ways from the Abrahamic traditions, and look to an entirely different line of enlightened ones as guides to the ultimate nature of reality.

The manifestation (*mazhar*) of God, in Bahá'í parlance, participates in a human discourse by communicating transcendent truth into a human language bound by culture and history, which nevertheless is able to transcend time and place. As Bahá'u'lláh alludes, in the *Hidden Words* (A67):

> By My spirit and by My favour! By My mercy and by My beauty! All that I have revealed unto thee with the tongue of power, and have written for thee with the pen of might, hath been in accordance with thy capacity and understanding, not with My state and the melody of My voice.[3]

Bahá'u'lláh spoke to the capacity and understanding of various correspondents, and thus addressed himself to more than one discourse tradition, as defined above. For example in communicating with Shiites or Babis, who expected an Eschaton in which the return of the 12th Imam figured prominently, Bahá'u'lláh frequently mentions the Qâ'im (Mahdî), Husayn and 'Alî, etc. He did not begin from the same assumptions, however, in communicating with Zoroastrians, who did not by and large revere Islamic figures and indeed would more likely have been offended by references to them. 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes this rhetorical principle explicit in a work written as a young man, in 1875:

> If for example a spiritually learned Muslim is conducting a debate with a Christian and he knows nothing of the glorious melodies of the Gospel, he will, no matter how much he imparts of the Qur'án and its truths, be unable to convince the Christian, and his words will fall on deaf ears. Should, however,

2 Different forms of discourse perform better or worse at answering certain kinds of questions. Scientific method, for example, does not do a particularly good job of addressing questions such as the existence or nature of divinity, the meaning of life, or how scientific knowledge should be morally applied.

3 *The Hidden Words*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, "with the assistance of some English friends" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, reprint 1975) 19-20, Arabic #67.

the Christian observe that the Muslim is better versed in the fundamentals of Christianity than the Christian priests themselves, and understands the purport of the Scriptures even better than they, he will gladly accept the Muslim's arguments, and he would indeed have no other recourse.[4]

Later in life, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said, in responding to his retinue's admiration for the effectiveness of his talks in America, that they were effective because he took the exigencies of the time (*eqtezâ-ye vaqt*) and the audience's perspective (*mashrab-e hozzâr*) into consideration. This report also suggests, however, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá learned from Bahá'u'lláh that this meant not simply respecting the audience by repeating the terms and assumptions of its cherished discourse, but including a quality of transcendental truth:

> *Bayân bâyad be-mashrab-e hozzâr va eqtezâ-ye vaqt bâshad, va hosn-e 'ebârat va e'tedâl dar adâ'-e ma'âni va kalemât lâzem, faqat harf zadan nist. Hamishe dar 'Akkâ Mirzâ Mohammad-e 'Ali bayânâti râ ke az man mi-shenid be-'aynehâ dar mavâqe'-e digar zekr migard [*sic*] vali moltafet nabud ke hezârân hekam va masâleh lâzem ast, na tanhâ goftan. Dar ayyâm-e Baghdâd va Solaymâniye, Shaykh 'Abd al-Hosayn gofte bud ke Jamâl-e Mobârak Kord-hâ râ be-in vasile jam' o jazb kardand, ke estelâhât-e 'orafâ va sufiyye râ bayân mi-nemudand. Bichâre Shaykh-e mazkur raft va ketâb-e <u>Futûhât-i Makkiya</u> râ paydâ va 'ebârat-e ân râ hefz nemude, dar har jâ zekr kard. Did hichkas gush nemi-dahad. Khayli ta'ajjob kard ke cherâ mardom gush nemidahand! Jamâl-e Mobârak farmudand: "Be–Shaykh begu'id mâ <u>Fotuhât-i Makkiya</u> râ nemi-khvânim, balke âyât-e madaniye râ elteqâ mi-konim. <u>Fosus</u>-e Shaykh râ nemi-gu'im, bal az nosus-e elâhiye harf mi-zanim."*[5]
>
> Discourse (*bayân*, also exposition, explanation, argument) must accord with the taste of the audience (*hozzâr*, literally, "those present) and the exigencies of the time. Elegance of expression and temperance is required in presenting (*adâ'*) meanings and ideas (*kalemât*, literally "words"), [but] it is not merely speaking [with words]. In Akkâ, Mirzâ Mohammad-e 'Ali always repeated verbatim on other occasions what he heard from me, but he was not aware that great wisdom (*hezârân hekam*, literally thousands of counsels or maxims) and much consideration (*masâleh*, literally the plural of welfare, benefit) are needed, not just talk. Shaykh 'Abd al-Hosayn had said that in the days of Baghdad and

[4] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, trans. Marzieh Gail with Ali Kuli Khan (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957; 3rd ed., 1975) 36. My thanks to Will McCants, who read a draft of this paper and pointed out the relevance of this passage here.

[5] Mirzâ Mahmud-e Zarqâni, *Badâye' al-âsâr* (Bombay, 1914; facsimile reprint, Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1982) 1:175-6. Note that this is Zarqâni's recollection of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá remembered Bahá'u'lláh to have said decades earlier, and as such is not authoritative. For speculation on Bahá'u'lláh's use of Sufi discourse as a bridge or transition between the particularist Shiite discourse of Babism and wider Sunni-based pan-Islamic concerns, see Franklin Lewis, "*Mathnaví-yi Mubárak*: introduction and provisional verse translation" [entitled "Poetry as Revelation" in the table of contents], *Bahá'í Studies Review* 9 (1999/2000) 106-16.

> Sulaymaniyyih the Blessed Beauty attracted the Kurds by discoursing in the terms of the gnostics and of Sufism. This poor Shaykh went and found a copy of the *Futûhât-i Makkîya,*[6] memorized its terminology, and used it everywhere. He found that no one would listen and was greatly surprised why people did not listen. The Blessed Beauty said, "Tell the Shaykh that we do not read *Futûhât-i Makkiya*, but recite the verses of civilization. We don't speak from the text of the *Fusûs* of the Shaykh, rather we speak of the divine texts."[7]

Although obviously informed of and able to participate in several different discourses, Bahá'u'lláh was visited by few Europeans during his lifetime, and does not seem to have been greatly preoccupied with addressing religious and philosophical matters in terms of western discourse.[8] The middle east did have, like the west, experience of newspapers, and Bahá'u'lláh described them as "the mirror of the world" (*mer'ât-e jahân*) and an "amazing and potent phenomenon" *(zohur-ist 'ajib va amr-ist bozorg*), while at the same time lamenting that most things reported of himself in the newspapers were incorrect. He warned journalists to be free of base or ulterior motivations (*az gharaz-e nafs va havâ*) and, instead, aspire to justice *('adl va ensâf*). In this context, Bahá'u'lláh recommends the following methodology or principle for journalists, which ought to apply equally to historians or those in any discipline seeking to write about the historical truth:

> *Dar omur be-qadr-e maqdur tafahhos namâyad tâ haqiqat-e ân âgâh shavad va benegârad.*
>
> They should enquire into situations as much as possible and ascertain the facts, then set them down in writing.[9]

Likewise, many of Bahá'u'lláh's moral exhortations could easily be extended to methodological premises, such as his injunction to the true seeker *(shakhs-e mojâhed*) to cleanse his heart from every remnant of love and hatred so that blind love will not lead

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6 *Futûhât-i Makkîya* (Meccan Revelations) is the magnum opus of the "Great Shaykh" of theoretical Sufism, Muhyî al-Dîn Ibn 'Arabî. Another of his works, *Fusûs al-Hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom), is also alluded to a few lines further down.

7 Translation by the present writer. This reported speech, which may or may not have been correctly remembered by Zarqâni, would have status in the Bahá'í community as "pilgrim's notes," not scripture.

8 The point has, however, been made, that in Istanbul and other places in the Middle East, political discourse had been greatly influenced in the latter half of the 19th century by European political theory. Juan Ricardo Cole in *Modernity and the Millenium*: *The Genesis of the Bahá'í Faith in the Nineteenth-century Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) argues that Bahá'u'lláh sometimes uses political terminology in a modern way that reflects awareness of European political theory. No general consensus has as yet emerged on the extent to which this may be the case.

9 All the preceding statements on journalism come from Bahá'u'lláh's tablet, "Tarâzât," in *Majmu'e'i az alvâh-e Jamâl-e Aqdas-e Abhâ ke ba'd az Ketâb-e Aqdas nâzel shode* (Langenhain: Lajne-ye Nashr-e âsâr-e Amri be-lesân-e Fârsi va 'Arabi, 137 B.E./1980) 21. The official English translation appears in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) 39-40.

him to err, nor will hatred prejudice him against the truth.[10] Likewise, we must not blindly imitate the ways of our forefathers,[11] but must see with our own eyes and hear with our own ears. To do this, and retain our humanity, we must be fair and equitable in our judgment:

> *Qul an ansifû yâ ûlî al-albâb, man lâ insâfa lahu lâ insânîya lahu*
>
> Say: Observe equity in your judgment, ye men of understanding heart! He that is unjust in his judgment is destitute of the characteristics that distinguish man's station.[12]

"Knowledge" in Bahá'u'lláh's writings

In the west, the post-Enlightenment discourse of knowledge had on several points contradicted religious dogma, traditional theology or notions about the authorship of the Bible. Therefore, science was seemingly in combat with religious knowledge, and western thinkers tended to dichotomise the two domains of knowledge. Since the clash between science and religion did not affect the Islamic world to the same extent it did the western world,[13] Bahá'u'lláh does not speak extensively of science in apposition or opposition to religion. He viewed the ultimate purpose of knowledge to be the moral improvement of humanity and the physical advance of civilization. Bahá'u'lláh describes the powers of human knowledge as ultimately proceeding from divine revelation or grace. As such, the goal of acquiring knowledge should be to further its possessors' progress toward God, not to veil him from divine truth:

> *Yâ qawm innâ qaddarnâ al-'ulûm li-'irfâni al-ma'lûm*
>
> We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learning be the

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10 Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán,* trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1931; 2nd ed. 1950) 192. For a more detailed consideration of this and related passages from the *Iqan*, see Momen's paper (p. 75) in this issue.

11 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, trans. Marzieh Gail in consultation with Ali Kuli Khan (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publish Trust, 1945, revised ed., 1975) 5.

12 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1939; 2nd revised edition, 1976) 204; Persian/Arabic text in *Montakhabâti az âsâr-e Hazrat-e Bahâ Allâh* (Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1984) 133.

13 While reason *('aql*) is celebrated by most Islamic thinkers, its limitations in apprehending the ultimate reality and attaining certitude (*yaqin*) are often discussed among Sufis in particular. This theme is repeatedly engaged, for example, by Rumi in his *Masnavi* (see Franklin Lewis*, Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000) 400ff. 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests in his 1875 *Secrets of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1975) 12, that the Iranian clergy cynically tried to convince the uneducated that modern western methods were contrary to religion. However, this was because they came from heathen Europeans, not because science and technology were inherently irreligious.

> recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge.[14]

In his later writings, Bahá'u'lláh frequently mentions the importance of acquiring knowledge and stresses the utilitarian and also transcendental value of the arts and sciences. In the sixth Tarâz, for example, Bahá'u'lláh declares:

> Knowledge (*dânâ'i*) is one of the wondrous gifts of God (*ne'mat-hâ-ye elâhi*). It is incumbent upon everyone to acquire it. Such arts and material means as are now manifest have been achieved by virtue of His knowledge (*'elm*) and wisdom (*hekmat*) which have been revealed in Epistles and Tablets through His Most Exalted Pen—a Pen out of whose treasury pearls of wisdom and utterance and the arts and crafts of the world are brought to light.[15]

In the Third Tajalli, Bahá'u'lláh writes of arts, crafts and sciences (*'olum va fonun va sanâye'*):

> Knowledge (*'elm*) is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent on everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim (*haqq*) of scientists and crafstmen (*sâhebân-e 'olum va sanâye'*) on the peoples of the world...In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him.[16]

Elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

> Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye

[14] Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992; Arabic edition, same place and publisher, 1995) verse 102. This passage was translated by Shoghi Effendi in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* 199 (# XCVIII).

[15] "Tarâzât," in Bahá'u'lláh, *Majmu'e'i az alvâh* 21 and in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 39.

[16] "Tajalliyât," in Bahá'u'lláh, *Majmu'e'i az alvâh* 28 and in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 51-2. Bahá'u'lláh also quotes the passage in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf,* trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1941; revised sixth printing, 1979) 26-7. The Persian text of the latter can be found in Bahá'u'lláh, *Lowh-e mobârak khatâb be Shaykh Mohammad Taqi Mojtahed-e Esfehâni, ma'ruf be Najafi* (Langenhain: Lajne-ye Nashr-e Âsâr-e Amri be-Lesân-e Fârsi va 'Arabi, 138 B.E./1982) 20. In view of recent concerns in various religious communities about inclusive language in scriptural texts, one might comment that the word "man" in the phrase "man's life" in the first sentence is not literally necessary and might unfortunately be read these days as an exclusive reference to the masculine gender. To avoid misapprehension, one might render the passage— *'elm be-manzele-ye jenâh ast az barâye vojud*—accurately and more in tune with the exigencies of the current time as "knowledge is as wings for creation." Likewise, in the final sentence, "knowledge is as a veritable treasure for man," the English predicate might also be pre-positioned, as it is in the Persian (*kanz-e haqiqi az barâye ensân 'elm-e u-st*), to render something like "The true treasure for mankind is his knowledge."

> needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception and eloquent speech.[17]

These and other writings of Bahá'u'lláh will, no doubt, be mined for further implications about the importance and the limitations of knowledge. Furthermore, reading Bahá'u'lláh's statements about the modes of knowing and the types of knowledge in the context of Islamic philosophical and religious discourse[18] might give us additional insight into the bases of Bahá'í epistemology. However, as mentioned earlier, Bahá'u'lláh does not usually address the problem of knowledge in terms of the western discourse on the conflict of science and religion or the contradictions of faith and reason,[19] a discourse which remains a crucial methodological issue in the western intellectual tradition. Rather, the notion of the harmony of science and religion, which has come to be thought of as a central principle of the Bahá'í Faith, seems to have been expounded most explicitly by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. During his travels in the west, 'Abdu'l-Bahá came into contact with many western intellectuals and religious thinkers of various backgrounds. His statements on these occasions extend and amplify his father's teachings by more directly engaging western discourse and methodology on the question of epistemology (or how we may know things), and the methodologies of investigation and inquiry.

If 'Abdu'l-Bahá did enter into discussions from the frame of reference of his audience (whether Shiite, Babi, Sunni, Christian, or secular western), then it is necessary to avoid facile conclusions about the propositional truth of each and every premise that he states. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá employs a particular discourse, he may not necessarily intend to validate it, as a "fact" or historical or physical reality, because the logical conclusions of a given discourse do not of necessity point to absolute truths. By analogy, a novel can reveal emotional, spiritual and social truths though it is entirely fictional: its truths are therefore propositional and metaphorical. Zarqâni quotes 'Abdu'l-Bahá as saying that the talks he gave in the churches and gatherings of America were in accordance with the receptivity of souls and the requirements of the age, at which point a poem is cited:

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17 *Bahá'í Education: a compilation of extracts from the Bahá'í Writings* (London: The Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976, revised 1987) 3.

18 There are, of course, fundamental differences between the traditional religious scholars (*'ulamâ*), the gnostics (*'urafâ*) or Sufis, and the philosophers (*mutakallimûn, hukamâ*) in their respective pursuit of the path of law (*sharî'a*), the path of interior spirituality (*tarîqa*), and *falsafa*. These various approaches diverge in their valorization of *'ilm* (knowledge) and *ma'rifa* (gnosis), *hikma* (wisdom), etc. Above and beyond this, however, different categories of knowledge have been adumbrated by medieval Muslim thinkers, such as al-Farâbî and al-Ghazzâlî, and the terms they have used might very well contribute to a more precise understanding of the terminology and concepts which 'Abdu'l-Bahá employs. One recent work of the many in English that treats this subject is Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study in the Islamic Philosophies of Science* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1998).

19 It is always dangerous to make statements such as this, since I have read only a small fraction of Bahá'u'lláh's voluminous writings, a great part of which remains as yet unpublished in the original languages. Obviously, our understanding of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh will become fuller as the entire corpus of his correspondence, tablets and books becomes available.

> The father sings la-la to lull his babe to sleep
> Although his mind encompasses a world of knowledge.[20]

So, when Bahá'u'lláh adopts a particular discourse—for example the discourse of Islamic philosophy he employs in his Tablet of Wisdom—we need not necessarily conclude that he is thereby validating it as propositionally, factually or absolutely true.[21] Rather than arguing that his audience's basic premises are imprecise or even false (a rhetorical strategy that might well distract listeners and engender resistance), Bahá'u'lláh would seem to let some of his audience's postulates, assumptions, and, even prejudices, stand. After all, these premises held by the audience are being used as analogs and metaphors to prove other points, and are, in themselves, of secondary importance. Similarly, the parables of Jesus are not meant to provide his audience with factual details of conversations or situations that actually took place; rather they are hypothetical or allegorical situations that point to a spiritual truth. Likewise, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of "ether" or refers to the Native Americans as "the savages of America,"[22] we might examine these statements as prevailing rhetorical assumptions, incidental elements of a particular discourse, rather than as absolute propositions about physical reality or historical truth.

So, in the remarks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that follow, he is arguing within a particular discourse. Therefore, some of the points made might variously be understood either as axiomatically true, relatively true, or metaphorically true. His comments on the types of knowledge and modes of acquiring them might intend a metaphorical reality, rather than a factual, scientific or propositionally exclusive mode of understanding ultimate reality. Indeed, even if some of these statements are meant to contain postulates of physics, chemistry, biology, history, etc., they may be simultaneously true with their apparent logical contraries (much as light can be understood both as a wave or as photon particles). In any case, according to the principle of the harmony of science and religion which these statements themselves expound, theological statements must be understood and construed in the light of scientific discoveries which may have some bearing on the

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20 Zarqâni, *Badâye'* 1:124. Zarqâni seems to imply that the phrase "were in accordance with the receptivity of souls and the requirements of the age" is a direct quote from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. I also infer that it was 'Abdu'l-Bahá who cited this proverbial verse on the occasion mentioned, though it may also be that Zarqâni adduced the verse to strengthen the point. In any case, the theme seems to echo the *Hidden Word* we saw above, that God reveals truth according to human capacity to understand, not according to divine omniscience.

21 See Juan Ricardo Cole, "Problems of Chronology in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom," *World Order* 13:3 (1979) 24-39, which suggests that the discourse of Islamic philosophy that Bahá'u'lláh adopts in this tablet closely follows what medieval Islamic historians presented as historical fact. However, the medieval Islamic historians were mistaken on some points of chronology and fact, at least insofar as we are able to establish with current research. That Bahá'u'lláh repeats these postulates ("facts" or "factoids") is due to his desire to explain things within the frame of reference of Islamic philosophy for the benefit of the addressee, and does not necessarily imply an absolute propositional assertion about the chronological facts of history.

22 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, collected and trans., Laura Clifford Barney, revised edition (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981) 190, 19. The Persian text is in *Mofâvazât*, (Cairo, 1920; facsimile reprint in New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983) 135 and 14 ("ether" renders *mâdde-ye asiriye*, and "savages of America" is for *barâbare va motavahheshin-e Amrikâ*).

same questions. Therefore, I do not propose that we necessarily understand the following comments of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as exclusive and absolute ways, valid in every conceivable frame of reference, of understanding the problem of truth and how human beings know things.

Consequently, I do not necessarily read the passages that follow from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings as the basis for a Bahá'í methodology or epistemology that should be advocated in a doctrinaire or dogmatic fashion. Rather, I would incline to see them as parables and guides to how Bahá'ís ought to think through the modern discourse on the conflict between science and religion, and more especially, the question of methodology in the study of the Bahá'í Faith (or any other object of investigation, for that matter). Since academic methodologies still operate largely within the discourse of the western empirical tradition and the enlightenment confrontation between science and tradition, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's framing of comments in this context ensures that they remain directly relevant to contemporary discourse.

A note on sources

As most of the passages in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings relevant to the question of epistemology considered in this paper come from *Some Answered Questions* or *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, some remarks are in order about these sources. *Some Answered Questions* (*Mofâvazât*), a record of the responses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a range of questions put to him by Laura Clifford Barney (later Dreyfus-Barney) in Akka during the years 1904-1906, offers one of the most systematic expositions of Baha'i beliefs about the human soul. It also addresses, both implicitly (by its insistent practice of logical philosophical argumentation) and explicitly (in theory), how we may know and discover the nature of reality, both physical and spiritual. *Some Answered Questions* was first published in London in 1908, with 'Abdu'l-Bahá listed as author and Barney as collector and translator of the Persian text. The Persian text was recorded by individuals accustomed to working as secretaries for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, since Barney did not wish to trust her personal notes. Barney gives the names of these secretaries as Myrza Hadi, Myrza Mohseinne, Nourideen and Moneer.[23] Their transcription of these talks was read line-by-line by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who occasionally corrected a word or a line with his reed pen, and then signed each lesson and stamped it with his seal, as he did with the tablets which he wrote or dictated himself. There are reportedly at least three copies of manuscripts extant, all of which contain corrections by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, himself.[24] The Persian text of the work was printed during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's lifetime, with the second edition published in Cairo by Faraj Allâh Zaki al-Kordi as *Al-nur al-abhâ fi Mofâvazât-e*

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23 Letter dated 31 March 1958 from Laura Dreyfus Barney to Horace Holley, cited among the Linard papers, accessed 11/30/00 at http://www.geocities.com/thlinard/publicat/saq.htm.

24 According to a letter from the Archives Office at the Bahá'í World Centre dated 9 December 1987, a copy of which was sent to the National Assembly of France, there were two copies of the Persian text in the Bahá'í Archives in Paris, one a copy of the secretary's notes of these talks taken at table, with corrections added by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the other a neat copy with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's further corrections. A third and later copy with still further amendments by 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in the Bahá'í World Centre Archives in Haifa. The text of this letter was accessed at www.geocities.com/thlinard/publicat.saq.htm on 11/30/00; a printout is in my possession.

'Abd al-Bahâ in 1920 (1329 AH).[25] *Some Answered Questions* is therefore considered as part of the authoritative scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith.

The talks that 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave while in North America are recorded in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, a compilation of stenographic records of speeches which 'Abdu'l-Bahá delivered in the United States and Canada. These records reflect what the note-takers understood from simultaneous English interpretations made by various Persians in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's entourage as he spoke in Persian. Comparison with the Persian originals of the talks reveals the English interpretations to be generally accurate.

The notes taken in English during some of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks were first published in the journal *Star of the West*. These articles, along with the notes from other talks, were later compiled by Howard MacNutt who sought 'Abdu'l-Bahá's permission to publish them in book form. Though 'Abdu'l-Bahá was aware that there had been errors by the interpreters, he gave permission for the compilation to be completed, charging Mr. MacNutt with the responsibility of taking care to ensure that the exact text of the talks be accurately reproduced without error and deviation.[26] The resulting book, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, was first published in two volumes, appearing in 1922 and 1925, respectively. It was subsequently reissued in a one-volume edition in 1939, and again in 1943. A new edition of this book appeared in 1982, containing a new translation by Amin Banani made directly from the Persian text of the talk delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá on 23 April 1912 at Howard University.

This particular talk at Howard University, because it is translated from the transcript of the original Persian, can be considered an accurate record of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá said. However, most of the talks in *Promulgation of Universal Peace* consist of the English notes recorded by various individuals, not of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, of course, but from the words of an interpreter. The English text, then, cannot be considered a verbatim record of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, and as such, it is not considered Bahá'í scripture. However, according to Zarqâni,[27] the *Persian* text of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks, as recorded by the Persian members of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's entourage, were generally presented to 'Abdu'l-Bahá for his approval and corrections before publication. As such, "the verbatim record in Persian of His talks would of course be more reliable than one in English, because he was not always accurately interpreted," as indicated in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 24 October 1947. A letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated 24 June 1980, indicates that where the "original authenticated text" of the Persian talk has not been found, the existing English texts in *Promulgation of Universal Peace* and *Paris Talks* would have to be "clearly distinguished from those which form a part of Bahá'í Scripture." These English notes of talks are not, therefore, Bahá'í scripture. They may nevertheless be used by the Bahá'í community as long as these

[25] I am working from a facsimile offprint published by the national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of India in 1983.

[26] See the translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's letters provided in the introduction to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, compiled by Howard MacNutt, revised edition (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) xx.

[27] Zarqâni, *Badâye'* 1:54, also 58.

distinctions are maintained and "the degree of authenticity of every document" is known and understood. The original authenticated Persian transcription of the talks would, by contrast, seem to qualify as Bahá'í scripture. The Persian text of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks in Europe, America and Egypt has fortunately been published, and it contains most, though by no means all, of the talks appearing in *Promulgation of Universal Peace*.[28] For this reason, we will consider the transliterated Persian text in conjunction with the English wherever possible.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments on epistemology

'Abdu'l-Bahá draws a distinction in some passages of *Some Answered Questions* between "logical" and "spiritual" proofs:

> The proofs which we have adduced relative to the origin of the human species were logical proofs. Now we will give the spiritual proofs, which are essential. For, as we have proved Divinity by logical arguments, and have also proved logically that man exists from his origin and foundation as man, and that his species has existed from all eternity, now we will establish spiritual proofs that human existence—that is the species of man—is a necessary existence, and that without man the perfections of Divinity would not appear. But these are spiritual proofs, not logical proofs...[29]

The reader will remark that neither the logical proofs (the word used in Persian for "logical" being *'aqli*, with a semantic range of rational, reasonable, logical, mental), nor the spiritual proofs (the word here translated as spiritual being *elâhi*, meaning divine, Lordly, belonging to the realm of God), is considered superior. Both are presented as valid ways of establishing truth, effective in certain contexts.

When we come to the end of this same section, however, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that not everyone will accept the spiritual proofs (*adalle-ye elâhiye*), and he has therefore begun with logical argumentation (*adalle-ye 'aqliye*), which is a self-evident mode of discourse, one open to discussion on shared premises and capable of acceptance or rejection by people of various beliefs on the common ground of logic:

> This is a spiritual truth, but one which we cannot at the beginning put forth for the benefit of the materialists. First we must speak of the logical proofs, afterward the spiritual proofs.[30]

Indeed, there are passages in the talks and writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá where he appears

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28 'Abd al-Bahâ, *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât-e Hazrat-e 'Abd al-Bahâ* (Langenhain: Lajne-ye Melli-ye Nashr-e Âsâr-e Amri be zabân-hâ-ye Fârsi va 'Arabi, 1984). This is a one volume reprint of separate volumes previously published in Egypt (1340 A.H./1921, and 99 B.E./1942-3) and in Tehran (127 B.E./1970-1971).

29 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, rev. ed., 195. This is from Chapter 50, "Spiritual Proofs of the Origin of Man." For the original Persian, see *Mofâvazât* 138.

30 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 197 and *Mofâvazât* 140.

to privilege that the logical mode of discourse as a means of understanding apparent contradictions between science and religion:

> That which science and reason cannot support must be rejected as imitation and not reality. Then differences of belief will disappear.[31]

The authenticated Persian original of this is even more emphatic in the primacy it gives to science and reason.

> If one of the religious questions is contrary to reason, contrary to science, it is pure fancy...that which science does not verify, reason does not accept, is not the truth.

The Persian text reads:

> *agar mas'ale-i az masâ'el-e dini mokhâlef-e 'aql bâshad, mokhâlef-e 'elm bâshad, vahm-e mahz ast...ânche 'elm tasdiq nemikonad, 'aql qabul nemikonad, haqiqat nist*[32]

Bahá'ís themselves probably do not think of the harmony of science and religion in such stark terms of privileging science over scripture, but let's consider another passage from a talk given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Church of the Messiah in Montreal, which, according to the Persian text of the talk, was a Unitarian church *(kelisâ-ye movaheddin*):[33]

> Bahá'u'lláh has declared that religion must be in accord with science and reason. If it does not correspond with scientific principles and the processes of reason, it is superstition. For God has endowed us with faculties by which we may comprehend the realities of things, contemplate reality itself. If religion is opposed to reason and science, faith is impossible...
>
> *Din bâyad motâbeq-e 'elm va 'aql bâshad. Agar motâbeq-e 'elm va 'aql na-bâshad, owhâm ast, zirâ khodâ 'aql be ensân dâde tâ edrâk-e haqâ'eq-e ashyâ' konad, haqiqat be-parastad. Agar din mokhâlef-e 'elm va 'aql bâshad, momken nist sabab-e etminân-e qalb shavad; chun sabab-e etminân nist, owhâm ast...lehâzâ, bâyad masâ'el-e diniye râ bâ 'aql va 'elm tatbiq nemud, tâ qalb etminân yâbad va sabab-e sorur-e ensân shavad*

'Abdu'l-Bahá several times repeated in almost identical words this idea that religion

[31] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 175-6.

[32] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât* 439-40 (English pagination at the foot of page). The provisional English translation preceding the transliterated Persian text is my own.

[33] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 298-9 and *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât* 530. Presumably, the denomination of the church can be checked against historical records.

must conform to science, not the other way around. For example, the following passage:[34]

> The fourth teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the agreement of religion and science. God has endowed man with intelligence and reason, whereby he is required to determine the verity of questions and propositions. If religious beliefs and opinions are found contrary to the standards of science, they are mere superstitions and imaginations; for the antithesis of knowledge is ignorance, and the child of ignorance is superstition. Unquestionably there must be agreement between true religion and science. If a question be found contrary to reason, faith and belief in it are impossible, and there is no outcome but wavering and vacillation.
>
> *Ta'lim-e chahârom-e Hazrat-e Bahâ' Allâh ânke din bâyad motâbeq-e 'elm bâshad zirâ khodâ 'aql be-ensân dâde tâ haqâ'eq-e ashyâ' râ tahqiq namâyad. Agar masâ'el-e diniye mokhâlef-e 'aql va 'elm bâshad, vahm ast, zirâ moqâbel-e 'elm, jahl ast. Lâ bodd din bâyad motâbeq-e 'aql bâshad tâ az barâye ensân etminân hâsel shavad. Agar mas'ale'i mokhâlef-e 'aql bâshad, momken nist az barâye ensân etminân hâsel gardad. Hamishe motazalzel ast.*

Bahá'ís and the western academy

If conflicts between science and religion, reason and faith, are to be adjudicated according to rational standards, such inquiries obviously cannot be carried out upon denominational lines. If the origins of the world, for example, are to be determined on the basis of scriptural accounts and theological traditions, then evangelical Christians would have one reality, Native Americans another, liberal Christians yet another, Buddhists yet again another, and so forth. There is no way to adjudicate between competing faith claims, which rest on the authority of scriptures or traditions considered divinely inspired. Rational, scientific methodology, however, creates a common ground upon which the various faith communities can meet and discuss evidence according to experimentally or logically verifiable standards, for all can participate in a shared discussion using these tools.[35]

Obviously, Bahá'ís, like other people of faith, must pursue such means of debate in

34 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 181 and *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât* 450. Note that the Persian repeats almost verbatim in some parts what we saw in the previous quotation, although the English versions reflect slightly greater variations.

35 As the University of Virginia was about to open, objections were raised over the fact that it had no professorship of divinity. Critics said this was not merely because the university was prohibited by the Constitution from upholding a particular kind of religion, but felt that the university was in fact against all religion. In response, the university trustees offered each religious sect to establish a professorship of its own, each according to its own particular tenets, on the grounds of the campus, so that students could use the library of the University (i.e., the public space of discourse) while still pursuing denominational, parochial studies. Thomas Jefferson explained, "By bringing the sects together, and mixing them with the mass of other students, we shall soften their asperities, liberalize and neutralize their prejudices, and make the general religion a religion of peace, reason and morality" (Thomas Jefferson, *Writings* [Library of America, 1994] 1465).

the public sphere, following shared methodologies, with people who do not accept many or even any of the same faith postulates. To do so, they must leave the comfortable topography of their faith-based mental landscape, and explore the common boundaries of discourse both within and outside the academy, among people of a variety of creeds, with a wide spectrum of beliefs about the ultimate nature of life and whether God is still healthy, ailing or dead. Such "intellectual pioneering" on the part of people of faith is an opportunity for consultation and ecumenical association with people of different faiths and of no faith in the crucial public sphere where civil and secular society is created, and which best fosters multiple approaches to the independent investigation of truth. This does not require any of the parties to jettison their faith or supra-rational beliefs; it merely means that they bracket these beliefs for the sake of discussion with people who do not begin from the same premises. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "first we must speak of logical proofs."

This rationalist mode of discourse is based on a culture of respect for the human mind. It is not completely value-free, nor does it require a purely materialist conception of the cosmos, though it can. Committed Christians of a certain stripe in the United States sometimes disparagingly refer to this type of intellectual discourse as "secular humanism." Within the Bahá'í community, there are also those who sometimes look upon intellectuals with scepticism or fear. People who rely overmuch on the intellect, at the expense of the spirit, are perhaps thought to hold and promote a distorted view of truth, or to be blind to the true promptings of the meta-rational or non-material world. There are statements in the Bahá'í writings to the effect that worldly knowledge can act as a veil to blind its possessor to the truth—this not because knowledge, or the pursuit of it, is corrosive, but because knowledge can lead to pride and hubris in those who possess it. However, both Bahá'u'lláh (in, e.g., *Seven Valleys,* 5; *Kitáb-i-Íqán,* 192-3; and the *Javâher al-asrâr*), and 'Abdu'l-Bahá (in *Some Answered Questions*), explain that the principle of independent investigation of truth requires that we be fair in our judgment, and not allow our love for or prejudice against particular people, and one presumes ideas, turn us away from the truth.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, himself, visited universities and praised their scientific methodologies. At Stanford University on 8 October 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá told 1800 university students and 180 professors that "knowledge" is the greatest of human achievements. He used the word '*elm* (Arabic, '*ilm*), meaning acquired knowledge, or science.[36] This word '*ilm* was traditionally used for the religious sciences, that is to say, the knowledge of *hadith* and their transmission, of the Koran and the Sunna, among other things. Its primary object was knowing the laws of Islam, expounded through established principles of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) which had been worked out and agreed upon as

[36] In the English translation of the talk, as transcribed by Bijou Straun, this reads "The greatest attainment in the world of humanity has ever been scientific in nature" (*Promulgation of Universal Peace* 348). The Persian reads "*a'zam manqabat-e 'âlam-e ensâni 'elm ast*" (from *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât* 570), a phrase which 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have used verbatim elsewhere in his talks, as well. See, for example, *Payâm-e Malakût*, ed. A.H. Ishrâq-Khâvari (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1986) 82, 86, and in the many examples from *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât* quoted above.

canonical.[37] In the 19th century, however, as scientific and technical knowledge began to permeate the middle east from Europe, the word '*ilm*, especially in its plural ('*ulûm*), was often used to translate "science" or the physical "sciences." It has now come to mean academic methods of study in general (*ravesh-e 'elmi* = scientific method) or bodies of knowledge, as in the academic discipline of political science (*'olum-e siâsi*) or even more generally, the humanities (*'olum-e ensâni*) and the natural sciences *('olum-e tabi'i*).

This acquired human knowledge ('*ilm*) is distinct from '*irfân*, the knowledge of spiritual recognition or insight, a word which among Sufis often has the meaning of esoteric knowledge or gnosis, though it can also more mundanely convey the sense of "cognition." It is actually this type of spiritual insight-knowledge-cognition (Arabic '*irfân*, Persian '*erfân*) of God, along with worship of the Deity, that is the purpose of human life, as Bahá'u'lláh calls upon his followers to confess in their obligatory prayers:

> I testify, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know ('*irfân*) Thee and to worship Thee
>
> *ashhadu yâ ilâhî bi-annaka khalaqtanî li-'irfânika wa 'ibâdatika*

To achieve this knowledge of God or Truth (*ma'refat-e Haqq*), a person must rely upon his own efforts of insight, his heart and his innate character (*be-basar va qalb va fetrat-e khod*). It is insufficient to imitate what one has been told (*che ke taqlid kefâyat nanamâyad*). This kind of knowledge/recognition/insight of God ('*irfân*) is, Bahá'u'lláh says in his Words of Wisdom, the root of the more experiential or logical knowledges, or sciences ('*ulûm*).[38]

> The greatest attainment in the world of humanity has ever been scientific in nature. It is the discovery of the realities of things...The highest praise is due to men who devote their energies to science, and the noblest centre is a centre wherein the sciences and arts are taught and studied. Science ever tends to the illumination of the world of humanity. It is the cause of eternal honour to man...[39]

The Persian is actually much more forceful, and it uses the word "ulema" (Persian *'olamâ*, derived from Arabic), a word that is typically translated from Islamic texts into western languages as "clergy," but which means "the learned," people who have studied and mastered the sciences, foremost among which was the science of hadith, the knowledge of Koran, of Islamic law, theology, (eventually also physics and philosophy, etc):

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[37] Eventually four schools (*madhhab*) were accepted as canonically valid points of view among the Sunnis. Shiites had their own schools, which have been reduced in modern times to one (*Ja'fari*) and recognized as canonical among most Sunnis.

[38] *Asl-i kull al-'ulûm huwa 'irfân Allâh, jalla jalâlahu*. Cited in Fâzel-e Mâzandarâni, ed., *Amr va Khalq* (Tehran, 111 B.E./1954-5; reprint Langenhain: Lajne-ye Nashr-e Âsar-e Amri be-Lesân-e Fârsi va 'Arabi, 141 B.E./1985) 1:14-15. The original source is not further specified.

[39] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 348.

