

# Bahā'īs

(6,160 words)

Adherents of Bahā'ism (*ahl al-Bahā'*), widely known as the “Bahā'ī Faith,” an independent world religion with Islamic origins. The Bahā'ī religion, a universalization of Bābism, was founded by Mīrzā Ḥusayn-‘Alī Nūrī (1817–92), known as Bahā' Allāh/Bahā'ullāh (Splendor of God; standardized Bahā'ī spelling, Bahā'u'llāh), in Baghdad in the year 1863. In 1866, it emerged as a distinct faith-community in Adrianople (Edirne). Bahā'ī identity is fully independent. While Bahā'īs do not identify as Muslims, Bahā'īs regard the Qur'ān with profound respect as divine revelation, as do Muslims, except that Bahā'īs have their own corpus of sacred scriptures, quite apart from the Qur'ān.

Bahā'īs also believe in Muḥammad as the “Seal of the Prophets and of the Messengers” (going beyond the Qur'ān's honorific of Muḥammad as the “Seal of the Prophets” (*khātām l-nabiyīn*) in Q 33:40) and hold him to be the final Messenger for the “Cycle of Prophecy.” Prophecy foretells, as well as tells forth. In Bahā'ī doctrine, the “Cycle of Prophecy (*kawr-i nubuvvat*) or “Adamic Cycle” (*kawr-i ādam*) prepared the world for the “Cycle of Fulfillment” (*kawr-i taḥaqquq va ikmāl*) or “Bahā'ī Cycle” (*kawr-i Bahā'ī*), symbolically foreshadowed in the Qur'ān as the “Great Announcement” (*al-nabā' al-‘aẓīm*, Q 78:2; Bahā'ullāh, *Kitāb l-aqdas*, par. 167). This Cycle of Fulfillment was inaugurated by the Bāb, who prophesied the imminent advent of “Him who God shall manifest” (*man yuẓhiruhu llāh*), whom the majority of Bābīs (followers of the Bāb) came to recognize as Bahā'ullāh.

A Bahā'ī theology of pluralism, with special reference to Islam, may be based on a statement by Shoghi Effendi, “Guardian” of the Bahā'ī Faith (1921–57): “Unequivocally and without the least reservation it proclaims all established religions to be divine in origin, identical in their aims, complementary in their functions, continuous in their purpose, indispensable in their value to mankind.” (S. Effendi, *World Order*, p. 58). This, of course, applies as much to Islam as to other religions.

Having arisen out of Islamic historical context and milieu, the Bahā'ī religion has certain Islamicate elements, yet Bahā'ism exhibits certain other features that are *supra*-Islamicate and distinct in character. For instance, Islamic doctrine adheres to a belief in successive revelations,

beginning with Adam, and culminating with the Prophet Muḥammad as the “Seal of the Prophets.” In Bahā’ī teachings, the idea of *successive* revelations is invested with a teleology that transforms it into “*progressive* revelation” (*tajdīd va takāmul-i adyān*) where the succession of Messengers throughout the history of religions is not only sequential but cumulative, coefficient with the social evolution of humanity (Y. Ioannesyan, The concept of the “manifestations of God’s will”). As humankind advances socially, so does the corresponding need for guidance and laws suited to the exigencies of the day and age. Here, “progressive” conveys the notion of “superior” in respect of “fuller” and “more advanced,” without making a claim of intrinsic superiority.

Before focusing on Bābī and Bahā’ī approaches to the interpretation of the Qur’ān, some distinctive features of Bahā’ism may be highlighted here. Bahā’ullāh, on 22 April 1863 privately declared himself “Him whom God shall manifest” (*man yuzḥiruhu llāh*), the messianic theophany foretold by the Bāb. In open epistles to Queen Victoria, Napoleon III, Pope Pius IX and other world leaders during the Adrianople and ‘Akkā (Haifa) periods (1864-92), Bahā’ullāh publicly proclaimed himself the advent of the millenarian “Promised One” of all religions—a “multiple-messiahship” (C. Buck, *Unique*, 158), i.e. the Zoroastrian Shāh Bahrām Varjāvand, the Jewish Everlasting Father (*Isa* 9:6)/Lord of Hosts, the Christian Spirit of Truth, the Shī’ī al-Ḥusayn *redivivus*, the Sunnī return of [Christ](#), and “Him who God shall manifest,” as announced by the Bāb (see [APOCALYPSE](#)).

As “World Reformer” (*muṣliḥ al-‘ālam*), Bahā’ullāh advocated world peace, parliamentary democracy, disarmament, an international language, the harmony of science and religion, interfaith concord as well as [gender](#) and racial equality. From a historicist perspective, Bahā’ī principles represent modernist universalizations of Islamic canons—which were announced during the reform period in the Ottoman Empire where Bahā’ullāh was an exile (