> *A'zam manqabat-e 'âlam-e ensâni 'elm ast, zirâ kashf-e haqâyeq-e ashyâ' ast... Ashraf jami'ati ke dar 'âlam tashkil migardad jam'iyat-e 'olamâ ast va ashraf markaz dar 'âlam-e ensâni markaz-e 'olum va fonun ast, zirâ 'elm sabab-e rowshanâ'i-ye 'âlam ast, sabab-e râhat va âsâyesh ast, 'elm sabab-e 'ezzat-e 'âlam-e ensâni ast.*[40]

On May 23, 1912, at Clark University, in Worcester, Massachusetts, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had used almost identical words. This talk is not included in translation in *Promulgation of Universal Peace*; a provisional rendering therefore follows the transliterated Persian:

> *Pas ma'lum shod ke 'elm a'zam-e manâqeb-e 'âlam-e ensani ast. 'Elm 'ezzat-e abadi ast, 'elm hayât-e sarmadi ast...*
> *Zirâ 'elm anvâr ast va shakhs-e 'âlem mesl-e qendil-e derakhshande va tâbân. Jami'-e khalq mayyet-and va 'olamâ zende...*
> *Mashâhir-e 'olamâ'e salaf râ molâheze konid ke setâre-ye 'ezzat-eshân az ofoq-e abadi derakhshande ast va tâ abad al-âbâd bâqi va bar qarâr. Lehâzâ nehâyat-e sorur râ dâram ke dar in dâr al-fonun hâzer-am. Omid-am chonân ast ke in markaz 'azim shavad va be-anvâr-e 'olum jami'-e âfâq râ rowshan konad, kur hâ râ binâ konad... Zirâ 'elm nur ast va jahl zolmat* [41]
>
> [So it is evident that knowledge is the greatest of the virtues of the human world. Knowledge is eternal might, knowledge is everlasting life... for knowledge is rays of light and the learned person is like a bright and shining lamp. All creatures are as dead, and the learned (*'olamâ*) alive...Consider the famous learned ones of the past and how the star of their might shines from the horizon of eternity and will remain fixed and undying from the beginning to the end of eternity. Therefore, I am extremely happy to be in this academy (*dâr al-fonun*).[42] My hope is that this centre will become great and illumine all horizons with the lights of knowledge ('*olum*), give sight to the blind... for knowledge is light and ignorance is darkness...]

During the course of this same talk, 'Abdu'l-Bahá praised the academic institutions of the United States, colleges and technical universities (*madâres-e dâr al-fonun-hâ*). He expressed the hope that other countries would follow this example and establish schools for the training of children, and raise the banner of knowledge so that the world of humanity would be illuminated and the realities and mysteries of all beings become apparent and prejudices be dispelled.[43] Since these same institutions were champions of

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[40] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât* 570.

[41] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât* 382.

[42] Literally, Academy of Arts/Technical Academy. This was the name of the first college established in Tehran along European models in 1851.

[43] *Al-hamdo le'llâh dar in eqlim 'elm ruz be ruz be taraqqi ast va madâres-e dâr al-fonun-hâ besyar ta'sis shode ast va dar in madâres talâmeze be nehâyat jahd mikushand va kashf-e haqâyeq-e 'âlam-e ensâni mikonand. Omid-am chonân ast ke mamâlek-e sâyere eqtedâ be in mamlekat namâyand va madâres-e 'adide barâye tarbiyat-e owlâd-hâ-ye khod bar pâ dârand va 'alam-e 'elm râ boland konand tâ 'âlam-e*

academic methodologies (sometimes considered materialist methodologies) and upheld theories, such as evolution, that were opposed by religious orthodoxy, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments, in the context of those days, suggests support for such methodologies.

At the Bethel Literary Society in Washington, DC, 'Abdu'l-Bahá specifically praised the technique of "inductive reasoning and research," through the process of which man is "informed of all that appertains to humanity." A scientific man using these principles "studies the human body politic, understands social problems and weaves the web and texture of civilization." Indeed, science is the "very foundation of all individual and national development. Without the basis of investigation development is impossible." He even puts it this way:

> All blessings are divine in origin, but none can be compared with this power of intellectual investigation and research...All other blessings are temporary, this is an everlasting possession.[44]

Bahá'u'lláh confirms the importance of this blessing, in the *Lawh-i Hikmat*, where he enjoins upon us respect for the learned (the *'ulamâ'*, the possessors of *'ilm*, the same who are denounced in *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* as "the learned divines"):

> Beware O My loved ones, lest ye despise the merits of My learned servants whom God hath graciously chosen to be the exponents of His Name, "The Fashioner" amidst mankind.[45]

In a talk in Minneapolis not regarded as authenticated because the original Persian notes are not extant, 'Abdu'l-Bahá praised the philosophic methods practised by "the philosophers of Greece—such as Aristotle, Socrates, Plato and others," who were "devoted to the investigation of both natural and spiritual phenomena."

> In divine questions we must not depend entirely upon the heritage of tradition and former human experience; nay, rather we must exercise reason, analyse and logically examine the facts presented so that confidence will be inspired and faith attained. Then and then only the reality of things will be revealed to us.
>
> Today the philosophy and logic of Aristotle are known throughout the world. Because they were interested in both natural and divine philosophy, furthering the development of the physical world of mankind as well as the intellectual, they rendered praiseworthy service to humanity. This was the reason of the triumph and survival of their teachings and principles. Man should continue both these lines of research and investigation so that all the human virtues, outer and inner, may become possible. The attainment of these virtues, both material and ideal, is conditioned upon intelligent investigation of reality, by which investigation the

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ensâni rowshan gardad va haqâ'eq va asrâr-e kâ'enât zâher shavad. In ta'assobât-e jâheliye namânad... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât* 383).

44 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 50.

45 Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 150; *Majmu'e-ye alvâh* 51-2.

> sublimity of man and his intellectual progress is accomplished. Forms must be set aside and renounced; reality must be sought. We must discover for ourselves where and what reality is. In religious beliefs nations and peoples today are imitators of ancestors and forefathers...The requirement in this day is that man must independently and impartially investigate every form of reality.[46]

Faith itself, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is here quoted as saying, requires the exercise of reason and logic.

Types of knowledge

In a talk to the Theosophists of Paris, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of knowledge (*'elm*) being of two kinds—abstract (*tasavvori,* conceptual or suppositional) and empirical (*tahaqqoqi*)—and he stressed the importance of the latter: "Complete knowledge is the experiential realization of a thing, not the imagination of a thing."[47] In his table talks with Laura Clifford Barney, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also divides knowledge into two types, though these categories differ somewhat from that above:

> A subject that is essential[48] for the comprehension of the questions that we have mentioned, and of others of which we are about to speak, so that the essence of the problems may be understood, is this: that human knowledge is of two kinds. One is the knowledge of things perceptible to the senses (*ma'lumât-e mahsuse*)—that is to say, things which the eye, or ear, or smell, or taste, can perceive, which are called objective, or sensible. So the sun, because it can be seen is said to be objective; and in the same way sounds are sensible because the ear hears them...
>
> The other kind of human knowledge is intellectual (*ma'qulât*)—that is to say, it is a reality of the intellect (*haqâ'eq-e ma'qule*); it has no outward form and no place and is not perceptible to the senses. For example, the power of intellect (*'aql*) is not sensible; none of the inner qualities of man is a sensible thing; on the contrary they are intellectual realities (*haqâ'eq-e ma'qule*). So love is a mental reality and not sensible (*va hamchonin hobb niz haqiqat-e ma'qule ast, mahsuse nist*); for this reality the ear does not hear, the eye does not see, the smell does not perceive...In the same way, nature, also, in its essence is an intellectual reality and is not sensible; the human spirit is an intellectual, not sensible reality...

This passage is taken from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discourse titled "Outward Forms and Symbols

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46 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 327.

47 Cited in Mâzandarâni, ed. *Amr va khalq* 1:67. Provisional translation by the present writer.

48 A footnote appears here in the English text of *Some Answered Questions* indicating, "Lit., the pivot." The Persian reads "*yek mas'ale ke khayli madâr ast*," which could also be translated as "One matter which is pivotal..."

Must be Used to Convey Intellectual Conceptions,"[49] which argues that scripture must be understood symbolically, as a metaphor for an intellectual reality that is not perceptible to the senses (*haqâ'eq-e ma'qule ast ke surat-e khârejiye nadârad va makân nadârad va ghayr mahsuse ast*).

'Abdu'l-Bahá returns to this theme in another chapter of *Some Answered Questions*, "The Knowledge of the Divine Manifestations." Laura Clifford Barney asks if the knowledge of the divine manifestations is limited, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reply should be noted here in full:

> Knowledge is of two kinds. One is subjective (*'elm-e vojudi*)[50] and the other is objective knowledge (*'elm-e sovari*)--that is to say, an intuitive knowledge (*'elm-e tahaqqoqi*) and a knowledge derived from perception (*'elm-e tasavvori*).
>
> The knowledge of things which men universally have is gained by reflection or by evidence--that is to say, either by the power of the mind the conception of an object is formed, or from beholding an object the form is produced in the mirror of the heart. The circle of this knowledge is very limited because it depends upon effort and attainment.
>
> But the second sort of knowledge, which is the knowledge of being, is intuitive (*'elm-e vojudi va tahaqqoqi ast*); it is like the cognizance and consciousness that man has of himself.
>
> For example, the mind (*'aql*) and the spirit of man are cognizant of the conditions and states of the members and component parts of the body, and are aware of all the physical sensations; in the same way, they are aware of their power, of their feelings, and of their spiritual conditions. This is the knowledge of being which man realizes and perceives, for the spirit surrounds the body and is aware of its sensations and powers. This knowledge is not the outcome of effort and study. It is an existing thing; it is an absolute gift.[51]

Modes of knowing

'Abdu'l-Bahá outlines four methods of acquiring knowledge, or modes of perception (*mizân-e edrâk*) in *Some Answered Questions*: the senses (*mizân-e hess*); reason (*mizân-e 'aql*); religious tradition (*mizân-e naql*; less specifically, whatever human knowledge is known through transmission, oral or written, and not through sense perception or logic); and the comprehension which comes through the bounty of the Holy Spirit (*fayz-e Ruh al-qodos*).[52] The first three methods are fallible: the senses can be mistaken; logic and reason, presumably because they can begin with faulty premises, can lead to conflicting conclusions; religious tradition, because it involves interpretation, which

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[49] *Dar bayân-e ânke ma'qulât faqat bevâsete-ye ezhâr dar qamis-e mahsus bâyad bayân shavad.* 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 83, *Mofâvazât* 61-2.

[50] One is tempted to translate in more technical terms, but perhaps somewhat anachronistically, as "ontological."

[51] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 157, *Mofâvazât* 111-12.

[52] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 297-9, *Mofâvazât* 207-8.

requires the use of reason, is also faulty. These various methods may be used separately, or in conjunction with one another; that is to say they are independent modes of investigation, though they can, and should, be brought to bear simultaneously on certain issues. Reason is the method 'Abdu'l-Bahá associates with the philosophers, and religious tradition with the theologians and clergy. Unfortunately, none of these methods are absolutely reliable. The fourth method, the outpourings of the holy spirit, is the only one that is true and sound (*sahih),* never subject to doubt (*dar ân abadan shakk va shobheh'i nist*). However, it apparently comes to us only by divine grace (*fayz*), and not by our own will and effort.[53]

At the Hotel Ansonia in New York on 17 April 1912, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of this fourth mode of knowledge it was translated as "inspiration",[54] and it was described as an "influx of the human heart." 'Abdu'l-Bahá went on to say, however, the "satanic promptings which afflict mankind" are also an "influx of the heart." 'Abdu'l-Bahá then poses the question, how do we know when our inspiration is divine and when it is "satanic"?

> Briefly, the point is that in the human material world of phenomena these four are the only existing criteria or avenues of knowledge, and all of them are faulty and unreliable. What then remains? How shall we attain the reality of knowledge? By the breath and prompting of the Holy Spirit, which is light and knowledge itself.[55]

Evidently, then, though perception, logic, and tradition are all flawed modes of knowledge, it is necessary sometimes to use the reason as the primary or at least initial mode of discourse, because the reason is a method that does not require equal stations of spiritual insight between the interlocutors, but provides a common ground, like the physical senses, on which most observers can agree.

Here is the closest we can come to certainty, by involving various modes of knowledge, as 'Abdu'l Bahá, according to the notes taken by Edna McKinney from a simultaneous translation given while he spoke at Green Acre on 16th August 1912, explains:

> But a statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete. When we apply but one test, there are possibilities of mistake. This is self-evident and

53 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 299, *Mofâvazât* 208.

54 The original Persian of this talk is not included in *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât*, and it cannot therefore be considered as official scripture of the Bahá'í Faith.

55 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 21-2, notes by Howard MacNutt. The Persian original of this talk is apparently not given in *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât*.

manifest.[56]

Perhaps the reason for this is that 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of the mind ('*aql*) and the spirit (*ruh*) as separate entities, which is, of course, an established discourse of neo-Platonic thought within the Islamic tradition. They are both present at birth, but in an imperfect state, "only when man attains maturity do the mind and the spirit appear and become evident in utmost perfection."[57]

Elsewhere, 'Abdu'l-Bahá distinguishes between soul (*nafs*), spirit (*ruh*) and mind ('*aql*). Spirit appears to be a quiddity, a kind of essence of an ontological state. There is a vegetable spirit (*ruh-e nabâti*), an animal spirit (*ruh-e hayvâni*), a human spirit (*ruh-e ensâni*), a spirit of faith (*ruh-e imâni*) and the holy spirit (*Ruh al-qodos*). The vegetable and the animal spirit are subject to composition and decomposition, and hence are not immortal; the human spirit, on the other hand, is defined by the rational soul (*nafs-e nâteqe*), which distinguishes it from the animal spirit. The human spirit and the rational soul are two names for one reality, the "rational soul" being a term used by the philosophers. It is this that allows us to discover the realities of things, but unless assisted by the spirit of faith, our rational soul cannot become apprised of "the divine secrets and heavenly realities" (*mottale' be asrâr-e elâhiye va haqâ'eq-e lâhutiye*). 'Abdu'l-Bahá compares this rational soul to a mirror, which no matter how polished, cannot reflect light until the light of faith shines upon it.[58]

Yet, the power within the human spirit is the mind or intellect (*'aql*). This intellect is like the light shining within the lamp of the rational soul/human spirit, or like the rays of the sun, with the soul/spirit being the sun.[59] The rational soul, which all humans possess alike, whether they are believers, deniers, faithful or wayward, is responsible for the discovery of all the sciences, arts, knowledge, institutions, and discoveries. True, this power of knowledge is limited and makes its discoveries only through the toil of investigation, and is subject to error. In contrast, the universal divine intellect ('*aql-e kolli-ye elâhi*) is a supernatural power (*mâ varâ'e tabi*'*at*), which, however, only the holy manifestations and the dawning places of prophecy possess. Human beings are illumined by it only in small measure, as it is reflected by God's intermediaries,[60] and we cannot attain to it through effort; this power to perceive spiritual realities is bestowed by the bounty of God. On the other hand, the power to make earthly discoveries is not bestowed on the basis of faithfulness or belief or any other spiritual quality, but on the basis of the effort of mental investigation.[61] And it is the rational soul/human spirit (*nafs-e nâteqe/ruh-e ensâni*) which is the immortal part of the human being, which will live on after our death.[62]

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56 Recorded in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 255. The Persian original of this talk is not given in *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât.*

57 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 198, *Mofâvazât* 141.

58 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 208-9, *Mofâvazât* 148.

59 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 209, *Mofâvazât* 148.

60 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions,* cited in Fâzel-e Mâzandarâni, ed. A*mr va khalq* 1:222.

61 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 217-19.

62 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 239, *Mofâvazât* 168.

'Abdu'l-Bahá enumerates in *Some Answered Questions* the following "spiritual powers" (*qovâ-ye ma'naviye*),[63] or faculties of the intellect and rational soul, which are over and above the five senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell), which we share in common with the animal spirit.[64] They are the power of the imagination (*qovve-ye motakhayyele*) which conceive things; the power of thought (*qovve-ye motafakkere*),[65] which reflects on realities; the power of comprehension (*qovve-ye modreke*) which comprehends realities; memory (*qovve-ye hâfeze*),[66] which retains that which man imagines, thinks or comprehends. There is a further sense, which mediates between the five outward or physical senses and these inward powers of the mind. This faculty 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls "the common faculty" (*hess-e moshtarak*).[67] Of these five inward powers, which operate hierarchically, the common faculty is the first, transferring an impression of the physical senses to the imagination, which transfers to thought, which is transformed into comprehension, and is preserved in the memory.[68]

These powers are not possessed in equal capacity by all. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that each person has intelligence and capacity, but in differing degrees. Furthermore, the degree of education affects the intelligence.[69] But, as we have seen above, this power is not dependent on spiritual attainment, belief in God, creed or any other qualification, other than the innate mental capacity and the degree of education. Of course, we do not gain knowledge of the essence of things, but only of their qualities (*chun ma'rufiyat-e ashyâ, va hâl ânke khalq-and va mahdud-and, be safât-ast, nah be zât*).[70] However, the English notes of the words spoken by 'Abdu'l-Bahá on September 20, 1912, at the home of Albert Hall in Minneapolis do equate the acquisition of knowledge and the development of the intellect with the capacity to attain virtue:

> As human creatures fitted and qualified with this dual endowment, we must endeavour through the assistance and grace of God and by the exercise of our

63 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 210, *Mofâvazât* 149.

64 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 217, *Mofâvazât* 153.

65 These two terms were used a thousand years earlier by al-Fârâbî and Avicenna (Ibn Sînâ) and have been rendered in English as the faculty of "compositive imagination" or the "sensitive imagination" (*mutakhayyala*), and the "cogitative faculty" or "rational imagination" (*mutafakkira*), where they apply respectively to animals (*mutakhayyala*) and humans (*mutafakkira*). See Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna (Ibn Sînâ)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) 62-63 and 82 and Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge* 51-53.

66 This term is also used by Avicenna and al-Fârâbî; see Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy* 63 and Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge* 51.

67 Avicenna uses this term, too (*al-hiss al-mushtarak*), which he sometimes seems to equate with "fantasy" (*banṭâsiyâ*), and locates in the front ventricle of the brain. In Avicenna's view, this faculty organizes the perceptions of the five senses in the brain and makes them relational and intelligible. Heath, *Allegory* 62, translates the phrase as "common sense."

68 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 210-11, *Mofâvazât* 149.

69 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 212ff, *Mofâvazât* 150ff.

70 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 220, *Mofâvazât* 155.

ideal power of intellect to attain all lofty virtues, that we may witness the effulgences of the Sun of Reality.[71]

Implications for Bahá'í methodology

Bahá'u'lláh, in presenting his message to Zoroastrians like Ustâd Javân Mard or Mânikji Sâhibji, did not emphasize the Shiite teachings or the Islamic tradition with which the Babis were engaged, for it was in fact anathema to the Zoroastrians. In so doing, Bahá'u'lláh did not abandon his belief in the truth of Muhammad or Shiism, he just bracketed those beliefs to participate in a discourse that a Zoroastrian could "hear" and respect. In similar fashion, the act of bracketing one's spiritual or supra-rational beliefs to participate in academic discourse that is believable, that can be heard, by people who do not share the same premises is not an inherently materialist exercise, nor does it presuppose abandoning one's faith convictions. Bahá'ís in academia should, of course, adopt the assumptions of intellectual discourse, not only because this is the only way to engage in a constructive dialogue with non-Bahá'í intellectuals and academics, but because it preserves, employs, and hones sophisticated techniques which help us to better understand not only the physical world, but the mental universe of the present and past.

If there is such a thing as a distinctively Bahá'í methodology, it cannot be based on essential differences in the modes of perception and evaluation of information. That is to say, somewhat obviously, there is no inherently Bahá'í mode of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, etc. There is likewise no inherent difference among people of different creeds in their ability for logic or rational evaluation; Socrates must be mortal if he is a man, and Bahá'ís are bound by this logic as much as anyone else. Bahá'ís are committed to consultation as a means of arriving at the truth, and this consultation should include the clash of differing opinions, including the rationalist or even materialist opinions, if the spark of truth is to be produced.

Where a distinctively Bahá'í methodology might emerge, it seems to me, is in the ethical application of knowledge and the creation of equitable access to knowledge and the benefits which ensue from it. This is properly a moral question about the means and ends of acquiring knowledge, and the values which drive a society's acquisition of knowledge, rather than a question about the modes or kinds of knowing. It is here, perhaps, where Bahá'ís have the most original contribution to make to the discourse of academic knowledge—in the ethics of what we do with what we can know, and how we consultatively adjudicate conflicting truth claims.

[71] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, from the notes taken by Ellen T. Pursell, 328. Mahmud-e Zarqâni in *Badâye' al-âsâr* indicates that this talk took place in the evening of 19th September, after a return by motorcar from the talk delivered in St. Paul. Such discrepancies in the dates given in the Persian and English sources are quite common, and no cause for great concern. However, no Persian original for this talk appears in *Majmu'e-ye khetâbât*, so the English notes of this talk are not verified by any transcription of the original Persian words.

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Methodology in Bahá'í studies[1]

MOOJAN MOMEN

Abstract

For historical reasons, atheistic, materialistic methodologies are prominent in the academic world, which may make it a place largely unfavourable to any faith-based approach to scholarship. In this paper I identify two ways that Bahá'í scholarship can develop: interior (i.e. scholarship that develops within the Bahá'í community and is based on faith) and exterior (i.e. academic scholarship based on the rationalistic, largely materialistic methodology of academia). I suggest that although the first is not without benefit, we also need, for a number of reasons, to develop the second. I identify several approaches that might be taken by Bahá'í scholars in interacting with the academic world. That of full engagement with the methodology of the academic world; that of finding academic methodologies that are more favourable to a faith perspective; that of trying to influence the academic world from outside. Lastly I attempt to identify some features of the Bahá'í teachings that could form the basis in the long run of a Bahá'í methodology: these include such qualities as detachment, justice, being positive and constructive, achieving the balance between reason and faith, consultative processes, and the correct attitude towards Bahá'í institutions and towards the Covenant.

Those doing Bahá'í studies at present interact often with the academic fields of religious studies and Islamic and middle eastern studies. Prominent in these academic worlds is a methodology that is based upon a philosophical materialism. There are, of course, strong historical reasons for this. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Enlightenment and the progress of science caused intellectuals in Europe to move away from a God-centred view of the universe towards thinking of it as a giant machine running according to immutable laws. The church naturally resisted this trend but as the new way of looking at the universe began to be more and more successful at unravelling its secrets, the church became increasingly sidelined. By the end of the 19th century, many eminent thinkers and scientists were completely atheistic in their perception of the world. The new universities that were springing up rapidly throughout the western world became bastions of this atheistic and materialistic vision of the world.

A key reason for the triumph of the materialistic viewpoint has been the success of science and the technological advances that have occurred in the wake of scientific progress. This seemed to offer self-evident justification of the correctness of the

[1] This paper was presented at the conference "Foundational Issues in Bahá'í Studies", held at Merton College, Oxford, in April 2000. It has also benefited from the valuable discussion of it on the Bridges e-mail list. Among those contributing to the discussion were: Dr Susan Brill, Dr Will van den Hoonaard, Dr Susan Maneck, Theo Cope, Safa Sadeghpour, Ismael Velasco, Daniel Grolin, William Michael and Gary Fuhrman.

materialistic assumptions that were held to underpin science. In philosophy, these materialistic assumptions led to the movement called positivism. According to this viewpoint, only propositions that can be empirically verified are meaningful. Although positivism itself is no longer fashionable in philosophy, it has continued to influence academic methodology. Under one variation or another, a commonly held viewpoint in positivist intellectual life was not only atheistic but rejected all metaphysical concepts as either outside its realm of consideration or meaningless.

During the 20th century, this materialistic, positivist trend was consolidated in western universities—through the physical sciences to the social sciences and humanities. A few have questioned whether the scientific, materialistic approach is valid when one moves from things to people, from the physical sciences to the social sciences and humanities. Indeed some have criticised such applications of science and called them scientism. Nevertheless, the majority of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences have developed methodologies that are based on positivism and philosophical materialism. Interestingly, at the same time as this positivist methodology was increasingly dominating the social sciences and humanities, its foundations were being overturned in the physical sciences. Developments in relativity theory, quantum theory and systems theory overturned the mechanistic conceptions of traditional science. The implications of this new science are now beginning to penetrate into the humanities and into the social sciences and so there are increasing possibilities for academic scholars to work outside the strict confines of a positivist methodology, although the latter still holds the centre-ground.

The reason for my prolonged introduction on the intellectual history of the west is to lay down the background to the intellectual climate in universities today; to describe the reason for the opposition that exists in the academic world towards any spiritual orientation or values-based approach to research and discourse. Inevitably then there must be something of a methodological clash between this worldview that has sway over the universities and the Bahá'í viewpoint; between a worldview that sees this whole world as an arena in which blind and impersonal laws are operating in a mechanistic and deterministic way (and in which human beings are an accidental and marginal phenomenon conditioned and determined by their environment) and a viewpoint that sees the world as a place where "every atom in existence and the essence of all created things" has been created by a Divinity for the guidance and training of human beings, so that they can rise above their lower natures.

Academics will no doubt feel that my depiction of their methodology is a caricature and out-of-date and that there are many academic methodologies available that are not mechanistic and deterministic. I would not disagree with this. With an established religion such as Islam, for example, there are many examples of scholars who are pursuing a more interior type of scholarship. The tendency with a new religion, such as the Bahá'í Faith, however, is to examine it from the more traditional deterministic viewpoint. Ultimately, the Bahá'í claim is that something supra-natural occurs in the world with the coming of each of the Manifestations of God. Therefore, to try to account for it entirely through an examination of the culture, education and the influences upon the Manifestation of God, to try to explain it entirely in terms of sociology or psychology, or to try to limit the meanings of the scriptures produced by these

Manifestations of God to their immediate context is to misread the phenomenon. But these supra-natural considerations in relation to the Bahá'í Faith are areas into which most academic scholars will not feel able to venture, precisely because they go outside the mechanistic and deterministic universe that the academic methodology imposes upon a new religious movement such as the Bahá'í Faith. Therefore their descriptions and conclusions will ultimately remain unsatisfactory to the believer.

The Bahá'í Faith with its emphasis on values, purpose and the centrality of the spiritual world is in many ways the exact antithesis of the value-free, purposeless, materialistic viewpoint on the world that the positivist approach espouses. Thus we appear to have an impasse, an opposition between two value systems. The Universal House of Justice has on several occasions called upon Bahá'í scholars not to be distracted by attempts to dichotomise science and religion (and mind and heart), but rather to see the Bahá'í teachings "as an organic, logically coherent whole."[2] This statement is important since it signals that Bahá'ís, and Bahá'í scholars, are not opposed to the academic methodology in itself. Rather they must seek to integrate it into their worldview and methodology. Bahá'í scholars must try to integrate a rational, empirical and testable methodology (which must remain the bedrock of good scholarship) with an acknowledgement that the world also has a spiritual dimension.[3]

The Bahá'í response to this situation can be twofold. The first I will term an interior or internal scholarship, by which is meant the pursuit of scholarship on the Bahá'í Faith within the Bahá'í community. Because this type of scholarship is within the community, it can adhere to a faith-based, revelation-centred methodology. Most of the participants will be Bahá'ís but occasionally external scholars may be invited in if they subscribe to this methodology. This is a pathway that other religious communities have chosen to tread. They have built theological colleges, madrasas, yeshivas and monasteries, within the confines of which a similar faith-based internal scholarship can be pursued.

This internal scholarship is certainly one response and it is useful in that it allows Bahá'í scholars the freedom to explore the full range of the possibilities of the Bahá'í Faith. But, I would contend, it is not enough—and this for several reasons:

- *Participation in the world's image of the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'í community.* At this early stage in the development of the Bahá'í Faith, when it is obscure and its teachings and principles so little known, Bahá'ís need to participate in the creation of the world's image of them. How is this image created? One of the first places that the writers of newspaper articles and the makers of television programmes go to when they need accurate, impartial information about an obscure religious movement is either to encyclopaedia articles written by academics or to academics

[2] Letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual dated 8 February 1998, and published in the compilation *Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith.*

[3] This divergence of viewpoints reflects somewhat the differences between the reductive/empiricist paradigm of scholarship (also called analytical/ determinist/positivist/etic) and the synthetic/relativistic paradigm (also called holistic or emic). This has been discussed at greater length in M. Momen, *The Phenomenon of Religion* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000) 77-83.

themselves. These are the people who are, to a large extent, responsible for providing information about the Bahá'í Faith to the world. If Bahá'ís want to be involved in the image of the Faith that is being created, then they need to interact with the academic world. And the best way of interacting positively with the academic world is to publish material that gains the respect of that world, material that accords with its standards. Bahá'ís can no more expect to enter the academic world with a different methodology than they can expect to join in a professional football match and then ask to play under an alternative set of rules.

- *Obligation to participate in the world*. Bahá'u'lláh has put an obligation on Bahá'ís not to separate themselves off from the world but to participate in it. In particular, Bahá'í have an obligation to promote Bahá'í principles and ideas in the hope that the speedy diffusion of these will assist in their wider adoption and the consequent alleviation of humanity's suffering. By participating in the academic world, Bahá'í scholars are assisting in this process. Academic works are often the seed-bed of concepts that filter into the wider world. Thus Bahá'í concepts can be diffused by participating in the academic environment.

- *Greater understanding of the Bahá'í Faith itself*. The Bahá'í Faith is a result of an interaction between a divine impulse and the human world. To understand it Bahá'ís must, of course, study the divine input, which is primarily the text of the scripture. But they must also study and understand the other side—the human response. In what way have human factors affected the Bahá'í Faith? What lessons should the Bahá'ís of today learn from what has happened in the past? In what way can the Bahá'í teachings be presented so as to bring them to the attention of the world? What aspects of the Bahá'í Faith are most appealing to different sorts of people? Such questions are best studied through the methodologies developed by such disciplines as history, psychology, and sociology. Beyond these considerations, there is also the fact that thus far, the Bahá'í Faith has only really been experienced and examined from a middle eastern Islamic or a western Christian perspective. The examination of the Bahá'í Faith from other perspectives has scarcely yet begun. It is only through engagement and understanding other cultures and religious traditions that progress can really be made in seeing what the Bahá'í Faith looks like from a Chinese or a Hindu or a Theravada Buddhist viewpoint. Academic scholarship could be very helpful in this process, although such developments within the Bahá'í Faith could also occur outside of the academic setting. Similarly important would be the development of a view of the Bahá'í Faith from the perspective of women's studies, environmental studies or international relations.

- *Infrastructure*. Another reason to reject an exclusively internal development of Bahá'í scholarship is the fact that the Bahá'í Faith at this stage of its development cannot afford the capital and running costs of institutions that would form the basis of such scholarship. Indeed, since the Bahá'í Faith does not have a professional clergy, there is little need in the Bahá'í community for institutions similar to the theological colleges and madrasas of Christianity and Islam. There is no career path

for graduates of such institutions.

Methodological approaches

I would suggest then that Bahá'í scholars must, to some extent at least, engage in an external scholarship - an interaction with the academic world. One can identify several approaches that might be taken by Bahá'í scholars in interacting with the academic world.

- For Bahá'í scholars to suspend the Bahá'í viewpoint and immerse themselves fully in the values and ethos of the academic world; to try thereby to gain the respect of that world in the hope that once in a position of influence, they can guide the academic world towards an interest in a limited number of Bahá'í concepts.

- To find areas in the academic world in which Bahá'í scholars can participate without compromising Bahá'í principles. There are methodologies that are more favourable to a faith-based approach. In the realm of the study of religion, for example, phenomenology is such a methodology. It considers that the reduction of religious phenomena to social, psychological or other explanations is a false oversimplification. The best way of understanding such a complex phenomenon as religion is to try to get inside the religious experience. One key aspect of the method is *einfühlung*, obtaining an empathic understanding of the religious position of others. An important writer within the phenomenological school, the late Wilfred Cantwell Smith, wrote of attempting to produce material on religion that stands a dual test: that of acceptance by the academic community and also acceptance by the religious community about which the piece is written.

  Some Bahá'ís have also suggested that writing within the perennial philosophy or neoplatonic schools would also be comfortable for Bahá'í scholars. Similarly, in sociology, there are areas such as grounded theory and symbolic interactionism which stand in contrast to the hypothetico-deductive methods that have held sway in the field. On the whole, however, these methodologies that tend to be more congenial towards a faith-based approach are themselves somewhat marginalised by the academic community.

- To stand outside and seek to influence from the outside. To acknowledge that it is not possible to enter fully into the academic world because of its values and premises and therefore to remain outside it, trying to engage with it and influence it in whatever way possible. This, of course, merges with the internal scholarship described above. It is likely to be only very minimally successful at influencing academic scholarship about the Bahá'í Faith, because the academic world will be unlikely to engage to any great degree with those whose work it perceives to be flawed by incorrect methodology and unprovable metaphysical assumptions.

And so I think Bahá'í scholars have little choice but to engage with the academic world

on its own terms, adopting its methodologies (although they can seek to bend these to what we might consider a truer reflection of reality). Personally, I favour the approach of Cantwell Smith that I have described above—that of writing material that satisfies both the academic community and the believing community.

Towards a Bahá'í methodology

Although I have said that it would not be advisable for Bahá'ís to isolate themselves and to try to create a separate world within which a Bahá'í methodology would obtain, there is no reason why Bahá'ís should not be developing the outlines of such a methodology against a day when it can be more fully applied. Many of the points of such a methodology can indeed be applied even today. The following is not a methodology *per se*, but rather an attempt to extract from the Bahá'í scriptures those concepts and ideas that could form the basis of a Bahá'í methodology.

Some may say that the passage of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* that is commonly referred to as the "Tablet of the True Seeker"[4] only concerns the seeking out of religious faith, but the introductory words, in fact, speak of seeking out "the knowledge of the Ancient of Days." Since "the signs of thy Lord's mercy" can be found "in every created thing, and see the spreading rays of His Names and Attributes throughout all the realm of being,"[5] it follows that seeking out "the knowledge of the Ancient of Days" can also involve all forms of seeking or research—provided the research is done with this aim of seeking out "the knowledge of the Ancient of Days."

In the passage regarding the true seeker, many statements can be found that can be related to the methodology of research. The following are the first six exhortations that Bahá'u'lláh makes in this passage:

> He must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy.

Interpretation: "acquired knowledge" is a difficult phrase, but in this context I think it could be interpreted as ridding oneself of preconceptions. Each human being has certain preconceptions that have arisen as a result of our education and experiences in this world. These preconceptions mean that human beings see everything that presents itself to them from a particular viewpoint. Often the greatest and most innovative researchers, those who create new paradigms, are those who are able to step outside their preconceptions and view an old problem from a new perspective.

> He must purge his breast, which is the sanctuary of the abiding love of the Beloved, of every defilement, and sanctify his soul from all that pertaineth to water and clay, from all shadowy and ephemeral attachments.

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4 Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989) 193-5.

5 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) 41.

Interpretation: This sentence would apply to the need to rid oneself of all base motives in one's research work. Very often, work is carried out for reasons other than the pure desire to obtain the truth. Career advancement, jealousy, fear of a rival, racial, religious or gender prejudices all play a part in the interactions of academic life and the production of research work. Bahá'u'lláh states that all such "defilements" ultimately cause human beings to veer away from the truth.

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

Interpretation: In the course of their scholarly research, scholars often become very committed to certain theories or approaches to a problem. Indeed, they acquire an emotional attachment to these. Similarly they can become emotionally opposed to other theories perhaps because these are associated with certain individuals whom they do not like. In either eventuality, such emotions may blind them to the best approach to take to a problem.

> That seeker must at all times put his trust in God, must renounce the peoples of the earth, detach himself from the world of dust, and cleave unto Him Who is the Lord of Lords.

Interpretation: Very often, researchers are afraid to put forward a new idea that conflicts with the received wisdom of the academic community or go against the prevailing fashionable theory. So the researcher must be willing to stand up for what he or she believes to be the truth, unless and until it is demonstrated to be otherwise.

> He must never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence, and refrain from idle talk.

Interpretation: Research work should not be motivated by a desire for self-advancement and fame, nor should one produce papers and publish material merely for the sake of having one's name before one's fellow scholars. One should only publish material when one has something new and worthwhile to say

> That seeker should also regard backbiting as grievous error, and keep himself aloof from its dominion, inasmuch as backbiting quencheth the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul.

Interpretation: Criticism of another's work should be positive and constructive and not negative and destructive.

All of the above exhortations from this passage in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* apply to one engaged on research to some extent. In addition to these passages, several other themes

that appear in the Bahá'í writings may help in the development of a distinctive methodology, including justice, reason, ethics, consultation, and the Covenant.

To see things fairly is an attribute that is of great value to researchers in assessing the results of their findings. Bahá'u'lláh states that if human beings can achieve this quality, it would enable them to know of their own knowledge and not through the knowledge of their neighbour.[6] In the course of constructing a Bahá'í methodology, the high station that 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave to human reason and to the fruit of that reason, scientific thought, is also important.

> God has endowed man with reason that he may perceive what is true. If we insist that such and such a subject is not to be reasoned out and tested according to the established logical modes of the intellect, what is the use of the reason which God has given man?[7]

Reason, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, is the "discoverer of the realities of things" and what is research but the attempt to uncover "the realities of things"? He also states "that which conflicts with its conclusions is the product of human fancy and imagination."[8] Thus any Bahá'í methodology must be firmly grounded in the use of reason. The conclusions reached must be demonstrably reasonable and not contain any flaws of logic.

But, while praising the human rational faculty and encouraging its use, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also warned against excessive reliance upon it as a criterion for truth. He points out that if the reason by itself were a sufficient instrument to arrive at the truth, then we would find the philosophers all agreed upon the fruits of their reasoning processes. Whereas in fact we find no such agreement. Indeed we find that two philosophers starting from exactly the same information derive very different conclusions, and each asserts that he or she has used only rational processes in arriving at this conclusion. Thus reason by itself is not a sufficient guide on which to base research. 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of the bird of humanity having two wings—science and religion—and that humanity cannot fly upwards without a balance between the two. In relation to a research methodology, this could be understood to mean that Bahá'í scholars must balance the knowledge that come to them empirically with what information they have through revelation. Given that both of these sources are usually subject to human interpretation that is fallible, neither necessarily outweighs the other.

This principle can also mean that research must be guided by both materialistic values (meticulous examination of the sources, the strength of the evidence, the balance of probabilities, etc.) and also by spiritual values (probity, fairness, etc.). Academic scholars have always tended to regard such issues as probity and fairness as belonging to the realm of ethics and therefore not strictly part of the academic methodology. A

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6 Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990) Arabic number 2.

7 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) 63-64.

8 *Ibid*., 316.

Bahá'í scholar will probably disagree.[9] In Bahá'í terms, science (hypothetico-deductive methods and the academic methodology) without religion (the application of values and ethics) will result in distortion and false conclusions. It must be also remembered that the opposite, religion (*a priori* beliefs and literalistic, fundamentalist understandings) without the science (reason) to balance it, will lead to dogmatism, superstition and sterility in the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community. A Bahá'í methodology would be human-centred rather than results-oriented. This means that ethical considerations would predominate over the desire to get results. Considerations of people's feelings, confidentiality, the ethics of the ways used to gather data, and the value of the individual human being may all mean that certain methods or certain data would not be used even though they may yield useful information.

The concept of consultation is a powerful one in the Bahá'í teachings. The methodology of consultation is one that could be applied to scholarly research and which could form the basis of a radical new Bahá'í research methodology that would be the exact antithesis of many of the features of the prevailing academic methodology. Instead of the promotion of one's own opinion, one's view becomes lost as one submits it to the group; the group then works on the view expressed and a complete revision of that view emerges as the final result, such that it is no longer possible to attach the name of any individual to the idea.

Lastly a Bahá'í methodology cannot ignore the centrality of the Covenant in the Bahá'í Faith. There are two aspects to this: the first theoretical and the second practical. The first means that for a Bahá'í, the situation with regard to authority is often the reverse of what it is for academic scholars. For an academic history scholar, the older a historical source, the more likely it is to be reliable. Thus an older source will usually be considered better than a more recent source. In the Bahá'í Faith, because of the Covenant, it does not work that way. The interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá may be more recent than the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, but if they interpret the writings of Bahá'u'lláh one way, then no amount of protestation by scholars that they can prove that Bahá'u'lláh intended something else is going convince a Bahá'í audience. For Bahá'ís, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretation trumps all other interpretations of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. The practical aspect of the Covenant involves, of course, obedience to the present centre of the Covenant, the Universal House of Justice, and those institutions of the Bahá'í Faith established under the authority of the Universal House of Justice.

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9 The following analogy may help to explain why: suppose one went to a football match and watched the game for the full period of time and thoroughly enjoyed it. All the rules of the game had been fully enforced. The referee had been fair to both sides. Everything seemed to indicate that one had watched a good game of football. What would then be one's thoughts if one read the next day in the newspaper that in fact the match had been fixed and one team had taken a bribe from the other team and had thrown the match. The fact is that the match was played out in front of one's eye and, according to the rules of the game, everything was done correctly. But this single piece of information (that the match was fixed) suddenly sheds a whole new light on what one had watched. Similarly, a scholar can produce a paper that follows academic methodology so well that it cannot be faulted. And yet if there is an ethical flaw underlying the paper—the paper is being written to assist some ulterior motive, for example, then surely this is relevant to one's assessment of the paper?

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Bahá'í apologetics?[1]

UDO SCHAEFER

Abstract

Apologetics is a branch of systematic theology, rather than religious studies. It has an important place in the Bahá'í Faith: in numerous Bahá'í writings, it is stated that "the Cause of God must be protected" and the arguments of its assailants refuted. However, apologetics has a wider purpose than mere defence. It can help explore the teachings of the Faith in the context of prevailing philosophies and standards in a secular society, and to answer critical inquiries in a rational manner. Although critical self-reflection on the fundamentals of the Faith is a prerequisite of this task, apologetics is not possible without commitment to revelation. Given the role of apologetics in Bahá'í history and in the development of its texts and ideas, it is surprising that the Bahá'í community has generally undervalued its importance.

Apologetics derives from Greek *apologeisthai*, to speak in defence. Socrates' defence in Plato's *Apology* is the classical work of apology. However, apologetics is usually considered a branch of Christian theology, not of religious studies. Its function is to support and justify the Christian truth in the face of objections, criticisms and attacks. The *locus classicus* is 1 Peter 3:15: "...and be ready to give answer (*apologia*) to everyman that asketh you a reason of hope that is in you." Early Christianity was challenged by three kinds of opponents: Jews, heathens (i.e. educated Greeks and Romans) and adherents of Gnosticism (a system of mystical religious and philosophical doctrines). Moreover, the early Church was plagued by internal controversies over dogmatic issues. Thus besieged, early Christendom had to defend itself against multifarious objections through rational argumentation. This situation was the foundation of Christian self-reflection, a self-reflection that is a prerequisite to apologetics. Christian apologetics was the progenitor of a systematic theology by which the fundamentals of the Christian faith were clarified. Paul Tillich called the apologetic movement "the birthplace of a developed Christian theology".[2] In this process of self-reflection, philosophy was of undeniable assistance. It was called *ancilla theologiae*, the handmaiden of theology. This paper briefly describes apologetics and its role in the Bahá'í community.

The *sedes materiae* of Bahá'í apologetics is *Gleanings* chapter 154: "It is incumbent upon all men, each according to his ability, to refute the arguments of those that have attacked the Faith of God." There follows an exhortation to promote the cause of God through one's "pen and tongue" rather than through "recourse to sword or violence", and an assurance of divine bounties for whomsoever "ariseth to defend, in his writings, the

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1 I am very much indebted to Gerald Keil for helping with the English style of my draft and to Jack McLean for the quotations from works of Paul Tillich (see footnote 2 and 5). When quoting the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, I have used section followed by paragraph number, where possible.

2 *The History of Christian Thought* (ed. C. Braaten. New York: Harper and Row, 1968) 24.

Cause of God against its assailants." There are numerous passages in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi on this subject which can be epitomised in the statement, "The Cause of God must be protected from the enemies of the faith and from those who sow seeds of doubt in the hearts of the believers, and the greatest of all protection is knowledge."[3]

Apologetics, however, has a far wider scope than merely the defence of faith against attack. Critical scholarly contributions or criticism raised in public or private discussions should not necessarily be equated with hostility. These are often perfectly legitimate questions in search of an answer. In the view of Paul Tillich, apologetics is an "answering theology."[4] The answering of critical inquiries or objections should be irenical (or peace-promoting), always bearing Bahá'u'lláh's exhortations in mind "primarily to speak with words as mild as milk," with "utmost leniency and forbearance."[5] However, in cases of rude and hostile attacks, if a rebuttal is required, words "mild as milk" may be inadequate and a harsher tone may well be justified.[6] It does not befit an apologist to belong to those "watchmen" the prophet Isaiah calls "dumb dogs that cannot bark."[7]

In its essence, apologetics is a kind of confrontation, an act of revealing one's true colours, of hoisting the flag, of demonstrating essential characteristics of faith. Apologetics can stand in tension with the attitude of dialogue, which in our time has increasingly replaced the attitude of religious controversy and confrontation. However, as Hans Küng puts it, "dialogue does not mean self-denial."[8] A faith that is opportunistically streamlined, adapted to the current trends, thus concealing its real features and dissimulating any and all elements that could provoke rejection in order to be acceptable for dialogue, is in danger of losing its identity[9] and will not be taken seriously in interfaith dialogue. As Georg Christoph Lichtenberg[10] said: "It is almost impossible to carry the torch of truth through a crowd without somebody's beard getting singed." This is an inevitable consequence of following 'Abdu'l-Bahá's call "to raise up the Word," "to refute what is vain and false, to establish the truth,"[11] but we should nevertheless strive for a balance between apologetic and dialogical aims.

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3 Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance* (Hofheim: Bahá'í Verlag, 1982) 1:134. See also *Crisis and Victory. A Compilation of Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988).

4 *Systematic Theology* (3 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) 1:6.

5 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) 11:31.

6 See, for example, Udo Schaefer/Nicola Towfigh/Ulrich Gollmer, *Making the Crooked Straight. A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000). Mírzá 'Abu'l Faḍl's *The Brilliant Proof* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1998) is not without polemics (see esp. 1-7).

7 Isaiah 56:10.

8 *Theologie im Aufbruch* (München 1987), S. 288.

9 The early Christians, who were in a situation similar to that of the Bahá'ís today, were exhorted by St Paul to resist temptation to conformity: "And be not conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2), "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1).

10 An 18th century professor of physics at the University of Göttingen who became famous for his aphorisms.

11 *Bahá'í Prayers* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984) 174.

Bahá'í apologetics derives from the experience of a fundamental discrepancy between secular thought, the current trends and tendencies of the period on the one hand, and revelation on the other. Bahá'u'lláh alluded to this tension when he considered "most people [to be] feeble and far-removed from the purpose of God."[12] This judgement has meanwhile gained a global dimension. The unbridgeable gulf between the two standards is increasingly perceivable from day to day. Critical self-reflection on the fundamentals of the Bahá'í Faith has therefore become an inevitable precondition to communication and proclamation. Religion must be able to persevere in the forum of reason.[13]

It is the purpose of Bahá'í apologetics to demonstrate the credibility and plausibility of revealed truth. It is not its purpose to prove the truth of revelation and to convince the partners in dialogue. This aim would transcend the dimension of rational and intellectual thought. As the English Cardinal Henry Newman stated: "The heart is commonly reached, not through reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by descriptions. Persons influence us ... looks subdue us, deeds inflame us ... no man will be a martyr for a conclusion."[14]

Several examples may help to clarify this point: first, some laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, such as its penal provisions and sexual prohibitions, are at odds with current western European standards. To Bahá'ís, however, they are manifestations of divine justice. For reasons that will be discussed in my forthcoming book, *Bahá'í Ethics*, it is not possible to make the truth of these provisions cogently evident through rational argumentation. This by no means implies that a Bahá'í has to resort to blindly relying on "articles of faith." In this respect, apologetics may help to:

- clarify the relevant fundamentals of faith (including the sovereign and unfathomable will of God, the doctrine of the Most Great Infallibility, the relationship between justice and mercy);
- demonstrate the relativity of western standards, which are not universal, but the result of a historical and evolutionary process;
- analyse the philosophy of individualism and elucidate the balance in Bahá'í ethics between the rights of individuals and those of society;
- analyse and compare the different concepts of freedom;
- analyse the philosophical theories on punishment;
- point out that in this area the metaphysical principle of justice has been superseded by the principle of utility and pragmatism;
- describe and analyse the inefficiency of modern judiciaries, and in general,
- correlate the principles of the Faith "with the modern aspects of philosophy and science."[15]

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[12] Quoted in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992) "Introduction," 6.

[13] See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969) 11:1-4; 22:4-5; 36:10; 44:3-4, 24-25; *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) 63.

[14] *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870).

[15] Letter of the Universal House of Justice dated 19 October 1993 to an individual.

Although it is not possible to convince anyone of the correctness of divine norms through rational argumentation, it is nevertheless possible to demonstrate that the ethical system underlying the revelation is internally consistent and reasonable. Here, apologetics primarily has the function of self-confirmation, i.e. of providing its own justification.

A second departure is the Bahá'í view of human nature, the image of man as "the supreme Talisman,"[16] which is incompatible with that determinism of philosophy and natural science which reduce man to a machine, to a computer system, eliminating every notion of personal responsibility and guilt. These antagonistic positions have far-reaching consequences in ethics, law, psychology and sociology. It is the task of apologetics to elucidate the Bahá'í positions in terms of theology, philosophy and the humanities. A third example is the concept of "infallibility," which, in this "age of falsifiability,"[17] is untenable to secular thought. The concept is historically burdened, conjures up all sorts of negative connotations, and provokes fierce rejection. We cannot validate this concept through reason. The function of apologetics is the clarification of this notion in a critical discourse, so that infallibility does not appear to be some kind of magical belief in our system, but rather something that is reasonable under the premise of faith. It is of utmost significance to discuss the immanent limits of this charisma and not to impose a *sacrificium intellectus*[18] upon the believers.[19]

As to the role of apologetics in Bahá'í scholarship, we should distinguish between external and internal views. Some scholars of religious studies feel obliged to carry out their research on the basis of methodical agnosticism and positivism. They are neither affected by the object of their research nor committed to it. They investigate and describe the historical, phenomenological, sociological and political aspects of a religious system. For these scholars revelation is a claim; and since this claim cannot be investigated and proved scientifically it is not taken up as a positive challenge. Such scholars of religious studies have therefore tended to incline toward historicism and reductionism: to explain revelation from and reduce it to its historical and socio-cultural influences. I do not think that it is the task of Bahá'í scholars to work just for the sake of it (*l'art pour l'art*, so to speak). Since the core of truth, the essential mystery of a religion, is beyond the reach of the sciences, their role should instead be that of the theologian.

Theologians regard their religion from inside. They are committed to the truth of revelation and to the authority of the scripture. Although their systematic and analytical reflection is scientific in methodology, they are not scientists—theology is not counted

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16 *Tablets* 11:3.

17 Cf. Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York, 1968) 78ff.

18 The imposition of a *sacrificium rationis* in the name of religion would be tantamount to blindness and fanaticism — nothing short of a complete denial of one's own critical faculties, in overt contradiction to the exalted rank conferred to *'aql* (reason, intellect) in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh (cf. *Gleanings* 83:1; 95:1) and 'Abdu'l-Bahá (cf. *The Secret of Divine Civilisation* [Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970] 1 [paragraphs 1 and 2]; see also *Paris Talks* [London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995] 44:3, 13, 24; *Promulgation of Universal Peace* [Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982] 63ff., 128, 175ff., 231, 287, 298, 316, 372ff., 394, 434).

19 See my article in the *Bahá'í Studies Review* 9 (1999/2000): 17-45 for preliminary observations on infallibility in a Bahá'í context.

among the exact sciences. The history of its faith, the facts and events, must undoubtedly be open to research; the theological significance of historical events, however, is a matter of theology. And theology, the *scientia fidei*, is a closed system, based on revelation, which is beyond the reach of scientific discourse. Thus, apologetics as a branch of systematic theology is not possible without a firm foothold in revelation, without commitment to revealed truth. The power to "face and withstand all in heaven and on earth" is, as Bahá'u'lláh says, given to those who stand "firm and steadfast in this ... exalted Revelation."[20]

Even so, apologetics is not generally held in high esteem by the Bahá'í community. This is all the more astonishing since Bahá'u'lláh himself defended his revelation against the Azalis and the Shaykhis. Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Badí'* and the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*[21] are works of *apologia*. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, considered one of the foremost apologists in the history of the Bahá'í Faith, was highly praised for his work. The negative attitude towards apologetics results partly from a widespread diffuse anti-intellectualism which is heedless of the fact that religion needs "the power of reflection"[22] and which views scholarly activity with disdain, regarding it as unspiritual and thus detrimental to faith. It is equally a consequence of the research of some experts on the Bábí-Bahá'í religions so committed to a positivistic methodology that they shun the apologetical. Neither attitude promotes the development of the Bahá'í Faith.[23]

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20 *Gleanings* 154:1.

21 "Defence of the mission of the Báb—with all its abrogatory implications—is the ostensible, indeed, the stated purpose of the Book of Certitude" (Christopher Buck, *Symbol & Secret. Qur'án Commentary in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Íqán* [Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1995] 233).

22 *Paris Talks* 44:14.

23 I, for my part, have considered myself a *defensor fidei* since the beginning of my Bahá'í life in 1948. Most of my publications are apologetic. However, when defending the Faith, I have often found it necessary to defend myself against the distrust of ultra-conservative, overprotective keepers of the Holy Grail. For ten years, until I found a Bahá'í publisher in another European country, I had no opportunity to publish, and the authors of *Desinformation als Methode: Die Bahá'ismus-Monographie des F. Ficicchia* (Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 1995) were free to start this project only on the intervention of the Universal House of Justice, which declared a rebuttal a matter of urgency, and which moreover suggested the publication of an English edition. I am aware that my experience is not unusual; I mention it to illustrate a problem which needs to be resolved for the sake of the Bahá'í Faith.

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VOLUME 8

THE BAHÁ'Í STUDIES REVIEW

A Publication of THE ASSOCIATION FOR BAHÁ'Í STUDIES – ENGLISH SPEAKING EUROPE
1998

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Methodology and Bahá'í studies: the bridge between realities

JOHN HATCHER

Abstract

In the Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh describes the resistance on the part of "divines" to accept new revelation. History also demonstrates the same resistance to revolutionary advances in the concept of reality that are introduced by enlightened individuals (e.g., Copernicus or Newton). It is in this context that the contemporary academy is often constrained by archaic notions of scholarship and even more particularly by the rejection of the notion of the interpenetration of the dual aspects of reality: the composite outer expression that is physical reality and the non-composite and unseen expression that is spiritual reality. However, this resistance is rapidly being overcome by the realization on the part of scholars in a variety of academic fields that the laws and relationships operant in the physical aspect of reality are the exact counterpart of the laws and relationships operant in spiritual aspect of reality. This paper posits the thesis that it is increasingly the role of Bahá'í academics to bring to light images of this interpenetration of the dual aspects of reality by showing how the dual methodologies described in the Bahá'í writings demonstrate the integration between these two expressions of reality.*

> These are spiritual truths relating to the spiritual world. In like manner, from these spiritual realities infer truths about the material world. For physical things are signs and imprints of spiritual things; every lower thing is an image.
>
> 'Abdu'l-Bahá[1]

Visualising the Elephant

In addition to my work in Bahá'í studies, I do research in medieval English literature, and as such I have witnessed a parade of critical vogues over the last forty years, a seemingly endless file of scholars who thought to make their mark. I, too, have thought I possessed my own special view of what Chaucer was saying. Often at conferences as I listened to presentations I mused about how delightful it would have been had Chaucer suddenly materialised before us (as Marshall McLuhan does in the Woody Allen's movie *Annie Hall*) to say "That is not what I meant at all./ That is not it, at all."[2] But then I wondered were we to hear Chaucer utter those fatal words, would it faze us any more than Christ's responses to the grand inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamozov* or the Báb's responses to His interrogators in Tabriz?

When Faulkner was a visiting professor at the University of Virginia, he gave a

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1 Provisional translation of *Lawḥ-i-Aflak* (Tablet of the Universe) from Bahá'í World Centre.

2 T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," ll. 97-98, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (3rd edition) 994.

public reading of one of his stories. Afterwards he began explaining what the story meant, but he was suddenly interrupted by a scholar in American literature who pronounced his interpretation inadequate and misguided. So it goes in the world of literary criticism where ambiguity reigns and produces mostly aging scholars with broken hearts, unless our life's goal be nothing more than a list of publications adequate to garner tenure, a professorship, and a modicum of recognition among an insular community of peers.

In other areas of academia, life may be a bit more hopeful: scholars pursue important answers to questions about objective reality. But all too often, I suspect, they, too, strive like the blindfolded men in the proverb who examine various parts an elephant and argue about the validity of their individual perceptions: it is skinny like a whip, says the tailist; it is thick, round, and straight like a tree trunk, says the leggist; it is flat and thick like a blanket, says the earist. In time they might cease contending, might consult, collaborate, and assemble their findings and emerge with some consensus about the reality of the elephant. But how much more rapid their progress would be were one to appear among them who had actually seen the elephant, who would gladly share this knowledge, or, even better, one who would remove their blindfolds that they, too, might behold reality for themselves.

But would they welcome this enlightened one? Would the truth-bringer be celebrated, or would he be berated as were the prophets, as was Faulkner, and as is Plato's philosopher king when he dutifully descends back down into the cave of ignorance to teach others after his noble ascent to encounter reality first hand in its pure and exalted forms?

In the beginning of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán,* Bahá'u'lláh observes (as did Christ and Muḥammad before him) how the prophets of God inevitably face scorn and ridicule from the learned in their midst, the very ones who should welcome their advanced vision of reality. This same ironic reception also greets ordinary human innovators who proffer enhanced visions of reality, such as Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. Of course, in time their re-visioned theories will be accepted, and the geniuses, like the prophets, will belatedly become lionized because their visions portray reality accurately and, therefore, offer the simplest, and, consequently, the most scientific description of reality. That's the nature of truth. It is practical and it works.

The scholar as servant

Whatever our particular field of study, we have the task of recognizing these visionaries and the visions they bring—these top-down, these integrative images of reality, especially if we ourselves are to understand how best to apply that image to the particular part of truth that we ourselves are studying.

Yet in this day when, according to the authoritative Bahá'í texts, humankind has attained maturity, the task of understanding and then actualising the integrative vision of Bahá'u'lláh into metaphorical social and physical forms of scholarship is no longer the province of a finite class of learned ones, of clergy or divines. Bahá'u'lláh has empowered all, has mandated all to read, to interpret, and to apply the text for themselves, to become scholars in their own right to the extent that they are able:

> ... every man hath been, and will continue to be, able of himself to appreciate the Beauty of God, the Glorified. Had he not been endowed with such a capacity, how could he be called to account for his failure? ... For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself.[3]

The House of Justice has emphasised this axiom by stating that "all Bahá'ís, whatever their professions, are challenged to reflect on the implications of our common struggle to achieve Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for the human race, including the use of our intellectual resources to gain deeper understanding of that Revelation and to apply its principles."[4]

This mandate is thus bi-directional: no one else can think for us or become spiritual for us, and, conversely, we cannot assume this task for someone else. Therefore, no particular academic body of Bahá'í scholars has special status within the Bahá'í community, either to guide the community as a whole or to guide other Bahá'ís individually:

> ... Bahá'ís who are trained in various academic disciplines do not constitute a discrete body within the community. While the Baha'i institutions benefit on an ongoing basis from the advice of believers in many fields of specialisation, there is obviously no group of academics who can claim to speak on behalf of Baha'i scholars generally. Scholarly qualifications enable individuals to make greatly valued contributions to the work of the Cause, but do not set those possessing them apart from the general body of the believers.[5]

Expanding the concept of scholarship

However, while prohibiting any specific body of scholars from having the role of leadership, this passage also observes that the role of the scholar and of scholarship itself is no less crucial or valuable in this revised relationship between learned individuals and the community they serve. Indeed, the role of the scholar in the Bahá'í context has increased in value and become more universal in its application: scholarly assistance is now relevant and valuable to everyone in the community because understanding Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a spiritually based commonwealth and applying that vision to the material world is the job of every individual. Thus, the Bahá'í scholar has the most exalted station of becoming, like 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a servant to the servants of God.

There is, then, an urgent need for the Bahá'í community as a whole and for Bahá'í academics in particular to re-evaluate and re-define what is meant by the terms "Bahá'í scholarship" and "Bahá'í studies." Heretofore we seem tacitly to have accepted definitions of scholarship based on traditional modalities of study and the traditional notion of the lack of any intimate relationship between the academy and the body politic.

This separation of the academic world from the so-called "real world," a view that

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3 *Gleanings from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971) 143.

4 From a letter dated 5 October 1993 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, in *Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1999) 9.

5 Universal House of Justice, 20 July 1997 in *Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith* 36.

we inherited mostly from previous religious history, has fostered an idea held by some that Bahá'í scholarship consists of well-defined fields explicitly relegated to those whose study focuses on the investigation of religion and religious communities and history. Perhaps it is because of this previously narrow and sometimes constraining concept of Bahá'í study that the Universal House of Justice made the following comment:

> The House of Justice wishes to avoid use of the terms "Bahá'í scholarship" and "Bahá'í scholars" in an exclusive sense, which would effectively establish a demarcation between those admitted into this category and those denied entrance to it.[6]

My personal sense of this statement is that its aim is to stimulate in us the goal of providing a more expansive view of scholarship by urging all Bahá'ís to accept their individual responsibility for their own spiritual and mental development. Likewise, this comment can be viewed as a mandate for scholars to assist the entire community in all fields of study:

> The House of Justice seeks the creation of a Bahá'í community in which the members encourage each other, where there is respect for accomplishment, and common realization that every one is, in his or her own way, seeking to acquire a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and to contribute to the advancement of the Faith."[7]

In this regard, the House of Justice expresses confidence that the critical role of the scholar in serving the general body of believers will become increasingly apparent and essential:

> The House of Justice feels confident that, with patience, self-discipline, and unity of faith, Baha'i academics will be able to contribute to a gradual forging of the more integrative paradigms of scholarship for which thoughtful minds in the international community are increasingly calling.[8]

Thus, while all of us are commanded to become learned to whatever degree we are able, the Bahá'í academic is particularly exhorted to examine the reciprocal relationship between a given field of study and the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. For example, the notion of an associative relationship between body and soul might impact the fields of medicine, psychology, and gerontology. The concept of human history as a spiritual dynamic will impact the fields of history, anthropology, and sociology. The image of the universe as an eternal and infinite expression of the unseen divine reality will impact the fields of theology, physics, and astronomy.

6 *Scholarship* (Mona Vale: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1995) 5-7.

7 *Ibid.*

8 From a letter dated 20 July 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, cited in *Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1999) 36.

In short, the Bahá'í vision of the essential unity of and the reciprocity between the seen and unseen aspects of reality and of the integration of all human activity in the process of fostering an "ever-advancing civilization" is not confined solely to the realization that true science and true religion are describing one organic creation. Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a "divine economy" implies that all human endeavours, all areas of scholarship, are integral expressions of this global enterprise and are, therefore, forms of Bahá'í study, something Peter Khan notes in his paper "Some Aspects of Bahá'í Scholarship"[9] where he lists some fields that would particularly benefit from these integrative forms of Bahá'í study: theories of personality, the nature of creativity, the dynamics of group decision making, social organization and governance, theories of history, theories of environmental development, and many others. As he also notes, Bahá'í academics are already at work in many or most of these fields of study. The point is, then, that the Bahá'í revelation presents an accurate vision of reality which integrates all areas of human knowledge and study because it portrays physical reality as nothing less than the outer or metaphorical expression of the divine or spiritual world:

> 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.[10]

Methodologies for the new vision

While all scholarship might thus conceivably be capable of becoming "Bahá'í scholarship," such an assertion does not mean that every Bahá'í in every academic field is *de facto* a "Bahá'í scholar." Implicit in such an appellation, no matter how guardedly we apply it, must be a critical relationship between the Bahá'í perspective and a given field of study. Merely having declared oneself a Bahá'í hardly renders an academic capable of accomplishing this subtle and demanding task of performing "Bahá'í scholarship." Furthermore, before a scholar can usefully apply the Bahá'í vision to a field of study, he or she must first be capable of understanding and accepting as a given the description of reality as presented in the authoritative Bahá'í texts. Stated another way, the Bahá'í scholar must first achieve confirmation that his or her "faith" or "belief" (as these terms are commonly understood in a religious context) has become transformed into what 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls "conscious knowledge."

This transformation occurs first by fashioning the initial attraction to the Faith or to the prophet—that inductive "leap of faith" that impels us to declare ourselves Bahá'ís—into a knowledge that is corroborated by what 'Abdu'l-Bahá terms the "standards of science":

> God has endowed man with intelligence and reason whereby he is required to determine the verity of questions and propositions. If religious beliefs and opinions are found contrary to the standards of science, they are mere superstitions and imaginations; for the antithesis of knowledge is ignorance,

9 "Some Aspects of Bahá'í Scholarship" appeared in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 9.4 (2000):43-64.

10 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) 10.

> and the child of ignorance is superstition.[11]

'Abdu'l-Bahá thus redefines *faith* or *belief*: No longer does such a term designate an acceptance of that which cannot be proven; *faith* implies "first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds."[12] But, again, what does 'Abdu'l-Bahá mean here by the "standards of science"? In the most general sense, 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to imply the corroboration of information (i.e., the idea of reasonableness[13]), such as the five proofs of the Manifestation of God given by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*[14] or the corroborative process given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá when he describes the four sources of information commonly employed as standards of proof: the senses, reason, traditions, and inspiration. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that individually each of these methodologies is fallible and liable to error, but if a proposition be corroborated by all four, then one may be said to have a relative proof of its veracity:

> But a statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete.[15]

If we apply this standard as we deepen our conviction about our beliefs as Bahá'ís, we can begin to accept as a reliable standard the verities articulated in the authoritative texts of the Bahá'í Faith, or, to employ Bahá'í parlance, we can "enter the City of Certitude."

Of course, having entered that metaphorical city does not mean we will dwell there eternally. In another passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that since each one of these standards is liable to error, then the only true test of a proposition is the test of the "inmost heart." For example, in a talk cited in *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá concludes an examination of these same standards by stating,

> This is a conclusive argument showing that all available human criteria are erroneous and defective, but the divine standard of knowledge is infallible. Therefore, man is not justified in saying, "I know because I perceive through my senses," or "I know because it is proved through my faculty of reason," or "I know because it is according to tradition and interpretation of the Holy Book," or "I know because I am inspired." All human standards of judgment

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[11] *Ibid.*, 181.

[12] Quoted in *Bahá'í World Faith* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976) 383.

[13] See 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discussion of the scientific methodology of the idea of reasonableness as discussed in *Promulgation* 357.

[14] The five proofs he gives are: (1) the divine utterance of the Prophet from one who has had no schooling or learning "common amongst men," (2) the heroic souls that arise to follow the Prophet, (3) the "constancy of the eternal Beauty in proclaiming the Faith of God, in facing death, and doing this unaided," (4) the repudiation by the people of the earth, and (5) the fulfillment of ancient prophecies and traditions.

[15] *Promulgation* 255.

> are faulty, finite."[16]

Thus, while the corroboration of these different sources of information is a helpful guide, it is not always a sufficient or even a relatively reliable guide compared with another standard he cites, namely, the awakening of the "human spirit," "the standard of the inmost heart," the standard or inner vision which God bestows upon whomsoever He willeth.

Here 'Abdu'l-Bahá may be alluding to the prophet's heart (the only infallibly inspired source of knowledge), or he may be invoking the more traditional concept of faith that is available to all alike, even to the most unlearned disciples whom Christ first chose, or to the eager Dawnbreakers who lay down their lives in the path of their belief in the Báb in spite of having never met Him or having read much of his teachings:

> But if the human spirit will rejoice and be attracted to the Kingdom of God, if the inner sight becomes opened, and the spiritual hearing strengthened, and the spiritual feelings predominant, he will see the immortality of the spirit as clearly as he sees the sun, and the glad tidings and signs of God will encompass him.[17]

But since we cannot ascertain with certainty who possesses such purity of spirit and vision, nor even whether or not we ourselves possess it, we are still exhorted and challenged constantly to reinforce and confirm any claim to knowledge, just as we would in any other arena of study that presents us with theories of reality. Indeed, as Bahá'ís we are given an entire regimen by which to achieve ever greater degrees of certitude, a regimen that involves an empirical or corroborative process, not a catechism or an indoctrination.

Through this methodology, our "beliefs" in the station and claims of Bahá'u'lláh and in his Covenant can become as proven (i.e., as corroborated by both subjective and objective methodologies) and, therefore, as certain as any other assertions we might make in any other academic field of study. Furthermore, once having attained this station, we can rely upon the texts as the infallible *mízán* (Persian) or *qustás* (Arabic)—the standard, the balance, the scales or touchstone by which all other verities are assayed. In short, once having attained certitude about the infallible station of Bahá'u'lláh (i.e., the Most Great Infallibility) and consequently of His Covenant as well, we then have access to a treasure house of related images of reality that are likewise capable of putting us substantially ahead of other scholars, but only if we are sufficiently daring to employ this "head start." In fact, I believe it is in this sense that 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "It is incumbent upon Baha'i children to surpass other children in the acquisition of sciences and arts, for they have been cradled in the grace of God. Whatever other children learn in a year, let Baha'i children learn in a month."[18]

Two methods of epistemology

16 *Ibid*., 22.

17 *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981) 226.

18 *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: The Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) 141.

In addition to this general methodology of the "standard of science" by which the scholar can come to rely on the new image of reality set forth in the Bahá'í texts as a standard by which to judge other theories, 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of two methodologies by which our conscious mind can examine all propositions and proofs regarding reality. 'Abdu'l-Bahá alludes to these two methods in various ways: as the indirect versus the direct method; as the objective versus the subjective method; as the rational method versus the intuitive method. But in every such discussion 'Abdu'l-Bahá distinguishes between two epistemological pathways by which information arrives in our conscious mind.

In one passage 'Abdu'l-Bahá discusses these two modes of knowing as the two kinds of "power and comprehension of the human spirit":

> Know that the power and the comprehension of the human spirit are of two kinds—that is to say, they perceive and act in two different modes. One way is through instruments and organs. . . The other manifestation of the powers and actions of the spirit is without instruments and organs. For example, in the state of sleep without eyes it sees; without an ear it hears; without a tongue it speaks; without feet it runs.[19]

The first method, the rational or indirect method (the pathway by which sensual data about reality is transformed into a mental image) is obviously tantamount to the common understanding of the scientific method. Therefore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls this the "objective" mode—a "knowledge derived from perception."[20]

> For instance, sight is one of the outer powers; it sees and perceives this flower, and conveys this perception to the inner power—the common faculty—which transmits this perception to the power of imagination, which in its turn conceives and forms this image and transmits it to the power of thought...[21]

It is important to note here how 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes "the common faculty" which transmits the information from the "outer" powers to the "inner powers":

> The intermediary between the five outward powers and the inward powers is the sense which they possess in common—that is to say, the sense which acts between the outer and inner powers, conveys to the inward powers whatever the outer powers discern. It is termed the common faculty, because it communicates between the outward and inward powers and thus is common to the outward and inward powers."[22]

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19 *Some Answered Questions* 227.

20 *Ibid.*, 157.

21 *Ibid.*, 210-211.

22 *Ibid.*, 210. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in passages in *The Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* alludes to what seems to be this same capacity as being the function of the "sympathetic nerve." However, this term is not used anywhere else by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, nor is the original text from which this was translated extant.

The second of the two methodologies which 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls "subjective" knowledge is information obtained directly from the realm of vision (i.e., the spiritual world): insights such as those derived from dreams, inspiration, intuition, or meditation. But even when insights derive directly from the spiritual world, they still end up in the repository of our conscious minds so long as our souls associate with and function through the instrumentality of the physical body. Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is careful to note that we can never be certain when promptings of the heart are from the "inmost heart" and not from "satanic fancies":

> What is inspiration? It is the influx of the human heart. But what are satanic promptings which afflict mankind? They are the influx of the heart also. How shall we differentiate between them? The question arises: How shall we know whether we are following inspiration from God or satanic promptings of the human soul? Briefly, the point is that in the human material world of phenomena these four are the only existing criteria or avenues of knowledge, and all of them are faulty and unreliable.[23]

Yet the conscious mind should not be confused with the physical organ of the brain. 'Abdu'l-Bahá notes, "the mind has no place, but it is connected with the brain."[24] Nevertheless, so long as the soul associates with the conscious mind through the instrumentality of the brain, our consciousness is fallible and subject to confusions as a result of illness or dysfunction. At death, however, we no longer need to examine reality through indirect or periscopic vision transferred through the common faculty—epistemology is entirely direct and subjective.

Thus, while we are in this life, our understanding is always filtered through our conscious mind, whether the source of that understanding be the direct or indirect pathway. That is why, in the final analysis, we are exhorted to weigh our conclusions against the standard, the *mízán* or *qustás* of the Bahá'í authoritative texts. But, of course, having achieved whatever degree of conscious knowledge we can, we are only half done with our task because we are further mandated by Bahá'u'lláh to couple that knowledge with action.[25]

Conclusion

Because of our own fallibility, then, it is vitally important that we achieve sufficient certitude about the station and claims of Bahá'u'lláh and his Covenant so that we can always weigh the conclusions derived by our conscious minds against the infallible standard of the Bahá'í authoritative texts, and these texts include all decisions by the Universal House of Justice since, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself."[26]

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23 *Promulgations of Universal Peace* 22.

24 *Some Answered Questions* 242.

25 See the first paragraph of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and a complete discussion of this paradigm in John S. Hatcher, *Arc of Ascent: The Purpose of Physical Reality II* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1994).

26 *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997) 20.

So it is that one of the most difficult challenges facing the Bahá'í scholar right now is to perform two tasks that are, more often than not, antithetical to each other: to do scholarship that is acceptable in the contemporary academy while remaining faithful to the authoritative and infallible vision of reality presented in the Bahá'í texts. This noble undertaking often subjects Bahá'í scholars to the scorn of colleagues who may view them as religious fanatics and to the disdain of fellow Bahá'ís who may view their scholarship as esoteric and as irrelevant to the immediate needs of the Bahá'í community.

Such reactions call to mind the story of Bahá'í poet Robert Hayden who now, twenty years after his death, daily leads people through his poetry (which is being increasingly anthologized throughout the world) to his belief in Bahá'u'lláh and to his vision of the world as a Bahá'í, a theme which permeates and underlies all his verse. Yet, during his life, Hayden was little regarded by the Bahá'í community because the practice of his art seemed self-indulgent and unrelated to "Bahá'í activities" as these activities were commonly understood in the context of Bahá'í community life.

Naturally, some fields of study are more perilous than others in this regard, particularly those fields that deal pointedly with the interpenetration between the spiritual and physical aspects of reality. For while there may be ways of avoiding or circumventing conflicts that can arise between the methodology or assumptions in one's field and one's personal assumptions as a Bahá'í, the forthright assertion of Bahá'í concepts within the context of an academic field can often incur great risk to the scholar's acceptance and professional progress. For example, how does the Bahá'í historian discuss theories of causality about the growth of the Bahá'í community and not present its claims of divine intervention? Indeed, Shoghi Effendi notes that the scriptures themselves are more reliable than scholarly commentaries when it comes to evaluating Christianity and Islám:

> The truth is that Western historians have for many centuries distorted the facts to suit their religious and ancestral prejudices. The Baha'is should try to study history anew, and to base all their investigations first and foremost on the written Scriptures of Islam and Christianity.[27]

Likewise, a Bahá'í scholar in the field of religious studies can hardly discuss the Bahá'í administrative order without discussing the Covenant or the concept of the Manifestation as an inherently infallible and divinely empowered emissary from another reality.

To attempt to circumvent these subjects from the methodological perspective of what the House of Justice has termed "dogmatic materialism" is to run the risk of introducing a variety of logical inconsistences, the most lethal of which may well be the *post hoc* fallacy of attributing causality to incidental circumstances surrounding major events: e.g. the sudden emergence of the Báb's leadership and eloquence after his meeting with the learned Mullá Husayn.

In short, once engaged in discussions of causality, the Bahá'í scholar can no longer avoid the challenge of discussing events and ideas that can have valid and accurate

[27] From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 27 April 1936, qtd. in *Lights of Guidance* compiled by Helen Hornby (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988) 495.

description only in terms of the Bahá'í assertion about the reciprocal relationship between the dual aspects of reality, any more than could a physicist agree to discuss falling objects so long there was no mention of an unseen force whereby masses are attracted to each other.

It is precisely in this context, I feel, that the House of Justice has admonished Bahá'í scholars to see as fundamentally unsound and baseless those materialistic methodologies that disallow out-of-hand any assertion that the progress of the Faith has proceeded from the influence of spiritual reality. Such a methodology implicitly denies the freedom of the scholar to set forth an explanation that is both logically consistent and accurate, especially when such a methodology insists *a priori* without proof "that even the nature of religion itself can be adequately understood only through the use of an academic methodology designed to ignore the truth that makes religion what it is."[28]

Of course, the resourceful Bahá'í scholar can prove the spiritual verities upon which the Bahá'í Faith is based: the existence of a spiritual dimension, the existence of God, the theory of history as a succession of divine interventions, the concept of consciousness and cognition as powers of the soul, the power of consciousness and prayer to affect material reality. Indeed, many Bahá'í and non-Baha'i scholars have already accomplished such studies.[29] The Bahá'í scholar can also choose to explicate Bahá'í theories through the methodology of apologetics, thereby articulating Bahá'í theories and hypotheses for the academy to test and explore.

In the final analysis, each Bahá'í scholar must discover individually the best methodology for integrating the Bahá'í perspective into his or her field of study. What should excite and motivate all Bahá'í academics is what the future holds as each day more and more of the verities revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, discussed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and elucidated by the House of Justice are vindicated because of one simple fact—these authoritative texts are accurate descriptions of reality.

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[28] Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice dated 7 April 1999.

[29] e.g., See William S. Hatcher, *Logic and Logos*, *The Law of Love Enshrined*, and *Love, Power and Justice* regarding proofs of the existence and nature of God. See Melvin Morse, *Transformed by the Light*, Larry Dossey, *Recovering the Soul: A Scientific and Spiritual Search*, Ken Wilber, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, and Fred Alan Wolf, *The Spiritual Universe* for proofs of the existence of the soul. See Jahn and Dunne, *Margins of Reality,* and Larry Dossey, *Healing Words* for proofs of the consciousness to affect material reality.

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Unfreezing the frame: the promise of inductive research in Bahá'í studies[1]

Will C. van den Hoonaard

Abstract

This paper explores the suitability of inductive analysis as a method in Bahá'í scholarship. It also looks at a number of stumbling blocks that inhibit the development of a Bahá'í methodology, whether inductive or otherwise. By examining Bahá'í studies from an inductive perspective, we note a reluctance to bridge the gap between Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í studies on the Bahá'í community, aspects of Bahá'í studies that limit the participation of women, the tendency among Bahá'í publishing scholarly outlets to reproduce "comfort" methodologies, and the workings of at least seven Bahá'í scholarly clusters that organize and structure discourse on Bahá'í methodologies which inhibit the rise of new perspectives. The paper proposes some six ways to unfreeze the methodological frame that seems to guide current Bahá'í methodological practice and discourse.

An inductive methodology

The Universal House of Justice has expressed its concern about using a "humanistic" or "materialistic" methodology as a means of studying religion.[2] We can only infer from its other texts that a humanistic or materialistic methodology prioritizes the social context over the divine context in explaining societal phenomena.[3] But, from the specific Bahá'í perspective, what are the parameters of a "materialistic" methodology? Lest we initially assume that a Bahá'í methodology excludes positivism and deductive reasoning[4]—the

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1 I am indebted to Deborah van den Hoonaard for offering valuable criticism of this paper, and to Hoda Mahmoudi and Michael McMullen for offering insights about an earlier, parallel paper. I am also grateful to Leonda W. Keniston, Lynn Echevarria, Carol Black, and Paula Drewek for ongoing discussions on this topic. I presented an earlier draft of this paper to a conference on Foundational Issues in Bahá'í Studies held at Merton College, Oxford, 1 April 2000.

2 The Universal House of Justice, letter to a national spiritual assembly dated 4 October 1994 cited in *The Bahá'í Studies Review* 5.1 (1995): 138-139, points to the confusion created by "dogmatic materialism today which insists that even the nature of religion itself can be adequately understood only through the use of an academic methodology designed to ignore the truths that make religion what it is."

3 *Ibid.*

4 Anthony Giddens sees three varieties of positivism (cited by Anthony M. Orum, "The Varieties of Sociological Experience," *Contemporary Sociology* [1980]: 748), while Peter Halfpenny evokes at least 20 definitions of positivism ("Guide to the Literature," Department of Sociology, Manchester University, Mimeo, 1972). Talcott Parsons (in *The Structure of Social Action, Vol. 1* [New York: The Free Press, 1968]) presents the basis and theory of positivism that was (and still is) quite current among many sociologists.

hallmark of "objectivity"—we need to refer to a recent piece[5] which highlights the promise and benefits of positivism and deductive thinking.[6] We seem to have arrived at a point where the Bahá'í research frame is frozen, seemingly locked between formal and informal Bahá'í research statements and practices. I intend, however, to approach the topic of Bahá'í methodology from an inductive angle. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated that "through processes of inductive reasoning and research" a scientific person "is informed of all that appertains to humanity, its status, conditions and happenings."[7]

Peter Kivisto, a Catholic scholar, noted that scholars wanted a "theologically grounded sociological position, one that sought to utilize interpretive tools from the social sciences that harmonized with the Catholic faith."[8] Within Islam, there were efforts to "Islamize" anthropology in order to look at Islamic "ideology, culture, or way of life, [as] as a process of deliberate obedience to God's laws."[9] However, scholars from other faiths, unable to thaw the frame, derived a subsidiary position: they would examine the "material and secondary efficient causes of society," leaving the first-order Cause (e.g. interventions by God) to theologians.[10]

Recently, we have witnessed a rebellion—and even an outright rejection—of that mainstream, deductive scientific model as a means to capture human and social reality. In the human and social sciences, with the exception of psychology in North America, the interpretive paradigm[11] is gaining ground.[12] An inductive social science emphasizes the meanings that a group assigns to its own actions and statements. Such a sociology attempts to arrive at the world view as understood by the subjects in its study. The primary sociological perspective that has fostered inductive analysis is *symbolic interactionism* which rests on three premises:

- human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them;
- the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows [*sic*]; and
- these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process

5 Farzam Arbab, "Knowledge and Civilization: Implications for the Community and the Individual," *The Bahá'í World, 1997-1998* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Publications, 1999): 157-178.

6 Terry Poirier queries this positivistic approach (email letter to the Universal House of Justice, dated 12 December 1999) (copy in possession of author).

7 Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, *Scholarship: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá and from the Letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice* (Mona Vale, Australia: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1995) 2.

8 Peter Kivisto, "The Brief Career of Catholic Sociology," *Sociological Analysis* 50.4 (1989): 356.

9 Richard Tapper, "'Islamic Anthropology' and the 'Anthropology of Islam'," *Anthropological Quarterly* 68.3 (1995): 188.

10 Kivisto, *op. cit.,* 357.

11 The interpretive paradigm is a rather vast label, but it covers phenomenology, qualitative analysis, inductive research, life-history analysis, narrative analysis, and so forth.

12 David Rennie, Kimberley D. Watson, and Althea Monteiro, "Qualitative Research in Canadian Psychology," (2000), Mimeo, 18pp.

used by the person in dealing with the things he [*sic*] encounters.[13]

This kind of sociology rejects the use of variables, claiming that they are the researchers' constructs of social life, rather than the subjects'. An inductive methodology is "grounded" in the data: the researcher pays close attention to how theory fits data, while a deductive sociology tries to fit data into theory. Above all, it is meanings and social interaction that constitute the world of data.[14] Attitudes and action are pregnant with meaning. Inductive research, however, is more than "believer intelligibility." The two terms (i.e. inductive research and believer intelligibility) are not synonymous, because inductive research involves analysis. It starts out from the perspective of the believers (in our case), but moves the data into conceptual frameworks.

The method of studying group life and the character of a people (in our case, the Bahá'í community) sways between an "objective" and "subjective" approach. Still, for some scholars looking at the Bahá'í community, the prevailing desired stance is one of objectivity. As a consequence, some writers pursue a statistical fetish as a means to denote the growth and social context of the Bahá'í community.[15] In any case, as Susan Maneck explains, "the idea that one can achieve an immaculate state of epistemological objectivity only leads one to mask one's presuppositions and ideological commitments under a facade of objectivity...."[16]

Samuel Heilman, a Jewish sociologist, outlines an ironic danger of merging academic interests with the objective study of one's own community: estrangement and marginalisation from his community when such a study involves the objective approach, derived from what Max Weber has advocated: the value of neutrality, of objectivity in social scientific research. He cites Robert Merton's predilection for the "outsider doctrine."[17] Insiders have a "structurally imposed incapacity to comprehend their own group because, having been socialized into its way of life, they no longer are capable of being sensitive to the grammar of its conduct and nuances of its cultural idiom in any objective way."[18] As Heilman[19] and many others[20] have shown, the reports of such outsiders have on occasion led to puzzlement, bewilderment, and humour among the studied who were not able to discern themselves in these reports. These reports lacked authenticity, as is the case with some of the work of sociologists who are not Bahá'ís, or

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13 Herbert G. Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley, CA: U. of California Press, 1986) 2; Will. C. van den Hoonaard, *Working with Sensitizing Concepts: Analytical Field Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997).

14 Sociologists who are Bahá'ís are also drawn to the works of Georg Simmel who offered timeless insights about the nature of society and interaction while acknowledging the central role of spirituality. He advocates inductive generalizations about social evolution (Kurt H. Wolf, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* [New York: Free Press, 1964] xxiv).

15 See, for example, William Garlington, email posting to H-NET List for Bahá'í Studies, (17 Aug. 1998).

16 Susan Maneck, email posting to H-NET List for Bahá'í Studies, (12 May 1997).

17 Samuel C. Heilman, "Jewish Sociologist: Native-as-'Stranger'," *The American Sociologist* 15 (1980): 106.

18 *Ibid.*, 101.

19 *Ibid.*, 102.

20 John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

in fact in works produced by Bahá'ís who favour the deductive method.[21]

When one follows the discussions among sociologists (and anthropologists) who are Bahá'ís, one is invariably drawn to compare the research and activities of these social scientists with some striking semblances that visit other "religious sociologies." It should be borne in mind that discussions about "religious sociologies" have waned—in fact the latest discussion about the divide between sociology and religion occurred some ten years ago.[22] Since then, sociologists of every type of religious conviction have carried out empirical research without any reference to that divide. Increasingly, scholars argue against reductionism of spiritual accounts to social or psychological explanations.[23] Bahá'ís can be excused for entering so late into the debate of "religious sociology," for we have few sociologists and no regular medium of contact. However, there is a way out of the deductive conundrum.

What has not yet come to the fore in Bahá'í studies—as it has in the social sciences as a whole—is the "new ethnography" and narrative life histories which can address the *angst* that Bahá'ís express about having social research conducted in the Bahá'í community. These "new ethnographies" indicate not just a strong resurgence of traditional research methods involving field research. They are attempts to understand cultures in a more delicate and theoretically complex way. This movement also underscores the pervasive and inalienable influence of the researcher's own culture when he or she explores other cultural settings. More importantly, the "new ethnographies" spell an end to the author-evacuated and passive style of writing, which we have come to associate with "objective" or "realist" research.[24] Contemporary ethnographers who advocate the "new ethnography" would convey all the elements involved in writing ethnographies, especially the role of the researcher, in the construction of other peoples' cultures, or even his or her own culture or community. The researcher's own experience in the field is relevant to the nature of his or her results.

Van Maanen presents us with new nomenclature for this approach.[25] "Confessional tales" are characterized by "their highly personalized styles and their self-absorbed mandates" to "explicitly demystify field work" in response to critics who claim that field research has no scientific merit.[26] "Impressionist tales" are out to "startle their audience" with an imaginative rendering of fieldwork, while using a "dramatic" and "vibrant" style of writing.[27] As might be expected, the new research quest has led to a broader spectrum of ethnographic possibilities that adumbrate life histories, narratives, the authenticity and

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21 An article on the "Nacirema" is perhaps the earliest satire on the "objective" method. Using this approach, the anthropologist stretched Nacireman ("American" spelled backwards) culture beyond recognition (Horace Miner, "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema," *American Anthropologist* 58.3 [1956]: 503-507).

22 *Sociological Analysis* carried this debate in 1989 (vol. 50).

23 See, in particular, Lorne L. Dawson, *Comprehending Cults* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1998).

24 Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

25 Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field.*

26 *Ibid.*, 73.

27 *Ibid.,*102.

role of everyday myths,[28] ambiguous depictions of culture,[29] and subjective understanding. This approach then differs widely from the traditional and conventional patterns of scholarship.

The social organisation of Bahá'í studies

How do we as Bahá'ís fare in terms of these newer methodologies in the human and social sciences? Does the social organisation of Bahá'í studies hinder or promote these advances? Let us examine more closely the nature of the Bahá'í methodological enterprise today. In many respects, my argument parallels Howard Becker's discussion on "methodology."[30] Becker points out that the centuries-long discourse about methods has not really brought us any closer to how scientists, especially social scientists, go about conducting research. In his analogous discussion, he reminds us of longstanding debates about what constitutes "truth," "beauty," or the "aesthetic," but what is of far greater interest is finding out what the participants in the art worlds mean by those terms and how they go about producing those works. Similarly, while it might be useful to understand ideally how research proceeds, the net accomplishment of scientific methodology is the result in what scientists *do,* not necessarily what they have assumed about doing scientific work *in the abstract.* The on-going belief that what researchers do is a reflection of some abstract consideration of "methodology" has resulted in scores of scholars and scientists believing in formal methodology, while practising something else on the ground. The myth that what we learn in school about "methodology" is "real" and what we do when we engage in research often deviates from that formal model results in less-than-honest reports of the methodology we have employed. This situation becomes more complicated for us Bahá'í scholars, novice and veteran, who must try to resolve the initial dilemma between what we are learning from our respective fields and our mandated struggle against "atheistic" or "materialistic" methodologies when trying to explore some facet of the Bahá'í Faith or Bahá'í community.

Elsewhere, I have attempted to explore the social organisation of Bahá'í studies.[31] In this paper I will touch only upon those facets that strike me as the essentials of what Bahá'ís have been doing. The totality of current Bahá'í methodologies is part of a social organisation of Bahá'í studies that is structured around gender, Bahá'í publishing outlets, and the presence of several distinctive Bahá'í scholarly communities or clusters. These elements play a large role in the manner in which we interact with the larger academic world and sometimes restrict that interaction, which is so necessary to developing a more rounded Bahá'í methodology.

Working in parallel systems

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28 E.g., Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, *The Myths We Live By* (2d ed. London: Routledge, 1993).

29 Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field* 127.

30 Howard S. Becker, "The Epistemology of Qualitative Research," in Richard Jessor, Anne Colby, and Richard Schweder, eds., *Ethnography and Human Development: Context and Meaning in Social Enquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

31 Will C. van den Hoonaard, "The Social Organization of Mentorship in Bahá'í Studies," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 8.3 (1997):19-38.

In such a context, we tend to give high salience to formal methodological statements, favouring "objective" stances. What we downplay or, more commonly, ignore are those aspects of methodology that are not part of that formal structure, namely personal interest in the subject matter, serendipity, coincidence, inspiration, lack of time, opposition, poorly-chosen research tools, and our beliefs as Bahá'ís. In such a setting, we find that the formal methodology is socially reproduced, while what really happens in research is pushed into footnotes, prefaces, and acknowledgements.[32]

We have casualties: some become disappointed with their education or training, others come to believe that, after all, they are not cut out to be "real" scholars or scientists, and many others simply compartmentalize the formal and practical bases of methodology. How these two models of methodology have managed to co-exist in the minds and hearts of researchers would be a fascinating subject, but is beyond the scope of this paper. Hence, my reluctance to prescribe, in deductive terms, a Bahá'í "methodology" when undertaking Bahá'í studies. Rather, my proclivity is to understand what *happens* when scholars engage in Bahá'í research.

The gender knot

Both women and men are complicit in the social construction of inequality that pervades our fields. The Bahá'í call for equality is a counterpoint to the competitive spirit under which our scholarship suffers. Both women and men need to work together on untying the gender knot.[33] The issue of gender bears directly on particular methodological outlooks in two ways. Male Bahá'í scholars still far outnumber female scholars. However, it is not simply a question of numbers. The issue of gender goes straight to the heart of methodological preferences. Female Bahá'í scholars—many of whom hold untenurable university positions or are recent PhD graduates—are concentrated in the lower social echelons of Bahá'í studies, including the social sciences. As the social sciences have emerged from the dark ages of positivism and have become increasingly strident about using inductive methodologies and qualitative analysis, it is the women who are primarily raising concerns about representation and issues of "voice."[34]

Bahá'í publishing outlets

Bahá'í publishing outlets compound, to some extent, the problem of methodology. There

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[32] See Shulamit Reinharz, *On Becoming a Social Scientist* (4th ed. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1993); Laurel Richardson, *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1990).

[33] Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling our Patriarchal Legacy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

[34] E.g., Susan B. Brill, "Conversive Relationality in Bahá'í Scholarship: Centering the Sacred and Decentering the Self," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 7.2 (1995): 1-28. There is an increasing number of published works devoted to the emergence of qualitative and inductive research, incl. Howard S. Becker, *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It* [Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998]; Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988]; John Van Maanen, *Representation in Ethnography* [Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995); Reinharz (*op. cit.*); and Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* [Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage,1996]. The annual Canadian "Qualitative Analysis Conference," of which my wife and I are regular attendees, and sometimes the organizers, is completely organized for these researchers, the majority of whom are women.

is no tight fit, but each of the major Bahá'í journals seems to favour certain approaches. *World Order* magazine, for example, seems mainly concerned with the public presentation of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, so it adheres to "normal science," a perspective that resonates with officials and the general public. *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* seems to promote a theological, Bahá'í writings-based approach, relying heavily on conventional methods employed by psychology and social work.[35] *The Bahá'í Studies Review* exemplifies a tone and content more representative of the historical and social-scientific approach—a format favoured by Bahá'ís who are academics.

The surfeit of Bahá'í journals for such a small global community, however, has had the unintended consequence of drawing potentially interesting Bahá'í articles out of mainstream or core journals in various fields. As a result, Bahá'í authors have settled into a methodological comfort zone which, in turn, is not invigorated by the exchange of ideas which would more naturally come from reviewers who do not share particular aspects of those "comfort methodologies." That is not to say that Bahá'í journals are deprived of some of the finer gems of scholarship and that non-Bahá'í journals have seen some of the more evangelical documents, either as dissertations or as articles.[36] One could even suggest that as the sorts of articles published in Bahá'í journals might not have been published elsewhere, that it has had a beneficial effect on novice Bahá'í scholars.

Bahá'í scholarly clusters

Howard Becker, in his study on the creation, production, and distribution of art,[37] adapts a term used by artists to refer to the whole borderless community that makes art possible, namely "art worlds." The social organisation of art worlds requires a division of labour, cooperative links, conventions, mobilizing resources of all kinds, patronage, sales by dealers, agents, culture industries, and so on. It is a world where the initiative and work of an artist is linked in many tangible and intangible ways to a wide variety of things that make his or her art possible, from someone's making a particular colour chalk to the organisation of an art gallery. Such "worlds" define what constitutes normative or deviant art, a place where some artists do not see others as genuine artists, but they do all constitute a part of that art world. We can extend the idea of "worlds" to other areas of human endeavour, whether they are music, schooling, plumbing, nursing, or the world of Bahá'í scholarship.

The presence of several distinctive scholarly communities in the English-speaking Bahá'í world highlights the lack of sustained contact among Bahá'í scholars. I am ambivalent about whether the existence of these clusters hinders or benefits the

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35 I explore this theme in van den Hoonaard (*op. cit.*). I found that, of the first 121 articles published by *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies,* 35% were dedicated to discussing the Bahá'í writings or theology, 20% were oriented in an applied direction, 15% involved history, and 12% literature and the fine arts. It would be useful to compare similar trends in the other Bahá'í journals, beyond the schematic impression I am giving here.

36 E.g., James J. Keene, "Bahá'í: Redefinition of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6.2 (1967): 221-235; and "Religious Behavior and Neuroticism, Spontaneity, and Worldmindedness," *Sociometry* 30 (1967): 137-157.

37 Howard S. Becker, *Arts Worlds* (Los Angeles, University of California Press: 1982).

development of new ideas in methodology. With each cluster promoting a distinctive stance (rather than a variety of stances) new methodologies are perhaps less likely to arise. These clusters of Bahá'í scholarly activity are defined by a preference of methods, choice of subject matter, discourse, and, sometimes, geography. I must rely on the reader to know that the following sketches are simple characterizations which, from another perspective, may not resemble the cluster I am attempting to describe.[38]

I should perhaps mention first the British *Lancaster/Newcastle-upon-Tyne* cluster which features some of our most prominent Bahá'í scholars today. The works by Peter Smith have set a high standard.[39] The cluster underscores the importance of an historical approach, maintains a positivistic outlook as standard research practice, and values the use, translation, interpretation, and contextualization of the Bahá'í writings. Its publications frequently appear in *The Bahá'í Studies Review.* There is a constant form of exchange between this cluster and scholars, both Iranian and non-Iranian, in the Netherlands, the United States, and Canada.

A second cluster is *American.* The forerunner of this cluster was several PhD dissertations undertaken by students who had little, if any, interconnection. Today's cluster represents a mix of historical writing and critical commentaries. We recall the *Dialogue* mini-cluster, with a penchant for a style and spirit of writing that was often critical of the Bahá'í community. Along with the mini-cluster of activity in Michigan and Indiana, these small clusters have evoked strong images of the unresolved dilemmas when academics undertake the study of the Bahá'í Faith and Bahá'í community. Kalimát Press functions in many respects as an international publisher of Bahá'í scholarly monographs. It draws on a wide body of Bahá'í writers and readers, many beyond North America. I should, however, make special note of the office of research of the national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States which has initiated, maintained, and promoted contact with several of the clusters referred to in this paper.

A third cluster consists of *continental Europe,* with its vigorous focus on defending the Bahá'í Faith from external attacks. Strongly versed in historical and scriptural texts, there is a deep concern for defining the Bahá'í Faith as an independent world religion.[40]

I might point out that one emerging cluster—the one that I am most familiar with—namely that of *Canada,* has a distinctive style of Bahá'í scholarship with two contrasting approaches. One has a marked psychological, social-work flavour which originally led to the formation of the Association for Bahá'í Studies in 1973. The other is primarily sociological in its orientation, notable for its inductive research. The cluster, as a whole, is marked by differences of tone and purpose between those who prefer a

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[38] One can locate these clusters by reading the referrals in the prefaces and acknowledgements in Bahá'í scholarly works.

[39] E.g., Peter Smith, "Motif Research: Peter Berger and the Bahá'í Faith," *Religion* 8 (1978): 210-234; and *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: From Messianic Shi`ism to a World Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Peter Smith and Moojan Momen, "The Bahá'í Faith, 1957-1988: A Survey of Contemporary Developments," *Religion* 19 (1989): 62-91.

[40] E.g., Udo Schaefer, *The Bahá'í Faith: Sect or Religion?* (Ottawa, ON: Association for Bahá'í Studies, 1988); Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh, and Ulrich Gollmer, *Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000); and Huschmand Sabet, *Der Gespaltene Himmel* (Stuttgart: Verbum-Verlag, 1967).

deductive orientation, steeped in the natural sciences and math—a positivistic approach, and those who advocate an inductive approach.

A *fifth* cluster is only characterised by the fact of their institutional affiliation of its components. Whereas the previous four clusters are not in any sense formal, the fifth consists of *formally-established Bahá'í agencies.* They include the various "chairs" of Bahá'í studies (or variations thereof) in India, Maryland, and Jerusalem. Many Bahá'ís infer the scope and intent of Bahá'í scholarship from what the Universal House of Justice has proclaimed about these places. Several scholars from other clusters have lectured at meetings organised by members of this cluster, but it is still too early to determine the methodologies that will be nurtured by these centres.

The *sixth* cluster represents scholars who manage to straddle creatively the divide between academia and the Bahá'í community. Members of the Newcastle-upon-Tyne group have achieved this, as have Richard Thomas' writings on race relations in the Bahá'í community,[41] June Thomas' exploration of social planning,[42] David Piff's work on Bahá'í rumour,[43] and Graham Hassall's study of the Bahá'í presence in the Pacific.[44] All share the characteristic of being publishable in both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í outlets.

The *Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project* represents a *seventh* cluster. The project, started in 1984, represents an amalgam of scholarly activity, held in check by substantial methodological differences among its some 350 contributors and editors and by a slowly emerging consensus among Bahá'í bodies as to its purpose and scope. The project has drawn on all of the clusters for a large bank of articles of varying quality and scope. Its influence as a methodological exercise will only become known in due course.

Unfreezing the frame

Where do we go from here? Here is what I would consider an optimistic perspective. The elements that contribute to unfreezing the Bahá'í methodological frame are a matter of audience and time, of scholarly maturation, of casting a positive outlook on working through the tensions between in-house and external perspectives, of stepping away from mission-driven research, and of more actively creating a welcoming atmosphere for women scholars.

Intended audience and the passing of time

A researcher must speak to an audience appropriate to his or her methodological

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41 Richard Thomas, *Understanding Interracial Unity: A Study of U.S. Race Relations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996).

42 June Thomas Manning, *Planning Progress: Lessons from Shoghi Effendi* (Ottawa, ON: Association for Bahá'í Studies, 1999).

43 David Piff, "The Book of Hearsay: Informal Oral Lore in the Bahá'í Community,"(PhD Dissertation, Department of Sociology of Religion, University of Copenhagen: 1997); "Unofficial Information and Rumour in the Bahá'í Community: The Case of 'The Tree They Couldn't Kill'," *Bahá'í Studies Review* 8 (1998): 45-54; David Piff and Margit Warburg, "Enemies of the Faith: Rumours and Anecdotes as Self-Definition and Social Control in the Bahá'i Religion," In Eileen Barker and Margit Warburg, eds., *New Religions and New Religiosity* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1998): 66-82.

44 Graham Hassall, "'Outpost of a World Religion': The Bahá'í Faith in Australia, 1920-47," *The Journal of Religious History* 16.3 (1991): 315-338.

approach. If, for example, in a peer-review process, a scholar's efforts are deemed unsatisfactory, then that would be a judgment grounded in a particular scholarly audience. If, on the other hand, the general Bahá'í community deems the work satisfactory—and if that is the chosen audience of arbitration—then one assumes the consequences of that judgment. It makes no sense to render a judgment by an audience for which the work was not intended. This approach also fosters a much-needed diversity in Bahá'í studies as scholars seek to marry with varying degrees of success (and possibly failure) the formal Bahá'í methodological stance, as advocated by Bahá'í bodies, and what really happens methodologically. It is the prerogative of the Bahá'í scholar to determine which audience will arbitrate his or her work. If more than one audience is satisfied, all the better; if only one audience is satisfied, we would leave it at that.

Scholarly maturation

In terms of methodology, too, we must rely on the scholar's own judgment about a suitable methodology. Such judgment comes out of one's training, one's personal bent or tradition, and out of one's faith with a particular eye on what Bahá'í institutions themselves assert as a proper methodology. The matter becomes seriously more complex when one factors in the preferences of one's discipline, an impatience on the part of the Bahá'í community to see relevance in the methodology, and shifts in one's stance due to maturation and scholarly experience, both individually and collectively.

Tensions between in-house and external perspectives

We can all expect to experience tensions that come from the struggle between what is perceived to be the official Bahá'í methodology and any methodology derived from one's discipline and/or experience. Attempts by Bahá'í social scientists, for example, to look at the Bahá'í community involve the fear of becoming a stranger to that community, or the researcher begins to define oneself as a stranger.[45] Can that research process be used not only as a further means to understanding the workings of the Bahá'í community, but also to challenge and enrich prevailing research methodologies? We do not need to surrender Bahá'í studies to those who are not Bahá'ís in order to develop a sophisticated and relevant methodology (although this could be a consequence of insisting on a particular, exclusive methodology). It is imperative, nevertheless, to engage the wider academic world in the pursuit of Bahá'í studies, either through Bahá'ís obtaining research grants or publishing in peer-reviewed journals, or inviting non-Bahá'í scholars into the house of Bahá'í studies, especially through their publishing in Bahá'í journals.

Stepping away from mission-driven research

Perhaps other disciplines are more suited to mission-driven research, but in sociology, it is fraught with ethical problems. As an example, should such research answer the criticism that the Bahá'í community is "invisible,"[46] that it has a utilitarian doctrine and

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[45] Heilman, *op. cit.*

[46] Ivan Julian Ruff, "Bahá'í-the Invisible Community," *New Society* 29 (Sept.12, 1974): 665-668.

as such it appeals to western minds,[47] or that the Bahá'í community is analogous to a panopticon?[48] Would our immediate reaction to such claims, however unsubstantiated, have a more limited influence than a substantial, whole-scale research and publication program on the part of all of the Bahá'í clusters of scholarship?

An inductive approach to Bahá'í studies avoids the pitfall of having to deal with the "truth-content" of either social science or the Bahá'í Faith: on one hand, this approach avoids the tendency of having to fasten Bahá'í developments to a social theory, explanation, or context that might be alien to the Bahá'í spirit; on the other hand, it avoids the temptation to engage in mission-driven research (such as, for example, how can my sociological study improve "universal participation in the Bahá'í community?").

Such an approach also avoids debates about how the Bahá'í Faith should be characterised, whether it is a religion, a world religion, a new religious movement, or a sect. Of course, what interests us is how believers, the Bahá'í institutions, opponents, or sympathizers define the Bahá'í Faith as a means to understand the perspective and definitions of the situation that they bring into their thoughts and actions which pertain to the Bahá'í community. Efforts to gain legitimacy as a world religion would, however, invite sociological research.

Summary

This paper has outlined some of the advantages of approaching the study of the Bahá'í community from an inductive perspective which embeds the research fully in the context of the meanings that Bahá'ís assign to the things they say and do. It is a grounded perspective that attempts to retain the integrity of the research "subjects," ensuring that the gathered data maintain a meaningful place in relationship to the wider belief system. I have also presented some of the obstacles in the social organisation of Bahá'í studies that stand in the way of arriving at an inductive approach. What is needed is clear: an openness to the world which would allow us to explore new methodologies and approaches which, however tentative those methodologies are, could result in meaningful studies of the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'í community, at least in its next stage of development.

[47] Raymond Firth, *Essays on Social Organization and Values* (London: Athlone Press, 1984) 278.

[48] Juan R.I. Cole, "The Bahá'í Faith in America as Panopticon, 1963-1997," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37.2 (1998): 234-248.

"By the Fig and the Olive": 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary in Ottoman Turkish on the Qur'ánic Sura 95 – notes and provisional translation[1]

NECATI ALKAN

Sura 95, Tín (the Fig)[2]

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

1. By the Fig and the Olive,
2. And the Mount of Sinai,
3. And this City of security, –
4. We have indeed created man in the best of moulds,
5. Then do We abase him (to be) the lowest of the low, –
6. Except such as believe and do righteous deeds:
   For they shall have a reward unfailing.
7. Then what can, after this, contradict thee,
   as to the judgment (to come)?
8. Is not God the wisest of judges?

Introduction

Although the Bahá'í Faith has its roots in Persia, it developed in the Ottoman Empire through Bahá'u'lláh's banishment to Baghdad (1853-1863), to Istanbul and Edirne in Rumelia (European Turkey, 1863-1868), and lastly to Ottoman Palestine (1868-1892). Many significant events, like Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation to various kings and rulers, occurred in the borders of what is today modern Turkey. From 1853, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá came into contact with many Ottoman officials during their exile, many of whom were friendly. For example, Namik Pasha, governor of Baghdad, and Hurṣid Pasha, governor of Edirne, both hesitated to enact banishment decrees of Sultan Abdulaziz. "Young Ottoman" reformers such as the famous poet and writer Namik Kemal (d. 1888) and Midhat Pasha (d. 1884), "father" of the Constitution of 1876 (the third *Tanzimat* or reform edict), and the writer Süleyman Nazif (d. 1927), supporter of the "Young Turk" movement, either communicated with or personally met 'Abdu'l-

[1] Modified version of a paper presented at the 36th 'Irfán Colloquium, "Mysticism and the Bahá'í Faith," in London, 13-15 July 2001. I am grateful for the many suggestions and references provided by the participants of that gathering and other colleagues.

[2] In this article Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation of the Qur'án is used; however, "Alláh" is substituted by "God".

Bahá.[3] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, well-versed in various Turkish dialects, acted as his father's mediator in those times, and had good relations with many Ottomans.

The only published collection of Turkish tablets and prayers by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is entitled *Majmú'ih-yi Alváḥ wa Munájáthá-yi Turkí*.[4] It contains several tablets and prayers of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which were written in the Arabic-Persian script, and some of which are partially composed in Persian and/or Arabic. These include tablets to individual Bahá'ís and groups in Caucasia, Erivan, Zinján, Sísán and other places. These texts are mostly short announcements of the glad tidings of Bahá'u'lláh's coming. Several are in the Azeri dialect. The Bahá'í World Centre apparently has a great number of tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá written in different Turkish dialects,[5] and there might be still more in private hands or libraries.

The Turkish tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are not known to many Bahá'ís, and except for some Ottoman prayers printed in Latin letters,[6] the Bahá'í community of Turkey has little access to them because of their Ottoman script. Consequently, I am aware of no scholarship that has yet been done in the field of Turkish Bahá'í studies. Turkish Bahá'ís born before the script and language reform made by the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), in 1928 and from 1932, who are able to read the Ottoman script, have not been engaged in the academic study of the Bahá'í Faith and its Ottoman writings.[7]

This paper includes what is probably the first study and provisional translation of an Ottoman Turkish tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The original text appears in the previously mentioned collection of Turkish tablets and prayers by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, entitled *Majmú'ih-yi Alváḥ wa Munájáthá-yi Turkí*.[8] The recipient and date of this commentary remain unknown. However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá ends it by saying that he dictated it to a certain Nesib

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3 See Necati Alkan, "Ottoman Reform Movements and the Bahá'í Faith, 1860s-1920s"; paper presented at a conference on the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 17-21 December 2000 (forthcoming).

4 Tihrán: Mu'assasih-i Millí-yi Maṭbú'át-i Amrí, BE 127/1970-7 (henceforth *MAMT*).

5 Personal communication, Iraj Ayman.

6 Mecdi Ínan (ed. and transl.), *Bahai Münacaatlari* (Bahá'í Prayers) Menteș Matbaasi: Istanbul, 1973. Mecdettin (Majdu'd-Din) Ïnan has translated major writings of Bahá'u'lláh like the *Hidden Words*, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, and the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* into Turkish. He was a son of the probably first Turkish Bahá'í, Ökkeș Efendi from Antep, who had met Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká in the 1870s; see Neyir Özșuca, *Türkiye'de Bahailer* (The Bahá'ís of Turkey), Ankara 1997, 106-108. For Ïnan's life, see *Bahá'í World* XIV:348-49.

7 Neyir Özșuca's aforementioned book may be regarded as an exception (see note 6 above). It is an insider's account of the development of the Bahá'í Faith in Turkey, mostly based on oral accounts. Haydar and Meserret Diriöz, scholars of Ottoman literature, were engaged in archive work with regard to the Bahá'í Faith, but have not published on the subject. Abdülkadir Diriöz, father of Haydar Diriöz, was one of the early Bahá'ís of Turkey. He wrote a history of the early Bahá'í community of Turkey entitled *A History of the Bahá'í Faith in Birecik and Memories*. Other books he wrote are *The Promised One of all Nations* and *Isbat-i Uluhiyyet* ("Proofs of the Existence of God"). He furthermore translated John Esslemont's *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* and Mirza Abu'l-Faḍl's *Kitáb al-Fará'iḍ* into Ottoman Turkish; see *Bahá'í World* XIV:332.

8 *MAMT* 146-54; the text of this edition is used in this article. Cf., no title (Tehran: Lajnih-i Nashr-i Áthár-i Amrí, B.E. 105/1327 Shamsí [1948-49]) 59-63, in which the same prayers and tablets are compiled. The latter is the first edition printed in type letters; it has some printing errors.

Effendi. No direct references are made to the Bahá'í Faith or its teachings in the commentary. It is possible from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comment, "as thine Excellency knows," that this piece is an answer to an inquiry by one of the many Ottoman officials in Palestine and elsewhere with whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in contact.[9] In it, 'Abdu'l-Bahá comments on the first verse "By the Fig and the Olive" (*wa't-tín wa'z-zaytún*) of Sura 95 of the Qur'án. Moreover, he presents a *tafsír* or commentary on the entire sura.[10] After informing the addressee about the traditional and exoteric interpretations of the commentators of the Qur'án, 'Abdu'l-Bahá offers spiritual meanings and an esoteric exegesis of this Qur'ánic chapter. The first part of this article is an overview of the Islamic and the biblical background of the motifs in Sura 95, followed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretation of the sura with cross-references to other Bahá'í writings. A provisional translation of the 'Abdu'l-Bahá's commentary is appended.

The Islamic Context

Sura 95, known as *Tín*, or the "Fig," is, most probably, one of the earliest Meccan revelations that Muḥammad had received. It belongs to a category of chapters which begin with so-called "introductory oath clusters"; more specifically, it is one of the suras beginning with oaths alluding to sacred localities.[11] The sura begins with the swearing of an oath, by "the Fig" (*at-tín*), "the Olive" (*az-zaytún*), "Mount Sinai" (*ṭúr sínín*) and the "City of security" (*al-balad al-amín*), that God has created man in the best form (*aḥsan taqwím*); he is then degraded to the "lowest of the low" (*asfala sáfilín*). Only those who believe and lead a moral life will receive an abiding reward. This is a testimony to the last two verses where the coming of the Judgement Day (*ad-dín*) is assured and that God is the "wisest of the judges" (*aḥkam al-ḥákimín*). The majority of Muslim scholars regard it as a Meccan revelation, supported by the image of "this City of security" for Mecca.

The "Fig" appears only once in the Qur'án, while the "Olive" is mentioned several times.[12] Different interpretations exist regarding their meaning. According to some, they represent the fruits themselves. God is swearing by them because of their benefits. The fig was regarded as wholesome and easy to digest, a medicine for various diseases; it softens the human nature, reduces phlegm, removes the filth in the liver and kidneys, and eliminates haemorrhoids. Muḥammad is reported to have recommended that the

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9 See, e.g., Moojan Momen, "'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on the Islamic Tradition 'I was a Hidden Treasure…'", *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* 3.4 (1985): 4-35, and at <http://www.northill.demon.co.uk/relstud/>. 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed this tablet at the age of thirteen to a certain Ali Ṣevket Pasha.

10 Other examples of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's commentaries are his *tafsír* mentioned in footnote 3, another tablet in *MAMT*:138-42, on the Islamic tradition *Inna'lláh la-yu'ayyid hádhá'd-dín bi-rajul fájir* (usually translated as "God may support this religion with an evil man"), and his commentary on Qur'án 30:1-4 (Moojan Momen, "'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on the Qur'ánic Verses Concerning the Overthrow of the Byzantines: The Stages of the Soul," *Lights of 'Irfán* [Papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars] [2001] II:99-117).

11 Angelika Neuwirth, "Images and Metaphors in the Introductory Sections of the Makkan *suras*", in GR Hawting and Abdul-Kader Shareef (eds.), *Approaches to the Qur'án* (London/N.Y.: Routledge, 1993) 3-36.

12 6:99, 142; 16:11; 24:35; 80:29.

believers eat figs and to have stated that had He chosen a fruit to have descended from Paradise it would have been the fig.[13]

In the Indian tradition as well, we come across the fig tree in paradise, as the "Tree of Life" or the "cosmic tree". In the Bhagavad-Gita (15:1-3), it is a giant cosmic "upside-down-tree" with its roots in the sky and its branches covering the earth, its leaves representing the hymns of the Veda. "The eternal *aśvattha* ("fig tree"; *Ficus religiosus*) is a manifestation of Brahma in the universe."[14] Hebraic and Islamic traditions likewise offer the same image of the Tree of Life.[15] Yusuf Ali, translator of the Qur'án, notes with regard to the "Fig" in Sura 95: "It has been suggested that the Fig stands for the *Ficus Indica*, the Bo-tree, under which Gautama Buddha obtained Nirvana … if accepted it would cover pristine Buddhism and the ancient Vedic religions from which it was an offshoot. In this way all the great religions of the world would be indicated" (note 6198). Furthermore, there are Islamic traditions from the Imams on the benefits and importance of the fig:

> The fig removes the bad smell of the mouth. It strengthens the gums and bones, causes the hair to grow, puts an end to some ailments so that medicine is not needed.[16]
>
> The fig is the most comparable thing to the fruits of Heaven.[17]

Another interpretation is that the fig is a metaphor for individuals developing or wasting their potential:

> If we take the Fig literally to refer to the fruit of the tree, it can stand as a symbol of man's destiny in many ways. Under cultivation it can be one of the finest, most delicious, and most wholesome fruits in existence: in its wild state, it is nothing but tiny seeds, and it is insipid, and often full of worms and maggots. So man at his best has a noble destiny: at his worst, he is "the lowest of the low."[18]

The olive fruit and its oil are no less salutary,[19] and, according to tradition, are

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13 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *aṭ-ṭibb an-Nabawí* (ed. Sayyid al-Jamílí) (Beirut: Dár al-kitáb al-'arabí, 1990) 224.

14 *Encyclopedia of Religion* (N.Y./London: MacMillan, 1987) s.v. "Trees," 15:27; see also Murray Emeneau, "The Strangling Figs in Sanskrit Literature", in *Sanskrit Studies of M.B. Emeneau – Selected paper*s, ed. B.A. van Nooten (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988) 11-27.

15 *Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. "Trees," 15:28.

16 Abú Ja'far Muḥammad al-Kulayní ar-Rází, *al-Káfí* (Tehran: WOFIS, 1982) 6:358; ascribed to Imam 'Alí ibn Músá ar-Riḍá; cited in Saiyed Abbas Sadr-'Ameli (transl.), *An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur'an* (Isfahan: Amir al-Mo'mineen Library, 1995) 2:117.

17 Cited in *ibid*.

18 Yusuf Ali, note 6194.

19 al-Jawziyya, 240.

recommended by Muḥammad and the Imams:

> Have olive oil (*zayt*) in your food and grease your body with it since it is from a Holy Tree (*shajara mubáraka*).[20]

> Olive oil is good food stuff. It makes the smell of the mouth sweet, removes phlegm, makes the colour of the face cheerful, strengthens the nerves, puts an end to sickness and weakness, and quenches the fire wrath.[21]

However, the interpretation of fig and olive as fruits is problematic in the context of this passage, which continues with the terms, "Mount Sinai" and the "City of security." Most commentators say that fruits themselves are not the intended meaning but rather that they represent two places or mountains in Syria (the holy land) where prophets received divine revelation. One tradition states that they are two mountains called in Aramaic Ṭúr Tíná and Ṭúr Zaytá; other traditions say that by "Fig" is meant the mosque of Damascus (*masjid Dimashq*), the mosque of the Seven Sleepers or "the companions of the cave" (*asḥáb al-kahf*),[22] or Damascus itself, while the "Olive" represents the mosque of Jerusalem (*masjid Bayt al-muqaddas*), the mosque of Elijah or the city of Jerusalem. According to others they represent the regions where the two trees grow.[23]

With regard to the verse "By the Fig and the Olive," Ibn Kathír states that it refers to two regions in Syria (Palestine); these are places where Jesus was born and dwelled. By continuing the passage with Mt. Sinai (where God conversed with Moses), and Mecca (the city where Muḥammad was commissioned with his prophethood) these verses are equivalent to the verses in the Torah: "The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran" (Deut. 33:2). Seir is where Jesus dwelled and Paran is Mecca. Due to their distinction, God has sworn an oath by these places. These regions where figs and olives grow are at the same time places where prophets were raised; God emphasizes here the importance of the places where they appeared.[24] The "Fig" is also said to refer to Noah's mosque that was constructed on Mount Judi of the Ararat range in Eastern Turkey, or to symbolize the leaves of the fig tree in Paradise with which Adam and Eve dressed themselves.[25]

It is has been suggested that the reference "a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the East nor of the West" (Qur'án 24:35), and "a tree springing out of Mt. Sinai, which produces oil, and relish for those who use it for food" in 23:20 are connected with Mt.

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20 Attributed to Muḥammad, cited in al-Jawziyya, 240, and Sadr-'Ameli, 2:117.

21 Attributed to Imam 'Alí b. Músá ar-Riḍá, cited in Sadr-'Ameli, 2:117.

22 Sura 18, *al-Kahf* (The Cave) relates their story.

23 Fakhru'd-dín ar-Rází, *Mafátíḥ al-ghayb* or *at-Tafsír al-kabír* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-mièriyya, 1278/1861-62) 6:577; Ibn Kathír, *Tafsír al-Qur'án al-'aãím* (Beirut: Dár al-fikr,2 1389/1970) 7:323.

24 Ibn Kathír, 7:324.

25 *Ibid*., 7:323; ar-Rází, 6:577.

Sinai, where olive groves were probably found.[26] Mt. Sinai in Arabic is *ṭúr síná'* (see Qur'án 23:20), and it appears in the form *ṭúr sínín* only in Sura 95, possibly only for the rhyme *sínín/amín*.[27] The first verse of Sura 52, "By the Mount (of Revelation) (*wa'ṭ-ṭúr*)" is probably a reference to Mount Sinai. The primary interpretation of *sínín* by the commentators is the mountain where God conversed with Moses; other meanings assigned to *sínín* are "blessed", "good", "fertile" and the like.[28]

With respect to the "Olive," the celebrated "Light Verse"[29] in Qur'án 24:35 is particularly worthy of consideration:

> God is the Light of the heavens and the earth (*Alláhu núr as-samáwát wa'l-arḍ*). The parable of His Light (*núr*) is as if there were a Niche (*mis͟hkát*) and within it a Lamp (*miṣbáḥ*): the Lamp enclosed in Glass (*zujája*): the glass as it were a brilliant star (*kawkab durrí*): lit from a blessed Tree (*s͟hajara mubáraka*), an Olive (*zaytúna*), neither of the East nor of the West (*lá s͟harqiyya wa-lá g͟harbiyya*), whose Oil (*zaytuhá*) is well nigh Luminous, though fire (*nár*) scarce touched it: light upon Light (*núr 'alá núr*)!

In Islamic mysticism and sayings ascribed to the S͟hí'í Imams the "burning bush" has symbolic meaning and is associated with the mystic olive in this verse and the Qur'ánic "Lote Tree" (*sidra*). The Sinaitic tree, the "burning bush", is moreover regarded as an olive.[30] In East Syriac/Persian Christianity, the essence of the Tree of Life, an ancient Mesopotamian image, is its oil. It is "sacramentally used as a 'white chrism' [in baptism ceremony], pressed from its fruit, the olive", and is the "key of the hidden treasure-house of symbols."[31]

As to the last sacred locality mentioned in Sura 95, commentators unanimously agree that the "City of security" (*al-balad al-amín*) is Mecca (cf. Qur'án 29:67, "a Sanctuary secure," *ḥaram ámin*). Before the dawn of Islam, Mecca was safe in the months of pilgrimage, because no fighting or war was allowed. "Mecca is the City of security, he who enters it is safe."[32] Some Imáms are reported to have stated that from each of those three places, i.e., Mt. Tíná, Mt. Zaytá' and Mecca, God has sent a prophet and messenger (*nabiyyan mursilan*), great lawgivers (*aṣḥáb ash-s͟hará'i' al-kibár*).[33]

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26 Richard Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur'án*, eds. C.E. Bosworth and M.E.J. Richardson (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1991) 2:557.

27 *Ibid*.

28 Násiru'd-Dín Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭúsí, *at-Tibyán fí tafsír al-Qur'án* (Najaf, 1383/1963) 10:375-76.

29 This verse has been of particular interest to Muslim commentators. See, e.g. the seminal work *Mis͟hkát al-anwár* (The Niche of Lights) of the great Muslim scholar al-G͟hazálí.

30 Stephen N. Lambden, "The Sinaitic Mysteries: Notes on Moses/Sinai Motifs in Bábí and Bahá'í Scripture", in Moojan Momen (ed.), *Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, vol. 5 (Studies in honor of the late Hasan M. Balyuzi) (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1988) 65-183.

31 Christopher Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith* (Albany: SUNY Press: 1998) 127.

32 Ibn Kat͟hír, 7:324.

33 *Ibid*.

Finally, there are some traditions which underline the importance of Sura 95:

> God will endow, in this world, the qualities of safety and certainty to the person who recites it [Sura Tín]. And, when he dies, He will give him rewards equal to the reward of fasting one day (multiplied) by the number of all those who have recited this Sura.[34]

> The Apostle of God (peace be upon him) said: When one of you recites "By the fig and the olive" (Surah 95) and comes to its end "Is not God the best judge?" (verse 8), he should say: "Certainly, and I am one of those who testify to that."[35]

> … I heard the Apostle of God (may peace be upon him) reciting in the night prayer: "By the Fig and the Olive", and I have never heard anyone with a sweeter voice than he.[36]

Biblical Background

The olive tree and its fruit and oil are an integral part in the sacred symbolism of the Bible. In antiquity the fruit *par excellence* was the olive. Its tree was highly respected and had mythical qualities. In Greek mythology, the olive was a gift from the goddess Athena to humankind.[37] The olive was omnipresent in the biblical landscape. It was a symbol of fertility ("thy children [shall be] like olive plants round about thy table"; Ps. 128.3), beauty ("The Lord called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit"; Jer. 11:16), divine sanctification ("he will also bless … thine oil"; Deut. 7:13); the olive branch was the first vegetation seen by Noah after the flood, brought by the dove ("And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth"; Gen. 8:11), and it was associated with Jesus when he dwelled on the Mount of Olives ("they went out into the mount of Olives"; Mark 14:26; "Jesus went unto the mount of Olives"; John 8:1). There was hardly an aspect of life not touched by the olive tree. Its fruit was used for food (Num. *passim*); the oil as a medicine (Isaiah 1:6; Luke 10:34); in sacrifice (Lev. 2:4; Gen. 28:18); and its wood was used for furniture (1 Kings 6:23, 31-33). Today the olive branch remains an emblem of peace and bountifulness.[38] The sacredness of olive oil is evident as a perfumed ointment for Kings and apparently also prophets (1 Sam. 10:1; 2 Kings 9:3; Isaiah 61:1; 1 Kings 19:16). The "messiah" (Hebrew, *mas͟hiak͟h*; "anointed one") was an agent of God chosen for a mission affecting the destiny of the chosen

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34 Abú 'Alí al-Faḍl ibn Ḥusayn aṭ-Ṭabarsí, *Majma' al-Bayán fí Tafsír al-Qur'án* (Beirut: Dár iḥyá' at-turát͟h al-'arabí, 1960) 10:510, cited in Sadr-'Ameli, 2:112; slightly modified.

35 *Sunan Abu Dawúd*, 3:886; partial Translation of Sunan Abu-Dawúd, Book 3: Prayer (Kitáb Al-salát). <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/ fundamentals/hadithsunnah>; slightly modified.

36 *Saḥíḥ Muslim*, Book 4, Number 935, at *ibid.*; slightly modified.

37 Cf. Michael Stapleton, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Mythology* (London: Hamlyn, 1978); s.v. "Athene", 42-43.

38 *The Harper-Collins Bible Dictionary,* ed. Paul J. Ackermeier (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) s.v. "olive", 782, and "oil", 773.

people. Moreover, anointing the head with the precious oil was a widespread form of hospitality (Ps. 23:5; 92:10; 133:2) and consecrated the person who received it. Likewise confirmed are the uses of ointments for healing lepers (Isaiah 1:6; Luke 10:34; Jer. 8:22).[39]

The Mount of Olives (Hebrew, *har hazzeitim*) is a mountain overlooking Jerusalem from the east. On the third peak is the Arab village of aṭ-Ṭur (Hebrew, *ha-har*, "the mountain"), an epithet deriving from the Aramaic "Tura Zita," the name of the Mount of Olives.[40] "According to tradition, 70 000 prophets died here of starvation and are buried there."[41] Rabbinic tradition maintained that the olive branch was brought to Noah from the Mount of Olives, which escaped the flood. An area of the mountain was appropriately called Gethsemane (Hebrew, "oil press"), perhaps being a garden area where the olive fruit was processed to oil (cf. John 18:1). Jesus frequently prayed here (Matt. 26:36; Mark 14:32; Luke 22:39-46). Pilgrims, like Jesus, who could not find quarters in the city, stayed on the Mount of Olives (John 18:1; Luke 22:39). Burial inside the city was prohibited, so the mount was gradually filled with tombs, in part owing to the belief that on the last day the dead would rise to gaze on the holy place. The New Testament refers to this mount as "a great and high mountain", the place from which the "holy Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God" is observed (Rev. 21:10). The relationship of the mount with the departure and return of the "glory of God" provides the scenery for the ascension of Jesus and of his promised return (Luke 24:50; Acts 1:12).[42] Jesus often went up on top of the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39). His famous "Olivet prophecy" is named after it (Matthew 24:1-51). The entry of Jesus riding on a donkey into Jerusalem took place over and down the Mount of Olives (Luke 19:28-44). Jesus prayed with his disciples there just before his arrest (Luke 22:39-46), during which Peter beat the servant of the high priest with a sword and cut off his ear (Luke 22:49-51). And Jesus became visible to His disciples on the Mount of Olives after his Resurrection, and he ascended into heaven from there (Acts 1:1-12).

There are many references to fig trees, its leaves and fruit in the Bible. Adam and Eve clothed themselves in fig leaves (Gen 3:7), and the prophet Isaiah gave orders to apply figs to someone's boil which was cured immediately (2 Kings 20:7). To dwell under a fig tree represents a time of happiness, safety and prosperity (1 Kings 4:25).

'Abdu'l-Bahá's commentary on Sura 95

'Abdu'l-Bahá informs the addressee that although the "people of truth" (*ahl-i haqíqat*) do accept the traditional interpretations of the famous Muslim commentators of the first verse of Sura 95 (see above), they "have carefully examined this blessed verse and unravelled therein other far-reaching meanings." He identifies the "Fig" as Mount Tíná, and the "Olive" as Mount Zaytá', "two blessed mounts" in the vicinity of Jerusalem where God has honoured his prophets with his manifestation. Mount Sinai is the "dayspring of God's boundless grace" where the divine signs were disclosed to Moses.

39 *Ibid*., s.v. "messiah", 677-79, and "ointments and perfumes", 773-76.

40 *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem/N.Y.: MacMillan, 1971-72) 12:482.

41 C Bosworth, "al-Ṭūr", *Encyclopedia of Islam* (*EI2*), 10:663-64; "Ṭūr Zaytā", 10:664.

42 *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Olives, Mount of", 782-83.

Contrary to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's[43] and traditional Islamic interpretations, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that "the City of security" is Medina (*Madína-yi munavvarih*), where Muḥammad had migrated, and "the centre of the manifestation of Islam and the designated point where the Word of God had been raised."

In other places, and in reference to Bahá'u'lláh's Arabic *Lawḥu'r-Ra'ís* addressed to Âli Pasha, which states, "O Chief! We have disclosed Ourself to thee (*tajallayná 'alayka*) once at Mount Tíná, and once at Mount Zaytá', and at this blessed [Sinaitic] Spot (*al-buq'a al-mubáraka*)",[44] 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that Tíná and Zaytá' are two mountains near Jerusalem where prophets have perceived God's self-disclosure (*tajallí*), and that this is evident in the holy books, if perused. But the "ignoble Chief" (*ra'ís-i khasís*) remained negligent and inattentive (*gháfil va dháhil*) of the divine revelation at this "blessed [Sinaitic] spot." According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the meaning of Tíná is the reality of Jesus (*ḥaqíqat-i 'Ísá*) and by Zaytá' the reality of Muḥammad (*ḥaqíqát-i Muḥammadiyyih*) is intended, where the "blessed Olive Tree … neither of the East nor of the West whose Oil is well nigh Luminous, …" is planted. God swears by these mountains and "this City of security", here meaning Mecca, as loci of manifestations.[45]

'Abdu'l-Bahá's summary of Sura 95 in his Ottoman tablet is as follows: God swears by Mount Tíná (*Ṭúr-i Tíná*), Mount Zaytá' (*Ṭúr-i Zaytá'*), Mount Sinai (*Ṭúr-i Síná*) and "this City of security" (*hádhá'l-baladi'l-amín*) that he has created the reality and temple of man in the "best of moulds" (*aḥsan taqwím*). Although other creatures and all of creation are the manifestations of clear signs (of God), only man embodies the signs and the reality of the divine perfections collectively. Man is the greatest demarcation (*barzakh*), the archetype of the macrocosm, i.e. of all the worlds of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that only humankind is privileged by divine messengers who hold the station of prophethood, and saints merely appear in the world of humanity. "Infinite sciences are manifested in the heart of man; divine discoveries become evident in the mirror of man; so are the discoveries of mysteries the effect of human intelligence; the philosophical sciences are human talents, and marvellous divine arts are the result of the hand of man." Through the power of mental faculties and talents, the reality of all things in creation, the intrinsic worth of human beings, and the mysteries in creation, first hidden in the imaginary world, will be discovered and appear in the visible plane.[46]

That human beings have been created in the "best form" (*aḥsan taqwím*) and that

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[43] See below, and 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idih-yi Asmání* (Tehran: Mu'assih-i Millí-yi Maṭbú'át-i Amrí, B.E. 129/1972-73) 9:8-9.

[44] My translation; Bahá'u'lláh, *Alwáḥ Ḥaḍrat Bahá'u'lláh ilá'l-mulúk wa'r-ru'asá'* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Bahá'í Brasil, 140 BE/1983) 66. Shoghi Effendi says that Bahá'u'lláh here identifies his Revelation with the Revelations of Moses and of Jesus (*God Passes By* 174). See also, Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idih-yi Asmání* 5:48, where the "ra'ís" is depicted as Âli Pasha who was the cause of the exile from Iraq to the Ottoman province of Eflak (Rumelia) and from there to the prison of 'Akká.

[45] Fáḍil Mázandarání, *Amr va Khalq* (Hofheim: Bahá'í-Verlag, B.E. 141/1984-85) 2:193-94. One Bahá'í interpretation of the four places holds that Abraham's manifestation was on the Mount of Figs, Jesus' on the Mount of Olives, Moses' on Mount Sinai, and Muḥammad's in Mecca; the author says that the figurative verses in Qur'án 95 become apparent by considering the passages in Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 62-65, regarding those four Prophets; see Muhammad Mustafa, *Bahá'u'lláh: The Great Announcement of the Qur'án* (Dhaka/Bangladesh: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, n.d.) xi.

[46] *MAMT*, 150-152.

they are a *barzakh*, "demarcation" or "barrier," is indicative of their destiny. Creation, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is collectively a manifestation of divine signs, but only human beings are honoured with excellence and the entirety of faculties. "He is a most great sign, a most mighty talisman, a most perfect manifestation, a comprehensive source of enlightenment, a manifest light, a mighty mountain, a dawning-place of the names [of God], a dayspring of the exalted attributes [of God], an all-comprehensive demarcation (*barzakh-i jámi'*), a place where the two seas meet (*multaqá baḥrayn*),[47] a confluence of the two rivers (*majma'-i nahrayn*), and together with being a centre where the lights of reality are diffused, he is a mine of dark malice." If spiritual powers are victorious over physical constraints, individuals can become heavenly, a source of love. But if the sensual side and carnal senses dominate, human beings become a mine of darkness, a source of deceit, a manifestation of ignorance and wickedness.[48]

The terminology 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses echoes the philosophy of the great Andalusian Muslim scholar Muḥyí'd-Dín Ibn al-'Arabí (d. 638/1240), who commented extensively on the term *barzakh* in connection with his concept of *al-insán al-kámil* ("the Perfect Man"). *Barzakh* can be translated as "isthmus," "obstacle," "hindrance," and "separation," and occurs three times in the Qur'án.[49] In the Qur'án, *barzakh* has a moral and concrete meaning. It can refer to the barrier between paradise and hell or represent the grave connecting the earthly life and the next world. In the Illuminationist philosophy (*Ishráqiyya*) of Suhrawardí "al-Maqtúl" (d. 1191), *barzakh*, i.e. the mortal body, is inherently dark, and through receiving the light of the spirit it becomes light.[50] In the theology of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá'í, *barzakh* is the "realm of similitudes" (*'álam-i mithál*) and equal to *Hurqalyá* or the "realm of the subtle." It is a "purgatorial realm,"[51] a world between the material (*'álam-i mulk*) and the spiritual (*'álam-i malakút*).[52]

For Ibn al-'Arabí, God, the nondelimited being, has his fullest manifestation in the "Perfect Man," that is to say, all his names and attributes are displayed in human perfection. The comprehensiveness of the existence of the Perfect Man must be searched for in the countless intermediate worlds of his heart that are between "his sensory shell and his divine kernel." In reality, human beings are the *barzakh al-barázikh*, the "Barzakh of the barzakhs," the transitional realm which encompasses all interworlds, the gap which fills the realm between the Absolute Being and absolute nothingness. Human beings are in themselves the macrocosm, i.e., their individual bodies, and the microcosm, their hearts. A human is the archetype of the cosmos, *al-kawn al-jámi'*, "the all-comprehensive engendered thing" who is the locus of the totality of God's names. Man

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47 Cf. Qur'án 55:19.

48 *MAMT*, 55-56.

49 23:102, 25:55, 55:20. Cf. *farsakh* in Persian, a measure of distance.

50 B. Carra de Vaux, "Barzakh", *Encyclopedia of Islam* (*EI²*), 1:1071-72.

51 In the recently published *Encyclopedia of the Qur'án* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 1:204-207, it is stated by Mona M. Zaki that most scholars hesitate to label it as purgatory, preferring the term limbo. Other academic writers in recent years have made the same point. The translation "purgatory" is too Christian-rooted and indicates a phenomenon not precisely indicated by the Qur'ánic term *barzakh*.

52 Vahid Rafati, *The Development of Shaykhi Thought in Shi'i Islam* (doctoral thesis, UCLA, 1979) 107, 108, 113.

turns round about God, and cosmos turns around the "Perfect Man."[53] In Sufism, man, attaining spiritual perfection on his path to God, first has a *nafs-i ammárih*, an inordinate soul which commands him to behave immorally; then it becomes a *nafs-i lawwámih*, a still unsubmissive soul which blames itself for its own shortcomings, and at the end of his journey he reaches the station of *nafs-i muṭma'innih*, of an obedient soul at peace.[54] 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

> The human spirit (*rúḥ-i insání*), in other words the rational soul (*nafs-i náṭiqih*), in the world of existence is the intermediary between things corporeal (disengaged – *mujarradát*) and delimited worldly things (*mutaḥayyizát*); that is to say, between realities spiritual and things corporeal. From one vantage point it possesses spiritual refinement while from the other it exhibits the crassness of carnality, animalistic traits and worldly characteristics. It is neither an absolute abstraction nor is it completely of the world but is the confluence of two seas (*majma' al-baḥrayn*), and a *barzakh* between two realities (*amrayn*). If the spiritual aspect dominates it becometh lofty, luminous, merciful, tranquil (*muṭma'innih*), contented (*raḍiyyih*) and approved (*marḍiyyih*). And if it is contaminated with contingent, worldly concerns, it becometh immersed in the ocean of darkness, reproachful (*lawwamih*), commanding to evil (*ammárih*) and residing in the nethermost regions of the world of existence. It is thus the case that the human spirit has two aspects. If the luminous aspect of the human intellect overcometh the world of nature, it will acquire the power of discovery, which is the basis for wondrous insights, and become informed about the realities and the characteristics of things. From this brief explanation perceive the detailed significances.[55]

The "Perfect Man" is the foremost thing God has created, the "primordial and original theophany (*tajallí*) of the Essence."[56] Jámí quotes Ibn al-'Arabí, defining the "Perfect Man": "Man is like 'an isthmus between the world and God, bringing together and embracing both the creatures and Him. Man is the dividing line between the shadow and the sun. This is his reality.'"[57] All beings in the world are seats (*maḥall-i istiwá'*) of the manifestation of particular divine names and attributes but only man is the place of the expression for the "universal Name", i.e., Alláh, which embraces all other names.

53 William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabí's Cosmology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998) 30.

54 Cf. William C. Chittick, "The Perfect Man as the Prototype of the Self in the Sufism of Jámí", *Studia Islamica* 49 (1979): 135-57. There are more stations attributed to man in his spiritual journey: *nafs-i raḍiyyih* (a submissive, content soul), *nafs-i marḍiyyih* (a laudable soul), *nafs-i mulhamih* (an inspired soul), and *nafs-i dhakiyyih* (a pure, virtuous soul); see M. Zeki Pakalin, *Osmanli Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü* (Dictionary of Ottoman Historical Idioms and Terms), (Istanbul 1993) 2:673-4.

55 Provisional translation of a tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Mírzá Qábil of Abadih, *Star of the West* (Persian section), 5.7:110. Translation posted by J. Vahid Brown to the Bahá'í Studies discussion list "Daira al-Marifa" (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Daira_al-Marifat/message/1230), 11 July 2001.

56 Chittick, "The Perfect Man" 138.

57 *Ibid*., 152 f.

The following passage from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reminiscent of Ibn al-'Arabi's esoteric interpretation of *barzakh*:

> For the inner reality of man is a demarcation line (*barzakh*) between the shadow and the light; a place where the two seas meet,[58] it is the lowest point on the arc of descent,[59] and therefore is it capable of gaining all the grades above. With education it can achieve all excellence; devoid of education it will stay on, at the lowest point of imperfection.[60]

To summarise, through the connection of the "sea" of the celestial world and the "sea" of the terrestrial world in the reality of man, a reality which forms the *barzakh* between them, man can produce treasures and bounties. Man is created after the image of God, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). If he turns to God's light, reflected by his messengers, he is worthy of his creation in the "best of moulds". If he refuses, he will be abased to the "lowest of the low" and will be brought to reckoning on the Judgment Day.

Overall, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's brief commentary, we see two themes that recur in Bahá'í interpretations. The first is the emphasis placed on the multiplicity of meanings in scripture, and the prominence given in Bahá'í tafsir to allegorical interpretations. The second is how Bahá'í interpretations focus the reader on the ethical and spiritual development of human beings.

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58 Qur'án 25:55, 35:13, 55:19-25.

59 Cf. *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990) 328-9.

60 The following sentence reads: "Every child is potentially the light of the world—and at the same time its darkness; wherefore must the question of education be accounted as of primary importance." (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* [Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982] 130). The position of man in creation in Ibn al-'Arabí's philosophy is expressed in the Neoplatonic terms of the "descending/ascending arc," to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá alludes in this passage.

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Provisional Translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "Tablet of the Fig and the Olive"[1]

He is God!

Thou hast inquired about the subtle meanings of the blessed verse "By the Fig and the Olive."[2] As thine excellency well knoweth, the most eminent commentators have interpreted this verse by stating that the fig cometh from a goodly tree, that it hath numerous benefits beyond its exceeding sweetness, and doth in particular constitute an efficacious and wholesome medicine against chest diseases, and that it is therefore an excellent fruit. As to the olive, it is, according to the explicit verses of God, the fruit of a blessed tree. These two fruits, being the expression of God's highest bounty, have therefore been chosen for an oath.

Such is the view that hath been expounded and considered sufficient in the literal interpretations. While confirming such interpretations, the people of truth, they who consider the hidden realities and inner significances, have carefully examined this blessed verse and unravelled therein other far-reaching meanings.

One of them is this: In the sight of God, the most hallowed, the most blessed and most auspicious of all spots are the dawning-places of the Divine effulgences and the centres of the Divine blessings. Accordingly, "by the Fig" alludeth to Mount Tíná and "by the Olive" to Mount Zaytá, which are situated on either side of Jerusalem. Both of these blessed mounts are in the Holy Land, for they are the places the exalted Prophets of God have used and received inspiration therein, and have been illumined with the effulgent lights of the Spirit. Thus have these mounts become the dayspring of the God's boundless grace.

After these two places, reference is made to Mount Sinai, where Moses, peace be upon Him, was manifested, and which therefore hath become the dawning-place of the splendours of the Divine verses and the day-spring of the Divine favours. Moreover, the city of Medina, the Secure City, hath been extolled as the place of the migration of Him Who is the Pride of the Messengers—upon Him rest salutations and praise—as the centre of the blessings of Islam, as the headquarters of its spiritual conquests, and as the spot wherein the Word of God hath been exalted. Thus the reference made to these blessed spots in the latter part of the verse proveth that the places mentioned earlier are also the seats of Divine effulgences.

The sublime meaning of these blessed verses is this: I swear by Mount Tíná, Mount Zaytá, Mount Sinai, and this Secure City, which are the most blessed and honoured of all places in the sight of God, the source of His effulgent glories, and the site of the fervent supplications of His Prophets, that I have created the human temple and the reality of man in the most excellent form, and according to the most perfect order and arrangement. That is, while other creatures, and indeed the entirety of creation, are the manifestations of God's clear tokens, only the excellent figure of man representeth His

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[1] This tablet is untitled. Translated by Necati Alkan, and revised by Hamid Samandari.

[2] Qur'án 95:1

most luminous sign and the sum of all Divine perfections. For he is the most great demarcation, the archetype of the greater world, the luminous Book,[3] the manifestation of the splendours of the Realms above,[4] the Inscribed Tablet,[5] and the Outspread Roll.[6] He it is who hath been made the recipient of the holy verse: "Read thine own record: Sufficient is thy soul in this day to make out an account against thee."[7]

Consider that the lights of prophethood have shone forth only above the horizon of mankind, and that the lamp of vice-regency hath been lit only within the glass of humanity. Infinite sciences have been manifested in the human heart; divine discoveries have been reflected in the mirror of man. Thus, the discovery of the hidden realities is due to human thought; the philosophical sciences are a favour vouchsafed unto man; the wonders of divine arts and crafts are his handiwork. Nay, the realities of all things, the natures of all beings, and the mysteries of the entire creation, which have been concealed in the invisible plane, are brought to light through his mental faculties and as the result of his activity. In sum, these virtues, qualities, and perfections are solely reserved for the reality of man, who is the essence of creation.

This letter is but a short and modest interpretation of this holy verse. Should a complete analysis and interpretation of its exalted meanings be desired, it would require a mighty book and a lengthy treatise. In view of thy well-wisher's exceeding weakness, frailty, grief, and sorrow, I have contented myself with this brief commentary and explanation. Given my fatigue after last night's meal, (as saith the holy tradition "When the stomach is filled, wisdom becometh silent"[8]); and the late night conversation with the friends, and since I had no time to write this letter myself, I caught his excellency Nesib Effendi and dictated it to him. Therefore, I beg thy forgiveness.

'Abbás

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3 *Kitáb mubín*; cf. Qur'án 43:2, 44:2.

4 *'Illiyyún* occurs in Qur'án 83:18-19.

5 *Lawh mastúr;* cf. Qur'án 52:2, *kitáb mastúr*.

6 *Raqq manshúr*; cf. Qur'án 52:3.

7 Qur'án, 17:14.

8 *Idha mala'at al-mi'da kharasat al-hikma*.

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SOUNDING

Early European Bahá'í involvement in social activism

Robert Weinberg

Many early western Bahá'ís had little concern about involving themselves within a Bahá'í context in campaigns for social reform, such as the emancipation of women, the education of children, and the support of the needy and dispossessed. For some of them, the Bahá'í movement was simply another organisation they belonged to alongside other cherished causes. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own involvement in social and economic development was recognised by the British government when he was knighted in 1920 for his work for the relief of distress and famine. But before this time, many western visitors had the opportunity to see first hand his active involvement in serving the poor and needy of Palestine. This example was reinforced on his visits to Britain. Lady Blomfield wished for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to visit King George V whom she knew through her father-in-law, the late Bishop of London. 'Abdu'l-Bahá declined the audience, saying he felt it might be misconstrued. He said his place was amongst the poor. Thus on his visits to London we find him speaking at the Passmore Edwards Settlement Centre, visiting a children's home, spending Christmas Day 1912 at the Salvation Army shelter with poor men, speaking at the Cedars Mission House and Club for working women and their children, and talking to a crowd at the Women's Freedom League on the equality of women and men.

The need for universal education was repeatedly stressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during his western travels. The Passmore-Edwards settlement in Tavistock Place, London, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited four days after his arrival in England was the site for a number of innovations. It housed the first fully equipped classrooms for children with disabilities living in the community. The school provided course work, physical therapy and meals. It was among the first institutionalised play centres. By 1902, more than 1200 children were attending sessions. An early follower of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, intimately involved in the work of the Passmore-Edwards Institute, was Alice Buckton. Buckton had a passionate desire to improve the lot of the poor in London and concentrated strongly on the education of women. With this in mind, she went to visit the Pestalozzi-Froebel Haus in Berlin and made a lasting friendship with its principal Annet Schepel. Buckton persuaded Schepel to come to London and manage a similar house in St. John's Wood. This "Sesame House" was part of an education network, spreading to Britain from Europe. Buckton and Schepel were deep sympathisers with the teachings of the Faith and they opened their home at Byfleet in Surrey to 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

A more direct early attempt at providing Bahá'í education for underprivileged children was a school set up by Victor and Fanny Ponsonaille. Ponsonaille felt his work for the Bahá'í cause should take place among Paris' children, waifs and orphans. They settled in a poor quarter and foregoing their midday meal, they gave what they saved to

needy children. From an old car, the Ponsonailles began going out to the children, serving them and sharing with them the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. So many children began coming that the clergy of other religions approached them to have the service consolidated under their auspices. When the Ponsonailles refused, the jealous priests managed to have the car confiscated. The Bahá'ís in Paris offered to build Ponsonaille a place for his work and he agreed, saying that if they would provide the boards and nails he would build the place himself, which he did. In this small board cabin, about 20 by 25 feet, the Ponsonailles ran their Bahá'í school. At one end was a raised platform and a desk made of rough boards. On 15 October 1911, 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself went to visit the school telling the Ponsonailles, "This is a great work you are doing for the love of God in this great day, through the power of Bahá'u'lláh. Your station is great. Your names will go down through all the ages. Kings and Queens have never been talked of and remembered as you will be."[1]

Florence George, one of the founders of Bahá'í education for children in England, had been instrumental in helping establish the Bahá'í group in Bournemouth in 1915. Along with John Esslemont, she gave talks to various groups and organizations and started regular meetings. Shortly before hearing of the Bahá'í teachings, one of Dr Esslemont's predominant concerns was the setting up of a national health service. With a number of eminent colleagues, he set up the state medical service association and was a member of its executive committee. It produced the Sawson report, acknowledged by medical historians as an important and far-sighted document, the recommendations of which were the foundation of the British National Health Service. Dr Esslemont also argued for the setting up of a state board of health with a minister of cabinet rank to coordinate and regulate the medical and allied professions—suggestions which were in part enacted by the Government in later years. The Bournemouth believers also attempted as a community to raise collectively an orphaned baby whose mother had been a believer. The baby's father had died before she was born and the mother soon after. One of the Bahá'ís who had lost her husband offered to care for the child and the Bournemouth community met the cost of raising her. Tragically the baby died a year later in its sleep.

More than any other social cause, women's suffrage captured the attention of the early British members of the Bahá'í movement. In this campaign, Bahá'í women saw aims parallels with their Faith. Elizabeth Herrick, a prominent early British Bahá'í, ran a millinery salon in Kensington High Street. Taking her orders one day from the Pankhursts, she went out into the street and broke a window with a hammer. She was sent to Holloway prison and when she came out her business was ruined. However, even while locked up in Holloway prison, Herrick found a way of influencing her environment and instigating change. She complained bitterly of the atmosphere of the prison cell. The walls were covered with obscenities and Herrick spent the entire first night in her cell attempting to cleanse it with unceasing prayer. Herrick exercised her right as a prisoner to have an interview with the governor, the doctor and the chaplain every day of her confinement. She demanded deletion of the graffiti, insisted that the chaplain recognised her right to be recorded as a Bahá'í (rather than an Anglican), and gave him information

1 *Sur les pas de 'Abdu'l-Baha á Paris* (Paris: Librarie Bahá'ís, 1998) 47.

on the Baha'i Faith. From the doctor she demanded a daily ration of fruit as a hygienic necessity, even obtaining an "apple a day" not only for herself but for all other prisoners.

Lady Blomfield also helped the suffragettes in many ways in the early stages of their campaign. But the later developments, such as pouring corrosive acid into pillar boxes and destroying works of art, shocked her. Even so, the Blomfields' stance on suffrage became known in a very public way. King George V had instituted a series of receptions with the intention of allowing closer contact with his people. On Thursday 3 June 1914, attending one such occasion, Mary "Parveen" Blomfield, with her sister standing beside her, on being presented to the King and Queen dropped on her knees before the King and cried, "For God's sake, Your Majesty, put a stop to forcible feeding!" She was hurried, as the *Daily Mirror* put it, from "the Presence" which, so the public was relieved to learn, had remained serene. Lady Blomfield had to intimate to the press her repudiation of what her daughter had done. News of the event reached the ears of Bahá'ís around the world. Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, in a letter dated 23 June 1914, described 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reaction to the event.

> The paper was given to me by the mail-man in the morning, and I read the article on page 7 with much interest. In half an hour, every Bahai knew about it, the Pilgrims were talking about it and admiring the supreme courage and fearlessness of Parveen Khanum. "What matchless resolution! What an heroic deed!" were the words uttered by every lip as soon as they heard the story and looked at the picture. I had the hardest time to keep the paper in my possession, because everyone wanted to have it for himself. At last the afternoon came around and the Beloved sent for me. I took the paper with me to show it to him. I knew he would be interested to hear the news. As soon as I entered the room, he said, "What is in thy hand?" I gave the paper to him. At first glance he recognized Lady Blomfield and her daughters, "Oh! What is this?" Then I gave him an outline of this most dramatic event. He listened most attentively, and then laughed heartily. "What courage!" he said "Come! Take the paper and read the article to me," which I did with equal ardour and spirits. He was especially pleased with the remark in the *Christian Commonwealth* of June 10th, in an Editorial on "King and People", in answer to the criticism of the Press. It says: "The original idea of these Royal receptions was to afford an opportunity for the Sovereign to become personally acquainted with his subjects and to receive any communication they might wish to make to him"... He continued to speak along this line and admired the pluck and energy of Miss Mary Blomfield.[2]

Lady Blomfield's courage and desire to be of service to the suffering was also evident during the First World War. Soon after war broke out, Lady Blomfield arrived with her daughters to lend their support, administering to the injured as V.A.D.s (Voluntary Aid Detachments) under the French Red Cross, based in the Haden Guest Unit at the Hospital Hotel Majestic. In a book about the women volunteers who rose to serve in a medical

[2] Letter from Mirza Ahmad Sohrab to Joseph Hannen, 23 June 1914. UK Bahá'í Archives.

capacity during the war, historian Lyn Macdonald has written, "On the face of it no one could have been less equipped for the job than these gently nurtured girls who walked straight out of Edwardian drawing-rooms into the manifold horrors of the First World War. It was all a far cry from the old myth of the 'ministering angel'. These girls had to be tough... They nursed men with terrible wounds and saw them off to convalescent camp, or laid them out when they died. They nursed in wards where the stench of gas-gangrenous wounds was almost overpowering. They nursed men choked to death as the fluid rose in their gassed lungs, men whose faces were mutilated beyond recognition, whose bodies were mangled beyond repair, whose nerves were shattered beyond redemption."[3] Lady Blomfield and her daughters were shocked by what they found on their first morning in the wards. "Any kind of suffering touched my mother profoundly," wrote Mary, "but the sight of young men maimed for life, and the new and horrible experiences she had to endure during the dressing of their wounds, her mental agony reflecting their pain, tortured her beyond words. After that first heart-rending morning in the wards, we were silent as we walked back to the Hotel d'Jena for luncheon. We imagined ourselves unable to touch any food. But my mother's courage and strength of mind prevailed. She said quietly: 'We must eat, or we shall be ill ourselves. Then we shall not be able to help.'"[4] When the hospital unit moved from Paris, the Blomfields returned to London. Throughout the war, Lady Blomfield volunteered in various hospitals, served on a number of committees and kept open house at Cadogan Gardens for the Anzacs (troops from Australia and New Zealand) who were recovering from their wounds.

Having witnessed first hand the devastation of the war and the chaos it wreaked on young lives in particular, Lady Blomfield welcomed the formation of the League of Nations and recognised the possibilities of its work being indirectly influenced by the Bahá'í teachings. She returned to Geneva in January 1920 and from her base at the Hotel d'Angleterre, she wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá telling him of her arrival and subsequent meetings with individuals who were working to send help to the famine hit areas of Central and Eastern Europe. Of particular concern was the plight of millions of children, now orphaned, dispossessed or dislocated as a result of the conflict. Lady Blomfield had met and quickly become a close collaborator with another Englishwoman of Irish descent, Eglantyne Jebb, and her sister Dorothy Buxton, founders of the Save the Children Fund. Jebb believed that children should receive help wherever they were, regardless of race, nationality or creed. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was swift to praise their work, telling Lady Blomfield that he hoped she would be confirmed in what was the greatest service. One major contribution Blomfield made to raising awareness of the Fund's work was the publication of a small booklet entitled *The First Obligation* in which she called upon the Bahá'ís in particular to support the Fund's work and ideals. She stated that this duty should consist not merely in giving children food to eat, but in training them to earn food for themselves in later years by their own works. Lady Blomfield firmly believed that joining the Bahá'ís with the work of the Fund would give to the world a practical demonstration of the Bahá'í teachings on child education.

[3] Lyn Macdonald, *The Roses of No Man's Land* (London: Penguin, 1980) xi.

[4] Mary Basil Hall, Unpublished memoir of her mother, Lady Blomfield. UK Bahá'í Archives.

Such social activism in the early 20th century was replaced in the 1940s and 1950s by an emphasis on community building and the development of publishing and residential schools. During the period of Shoghi Effendi, the building of the Bahá'í administration became the dominant focus for the energies of Bahá'ís. Individual Bahá'ís continued to support charities and educational projects, until the Universal House of Justice's call in 1983 for Bahá'ís to be at the forefront of social reform,[5] when social and economic development became a major focus of Bahá'í activity.

[5] Message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 20 October 1983.

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COMMENTARY

The Apocalyptic Upheaval Completed?
COMMENTARY on Stephen Lambden's "Catastrophe, Armageddon and Millennium: Some Aspects of the Bábí-Bahá'í Exegesis of Apocalyptic Symbolism,"
Bahá'í Studies Review 9 (1999/2000): 81-99.
William P. Collins

Millennialism is one of the most vibrant topics in the worlds of sociological, political, historical and religious studies today. This interest was in part fuelled by the millennium fever as the year 2000 approached. It also owes its popularity to a growing body of scholarship from the past four decades that has unearthed millennialism's links to revolution and violence, to the establishment and growth of religions, and to social change. As Stephen Lambden explains in his article, "millennium" means a period of one thousand years, and alludes specifically to the period mentioned in the biblical Book of Revelation (the Apocalypse) during which the returned Jesus Christ is expected to reign. Millennialism, however, has taken on a generic sociological meaning that goes beyond Christianity. It has been defined as imminent collective salvation accomplished according to a divine plan, or the expectation of a future time free from cares, imperfection and suffering. Millennialism is the rubric frequently used to describe any movement that has as its goal the replacement of the current defective order with a perfect one, either by immediate overthrow or long-term eventual replacement.[1]

Stephen Lambden's analysis is a perceptive look at the use of catastrophic symbolism by the world's religions (e.g. Armageddon— the final battle between good and evil), and the Bahá'í exegesis of these symbols. His conclusions are: (1) Bahá'í interpretations of end-time catastrophe are best viewed in their evolving historical contexts; (2) Bábí and Bahá'í texts anticipate numerous catastrophes, some of which have been outwardly realized and some of which have been metaphorically interpreted; (3) the apocalyptic upheaval of the end times has largely been completed in the 20th century. Lambden's conclusions must be seen in the context of a forceful apocalyptic sub-theme in official and unofficial Bahá'í discourse during the past seven decades. Bahá'u'lláh's writings themselves contain passages of extraordinary power in this regard:

> O ye peoples of the world! Know, verily, that an unforeseen calamity is following you, and that grievous retribution awaiteth you. Think not the deeds ye have committed have been blotted from My sight. By My beauty! All your

[1] For other recent treatments of the millennialist impulse in the Bahá'í Faith, see the following by William P. Collins: "Baha'i Faith," *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements* (New York; London: Routledge, 2000) 42-46; "Millennialism, the Millerites, and Historicism," *World Order* 30.1 (1998): 9-26; "Bahá'í Interpretation of Biblical Time Prophecy," *World Order* 30.2 (1998/1999): 9-29; "The Millerites and Time Prophecy: Their Function as Millennial Themes in the American Bahá'í Community," unpublished M.S.Sc. Thesis, Syracuse University, 1995; and Moojan Momen, "Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares," forthcoming in the proceedings of the First International Conference on Modern Religions and Religious Movements in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths (held at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 17-20 December 2000).

> doings hath My Pen graven with open characters upon tablets of chrysolite.[2]
>
> We have fixed a time for you, O peoples. If ye fail, at the appointed hour, to turn towards God, He, verily, will lay violent hold on you, and will cause grievous afflictions to assail you from every direction. How severe, indeed, is the chastisement with which your Lord will then chastise you![3]
>
> The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue. And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake. Then, and only then, will the Divine Standard be unfurled, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody.[4]

Shoghi Effendi frequently quoted these passages from the 1930s to the 1950s, and to warn of the dire consequences of humanity's continued waywardness and refusal to accept Bahá'u'lláh. These authoritative statements were reinforced by Shoghi Effendi's private conversations with pilgrims, during which he reportedly emphasized, in even more dire and specific language, the terrible results of human stubbornness.[5]

The warnings uttered by Shoghi Effendi about the actual and potential calamitous events associated with warfare and human-created destruction engendered a climate in which many Bahá'ís made major life decisions, especially in favour of pioneering[6] to other countries or to more rural areas, in order to escape the coming tribulations. Shoghi Effendi's warnings had the positive effect of galvanising a portion of the Bahá'ís to action, and maintaining group cohesion in the face of the onslaught of the non-Bahá'í world.[7] A more negative impact was that it also encouraged a certain paralysis and guilt. A calamity of such devastating power would very likely mean significant destruction of life, including probably one's own and those of one's family. If the calamity was to be of such power that it would bring humanity to recognition of Bahá'u'lláh, why risk having a family, earning a livelihood, and getting an education, let alone attempting to teach the Faith to large numbers of uninterested people? Shoghi Effendi was an astute observer of the world scene, and had accurately seen the shadows of World War II

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2 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978) section CIV.

3 *Ibid.,* section CVIII.

4 *Ibid*., section LXI.

5 David Piff, *Bahá'í Lore* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000) 122-123. See Watson's review of Piff in this volume, page 161.

6 "Pioneers" are Bahá'ís who move to another locality or to another country with the express purpose of promoting the Bahá'í Faith.

7 A useful analysis of the influence of this type of apocalyptic warning is Frank L. Borchardt, *Doomsday Speculation as a Strategy of Persuasion* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990) (*Studies in Comparative Religion*; v.4).

descending upon the world.[8] He likewise foresaw the apocalyptic possibilities of a bipolar world in which western capitalism led by the United States, and materialistic communism led by the Soviet Union, could destroy civilization. Shoghi Effendi referred to the most disturbing periods of the 20th century both in terms of specificity (e.g. he initially identified World War II as the convulsion foretold by Bahá'u'lláh[9]), and in general terms as a series of upheavals reflecting the process of disintegration of a bankrupt world order.

In the aftermath of the collapse of communism, the re-drawing of political boundaries, and a new international power distribution, there is a tempting desire to go in the other direction by placing all references to catastrophe in a framework that is primarily spiritually interpreted or rendered as a sociological description of a long period of upheaval. As Lambden demonstrates, there is much evidence in the writings of the Bahá'í central figures to indicate that they spiritualised the apocalyptic symbols of past religions, and also foretold a period of disintegration that would be filled with numerous upheavals, calamities, catastrophes and convulsions, primarily man-made.

This raises some issues, however. Lambden characterises millennialism in his article using categorisations coloured by their initial Christian meanings:

> Premillennialism: Jesus Christ's return, accompanied by various apocalyptic signs, occurs before the general resurrection and judgment; God remakes the world, and the thousand-year reign begins.
>
> Postmillennialism: the "kingdom of God" being built by Christians results in a peaceful order for a thousand years, after which Jesus Christ returns.

These are being supplemented by other terminology that is more generically descriptive. Two new terms, which are increasingly being used, have been coined by Catherine Wessinger of Loyola University in New Orleans:

> Catastrophic millennialism: pessimistic view of humanity, society and history; evil is rampant; to eliminate evil and achieve collective salvation on earth, the world must be destroyed and made new by God; the catastrophic destruction is imminent.
>
> Progressive millennialism: optimistic view of humanity, society and history; progress is possible; collective salvation will be achieved by humans working in harmony with a divine plan.[10]

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8 For instance, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), which were written in the early to mid-1930s; see 46, 189, 193.

9 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 1932-1946 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1947) 42-43, 45-46, 48, 53-54.

10 Catherine Wessinger, "Millennialism with and without the Mayhem," in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, edited by Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer (New York; London: Routledge, 1997) 47-59; Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000); Catherine Wessinger, ed.,

If we look at Lambden's characterisation of the Bahá'í millennium, he states that it is of the premillennial variety, since the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh—the "Christs" of this era—come at the beginning of the thousand years of the Bahá'í dispensation. Per the "premillennialist" definition of messianic appearance before the millennium, the Bahá'í Faith is technically premillennial. Operationally, however, the Bahá'í Faith is postmillennial because Bahá'ís have the task of building the kingdom; the millennium does not immediately cover all the world through divine fiat. Consider an alternative perspective. Think of millennialism as a catastrophic-progressive continuum, with the history of each religion moving along that continuum emphasizing a variable mix of catastrophic and progressive elements over time.

Most of the Bábís initially appear to have believed in an imminent overturning of the existing order in Iran. Indeed, the more severe laws of the Bayán certainly have this implication. By definition, the Báb's claims were a threat to church and state. The Mahdi, after all, was the one in whose name both the clergy and the rulers of Persia were operating. Shoghi Effendi even termed Babism a religious and social revolution.[11] It is therefore more congruent to think of the Bábí phase as primarily catastrophic, and indeed the Bábís and possibly Iran itself experienced the movement as just that.[12] Bahá'u'lláh promulgated a longer-term divine plan that would require centuries of work and development, long after his earthly life was ended. This is a progressive millennial stance. However, full-fledged religious traditions are more nuanced and more diverse than such simplistic categorisations allow. Returning to Shoghi Effendi's interpretations,

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Millennialism, Persecution and Violence: Historical Cases (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000); entries in *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*; Robert H. Stockman, "Millennialism in the Bahá'í Faith: Progressive and Catastrophic Themes," paper delivered at the 12th Irfan Colloquium on Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK, Dec. 6-8, 1996. The Wessinger terminology is frequently used among scholars of New Religious Movements in current conference papers. A further work that makes use of these terms is: Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

11 "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. As these statements clearly reveal, the Bábí Dispensation was essentially in the nature of a religious and indeed social revolution, and its duration had therefore to be short, but full of tragic events, of sweeping and drastic reforms. Those drastic measures enforced by the Báb and His followers were taken with the view of undermining the very foundations of Shi'ih orthodoxy, and thus paving the way for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh." (Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* [Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992] note 109, p. 214).

12 In *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence* (35), Wessinger writes, "The experience of devastating defeats has prompted other violent millennialists to become pacifists, notably the anabaptists and the Babis, who evolved into the Baha'is." This is based on Gary Waite's "The Religious State: A Comparative Study of Sixteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Opposition—The Case of the Anabaptists and the Bábís," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 7.1 (1995): 69-90. If the Bábís can be described as violent, it is insofar as they were an assaulted millennialist group willing to take up arms to defend themselves against government assault, in accord with existing Islamic injunctions enjoining self-defence. The Báb's claim to fulfil Shiite millennialist expectation, however, played into some militant elements of that expectation and were heightened once the government assault began. The transition of which Wessinger writes was not a clear-cut movement from an anti-authoritarian militancy to an absolute pacifism. The Bahá'í Faith's teachings are not completely pacifist, since the religion recognizes as legitimate the need for national defence, as well as for an International Force whenever a world federation is developed. Clearly, however, this is force that is under legal control by institutions of governance.

even in his outline of a long-term divine plan that was intended gradually to improve the life of humankind, he painted a distressingly dark picture of the near-term future of a human race unwilling to turn to Bahá'u'lláh for its cure. If we look at places where there is persecution of Bahá'ís, or countries where the Faith is difficult to establish, or periods when the international horizon appears dark, elements of catastrophism can hold sway in the outlook of individual Bahá'ís. David Piff has documented the influence of catastrophism in the Bahá'í community as expressed in its unofficial lore.[13] There are thus two general lines of discourse in the Bahá'í community: one that takes the statements made by Bahá'u'lláh, as amplified and interpreted by Shoghi Effendi, to refer to one or more cataclysmic events of such intensity as to give humanity a wake-up call; and a second which views this as a gradual process of disintegration, a series of disasters and setbacks, but not a single event of such a world-shaking nature.

To ask whether either one of these is the "correct" way of understanding the references in the Bahá'í texts misses the dynamic of the millennial moment and the millennial enterprise. It is possible for reasonable people to come to either conclusion. Certainly it is difficult to escape the more catastrophic possibilities suggested by Bahá'u'lláh's definiteness, even while he leaves the nature and time of the event unspecified: "the appointed hour," "that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake," and "an unforeseen calamity" (not simply "unforeseen calamities"). Yet the processes, program and general long-term optimism of the Bahá'í vision would lead to the conclusion that progressivism is the millennialism of choice for Bahá'ís. This is particularly evident in the increasing emphasis on "process" strongly evoked in recent statements issued by various organs of the Bahá'í International Community.[14]

In evolutionary science there is a notion of "punctuated equilibrium." This postulates long periods of stability or slow progress, periodically interrupted by sudden catastrophic events from which great bursts of natural creativity and evolution occur. I propose that the millennialist impulse in the Bahá'í Faith is "punctuated progressive millennialism," that is, a generally positive progressive outlook that retains strong elements of concern and expectation of one or several individual world-shaking events that will destroy reactionary forces and give impetus to progressive ones. Bábí-Bahá'í history already demonstrates this. The Bábí period was catastrophic in its immediate expectations of an overthrow of the corrupt contemporary order. It was followed by Bahá'u'lláh's introduction of a progressive plan for building the kingdom of God. The 20th century was a period of the kingdom unfolding very slowly, but filled with tremendously shocking events in the world, including wars in which tens of millions of people perished. Since the fall of communism to the close of the 20th century, a certain anxious optimism reigns in the Bahá'í community.

What do the Bahá'í sacred texts themselves portend? Among American Bahá'ís from the mid-1930s through the early 1980s there was considerable expectation that by the end of the 20th century the Lesser Peace would be established. The Lesser Peace is a covenantal compact among states to bring about the cessation of war, and (possibly)

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[13] Piff, *Bahá'í Lore*, especially the chapter "Catastrophism in Bahá'í Popular Lore," 117-130.

[14] For instance, *The Prosperity of Humankind* (New York: Bahá'í International Community Office of Public Information, 1995) and subsequent statements.

the establishment of the rudiments of world federation. Some Bahá'ís developed very different positions with regard to the establishment of the Lesser Peace. Believers who leaned toward the notion of a single calamity were quick to hitch the timing of that event to the end of the 20th century and the establishment of a definitive and clearly-visible Lesser Peace. Those who leaned toward progressivism have been inclined to consider the 20th century to have exhibited movement toward the foundations of the Lesser Peace combined with a decades-long series of calamitous events. It appears that there were erroneous assumptions in both views that blinded the viewers to the following points: (1) the Lesser Peace as defined in the Bahá'í writings is not yet fully and visibly established as a political pact of states[15]; (2) 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reference to the unity of nations being established in the 20th century[16] was not a promise or prophecy of the clearly visible, fully-established Lesser Peace; (3) the Bahá'í writings do not appear specifically to indicate that "the calamity" must occur before the Lesser Peace; (4) nowhere in the Bahá'í texts is there an indication that the period of the Lesser Peace will be free of calamity.

Most of these very points have recently made by the Universal House of Justice.[17] It is interesting that the Universal House of Justice waited until now to make a clear elucidation of this subject. Because human beings tend to think of prophecy in terms of things that they already know have been fulfilled, they may think that knowing something to be a prophecy enables them to predict the future. A Bahá'í author has recently tackled this problem:

> Certainly it would seem that predicting the future through prophecy is not only a reasonable thing to do, but even a duty of the faithful, so that they might prepare themselves for the coming of their Lord. And those whose vision of the Second Coming is based upon the words of the Bible should be assured that their vision is correct—except for one unavoidable fact: *there is no evidence to support the commonly held assumption that the meaning of prophecies can be understood before they have been fulfilled.* Quite the contrary, the evidence of the Bible overwhelmingly demonstrates that until they are fulfilled, prophecies are ignored, misunderstood, and, in many cases, present a barrier between the seeker and his goal. Having no foreknowledge of the meaning of a prophecy, one cannot, therefore, use it to predict the future. *It must first be fulfilled for its meaning to be revealed*.[18]

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15 "The first candle is unity in the political realm, the early glimmerings of which can now be discerned."—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997) 32.

16 "The fifth candle is the unity of nations – a unity which in this century will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland."—*ibid.*, 32.

17 Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, letter dated 19 April 2001 to an individual, including a memorandum from the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice dated 19 April 2001, entitled "Attainment of the Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace."

18 David Yamartino, *Come Now and Let Us Reason Together Saith the Lord: Understanding Prophecy and the Return of Christ* (2000). Available in html or pdf format at http://www.reasontogether.com

Such a principle can be applied to the notion that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reference to the "unity of nations" being established in the 20th century must mean that the Lesser Peace would be established and that the "calamity" or "catastrophe" would occur first. While this belief *might* have been one way that history could have unfolded, only in hindsight can any understanding of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement be gained. The Universal House of Justice makes clear that the differentiation between "unity of nations" and "Lesser Peace" was there all along, even in the interpretations of Shoghi Effendi, in which he explicitly stated that "the Lesser Peace... *will* come" but its "*exact* dates we do not know."[19]

It is almost certain that there will be a centuries-long period when the simultaneous processes of disintegration and integration are in operation. Is there any assurance that there will or will not be a single earth-shaking calamity that will revolutionize the fortunes of the Bahá'í community? Precisely because we cannot see the future on this point, the Bahá'í Faith will almost certainly remain a religion with strongly manifested progressive millennialism and a periodic energetic infusion of the catastrophic type.[20] Progressive millennialism is at the fore, but the catastrophic undercurrent will remain, at least so long as humanity remains unwilling to respond to the Bahá'í Faith in significant numbers. It will also remain until, in hindsight, Bahá'ís have more authoritative definition of the events or processes that fulfil Bahá'u'lláh's statements.

Many, though not all, religions follow an evolutionary path involving changing foci from catastrophic to progressive millennialism. Scholars find many nuances to this very broad schema, but it has a certain appeal and applicability to many religious movements, including the Bahá'í Faith. A new creative impulse enters the world, usually through a messianic figure, and makes rapid headway among portions of a population. This impulse, both because of its immediate demand for transformation of the social order, and its perceived or direct assault on social stability and entrenched structures, is viewed as a threat by the established forces of orthodoxy and authority. The followers of the new movement experience opposition. The established forces of orthodoxy and authority feel threatened. The millennialists, the authorities, or both, may become militant. The state and/or church launch an assault on the new movement, usually by force of arms, by killing the leader, or both. The assault either destroys the movement or weakens it. If the religion survives, it may find a new leader and/or the community of believers may become aware of a long-term divine plan to attain the movement's goals and the reformation of society. The movement then leaves the revolutionary catastrophic phase to become a progressive millennial movement, so long as it retains that long-term divine

[19] Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in 1946, quoted in memorandum from the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice dated 19 April 2001, entitled "Attainment of the Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace," 4.

[20] It must be noted that any manifestation of "catastrophic millennialism" in the mainstream Bahá'í Faith is characterized by preoccupation with the possibility of divine intervention to bring about one or more catastrophes that are expected to reinforce the fortunes of the Bahá'í Faith. It is not a catastrophism in which individuals or groups of Bahá'ís consider bringing about the catastrophe in order to hurry the transition, as such action is strongly abhorred in the Bahá'í teachings. This may serve as a solid preventive measure for managing the potentially violent effects of catastrophism.

plan.[21] Millennialism is long-lived, can become dangerous, and is historically one of the most creative social impulses over the long term. It seeks to be ready for any eventuality, to be capable of surviving whatever God, universe, or human society, can throw at it. The Bábí-Bahá'í Faith can be seen as one type in this model, having developed a strong progressive millennialism built on several catastrophic pillars. For this reason, wisdom dictates that we not over-interpret or selectively interpret the religion's texts to make it fall completely within either catastrophic or progressive millennialism.

Another useful term that may be used to describe some portions of the Bahá'í millennialist impulse is "managed millennialism," coined by Jacqueline Stone.[22] Managed millennialism is a catastrophic millennialism that has lost a sense of the imminence of the catastrophe. Though still officially catastrophic, the emphasis on the catastrophe has diminished. Such a movement might or might not make the shift to progressive millennialism. The Bahá'í Faith clearly exhibits a strong progressive orientation, possesses official directives that minimize the focus on the "catastrophe" or "calamity," and espouses principles that eschew the use of violence to end the old order. It also has authoritative texts that refer to one or more catastrophic events, which can become the focus of concern for a portion of the Bahá'í community under some circumstances. I would offer "punctuated progressive millennialism" and "managed millennialism" as potentially useful descriptors for the Bahá'í case.

There remain other textual questions relating to the expression of catastrophism in the Bahá'í Faith. To what extent does Shoghi Effendi's use of different terms—catastrophe, calamity, convulsion, upheaval—imply different or similar types of events? Do these terms, as Shoghi Effendi translated them, refer to distinct concepts from Bahá'u'lláh's Arabic and Persian writings? Is the "convulsion" promised by Bahá'u'lláh the same as the "calamity"? A study of the usage of catastrophic terminology in the original sacred texts and in Shoghi Effendi's writings could prove enlightening.

The Bahá'í millennial kingdom—measured, not from 1844 as Stephen Lambden indicated,[23] but from Bahá'u'lláh's October 1852 intimation of His mission while he was imprisoned in the Síyáh-Chál in Tehran[24]—is envisioned as a stable, peaceful and prosperous civilization operating under divine principles, raised by the long-term efforts of believers. Its full establishment will require centuries of difficult work and the continuing operation of those disintegrative and integrative forces of which Shoghi Effendi frequently wrote. Among those forces may yet be an "appointed hour," an "unforeseen calamity," of sufficient magnitude for us to say that it was what Bahá'u'lláh meant in his writings. It may also be that the worst is over, although such a sentiment may be overly optimistic at this stage, given the world's seemingly intractable problems and the predictions of future large-scale opposition to the Bahá'í Faith.[25]

21 Many scholars of millennialism accept this model in its broad outlines, although readers should be cautious about using it as a procrustean bed for all millennialist movements. For an analysis of the Bábí period from this perspective, by a non-Bahá'í, see Gary K. Waite, "The Religious State," *op.cit.*

22 Jacqueline Stone, "Japanese *Lotus* Millennialism," in Catherine Wessinger, ed., *Millennialism, Persecution and Violence* 261-280, especially 277-279.

23 Lambden, "Catastrophe," 98.

24 Note 62 in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 196.

25 For instance, Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 17-18, 25-26.

> It should not be imagined that the processes now moving in the world will be free from challenge or difficulty. There may well be set-backs, and conflicts may erupt periodically, as humanity proceeds towards the emergence and consolidation of the Lesser Peace, giving rise in due course to the establishment of the Most Great Peace.[26]

What we can know for certain is that the Bahá'í community must deal with the world as it is and as it will be, whether the planet is progressing, undergoing catastrophe, or both at the same time. That is the way it has always been.

[26] Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, letter dated 19 April 2001.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Logos and Civilization: Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh
Author: Nader Saiedi
Publisher: University Press of Maryland, Bethesda, 2000, 404 pages
Reviewers: Seena Fazel and Dominic Brookshaw

Nader Saiedi, a sociologist at Carleton College in the USA, has undertaken an ambitious task. His book is framed as a response to those who have analysed Bahá'u'lláh's writings in "hasty", "premature" and "reductionist" ways, and presented Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to "fit into the mold of traditional Eastern categories from Neoplatonism to Islamic Sufism, or modern western ones from liberalism to postmodernism" (8). Saiedi wants to redress the "current reductive approach" (28) and "current Middle East Studies approach" (42) in Bahá'í scholarship. He states his aim is to show that, "Bahá'u'lláh's complex vision transcends all of the given Eastern or western categories... and that His writings must be read on their own terms and in light of their own hermeneutical principles and creative and novel approaches to metaphysics, mysticism, historical dynamics, ethics, and social/political theory" (8). The first few chapters explore some of the major works of Bahá'u'lláh—the *Seven Valleys*, the *Four Valleys*, the *Kitáb-i Íqán*, the *Kitáb-i Badí'*, and the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*—in the light of these approaches.

The most useful section of the book is an analysis of the *Kitáb-i Badí'*, of which little has previously been written in English. Written in Edirne (c.1867), the *Kitáb-i Badí'*, which Saiedi translates as "Wondrous New Book" (though "Wondrous Book" or "Unique Book" might be a more faithful rendering) is perhaps Bahá'u'lláh's most important apologia. Saiedi's summary of Mírzá Mihdí Rashtí's arguments against Bahá'u'lláh (179-180) and Bahá'u'lláh's detailed and elaborate response (183-209) provide fascinating reading. Of particular interest are Bahá'u'lláh's criticism of Mírzá Mihdí Rashtí's written Persian (202), and Bahá'u'lláh's defence of frequenting Baghdad's coffeehouses in order to win friends for the Babis (208). Other strong areas in *Logos and Civilization* include the discussion of Bahá'í responses to Saint-Simon (313ff) and Hobbes (318ff).

A problem at the heart of the book is Saiedi's attitude towards methodology. Repeatedly he states that Bahá'u'lláh's writings transcend all categories, only then to use sociological ones to define them (in addition to creating categories of his own). In one page alone, we are presented with three new categories by which to understand the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*: the three realms of existence (God, the manifestations, and creation), Bahá'u'lláh's metaphysics of "being, revelation, and will", and the twin duties that are part of "an inseparable triad of recognition, love, and action" (239). Although he criticises other writers for "reductionism" in analysing texts or "relativism" in providing new interpretations, he freely adopts these approaches himself when they suit. For example, the "problematic of Gems of Mysteries" [*Javáhiru'l-Asrár*] is "the historicization of the spiritual journey" (65), and Saiedi boldly claims that the "entire structure of the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys can be understood as the dialectic of negation and affirmation" (102). Saiedi's interpretation of the inheritance laws of the *Aqdas* appears to be relativist: Bahá'u'lláh's purpose, Saiedi states, "is not primarily to

establish a particular law of passing on material possessions but to emphasize the symbolic meaning of the numbers themselves" (271). Implicit in this approach is Saiedi's rejection of all other endeavours in Bahá'í studies: un-named writers are collectively called "Bahá'í scholars" who all subscribe to a single flawed "Middle East Studies approach" (42).[1] His work is an island in a sea of confusion.

Saiedi asserts that Bahá'u'lláh's writings cannot be understood without knowledge of the "conscious intention" of their author (256). This is problematic for two reasons: firstly, Bahá'u'lláh states that his words have multiple meanings and, secondly, how can we know exactly what Bahá'u'lláh intended? Such problems are exemplified in some of Saiedi's own interpretations. How, for example, do we know the "conscious intention" of Bahá'u'lláh in revealing the inheritance laws was a symbolic numerology? One corollary of the methodology proposed by Saiedi would be humility and caution in the interpretation of texts, but Saiedi lacks any tentativeness. We are told what the "primary object of the Four Valleys" is (80), what Bahá'u'lláh "is saying" (24), and that the "reason" Bahá'u'lláh refutes the specific objections of Mírzá Mihdí Rashtí "is simply due to His compassion, as well as the spiritual state of His audience" (181). Apparently, that Bahá'u'lláh altered some laws in the Aqdas "can only imply their binding authority and that those of His laws that He did not change remain absolutely binding" (223). But Saiedi's hermeneutics necessitates evidence in support of these interpretations with the "conscious intention" of Bahá'u'lláh. The problem is that the history of religion shows that individuals, particularly clergy, have tried to limit the interpretation of texts as a pretence to impose their own interpretations on their co-religionists. Discussion of these implications and the possible problems of Saiedi's hermeneutics would have, therefore, been appropriate.

Saiedi's selective citation of previous relevant academic work is problematic. It is inappropriate for a scholarly book not to mention, let alone build on the work of others. For example, there is no mention of Christopher Buck's work on the dating or theology of the *Kitáb-i Iqán*[2] in Saiedi's discussion of it (113-174), no mention of Stephen Lambden's study of the *Seven Valleys*[3] in Saiedi's chapters on this work (17-51 and 79-110), and no mention of relevant work by Todd Lawson[4] or Moojan Momen[5] whatsoever. Even Saiedi's discussion of the term "manifestation" appears in splendid isolation (163-4). Maybe Saiedi thinks that these previous works are unworthy of mention, but this does not prevent him citing two obscure "publications" on the internet by John Walbridge and Tony Lee when criticising their ideas about the structure and limited applicability of some of the laws of the *Kitáb-i Aqdas* (236, 216). But it is not just contemporary scholarship that is ignored or criticised. Saiedi disapproves of the "limiting premise" of what he coins the "traditional approach" of some early Iranian

[1] There are, of course, many methodologies in Middle Eastern studies.

[2] C. Buck, *Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i Iqán* (Los Angeles: Kalimat, 1995).

[3] S. Lambden, "The Seven Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh: a provisional translation with occasional notes," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* 6.2/3 (1992): 26-73.

[4] Cf. e.g. B. T. Lawson, *The Qur'an commentary of Sayyid Ali Muhammad Shirazi, the Báb*, Ph. D. thesis, McGill, 1987.

[5] Cf. e.g. M. Momen, "Relativism: a basis for Bahá'í metaphysics," in *Studies in Honor of the late Hasan M. Balyuzi*, ed. M. Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimat 1988).

Bahá'ís whose scholarship, he believes, was so "dominated by Iranian, Islamic and Middle Eastern cultural perspectives," that it failed to "pay attention to the complexity and universality of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation" and was often "preoccupied and defined" by Islamic issues (42). This broad sweep of criticism may strike readers as ungenerous.

An area where *Logos and Civilization* disappoints is its analysis of the *Seven Valleys*, in particular Saiedi's reading of 'Aṭṭar's *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* (*Conference of the Birds*). We are told that by adapting 'Aṭṭar's terminology, Bahá'u'lláh has "revived interest in 'Aṭṭar's magnificent poetry of mystical stations" (25), although we are not informed when (if ever) such interest died. Saiedi's reductive reading of Iranian literature is highlighted when he argues that the mere fact that Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to use 'Aṭṭar's terms as vehicles for his revelation "is a testimony to the beauty and spiritual depth of 'Aṭṭar's poetry" (23) which "implies His approval" (89). Saiedi is also anxious to point out Bahá'u'lláh's "economical and beautiful" style in contrast to 'Aṭṭar's use of "lengthy illustrative tales" that "tend to overwhelm the unity and continuity of the text" (89). Surely it is natural that the *Seven Valleys*, which is only drawing on one section of the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*, should be more concise? Saiedi is keen to emphasise what he sees as the qualitative differences between the two texts (23 and 89), but fails to discuss one of the essential points of divergence: the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* is verse whereas the body of the *Seven Valleys* is prose. One of the differences Saiedi identifies is that the beloveds in the *Seven Valleys* are female (89), ignoring Jacob's love for the lost Joseph as a story of male/male love in Bahá'u'lláh's work. Furthermore, it is notable that Saiedi's bibliography only contains English translations of works by Ibn 'Arabí, 'Aṭṭar and al-Fárábí.

One author that Saiedi does cite is Juan Cole, and he devotes the last two chapters to criticizing Cole's ideas as presented on the internet and in his book, *Modernity and the Millennium*. The Saiedi that co-authored a well-known (but overly speculative) paper with Cole and a few others in the 1980s calling for women to be included in the membership of the Universal House of Justice seems distant.[6] *Logos and Civilization* corrects some of the "mistakes" and "inaccuracies" in Cole's translations of Bahá'í texts (e.g. 344), and consequently questions the thesis proposed by Cole that Bahá'u'lláh's ideas were adapted opportunistically to appeal to western audiences. One example is the translation of "'*aql*" that Cole proposes should be "reason" while Saiedi argues for "wisdom" in accordance with Shoghi Effendi (338-9). This is a useful beginning to the discussion of these themes, though some of this material has already been published.[7] The discussion of Bahá'í teachings on the relationship between church and state seems somewhat unclear with Saiedi mainly arguing that the Bahá'í view transcends any simple dichotomy between secularism and theocracy, and concluding that citizens "can only be safeguarded through the collective institutionalization of respect for religion and spiritual orientation" (365)—although further clarification of the meaning of this perspective would have been helpful.

Transliteration is another area where the book runs into difficulties. Saiedi often transliterates Arabic terms according to the way in which they are pronounced in Persian, e.g. Ibn 'Arabi's *waḥdat al-wujúd* is transliterated *vaḥdatu'l-vujúd* (18 and 70).

6 "The Service of Women on the Universal House of Justice," *Documents in Shayki, Babi and Bahá'í History* 3 (1998), www.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/docs/vol3/wmnuhj.htm

7 In *Payam-i-Bahá'í* and *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*.

Occasionally, Arabic terms are transliterated twice, e.g. *wahy* (*vaḥy*) (35), or else mixed randomly with Persian terms, e.g. *sharí'ah* and *ṭaríqah* with *pír* and *insán-i-kámil* (19). Saiedi fails to provide a note on his transliteration system—a must in any scholarly publication. Although, Saiedi expresses his gratitude, in the preface, to the Association for Bahá'í Studies—North America for publishing this book, it is actually published by the University Press of Maryland. The reader may be surprised to learn that this is not a university publisher (it is a private press, which has previously published Suheil Bushrui's *Style of the Aqdas*[8] with the aid of a donation).

Saiedi's style is, at times, difficult. Although there is no explanation of the intended audience, it becomes clear that his reverential tone is not appropriate for a non-Bahá'í readership. Saiedi talks about the "treasury of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation" (2), of how "the ocean of divine utterance billows" (145), of the "depth of His [Bahá'u'lláh's] ocean of knowledge" (196), and how Bahá'u'lláh's response destroyed an opponent's argument "like the waves of an ocean erasing a hill of sand" (197). We read about the "unequivocal authenticity" of Bahá'u'lláh writings (6) and Bahá'u'lláh's "authorized interpreters" (214) without explanation of these terms. Occasionally it appears that the book is not appropriate to those unfamiliar with a sociologist's turn of phrase. Some examples follow, but the book has many similar sentences: "the unity of the two concepts of transcendence and history implies the unity and harmony of a dynamic instrumental and practical/moral rationalization process" (46); "the details of the creative process then become realized through the final three stages, which represent permission for actualization, determination of duration, and registration of all the details pertaining to the particular being or event" (56); "The solution to this antinomy is precisely the mediating synthesis of the two" (78); "The kingdom of the heart becomes a thesis opposed to the antithesis of the kingdom of the earth" (368-9). The "logic" of things is important for Saiedi, although it is not entirely clear what using this word adds. We have the "new logic of Bahá'u'lláh's early writings" (40), the "logic of ideas" (47), "the poetic logic" (81), the "logic of spiritual journey" (96), the "logic of desire" (101), the "logic of Bahá'u'lláh's hermeneutics" (152), "unified holistic logic" (152), "the logic of Bahá'u'lláh's style of revelation" (236), "the logic of the pure heart" (239), the "logic of consumerism" (358) and, interestingly, "the romantic logic of space" (91). The use of long quotes, such as a three-page quote in one chapter (244) and a 1½-page quote elsewhere (340-342), also limits the accessibility of the book.

Overall, this book deserves praise for its ambitious scope and for the new material it brings to the attention of English-speaking readers, but it suffers from being too reductive and too narrow in its analysis; problems in the work of others that Saiedi had set to redress in writing this book. *Logos and Civilization* is an apologetic, yet it lacks the methodological rigour of *Making the Crooked Straight*[9] that builds on previous Bahá'í scholarship, or the accessibility of Douglas Martin's "The Missionary as Historian,"[10] written in an economical and crisp style. It demonstrates, perhaps without the conscious intention of its author, that scholarship needs an intellectual context to be meaningful.

[8] See review in *Bahá'í Studies Review* 6 (1996): 93-96.

[9] Udo Schaefer/Nicola Towfigh/Ulrich Gollmer, *Making the Crooked Straight. A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000).

[10] *Bahá'í Studies* 4 (1978): 1-29.

Scripture and Revelation (Papers presented at the First Irfan Colloquium, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, December 1993 and the Second Irfan Colloquium, Wilmette, USA, March 1994)
Editor: Moojan Momen
Publisher: George Ronald, Oxford, 1997, 369 pages
Reviewer: Brian A Miller

Scripture and Revelation, the third volume of George Ronald's series *Bahá'í Studies*, initiates a departure from the first two volumes. The latter were single author works, *Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time* by John Walbridge and Diane Malouf's *Unveiling the Hidden Words*.[1] In his introduction to *Volume 3*, editor Moojan Momen promises that this collection of articles taken from conferences held in England and the United States during 1993 and 1994 "represents the first in a series of volumes presenting the proceedings of the Irfan Colloquia." On the diversity of material included, he comments that, "The essays in this volume vary widely in style. Some are written from the viewpoint of faith…while others adopt a more neutral academic style." He states that he has not "attempted to achieve a uniformity of tone or style" (ix-x). While the variety of approaches employed by the authors is significant and refreshing, the quality of material is uneven. Some of the research and findings reported by the authors has been used in subsequent publications, as with the work of John Hatcher. Others, like Robert Stockman, Stephen Lambden, and Khazeh Fananapazir offer highly useful starting points for further inquiry. Three major questions recur throughout these essays and studies: what insights can a reasoned analysis of sacred scripture yield? What critical and interpretive approaches do the Bahá'í writings support or employ? What can be learned from the methodologies used in the study of other religious traditions and their scriptures?

The core essays in this volume employ a "study of religions" approach. This methodology is both historical and comparative. Robert Stockman, Stephen Lambden, Kamran Ekbal, Todd Lawson, Seena Fazel and William Barnes examine a variety of texts from the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and explore diverse avenues of understanding and interpretation. These scholars carefully consider analytical tools developed for the study of Zoroastrian, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and experiment with their applicability to related issues in their study of Bahá'í scriptures. Throughout this volume the authors either demonstrate by example or argue directly for the usefulness of a critical approach, in the scholarly sense of the word, to the Bahá'í writings, where criticism means the application of the tools of reason and logical discernment.

John Hatcher advocates comparative literary approaches as he explores "The Validity and Value of an Historical-Critical Approach to the Revealed Works of Bahá'u'lláh." Hatcher's essay introduces to the general reader some of the aims and terms of literary criticism and advocates the usefulness of a literary approach to the Bahá'í writings. In this lies the article's primary strengths. He argues that interpretive methods developed in the field of literary criticism, textual analysis and historical criticism may be combined and applied effectively to the study of the writings of

[1] Reviewed in *BSR* 6 (1996): 61-63 and *BSR* 8 (1998): 1-14 by R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram and Frankin Lewis respectively – eds.

Bahá'u'lláh. He suggests that the objectivist approach that relies on "a close reading of text and its attempt to discern various metaphorical and symbolic levels of meaning would be the appropriate critical approach to take with the revealed works of Bahá'u'lláh" (28). Hatcher examines several passages from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Shoghi Effendi that support not only this approach developed in America by the practitioners of "New Criticism," but the importance of an analysis that explores the historical context for the revelations of sacred scripture. In support of this argument, he examines the "Tablet of the Holy Mariner" and the Arabic "Tablet of Ahmad." While these two approaches are perhaps the easiest to advocate among the various techniques of literary analysis employed by scholars, Hatcher wisely avoids excluding other methodologies. He concludes: "In the final analysis, of course, there can be no reliable formula for interpreting the revealed works of Bahá'u'lláh, but we can infer from the examples mentioned above that the tools of historical criticism—as well as those of other branches of literary analysis—can offer useful and valid assistance for the average reader as well as for the scholar because Bahá'í scripture appears in an astounding variety of literary styles."

Hatcher does not include among those "other branches" any of the more contemporary literary methodologies—neither in this article, nor in his book *Ocean of His Words*.[2] While he rightly focuses on his preferred approach, that of close reading with reference to historical criticism, he could have presented his case more forcefully in the article had he stated his reasons for excluding the structuralist methods and some of the more contemporary post-structuralist techniques for textual analysis. Indeed, even methods related to his own area of expertise such as what is being called "new rhetoric" have much to say about the use of rhetorical devices that could be applied to Bahá'u'lláh's writings with good results. Some literary theorists advocate deconstructionist methods based on post-modernist decisions about the status of the author, the proliferation of meaning, and the importance of uncertainty. While most Bahá'í scholars, like Hatcher, would find these approaches inappropriate for their projects, the examination of textual dynamics and theories of reading could help address some of issues that Hatcher raises.[3] Still, Hatcher offers a good introduction to the methods and concerns of literary analysis without attempting to be comprehensive.

Hatcher does not wish to advocate prescriptively a narrow approach but he attempts to link one set of methods and support it with a particular theological position. He poses an interesting set of questions when he considers a passage from the *Lawḥ-i Hikmat*:

> Indeed, in the Tablet of Wisdom Bahá'u'lláh states that He is able to quote passages from books He has never had physical access to because He sees before Him the pages of works He wishes to cite: "*Thou knowest full well that We perused not the books which men possess and We acquired not the learning current amongst them, and yet whenever We desire to quote the sayings of the learned and of the wise, presently there will appear before the face of the Lord in the form of a tablet all that which hath appeared in the world and is revealed in the Holy Books and Scriptures.*" We might well wonder whether the process

[2] Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997.

[3] See *The Century of Light* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2001) 132.

> Bahá'u'lláh describes here alludes to some divinely arranged text retrieval system or whether this same process obtains with all the revealed works of Bahá'u'lláh. In other words, does the Manifestation have any creative role to play in the rendering of the divine thought into a particular language? For example, in the concluding sentence of this same passage Bahá'u'lláh states, "*Thus do We set down in writing that which the eye perceiveth.*" Perhaps He is indicating that revelation always employs this procedure whereby He sets down precisely the words He is commanded to utter. (31)

Hatcher could use this passage to answer his own question about the creativity and exercise of will by the Manifestation. Instead, he confuses two different processes by conflating them. He has previously quoted Bahá'u'lláh regarding the process of revelation. Here he quotes him on a different subject that Bahá'u'lláh describes in order to explain his miraculous ability to quote from texts to which he has no material access. He does so by an exercise of will "*whenever We desire to quote…*" Yet in the act of revelation, Bahá'u'lláh affirms that he has no power to resist or alter the course of the divine will. This leaves the author ineffective in exploring a fascinating question that literary method, in addition to theology and philosophy, might help to answer.

Sen McGlinn in his review of Hatcher's book *Ocean of God's Words* identifies some of Hatcher's theological views and their effect on his readings.[4] His insightful critique has its own problems, but his concern about Hatcher's narrow selection of sources and methodological weaknesses deserves careful reading. He also points out that Persian and Arabic are necessary to study questions of style and genre. He notes several instances where knowledge of key Arabic terms would have clarified certain questions Hatcher poses. Even so, neither McGlinn nor I would insist that fluency in Arabic and Persian are prerequisites necessary for a literary analysis of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. It simply limits the kinds of questions the reader can ask. Hatcher's article for *Scripture and Revelation* is limited by its elementary approach to questions governing literary analysis as applied to the Bahá'í writings. Articles aimed at non-specialists are valuable and particularly helpful at this juncture; however, I think Hatcher has underestimated his audience. Otherwise we might concur with McGlinn that he is overcautious due to his own uncertainty regarding his methods. A third possibility would hardly bear mentioning—that his caution arises from an unconscious fear of the results of a vigorous application of critical methods would yield. I choose to mention this possibility not because it applies to Hatcher, for it does not; rather, it applies to those in the Bahá'í community who are still suspicious of critical scholarship because it challenges assumptions they may hold dear. In any case, these limitations—whether due to Hatcher's assumptions or the weakness of his methods—are in part overcome in *Ocean* where he applies hermeneutic methods, genre criticism, structuralist analysis, etc. McGlinn's review itself is a cogent and thought provoking application of literary methods of analysis to readings of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. His review of Hatcher's work provides a welcome service in its critique of his methods by highlighting the dangers and pitfalls that have ensnared many Bahá'í readers. Still, the works of John Hatcher, Sen McGlinn, Franklin Lewis, Susan Brill de Ramirez, Christopher Buck and Todd Lawson provide ample proof of Hatcher's principle argument: literary methods properly applied

4 *Bahá'í Studies Review* 9 (1999/2000): 195-207.

can yield many rich and insighteful readings of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, not to mention those of the Báb, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. We need to address more challenging questions in our readings of Baha'i writings. As we negotiate the difficult terrain between reasoned belief, careful scholarship and honest inquiry into matters of faith, it is imperative that we experiment with diverse methods to discover the most useful tools for plunging into the depths of these texts for meaning and structural significances. The revelations of Bahá'u'lláh require the best scholarship and criticism we can bring to bear and will yield wonders commensurate with our efforts.

Todd Lawson also uses literary methods in his discussion of an intriguing example of Qur'án commentary by the Báb. He provides an illuminating introduction to the genre of *tafsír* or Qur'anic exegesis as not only a scholarly endeavour, but a deeply religious and highly personal engagement with holy scripture. He places the Báb's commentary on Súra 103, *Wa'l-Asr* in this genre and then gives a detailed analysis. He describes this tablet as a divine encounter with the Word of God on the most fundamental level. The text in question is actually an example of *ta'wíl,* an esoteric interpretation of the symbolic meaning of each letter that comprises this *Sura,* or chapter of the Qur'an. Lawson helps us to see that this is not a rational exercise in symbology, but a spiritual process of engaging the text in which insight, *'irfán*, takes precedence. He uses clear prose and thoughtful analysis to guide us through a minefield of Islamic epistemology with clarity, grace, and sensitivity. The success of Lawson's efforts recommends a similar approach to other examples of *tafsír* and *ta'wíl* in the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

Kamran Ekbal contributes one of the best essays to *Scripture and Revelation,* entitled "Daéná-Dén-Dín: The Zoroastrian Heritage of the 'Maid of Heaven' in the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh." Apart from Christopher Buck's dissertation,[5] this is one of the most significant contributions to the fruitful area of inquiry into the relationship between previous Iranian religions and the Bahá'í Faith. His method of close textual comparison of relevant passages from several religious traditions traces the use of the motif or figure of the Maid of Heaven in Zoroastrian scriptures and her echoes and recurrences in Christianity, Manicheanism, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith. He uses the methodologies of linguistics, religious studies, history and literary criticism to build a strong case for both the wide influence of Zoroastrianism on the religions of the region and the universality of the specific figure of the Heavenly Maid. He discovers startling parallels between Zoroastrian descriptions of the Maid of Heaven and those found in the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. He argues that the very word for religion in Arabic and Persian (*dín*) derives from the Avestan *daena*. Commenting on one such description, he observes that "*daena* obviously indicates here religion in general, the eternal religion of God which had already existed before Zarathushtra and which He is called upon to 'purify'" (137). He suggests that this meaning arises from the function of the Maiden*daena* as the embodiment of the righteous practice of a holy man. "The Maiden perceived in [another] passage is without doubt an image of the transcendental double of the soul, a reflection of his own self; she is the 'mirror' in which the righteous man contemplates his own ego" or, perhaps, the results of his righteousness (139). This adds meaning to Bahá'u'lláh's description of the Maiden as "the embodiment of the remembrance of the

[5] See review by William Collins in this issue, page 157 – Eds.

name of My Lord"[6] and substantiates the Guardian's comment "that Maiden that personified the Spirit of God within Him..."[7] Ekbal also notes her appearance in Christian and Manichean texts. This masterful study in comparative religious symbology represents a major advancement in our understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's employment of the figure of the maiden. It provides a fascinating elaboration of the statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi that the Maid of Heaven represents at once the personification of Bahá'u'lláh's revelatory soul and the embodiment of His religion. We might infer that she also symbolizes the transformative power of divine revelation. More than this, Ekbal points the way toward a comparative theology that greatly enhances our appreciation of the textual links between the Zoroastrian religion and the Bábí and Bahá'í revelations. He could have said more about her place in the writings of the Báb. In particular, he would have enriched his discussion had he elaborated on the similarity between the text he cites from the Revelation of St. John the Divine (Revelations 21: 9-11) and a remarkable passage from Báb found on page 54 of *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*. He suggests lines of inquiry that could substantiate a theological interdependence, even a genealogy of ideas that lies at the foundation of Semitic and Indo-European religions.

In response to these findings, I wish to raise the question whether similar links might be found to the religious systems of East Asia and perhaps Europe and Africa. It is quite possible that this resplendent feminine being has her counterparts in the deities of Hinduism. The Hindu and Zoroastrian religions share a common religions heritage (or parentage) as evidenced by divine figures or powers that share the same name, but with divergent, occasionally inverse valuations. If this can be shown to hold true, we may find the Maid of Heaven in the Hindu pantheon with a reversed image—associated with darkness instead of light, like Kali, or complex, like Shiva. What are the feminine beauties associated with Buddhism and Confucianism? How is the Maiden related either genetically or symbolically to the fertility goddesses and mother goddesses of Europe and Africa? In the Greek pantheon, the figures of Aphrodite and Athena come to mind as they represent attractive beauty and love on the one hand, wisdom and virtuous action on the other. We may well find a close resemblance in Achilles' mother, Thetis, the *nereid* or sea-nymph. She appears to him on several significant occasions in the *Iliad*. Not only is she his mother, she is his source of divine assistance, and to an extent his knowledge and wisdom. She appears as a luminous mist rising from the sea before she manifests a feminine shape. (Iliad, Book 1, lines 350-425) Her attribute is "silver-footed." Her *apparition*, like that of a few other divinities in the *Iliad*, reads like an instance of manifestation. Formless light takes human shape. In post-classical Greek literature, Sophia should be considered as a possible occurrence of the Maiden. Ekbal's exploration of these issues carries forward the kind of work that the anthropologist and student of religion, Mircea Eliade pioneered. Ekbal's essay alone makes the acquisition of *Scripture and Revelation* worthwhile.

Stephen Lambden surveys Christian, Muslim, Bábí and Bahá'í interpretations of the figure of the Paraclete (or "Counsellor") in the Gospel of John. His detached presentation allows the reader to participate in his comparison of scripture, prophecy,

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6 *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1965) 101.

7 *Ibid*., 121.

commentary and interpretation. He shows that while each religion interpreted the Biblical prophecies differently, they respond to a shared promise of continuity in divine guidance. Lambden offers a research paper that describes the occurrences of and references to the figure of the paraclete or comforter in Christian, Muslim and Bahá'í scriptures. He presents a fascinating collection of texts that allows for serious comparative scriptural study. I think he would do well to elaborate more extensively the implications of his research.

Khazeh Fananapazir applies a similar approach to that of Stephen Lambden when he investigates several religious traditions for the occurrences of terms "Day of God" (*Yawmu'lláh*) and "the Days of God" (*Ayyámu'lláh*). He takes as his starting point the work of Hájí Mihdí Arjmand, the person in whose honour the conferences were held. He then assembles a useful collection of references from Christian, Muslim, Shaykhi, Bábí and Bahá'í scriptures and writings. Like Lambden, he avoids elaborate interpretation in favour of enabling the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. He selects a passage from the writings of Shoghi Effendi as the concluding observation on the meaning of these terms.

Robert Stockman assigns three categories to Bahá'í scripture: revelation (by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh), interpretation (by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi), and elucidation (by the Universal House of Justice.) He discusses the parameters and functions associated with each category. He thoughtfully examines quotes from each figure that suggest certain limitations on omniscience and infallibility. Stockman's discussion addresses a recurring question in Bahá'í scholarship regarding the parameters of authority and potential or actual limitations to the infallibility of the central authorities in the Bahá'í Faith. He begins by contrasting the primacy of the concept of revelation in Bahá'í thought with its precarious position in academia, where its assignation to scripture is either rejected as falling outside the parameters of scholarly inquiry or downplayed and held in doubt, even among Christian scholars. He then asks if current descriptions and definitions of revelation, whether by Bahá'ís, Christians, or academics, are adequate. He answers in the negative and observes that "the situation appears to be more complicated than one might initially think…. Further, in the process of such explorations, one should feel free to ask tough questions from the perspective of faith…. An investigation of revelation does not require a choice between honesty and respect; rather, both are necessary." Stockman explains that "revelation…appears to have a dual nature: divine origin and earthly expression. The words, the grammar, the style, the brain and the hand or voice will all leave traces that we can identify in the thought of God when it becomes text. They may all generate limitations on the revelation, as Bahá'u'lláh Himself suggests when He laments 'how great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain!'"(54-55) The deft phrase, "the thought of God when it becomes text," exemplifies Stockman's ability to express complex concepts in accessible and provocative language.

Seena Fazel addresses a subject important to anyone engaged in dialogue with followers of other religions in his essay "Understanding Exclusivist Texts." He suggests that as religions assert their claims for uniqueness and universality, they can foster notions of exclusive access to truth and salvation. Such ideas may lead to spiritual pride and divisiveness. He examines how Christian scholars and theologians have addressed this problem as they come to terms with religious pluralism. Fazel identifies several

problems or "interpretive errors" that often accompany the use of "exclusivist texts." These include "erroneous texts, erroneous interpretations, and misrepresentative texts." He then identifies modes of expression and types of language (diction) used in sacred scripture for various purposes. These are "survival language, apocalyptic language, confessional language, and action language." Failure to recognize these different modes of expression can lead to erroneous interpretation or reliance on misrepresentative texts. He then turns to the Bahá'í writings to examine the potential for similar problems. He examines selected passages in the Bahá'í writings that could present difficulties to the general reader and that Bahá'ís have used or might use to advance their own exclusivist claims. Fazel calls our attention to the significant dimensions of voice in the Bahá'í writings. Since Bahá'u'lláh has affirmed the multiplicity of meaning in his writings, we must be attentive to literary structures and shifts in the speaking voice. Attentiveness to this point would temper the language of interfaith dialogue. Fazel offers a particularly useful analyses of the "Tablet of Ahmad" (Arabic) and its potential difficulties. "But perhaps the strongest voice [in the Tablet] is 'action language'. Bahá'u'lláh calls the Bábí community to follow the laws of the Báb at a time when it was 'in such a state of deprivation and perversity': 'O people be obedient to the ordinances of God, which have been enjoined in the Bayán.' Another element of its 'action language' is aimed at the Tablet's recipient, Ahmad, calling him to proclaim Bahá'u'lláh as 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' to the Bábís." He then addresses the most problematic passage, "*He who turns away from this Beauty hath also turned away from the Messengers of the past*…." He comments, "The Arabic for 'turning away', *i'rád*, implies willful rejection. On this level, it remains applicable to Bahá'ís who are reminded of the dynamic of belief in Bahá'u'lláh, the lifelong challenge of mystical insight, *'irfán,* into the Manifestation. Thus, the verse would be misinterpreted if understood to refer to the salvation of non-Bahá'ís" (270-71). While Fazel could have suggested several other interpretive manoeuvres to address the problems of these passages, his reading is faithful to the text, the subtleties of language and the larger context of Bahá'u'lláh's other writings. He provides Bahá'í readers with very useful models for sensitive and insightful readings to resolve difficult questions and common misinterpretations. I would offer one caution for such a project. If we adhere too closely to the contextualization of these utterance, we may miss the larger structures found in the writings. This can create two problems. One the one hand, it may lead to an exegetical error by excluding appropriate meanings or interpretations. On the other hand, it can limit the emotional and spiritual impact of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation on the mind and heart of the reader. Fazel acknowledges this problem, particularly with texts that he identifies as using "confessional" or "action language." These categories cannot be applied rigidly. As Fazel notes with the "Table of Ahmad," several voices may function together in a single text. Scholars need to exercise great caution so that their readings do not limit the multiplicity of potential meanings in the revelation.

Julio Savi, William Barnes, and Ross Woodman conduct internal scriptural analyses. Julio Savi discusses "The Love Relationship between God and Humanity: Reflections on *The Hidden Words* of Bahá'u'lláh." William Barnes attempts a comparative reading of themes of "Origin, Fall and Redemption" in Biblical and Bahá'í texts. His fascinating discussion draws on the work of Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, and Carl Jung. Yet the intersection of Christian concepts of fall and redemption with

Bahá'u'lláh's healing vision of unity misses the Qur'anic elements of original nobility, forgetfulness, and personal responsibility. Woodman's "Inner Dimensions of Revelation" traces the progression of masculine and feminine imagery associated with revelation from Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Íqán* to the "Tablet of Carmel." He focuses on the use metaphor, the unveiling of meaning, and the spiritual marriage between the Maid of Heaven and the Lord of the Age.

This wide-ranging collection of essays and studies offers provocative insights, raises profound questions and suggests many fruitful avenues of inquiry. Bahá'í scholars are expanding the range of their inquiries and the diversity of tools they utilize. The contributors demonstrate the value of developing new approaches to the study of the Bahá'í writings. They initiate the reader into a process of discovery and avoid the formulation of definitive answers. We look forward to the publication, anticipated by the editor in his forward, of the proceedings of other Irfan conferences .

Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha 'i Faith
Author: Christopher Buck
Publisher: State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999, 402 pages
Reviewer: William P. Collins

If the Bahá'í Faith has a specialist in comparative religion, it is Christopher Buck. His earlier work, *Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1995), was the first full-length English-language study of this particular Bahá'í scripture. Buck's study made more widely accessible within Bahá'í scholarly discourse such existing concepts as the "messianic secret" to denote Bahá'u'lláh's as-yet-undeclared station as a Manifestation of God which is at the heart of the Íqán, and "realized eschatology" to characterise the nature of Bahá'u'lláh's exegesis and revelation.

Buck has made an even more significant contribution with *Paradise and Paradigm*, the published version of his doctoral dissertation. When a study breaks new ground in Bahá'í scholarship, it is not an easy task to wrap one's mind around its significance. When that study also enters unexplored realms in the entire craft of *Religions-wissenschaft,* appropriate review is made even more difficult. This volume is certainly, from this reviewer's perspective, the best comparative work on the Bahá'í Faith and another religious tradition that has yet appeared, and may serve as a model for future such studies. It succeeds by its depth and its respectful approach to the unfamiliar paradigms of another religious culture. It also succeeds by making explicit a whole range of symbols in the Bahá'í paradigm that are largely unconscious to Bahá'ís themselves.

Buck has created a new methodology in comparative religion termed "symbolic paradigm analysis," and then applied it to the rich spiritual worlds of Persian Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith. He did so by testing a hypothesis: "'Parallels' yield paradoxes of commensurability resolvable by paradigm 'logics' within religious systems, resulting in symbolic transformation." The statement boils down to this: two religions may appear to have the same or similar symbols, but the way to understand any real similarities or differences in the symbols' meanings must be found through the religious paradigms within which they are applied. The volume has an initial chapter dealing with the definitions, issues, and problems presented by a comparative study of the symbols and paradigms in two traditions. Buck focuses the main part of his study on the imagery of paradise, and what such imagery signifies in Persian Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith. Buck then proceeds with historical and symbolic profiles of Persian Christianity and of the Bahá'í Faith, each of which is a self-contained and fascinating review.

Buck has framed his argument in a set of parallel overviews of Persian Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith. He sets forth a historical profile and a symbolic profile for each tradition. The historical profiles could not, from a Bahá'í perspective, be carried out on an absolutely symmetrical basis. The primary sources for Buck's historical profile of Persian Christianity are works by Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373 CE) and Aphrahat "the Persian Sage" (d. 345 CE). Ephrem in particular was a significant writer and creator of the symbolic world of Persian Christianity. Neither of these figures, however, makes the kind of divine truth claims that Bahá'u'lláh does. However, from the point of view of value to each tradition, the historical reviews are balanced reviews of source documents for symbolic worldviews. Buck indicates that Persian Christianity is a response to late

antiquity, and that the Bahá'í Faith is a response to the crisis of modernity, so succinctly noted by Ninian Smart who wrote of the Bahá'í Faith that, "It is an example of a spiritual revolution which intuitively recognized the global state of world culture before its time and gave religious preparation for this unified world."[1] Buck's historical profile of the Bahá'í Faith is uniquely arranged around the framework of Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawḥ-i-Bis͟hárát*, and the notion that Bahá'u'lláh's reforms involve desacralization of certain constraining religious formulae of the past, and sacralization of certain social notions that might be viewed as secular. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh abolished holy war, confession to anyone but God, and the destruction of books; yet on the other hand, He made sacred such concepts as interfaith amity, constitutional monarchy, and the pursuit of peace. It is possible to think of the Bábí-Bahá'í movements as a "response" to modernity if it is thought of as arising out of purely social, psychological and historical forces, and indeed works by Cole and Amanat take this view.[2] There is another perspective that might also have been pursued by Buck—the extent to which the works of Ephrem or the scriptural works by Bahá'u'lláh may have reflected an impulse to remake or repossess worlds that had moved out of old paradigms into new ones. There is a mythic belief in the Bahá'í Faith that the advent of Bahá'u'lláh set in motion, invisibly, the changes that have made the modern world. That world must now be sacralized. In that sense, rather than being a response to modernity, the Bahá'í Faith would be viewed as the instrument for infusing into the modern world the holiness that it needs in order to operate on a moral and ethical plane. In emphasizing the particular points made by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Lawḥ-i-Bis͟hárát*, Buck may have selected a text that tends to be less concerned with the mysticism and personal devotion central to other of Bahá'u'lláh's works.

The symbolic profiles are extremely interesting and less constrained by the framework that Buck placed on his historical profiles. The symbolic profiles have a single framework to facilitate comparison. Each profile notes the key scenarios, root metaphors and symbolic paradigm of the religion being treated. The scenarios and metaphors are classified as either doctrinal, ritual, ethical, experiential, mythic or social. Buck comes up with the following symbols that he compares:

KEY SCENARIOS		
	Persian Christianity	**Bahá'í Faith**
Doctrinal	the way	the promised one
Ritual	the robe of glory	the covenant
Ethical	sons and daughters of the covenant	illumination
Experiential	the wedding feast	the lover and the beloved
Mythic	the harrowing of hell	the maid of heaven
Social	Noah's ark/the mariner	crimson ark/holy mariner

[1] Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 480.

[2] Juan R. I. Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Bahá'í Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), especially as stated in the introduction. Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), particularly the epilogue.

ROOT METAPHORS		
	Persian Christianity	**Bahá'í Faith**
Doctrinal	the physician	the physician
Ritual	the medicine of life	wine/the water of life
Ethical	the mirror	mirror/gems
Experiential	the pearl	the journey
Mythic	the tree of life	the lote tree/Sinai
Social	paradise	paradise

The volume concludes with chapters that review and draw conclusions about paradise similarities and paradigm differences. It is not possible to do justice to Buck's conclusions in a short review, but in summary, the similar symbols in Persian Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith are ensconced in two different paradigms about soteriology (the theology of salvation). According to Buck, Persian Christianity's paradigm is sacramental; the Bahá'í Faith's is a paradigm about unity. Therefore Jesus, as "the Way" in Persian Christianity, achieves God's purpose of providing sanctification and immortality through the Eucharist—a notion totally absent from the Bahá'í notion of prophetic history exemplified by Bahá'u'lláh as "the Promised One" who is the return of the bounty and perfections of Jesus, and whose purpose is unific rather than sacramental. The book argues persuasively that the Bahá'í Faith seeks a more collective salvation of humankind on a broader plain of unity, rather than on the sacramental and/or individual level of Persian Christianity and Christianity generally. This is an important foray into the deeper realm of each religion's framework of understanding. As even a cursory glance at the tables of key scenarios and root metaphors will show, there is a deceptive similarity to the symbols. Rather it is the underlying meaning, the ultimate concern, of each religion that must be uncovered through the symbols.

If there is any criticism to make of this work, it is that the Bahá'í Faith and Persian Christianity surely have paradigms that are of greater complexity than Buck was able to convey in the limited structure of his book. Buck uses an operational definition of "sacrament" as a priest-mediated sign or symbol of a spiritual reality. Although it could be argued that the Bahá'í Faith has formal religious acts that are symbols of a higher spiritual reality, and that observance of them contributes both to individual well-being and to unity of the community, they are not sacraments in this stricter sense. While the unity paradigm is the overarching frame of symbolic interpretation, there are incorporated in the Bahá'í Faith elements of other paradigms such as those of individual salvation (a Christian paradigm), family salvation (a Mormon paradigm), and the like. Nevertheless, as Buck demonstrates, the unity paradigm is the high-level prism through which Bahá'ís give everything else colour.

An additional benefit that this work affords to the Bahá'í community is the opportunity for profound learning about Christian communities of Iran that are relatively unknown in the west. The discovery of a Christian world unlike the one we know is refreshing and challenging. That Persian Christian symbols resonate with Bahá'ís is a startling discovery. Such symbols simultaneously carry some different meanings as mediated by the Persian Christian and Bahá'í paradigms. Bahá'ís therefore owe three debts to Christopher Buck's *Paradise and Paradigm*. First, that we perforce had to

absorb the symbolism of an unfamiliar faith community. Second, that we then had the opportunity to see our own symbolic worldview with new eyes. And third, that we have before us a new model of comparative religious studies for reading symbolic similarities in light of paradigmatic differences.

The larger dimension of Buck's work is its contribution to the study of religious mythology in the broad sense of the universe of metaphors, analogies, signs, symbols, and stories that make up the cosmologies and worldviews of human beings. That there are similarities in symbols, but differences in the paradigms ("myths"), of two religions means that the created world affords us symbols that can be recycled and yet can be understood in an infinite number of ways. For this very reason, the scholar and the believer are presented with problems of interpretation that suggest a need to guard against two extremes. The well-known mythologist Joseph Campbell described these extremes as:

> ... the positivistic...represented, on the one hand, by religious experiences of the literal sort, where the impact of the daemon, rising to the plane of consciousness from its place of birth on the level of the sentiments, is taken to be objectively real, and on the other, by science and political economy, for which only measurable facts are real... Whenever a myth has been taken literally its sense has been perverted...[and] whenever it has been dismissed as merely priestly fraud or sign of inferior intelligence, truth has slipped out the other door.[3]

Paradise and Paradigm avoids these extremes. It is a work of scholarship that can see clearly from outside, and yet impart inner truth. It treats, with tremendous respect, accuracy and courtesy, two religious traditions. It catalogues, with objectivity and due regard for faith and science, the symbolic universes of Persian Christians and Bahá'ís. For that reason, I believe that this tool will inspire a wealth of better studies and sound dialogue with other religious traditions, and will help those who are Bahá'ís to understand more deeply the mythic and symbolic universe of their own faith.

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[3] Joseph Campbell, *Oriental Mythology* (New York: Penguin, 1962) 27.

Unofficial Bahá'í Lore
Author: David Piff
Publisher: George Ronald, Oxford, 2000, 584 pages
Reviewer: Iarfhlaith Watson

Never judge a book by its cover. There is something unappealing about this book's cover, its size, and title. Yet, when I began to read I found it to be a most enjoyable book. I did hesitate at my enjoyment, however, and wondered if there was something risqué about its content that appealed to me. I pushed that thought aside and read it over a short period of time and found it not to be the boring tome that I had initially expected.

What is Bahá'í lore? According to David Piff, Bahá'í lore is unofficial information within the Bahá'í community. This unofficial information comes in various guises, such as gossip, rumour, hearsay, etc. Piff does not discuss the vast differences between these types of unofficial information. Sociologically, it would be interesting to come to some understanding of these differences and how they are related systemically in different ways to the worldview of Bahá'ís. For Bahá'ís, it would be interesting to have a line drawn between spiritually acceptable forms of unofficial information and the more destructive forms usually referred to as backbiting.

Related to the differences within unofficial information is the question of the accuracy of some of these claims. Bahá'ís would be interested, where possible, to know the source of the information and how it relates to the official version. The closest Piff comes to this is to argue that while Bahá'í lore is naive, unnuanced and inconsistent, it is closely related in theme and content to official teachings. It is clear, however, that he wasn't interested in the origin or accuracy of the information, but rather, in its function in constructing a Bahá'í worldview. I do not find this satisfactory. A single individual, by and large, reports each rumour. There is no evidence that these "rumours" are not isolated instances of misunderstandings that are then conveyed to the author by another individual without corroboration. There are many instances where the "lore" is inaccurate. One respondent claimed that "you have to do ablutions with cold water" (174), yet, in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh said that, "Warm water may be used in times of bitter cold". Curiously, the same respondent reported that, "You have to do them with hot water" (174). Another respondent reported that "heavy petting and everything else short of actual intercourse is permissible for unmarried Bahá'í couples" (278) and also that the marriage of a couple whom had engaged in premarital sex is "foredoomed" to failure (277). She also reported that, "If you begin breakfast before the sun comes up, you can finish eating after the sun comes up without having broken the fast," even though Bahá'u'lláh stated in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* that to fast means to "Abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sundown." This leads to two problems. First, these individual misunderstandings cannot be defined as community lore if they are confined to individuals. Second, where some of the information appears relatively accurate and believable and other information appears completely inaccurate, and perhaps even hurtful backbiting, there is a blurring of the distinction between the acceptable and the unacceptable and between truth and falsity. To a certain extent the truth is made false and falsity made true.

This blurring is evident not only between the different types of information, but also between unofficial and official Bahá'í information. There is no marker laid down around the accuracy or inaccuracy of unofficial information relative to official Bahá'í

information and especially to the Bahá'í writings. The impression is left that there is an unofficial Bahá'í tradition and that it is an accepted part of Bahá'í doctrine.

The original aim of the research was "to identify misinformation within popular Bahá'í discourse" (8). Although my comments above make it clear that I regret that the author did not retain at least some of this original intent, I am extremely interested in what the research became—"an effort to investigate how the discourse of the community, regardless of its canonical accuracy, contributes to and reflects the process of creating a Bahá'í world view and reinforcing Bahá'í self-understanding" (8-9). This sounds like a most welcome contribution to the sociological study of the Bahá'í Faith.

In the main chapters of the book Piff outlines Bahá'í lore around a number of "topics." These chapters deal with lore around Bahá'í teachings, enemies of the Faith, conversion, important figures in the Faith, celebrities, and unofficial interpretation by Bahá'ís of world events, especially of an impending catastrophe. In discussing these topics Piff attempts to explain the existence of these "rumours."

Piff's descriptions and explanations are generally appealing and sensible. For example, he claims that rumours about Bahá'í teachings occur as a result of a lack of information. The most pertinent example is the discourse surrounding the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* before it was fully published in English in 1992. He claims that this discourse, which surrounds some problematic areas of Bahá'í history, functions to alleviate uncertainty. There is, however, a clear need to justify these discourses and support them with evidence. For example, he claims that anecdotes about dire consequences for enemies of the Bahá'í Faith serve to control the Bahá'ís and allows them to safely ignore criticism.

In the penultimate chapter Piff outlines six functions of Bahá'í lore. These are to validate the "charisma" of the central figures and institutions of the Faith; to humanise the central figures and Bahá'í leaders; to reinforce community boundaries; to establish and sustain Bahá'í identity; for community self-education; and testimonies of Bahá'í living. While these may or may not be valid explanations of the functions of these discourses, I would need to see how these functions relate to the aim of the research, which was "to investigate how the discourse of the community…contributes to and reflects the process of creating a Bahá'í world view." As it stands, the research outlines the rumours and a number of functions they perform without analysing how the discourse performs these functions. It is perhaps a rather functional, tautological and teleological argument—the Bahá'í community needs this lore, therefore it exists.

Piff's work would have been stronger if he had retained some of his original intention and addressed the issue of misinformation. More importantly this research would have benefited from an in-depth sociological analysis of the context from which this lore emerges. This lack of context, this lack of critique of the content of the rumours is the most important limitation of this work. Finally, I am also critical of the conclusions. It is unremarkable to argue that Bahá'í informal discourse is an unofficial version of the Faith. Second, he claims that both the official and unofficial discourses serve the needs of the community. I have argued above that this argument is flawed. Moreover, the author's claim that there is a cognitive and attitudinal correspondence between unofficial and official information would require assessing the misinformation of the unofficial discourse. Even so, Piff's research is an initial foray into an interesting and fruitful topic that makes an important contribution to the sociology of the Bahá'í Faith as well a being an enjoyable—if unsatisfactory—read.

Shoghi Effendi in Oxford
Author: Riaz Khadem
Publisher: George Ronald, Oxford, 1999, 173 pages

Her Eternal Crown, Queen Marie of Romania and the Bahá'í Faith
Author: Della L. Marcus
Publisher: George Ronald, Oxford, 1999, 319 pages

Reviewer: Lil Abdo

It is always a pleasure to see the publication of new literature concerning the history of the Bahá'í Faith in the west. It is especially welcome when the subject matter has not previously been the subject of full scholastic scrutiny. It is undeniable that there is a need for a scholarly biography of Shoghi Effendi but sadly *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford* does not answer this need. In his preface, Khadem points out that his research "had produced only fragments, tiny pieces of information not sufficient to make a book" and in this he is quite correct. His research has produced some interesting information, but as he fails to analyse it or place it in context it remains hidden amongst gratuitous information and long extracts from published sources. He states in the introduction that the book is aimed at ordinary Bahá'ís and consequently written in a simple style using Bahá'í terminology. In fact it is written in what comes across as Bahá'í-jargon, which would reduce even the most objective biography to hagiography.

The book starts with a introductory background to Shoghi Effendi, which closely follows Rúhíyyih Khánum's biography *Priceless Pearl* and, despite interviews with Dr Mo'ayyid in 1970, it adds little new information. Mo'ayyid recalled Shoghi Effendi's happiness at transferring from the Catholic boarding school in Beirut to the Syrian Protestant College, thus confirming his unhappiness at the former establishment documented in *Priceless Pearl*. However, no comment is made to enlighten the reader about the cause of his unhappiness. In describing Shoghi Effendi's time at the Syrian Protestant College, Khadem produces a number of lists. He lists the courses Shoghi Effendi took and the terms in which he took them, the names of the professors and their assistants who taught the courses, and the names of the people who graduated with Shoghi Effendi and the towns from which they came. The problem is that as he gives no indication to the relative importance of these individuals to his subject, we are left unaware of any influence they may have had or what role they played. Whilst this raw data might prove useful to later researchers and as such could have formed an appendix, in its present form it is no more enlightening than listing the people with whom he shared a dentist or waited for a bus. In the period between his leaving the Syrian Protestant College and going up to Oxford, Shoghi Effendi worked for 'Abdu'l-Bahá translating tablets and supplications. Again we are supplied with lists of recipients of tablets but with no indication to their importance. Where the content of the tablet is reproduced it may tell us something about 'Abdu'l-Bahá or the recipient, but nothing about the translator. A large part of this section comprises diary letters of Shoghi Effendi published in *Star of the West*. Although, these provide a fascinating insight into the activities of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, they shed no light on their author as they are purely descriptive. The only insightful comment is about Shoghi Effendi rather than from him,

when 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments to Dr Fallscheer are reproduced from *Priceless Pearl*.

The move to Oxford generally changes the pace of the narrative for the better, and introduces new material. Even so, the author fails to point out the strong connection between the Persian literati and Oxford that originated from the sending of Persian students to western universities by Nasru'd-Din Shah. Khadem points out that Oxford had been "blessed by the footsteps of the Master" (which is "Bahá'í-speak" for 'Abdu'l-Bahá went there), but he does not mention that 'Abdu'l-Bahá went there to meet Professor Thomas Cheyne, and later the same day, to address Manchester College. Eminent members of Manchester College were Philip Wicksteed and Estlin Carpenter. The latter was married to a prominent Bahá'í, Alice Buckton, and therefore Carpenter was well aware of Bahá'í movement. [For more information on Buckton, see page 129 in this issue – Eds.] In his Essex Hall lecture of 1895 Carpenter had discussed the Bab and the Babi movement at length and in a footnote to the published transcript he adds, "The late Master of Balliol once told me that he thought Babism might prove the most important religious movement since the foundation of Christianity."[1]

Although Cheyne was dead and Carpenter retired by the time Shoghi Effendi was in Oxford, it is clear that the choice of Oxford University for his studies was far from random. However, the lack of contacts less than a decade later indicates a decline in Bahá'í influence in academic circles. Shoghi Effendi's admittance to Balliol College was not straightforward. Khadem uncovers his original registration was in a non-college institution affiliated to the university known as the non-collegiate delegacy. He reproduces letters from Shoghi Effendi indicating his concern and anxiety about his failure to gain entry to Balliol, as well as correspondence between the college and the non-collegiate delegacy. It would seem that Shoghi Effendi was the hapless victim of administrative incompetence and university bureaucracy—a situation with which many can empathise. His reaction to this situation and his perseverance in the face of adversity are a fascinating insight into the character of the man who would become Guardian. No less fascinating are the memoirs of Shoghi Effendi's contemporaries at Balliol. Khadem approached 205 men who went up to Balliol between 1918 and 1921, and received 135 replies of which 52 contained information or recollections. These form the most interesting part of the book. These Balliol men, none of whom were or became Bahá'ís, offer a unique picture of Shoghi Effendi. In one of the few passages of analysis, Khadem speculates on the difficulties Shoghi Effendi would have faced fitting in with the English upper class ethos of Oxford. This indeed must have puzzled him as none of the British Bahá'ís were Oxonians and only Esslemont a university graduate. It is a pity that so few of these reminiscences are reproduced or discussed.

For the rest of the description of Shoghi Effendi's stay in England, Khadem relies mainly on published sources, arranged in a chronological narrative that will be interesting reading for his target audience of "ordinary believers." The final chapter is simply repetition. For some reason the Bahá'í jargon is even denser in this chapter and it is liberally sprinkled with "radiant youth," "beloved" this and thats. Why Bahá'í authors still insist on using this type of language is beyond me—if they think it adds dignity either to their work or its subject they are mistaken—it just sounds peculiar. Overall this book has the feel of diligent research hurriedly edited into an overlong book

[1] J. Estlin Carpenter & P.H. Wicksteed, *Studies in Theology* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1903) 254 footnote.

with too much padding.

It is interesting to consider how in the early years of the last century the Bahá'í teachings spread in so many environments. For different reasons and by different means, Khadem discusses how people become aware of things Bahá'í in Oxford colleges, and Della Marcus in *Her Eternal Crown, Queen Marie of Romania and the Bahá'í Faith* explores how the religion first came to attention in the royal palaces of the Balkans. I must confess that prior to reading this book I was woefully ignorant of the story of Queen Marie. I had encountered the denial of her involvement in the Bahá'í Faith by her daughter, Princess Ileana, in William Miller's book *The Bahá'í Faith: its history and teachings*. This caused me to peruse the index of a couple of biographies of the queen and finding no mention of the Bahá'í Faith therein, conclude that the queen had probably made a few polite remarks in response to overtures from Bahá'ís. Consequently, I relegated Queen Marie, along with Cher and Mr Spock, to the netherworld of Bahá'ís whose credentials are entirely composed of the wishful thinking of Bahá'ís. However, Della Marcus' book totally refutes any denial of Queen Marie's involvement with Bahá'ís. It is somewhat odd then that it does not mention the fact that these denials exist. This gives the book a rather unbalanced stance and does not allow the author to develop the thesis. Had Marcus started by pointing out that critics of the Faith had dismissed Queen Marie's involvement and that most biographers had ignored it, it would have given her the opportunity to discuss some very interesting questions. Questions such as: why should Princess Ileana, herself once very interested in the Bahá'í cause, make such a denial, or if Queen Marie totally accepted the Bahá'í teachings (insofar as she understood them), did she ever reject Christianity of the authority of the Church? The answers to these unspoken questions are curiously to be found in the introduction where the "evolutionary" process of the development of the modern Bahá'í Faith is explained but not related to the subject matter of the text. It is pointed out that the prior to the 1940's when incompatibility of membership of the Bahá'í Faith with other religious bodies was made clear many Bahá'ís had "dual memberships," but how that affected Queen Marie and Princess Ileana is not discussed. In my opinion the queen and her daughter totally accepted the Bahá'í movement, which was a supplementary religious movement requiring no conversion experience, but did not embrace the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religion.

Marcus, however, does not set out to provide analysis, but rather to reproduce the correspondence and diary entries concerning the queen's involvement with the Bahá'í teachings and with Martha Root. This she does admirably, although the text is sometimes repetitive when, for example, the same incident is described in a diary entry, a letter, and an article in *Star of the West*. The problem with this approach is that the reader is not given any kind of context or comparison, so whilst Queen Marie's acceptance of Bahá'í Faith, her relationship with Martha Root, and her desire to visit Shoghi Effendi are proved beyond doubt, there is no information about other interests she might have had—did she, for example, also correspond with Theosophists or Christian Scientists?

The importance of this book is that no future biographer will be able to ignore the importance of the Bahá'í message in Queen Marie's life. Some interesting light is shed on the domestic life of European royalty in the first half of the last century. It does not seem to have been a pleasant existence, and Marie was subjected to restrictions, financial

constraints and family dysfunction. Superficially the queen's friendship with Martha Root seems surprising, but Root must have been a wonderful antidote to the intrigues of the court. Root's "handling" of the queen is also interesting—she reports directly to Shoghi Effendi and he intervenes directly only when required. His correspondence with Root indicates his trust in her abilities and the care with which they planned their relationship with the queen. It is no doubt significant that other Bahá'ís did not approach Queen Marie and that, on her tour of North America, the American Bahá'í community communicated with her only by sending flowers. Clearly the Queen's relationship with the Bahá'í Faith had to be carefully managed.

The role of kingship and Bahá'u'lláh's writings to kings and rulers are explained in the introduction, as well as the importance of monarchical acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith. This book will be useful in re-examining this aspect of the writings particularly in England where the House of Windsor has begun to look rather unsteady. Whilst the conversion of Saxon warlords might have worked for the Christian missionary saints, how useful would a strategy of canvassing royalty or the aristocracy be in a more egalitarian society? Overall this book makes a useful contribution to the literature on the history of the Bahá'í Faith. It allows its subjects to speak for themselves and, whilst it is short on analysis, it raises a number of interesting points that can be pursued in further work.

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OBITUARY

Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988)
Professor of Oriental Studies, Encyclopaedic Scholar, Gifted Linguist

The date 29 May 2001 marked the 80th anniversary of Alessandro Bausani's birthday, whose premature death thirteen years earlier, saddening as it was, brought forth many expressions of admiration from his colleagues and students from Europe and beyond. They praised his erudition and the vast range of his academic interests, the eloquence and elegance of his style, and, above all, the power of his creative mind, demonstrated in over 329 publications, plus at least two books that were published posthumously.

Three years after his death, coinciding with his 70th birthday, the University of Rome published *Yad-Nama. In Memoria di Alessandro Bausani* ("In Memory of Alessandro Bausani") in two volumes, containing 74 articles by scholars from around the world on topics related to Islamic studies, the history of science, linguistics, and literature. However, *Yad-Nama* was neither the first, nor the last compilation of studies devoted to Bausani. Ten years earlier, on the occasion of his 60th birthday, a festschrift called *La Bisaccia dello Sheikh* ("The Bag of the Sheikh") was published, including 39 articles by his colleagues and former students at the University of Venice. It demonstrated the respect and affection that a younger generation of Italian orientalists felt towards him. And, in 1995, scholars at the Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, where Bausani held the chair of Persian Studies from 1956 to 1974, a chair to which Urdu and Indonesian were later added, dedicated a volume of 35 studies to his memory, appropriately titled: *Un Ricordo che Non si Spegne* ("A record that will not die"). And finally the journal of the Istituto Per L'Oriente in Rome published its volume 3, *Nuova Serie* (1998), with 9 contributions all dealing specifically with some aspects of the "Maestro's" own scholarly heritage.

Literature and religion fascinated Bausani more than any other subject of academic interest. These two fields with their manifold ramifications in terms of time, country of origin, and language that inspired him to ever new endeavours. The taste for beauty of poetic statement and faith in the basic universality of religious truth motivated him to search for thematic and linguistic interdependence in different cultures and religious traditions. Thus Iran, the homeland of superb poets for over eleven hundred years and the cradle of several great religions from Zoroastrianism to the Bahá'í Faith, became the focal point, but also the springboard of his lifelong study and writing. It is only proper that in all of the volumes mentioned above, Bausani has been remembered as a scholar with the broadest stretch of intellectual curiosity and academic capacity. His mind was open to impressions from different humanistic disciplines, religious traditions, and cultural varieties. He did not limit his linguistic and literary research only to Persian language and literature (which, nevertheless, ranked highest among his contributions). He was a prolific Islamicist who wrote a monograph on Islam, *L'Islam*, in 1980 and dozens of long articles on a variety of Islamic subjects; for example, a substantial volume

on the *Ikhvan as-Safa* (the Brethren of the Purity, a 10th century esoteric religio-philosophic society), entitled *L'Enciclopedia dei Fratelli della Purita. Riassunto,con Introduzione e breve Commento dei 52 Trattati o Epistole degli Ikhwan as-Safa* (Napoli, 1978) (The Encyclopaedia of the Brethren of Purity, a summary with an introduction and brief commentary of 52 treatises and epistles by the members of that society), and a translation of the Qur'án with an extended introduction and copious notes (1955, 1978).

He studied other religions and religious traditions as well. Zoroastrianism and the Bahá'í Faith, separated from each other by nearly three thousand years of religious development in Iran, played a significant role in his thinking and scholarship, not only as different entities worthy of investigation, but as the two ends of a long chain of religious systems and philosophy, all entwined with each other in a large part of the world. Bausani's ideas and studies in this field culminated in one of his most original books, *Persia Religiosa da Zaratustra a Baha'ullah* (1959, 1999; recently published in English with the title: *Religion in Iran. From Zoroaster to Bahá'u'lláh*, translated by J.M. Marchesi. New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2000).

Language had a particular fascination for Bausani, both for its own sake and as the vehicle for the expression of feelings and thoughts. Perhaps no one knows exactly how many languages he knew and to what degree he was able to communicate in them or use them in research. However, it is certain that his gift for languages, at least for reading purposes, was rare. A friend once told me that at the yearly conferences of the European Arabists, Bausani always spoke the language of the host country. In the early sixties when I was in Naples, students from different countries, not conversant in Italian, used to talk with Bausani in their own languages. I jokingly compared him to Solomon who, according to legends based on the Qur'án's *Sura Naml*, spoke the languages of all birds and animals. He had a special knack for making jokes based on the sounds of words and idioms in various languages.

Bausani was an expert in the national literatures of several countries in the Middle and Far East. He wrote three volumes on the literatures of Pakistan and South East Asia, encompassing Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Baluchi, Bengali, Pashtu, and Indonesian, Malay, Burmese, Siamese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Javanese (see *La Bisaccia*, bibliography nos. 72, 143, 153). He also produced entire volumes of annotated translations of important poems, such as, for example, Nezami's *Haft Peikar*, *Le Sette Principesse* ("The Seven Princesses," a medieval Persian romance, 1967), three of Sir Muh. Iqbal's poems: *Il Poema Celeste* (Javidnama, The Book of Eternity), 1952, 1965, *Poesie di Muh. Iqbal* (Poems of Muhammad Iqbal) 1956, and *Golshan-i Raz-e Gadid* (The New Rose Garden of Secrets), 1958. He also translated Khayyam's *Ruba'iyat Quartine* (Quatrains) in 1956 and even Avicenna's *Opera Poetica* (tr. from Arabic and Persian, 1956). However, his opus magnum in literary studies is *Storia della Letteratura Persiana* ("The History of Persian Literature," 1960, 1968) in which he approaches the subject, not chronologically as his predecessors had done, and without filling the pages with mere names, titles, and dates. Instead, after two short chapters on political history and development of the Persian language, he describes the immense body of Persian poetry detached from historical circumstances by analyzing it in terms of motives, lyricism, romances, panegyrics etc. in Qasida, Ghazal, Roba'i, and Masnawi forms.

His deliberate disregard for minute details and variants, overlooking of the textual

borrowings of metaphors and other forms of interdependence, and neglect of other exercises of text verification, may have occasionally led to pitfalls. But Bausani's taste and style, and certainly his inclination to originality, determined his methods and preferences. They left little room for long pauses and painstaking search for sources hard to obtain. He started and finished the *Haft Peikar* translation, as I well remember, within only two months. The number of articles he wrote on individual poets and scholars, on literary genres, on the sciences and medieval scientists in Islamic countries, on socio-political and religious trends, is too large even for cursory references. Poets and mystics from Nezami, Sana'i, 'Attar, Rumi and Hafiz down to Bidel (1644-1720), Ghalib Dihlavi (1797-1869), Hali (1837-1914), Iqbal (1873-1938), Qa'ani (1807-1853), Tahereh (1816-1852), and Na'im Sedehi (1855-1916), are only some of the more famous names, with Rumi and Iqbal faring supreme in his mind. In 1980, years before the recent popular interest in Rumi in western countries, he published an anthology of Rumi's mystical poems, translated and annotated. A number of his non-religious and non-literary articles dealt with geography and astronomy. Abu Raihan al-Biruni (973-1050), the supreme scholar and polymath in the history of Islamic civilization, attracted him greatly (*La Bisaccia*, nos. 20, 179, 182, 192, 193, 229, 233).

Bausani was a true European humanist with deep-rooted ties to and knowledge of western poetry, art, music, and philosophy. His lifelong devotion to his oriental academic interests did not come at the cost of neglecting his own great cultural heritage. The publication of a delightful little volume, *La Bbona Notizzia, Vangelo di Matteo Nella Versione Romanesca di Alessandro Bausani* ("Glad Tidings, The Gospel of Matthew, a Romanesque Version by Alessandro Bausani," published twice in 1992) typified his blending of humour and fascination for languages. It should also be noted that he was a member of the prestigious Academia dei Lincei.

Despite this enormous scholarly productivity, Bausani was a leisurely, easy-going, humble, and unassuming person. No trace of haughtiness or pomposity could be found in his deportment. His sense of humour, openly and unabashedly displayed everywhere and with everyone, revealed much about his inner feelings and views. "Criminal" was his substitute for anyone's name he did not immediately remember, or pretended not to remember. His nonchalant way with people of high and low rank alike was endearing. One day a doorman of the Istituto, who loved Bausani, lifted him and pretended to be about to throw him down from the second floor. Bausani, hardly able to control his laughter, reported the incident to the entire class. His annoyance with university bureaucracy, such as being a member of the Istituto's Council and the resulting functions and obligations, many of them trivial in his view, was well known. His contempt for hypocrites and "Scheinheilige," his cheeky imitation of the accent of Iranians speaking Italian, his amusement at a little girl's pronouncing him "Il vecchio Peccatore" (the old sinner) because he placed a chocolate-box high up on a shelve beyond her reach—these glimpses at Bausani's everyday manner explain why so many found him so warm and engaging.

Perhaps his master prank occurred in 1964, when *Il Libro della Barba*, Bausani's translation of the satirical Rishname ("The Book of the Beard") by Obaid Zakani (d. 1370) was published. At Bausani's suggestion for a celebration, the publisher invited a number of guests whose names were compounds of "barba" (Barbanero, Barbarosso,

Barbalungo, Barbablu, Barbuto, etc.), randomly plucked from Rome's telephone book. It was a comic evening, when the guests, introducing themselves, realised that they were part of a bizarre farce.

Bausani loved many cultures and travelled widely with his beloved wife Elsa without whose devotion and care he felt lost. I have hardly known a couple more united in mutual love and understanding as Elsa and Alessandro. Iran and Pakistan were his two favourite countries. In both he delivered lectures to university audiences in their own languages and acted as cultural ambassador. In 1968, the Bausanis visited Chicago. The Dean of Humanities at the University of Chicago, with a selected group of faculty members, gave a luncheon in Bausani's honour. Near the end of the reception the door opened and, uninvited, a humbly dressed and humble looking man entered. The guests rose to their feet. The "intruder" was, perhaps then the world's most famous scholar of religion alive, Mircea Eliade. Eliade sat down and said he had come to see and to thank the author of an article that had greatly impressed him. He referred to Bausani's article, *Betrachtungen ueber die Zeit in Mythos und Dichtung* ("Thoughts on Time and Myth in Poetry").[1]

These are only some of my reflections from many years of association and friendship with Bausani. I should not end without a few words about his religious affiliation with the Bahá'í Faith. For nearly forty years, since he had accepted Bahá'u'-lláh and joined the Bahá'í community in 1949, he served as a member of the Faith's local and national assemblies in Italy. He was a speaker much in demand at all sorts of Bahá'í gatherings in Italy and beyond. A number of his written contributions about the Bahá'í teachings were published posthumously in a volume called, *Saggi sulla Fede Bahá'í* ("Essays on the Bahá'í Faith", Rome, 1991). His reputation and personal standing drew the attention of many in academic circles to the Bahá'í Faith. It was this religion that crystallized his character and, in a world where many scholars generally agree with Bahá'í principles, but lack the courage to commit themselves to a faith, Bausani stood out and staunchly proclaimed its timely appeal and vital importance for the world. He will be remembered as a Bahá'í who, in harmony with a major principle of this faith, demonstrated the possibility of essential harmony between faith and reason.

Heshmat Moayyad

1 *Antaios* 5 (1963): 201-224 (translated from the original Italian, "Divagazioni sul tempo nel mito e nelle poesia," *Montaggio* 2.3-4 [1954]: 15-37).

Compilation: Writers and Writing

Introduction

The importance of the written word in the Bahá'í religion was established in its first moments. Bahá'u'lláh received this assurance in a dream while incarcerated in the Black Pit: "Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen."[1] While exhortation unsupported by action is considered empty, Bahá'ís regard as worthy the delivery of words that inspire, educate, and transform.

Bahá'u'lláh frequently refers to the power of words and the impact of speech: "If it be Our pleasure," he wrote, "We shall render the Cause victorious through the power of a single word from Our presence... However since Our loving providence surpasseth all things, We have ordained that complete victory should be achieved through speech and utterance, that Our servants throughout the earth may thereby become the recipients of divine good."[2]

Bahá'u'lláh guided his followers in the development of apologetic skills, best exemplified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In *The Secret of Divine Civilization,*[3] 'Abdu'l-Bahá skilfully balances social analysis with spiritual exposition, using language that epitomized Bahá'u'lláh's call for a style of communication replete with tact, wisdom, fairness, and integrity. In 1933, Shoghi Effendi stated, "What the Faith needs, even more than teachers, is books that expound the true significance of its principles in the light of modern thought and social problems."[4] Several writers, including Mirzá Abu'l-Faḍl, John Esslemont, and George Townshend reached standards of excellence.

The present compilation, *Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings on the Subject of Writers and Writing*, indicates that there has been a consistent stream of advice for Bahá'í writers for more than a century. Bahá'u'lláh enjoins the use of words in which "lie hid the property of milk" (#1). Holding fast to the "Root of Knowledge, and to Him Who is the Fountain thereof" (#2) protects the writer from weighing the book of God with "the standards current amongst men." 'Abdu'l-Bahá takes up the theme with his call for language that should be "moderate, tempered and infinitely courteous" (#7), wherein "conclusive and brilliant proofs" should be adduced (#8). Elsewhere, the Universal House of Justice has written that "Content, volume, style, tact, wisdom, timeliness" will lead to the birth of an "etiquette of expression worthy of the approaching maturity of the human race."[5]

Shoghi Effendi's guidance contained here is directed to the specific questions put by writers. One correspondent displays extraordinary literal-mindedness—do shorthand

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1 Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1941) 21.

2 Bahá'u'lláh, "Lawh-i-Siyyid-i-Mihdíy-i-Dahají," *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) 197-198.

3 Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957.

4 From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 6 May 1933 cited in *Unfolding Destiny* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981) 431.

5 The Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989).

or typing constitute "sciences that begin and end in words" (#13)? Another seeks advice on whether writing fiction may be regarded as an appropriate means of spreading the Bahá'í Faith (#15). Some correspondents are clearly seeking the Guardian's approval for a piece of work they have submitted to him (#14), or asking whether following a career as a writer or journalist is appropriate (#16,18,19). It is, of course, important to weigh up these responses in the light of the context of the question asked, and the specific needs of the Faith at the time of answering. At the beginning of this new century when the cultural expression of Bahá'í ideas and values is likely to diversify enormously, one can certainly anticipate the important contribution of Bahá'í writers, cultivating their unique vision, maintaining their personal integrity, producing works which can stand alongside the best of contemporary writing, and as a result, introduce thousands of readers to Bahá'í thought. Many examples from the last thirty years attest to the impact of excellent writing within the Faith, such as the descriptions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Roger White's *A Sudden Music* and *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*,[6] and the brilliant artistry of Marzieh Gail's memoir in the final three chapters of *Arches of the Years*[7] which create for the reader an emotional bond with Shoghi Effendi, unattainable by conventional, factual descriptions.

The challenge for Bahá'í communities is to value and recognise the contribution of writers, in common with other artists and scholars, who may not necessarily conform to expectations. The African American poet Robert Hayden found becoming a Bahá'í extremely difficult because "he was not a group person."[8] Insult was added when the chairperson of a poetry recital that Hayden was giving, asked the award-winning poet, "But what have you done in the way of Bahá'í service?"[9]

This compilation may not only help writers discover their voice but Bahá'í communities to discover their writers. Poet Roger White, addressing a group of youth at the Bahá'í world centre, expressed his "conviction that in the future, increasingly, one important measure of the spiritual maturity and health of the Bahá'í world community will be its capacity to attract and win the allegiance of artists of all kinds, and its sensitivity and imaginativeness in making creative use of them...To the degree the Bahá'í community views its artists as a gift rather than a problem will it witness the spread of the Faith 'like wildfire' as promised by Shoghi Effendi, through their talents being harnessed to the dissemination of the spirit of the Cause."[10] Disseminating the spirit through the pen returns us once more to the promise voiced in the Black Pit of all things being made new through the regenerative power of words.

Robert Weinberg

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6 Oxford: George Ronald, 1983, and Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1983.

7 Oxford: George Ronald, 1991.

8 John Hatcher, *From the Auroral Darkness* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1984) 17.

9 *Ibid*., 29.

10 Roger White, "Bring Chocolate – Advice from a Poet," in *The Language of There* (Richmond, BC: New Leaf Publishing, 1992) 79-80.

EXTRACTS FROM THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS ON THE SUBJECT OF WRITERS AND WRITING

July 1980

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Thou hast written that one of the friends hath composed a treatise. This was mentioned in the Holy Presence, and this is what was revealed in response: Great care should be exercised that whatever is written in these days doth not cause dissension, and invite the objection of the people. Whatever the friends of the one true God say in these days is listened to by the people of the world. It hath been revealed in the Lawh-i-Hikmat: "The unbelievers have inclined their ears towards us in order to hear that which might enable them to cavil against God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting." Whatever is written should not transgress the bounds of tact and wisdom, and in the words used there should lie hid the property of milk, so that the children of the world may be nurtured therewith, and attain maturity. We have said in the past that one word hath the influence of spring and causeth hearts to become fresh and verdant, while another is like unto blight which causeth the blossoms and flowers to wither. God grant that authors among the friends will write in such a way as would be acceptable to fair-minded souls, and not lead to cavilling by the people.

From a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to an individual believer [1]

Say: O men! This is a matchless Day. Matchless must, likewise, be the tongue that celebrateth the praise of the Desire of all nations, and matchless the deed that aspireth to be acceptable in His Sight. The whole human race hath longed for this Day, that perchance it may fulfil that which well beseemeth its station, and is worthy of its destiny. Blessed is the man whom the affairs of the world have failed to deter from recognizing Him Who is the Lord of all things.

"Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", rev. ed.
(Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), XVI, p. 39 [2]

How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made! How manifold are the truths which must remain unuttered until the appointed time is come! Even as it hath been said: "Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it."

Of these truths some can be disclosed only to the extent of the capacity of the repositories of the light of Our knowledge, and the recipients of Our hidden grace. We beseech God to strengthen thee with His power, and enable thee to recognize Him Who is the Source of all knowledge, that thou mayest detach thyself from all human learning, for, what would it profit any man to strive after learning when he hath already found and recognized Him Who is the Object of all knowledge? Cleave to the Root of Knowledge,

and to Him Who is the Fountain thereof, that thou mayest find thyself independent of all who claim to be well versed in human learning, and whose claim no clear proof, nor the testimony of any enlightening book, can support.

"Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", rev. ed.
(Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), LXXXIX, pp. 176-77 [3]

In this Day the secrets of the earth are laid bare before the eyes of men. The pages of swiftly-appearing newspapers are indeed the mirror of the world. They reflect the deeds and the pursuits of divers peoples and kindreds. They both reflect them and make them known. They are a mirror endowed with hearing, sight and speech. This is an amazing and potent phenomenon. However, it behoveth the writers thereof to be purged from the promptings of evil passions and desires and to be attired with the raiment of justice and equity. They should enquire into situations as much as possible and ascertain the facts, then set them down in writing.

From Tarazat, published in "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas"
[rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 39-40 [4]

It ill beseemeth thee to turn thy gaze unto former or more recent times. Make thou mention of this Day and magnify that which hath appeared therein. It will in truth suffice all mankind. Indeed expositions and discourses in explanation of such things cause the spirits to be chilled. It behoveth thee to speak forth in such wise as to set the hearts of true believers ablaze and cause their bodies to soar....

Teach thou the Cause of God with an utterance which will cause the bushes to be enkindled, and the call "Verily, there is no God but Me, the Almighty, the Unconstrained" to be raised therefrom. Say: Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets. Meditate upon that which hath streamed forth from the heaven of the Will of thy Lord, He Who is the Source of all grace, that thou mayest grasp the intended meaning which is enshrined in the sacred depths of the Holy Writings.

From Lawh-i-Hikmat, published in "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas"
[rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 142-43 [5]

Every word of thy poetry is indeed like unto a mirror in which the evidences of the devotion and love thou cherishest for God and His chosen ones are reflected. Well is it with thee who hast quaffed the choice wine of utterance and partaken of the soft flowing stream of true knowledge. Happy is he who hath drunk his fill and attained unto Him and woe betide the heedless. Its perusal hath truly proved highly impressive, for it was indicative of both the light of reunion and the fire of separation.

From Lawh-i-Maqsud, published in "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas"
[rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 175-76 [6]

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

It is my hope that thou mayest succeed in writing thy book. However, the language should be moderate, tempered, and infinitely courteous . Look not at the language used by that hostile writer, for he was prejudiced and unrefined. Any person, with the slightest degree of fairness, will understand that his writing is totally biassed and inspired by enmity. This is enough proof that what he hath written is spurious.

From a Tablet to an individual believer – translated from the Persian [7]

Pure souls, such as Mirza Abu'l-Faḍl, upon him be the Glory of God, spend their nights and days in demonstrating the truth of the Revelation, by adducing conclusive and brilliant proofs and expanding the verities of the Faith, by lifting the veils, promoting the religion of God and spreading His fragrances.

From a Tablet to an individual believer – translated from the Persian [8]

Great care should be exercised in preparing this translation. Mr.... should make a supreme effort so that the language will be most exquisite, eloquent and lucid, even if the translated text is to be submitted to, and made dependent upon the opinions of, experts in language.

From a Tablet to an individual believer – translated from the Persian [9]

The subjects to be taught in children's school are many, and for lack of time We can touch on only a few: First and most important is training in behaviour and good character; the rectification of qualities; arousing the desire to become accomplished and acquire perfections, and to cleave unto the religion of God and stand firm in His Laws, to accord total obedience to every just government, to show forth loyalty and trustworthiness to the ruler of the time, to be well wishers of mankind, to be kind to all.

And further, as well as in the ideals of character, instruction in such arts and sciences as are of benefit, and in foreign tongues. Also, the repeating of prayers for the well-being of ruler and ruled; and the avoidance of materialistic works that are current among those who see only natural causation, and tales of love, and books that arouse the passions.

To sum up, let all the lessons be entirely devoted to the acquisition of human perfections.

Here, then, in brief are directions for the curriculum of these schools.

Greetings be unto you, and praise.

From a Tablet to an individual believer, published in "The Bahá'í World", vol. 16, p. 37 [10]

From letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers

I am overjoyed at such a splendid production. I strongly urge you to secure the assistance of one of the best and most respected publishers in England and to ensure that it will receive the fullest attention regarding its outward form and style of printing. The book is correct in its presentation of the essentials of the Faith, eminently readable, exquisitely arranged, and has a distinctive charm unsurpassed by any book of its kind whether written by Eastern or Western believers. I heartily recommend it to every earnest and devout teacher of the Cause.

In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 11 November 1927
written on his behalf [11]

Your literary ability makes you specially qualified to teach the Cause. For in the world of to-day much can be achieved through the power of pen. All you need is to try to deepen your knowledge of the history and the teachings of the Faith, and thus well-equipped you will assuredly win a glorious success. Bahá'u'lláh has given us the assurance that He will be always on our side and will give us all the help we may need. You should, therefore, arise steadfastly to serve our beloved Cause and dedicate the rest of your life to the noble ideal which it seeks to realize.

30 July 1932 [12]

What Bahá'u'lláh meant primarily with "sciences that begin and end in words" are those theological treatises and commentaries that encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth. The students would devote their life to their study but still attain no where.

Bahá'u'lláh surely never meant to include story writing under such a category; and shorthand and typewriting are both most useful talents very necessary in our present social and economic life.

What you could do, and should do, is to use your stories to become a source of inspiration and guidance for those who read them. With such a means at your disposal you can spread the spirit and teachings of the Cause; you can show the evils that exist in society, as well as the way they can be remedied. If you possess a real talent in writing you should consider it as given by God and exert your efforts to use it for the betterment of society.[1]

30 November 1932 [13]

He has received and read with deepest interest the manuscripts you had enclosed in your letter, one entitled ..., and the other consisting of a long poem in which you had made an attempt to present the Message indirectly.

As to this last one, he approves of your suggestion to write a sequel to it, and to refer more directly to the Cause. He would, however, advise you to couch the whole subject in such a form as to make it interesting and appealing to the non-Bahá'í reader. The direct presentation of the Teachings is surely highly important and even indispensable nowadays. But it should be done with utmost care and tact, and in a manner that would appeal to the non-believers.

31 December 1935 [14]

There is a great need for teaching the Cause at present; every Bahá'í should teach, and each one has his own capacities and can expect to reach certain souls who respond to his efforts. Your gift of writing should by all means be utilized in serving the Cause. Every one is perforce only an instrument in giving the Message which is more or less coloured by his own capacities and approach to life. There is no harm in this. You should write

[1] This advice was given to a believer who asked whether such skills as shorthand and typing, and the writing of stories dealing with human experience, would be classified among those sciences that "begin and end in words", as mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh.

freely what you feel, what you wish to convey to the mind of the reader; afterwards you yourself, and those who pass upon Bahá'í manuscripts and publications, can make sure that all your points conform to the teachings. The way you give them out and present them is an individual matter and there is no objection to this at all.

He would not recommend fiction as a means of teaching; the condition of the world is too acute to permit of delay in giving them the direct teachings, associated with the name of Bahá'u'lláh. But any suitable approach to the Faith, which appeals to this or that group, is certainly worthy of effort, as we wish to bring the Cause to all men, in all walks of life, of all mentalities.[2]

23 March 1945 [15]

Regarding your question about what courses would be most useful for you to study: He feels that both radio and journalistic work are fields in which the Bahá'ís could well learn to express themselves for the sake of helping their teaching work, and advises you, if you have the time, to study these subjects.

15 August 1945 [16]

Your suggestion regarding a book for the general public is a good one. The question is not only have we Bahá'ís competent to present this subject in a way which would catch the attention of the public, but also even if such a book existed would it achieve its end? We have, unfortunately, not very many capable Bahá'í writers, and the condition of confusion in the World is such that it seems doubtful if such a work would arrest the attention of distracted mankind.

However, we need more and better Bahá'í books, and he suggests you present your idea to the German, British and American NSA's.

26 October 1950 [17]

There is no objection to your being a journalist as long as you try to keep off political issues; especially the big East-West issue. You have a talent for writing, and it might be of help to you financially and in making contacts for the Faith.

30 November 1950 [18]

Regarding the advice you asked him for, he feels that to devote all one's studies with the object of becoming a Bahá'í author, is rather risky. We need Bahá'í authors badly, but you have to be assured that you have the talent to earn your living in that field, and also serve the Faith in it.

He feels that the best thing for you to do is to devote your studies to acquiring a sound education, if you like along literary lines, and then see what develops.

14 May 1957 [19]

From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

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2 This advice was given to a believer who sought the counsel of the Guardian on ways one might use writing skills to teach the Faith. The believer proposed writing a novel in which the Bahá'í teachings and their source would be presented indirectly and in such a way as to stimulate curiosity and search by the reader.

The Universal House of Justice has considered your letter of 6 December 1979 concerning the novel you are writing involving a romantic relationship and asking whether you should continue this project in light of the advice of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that curricula of schools should avoid tales of love.

We have been asked to say that what should be avoided are stories that arouse the passions. From what you say, the purpose of your story is to appeal to higher motivations in life and, in fact, to spread the spirit and teachings of the Cause.

23 December 1979 to an individual believer [20]

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1998–2000

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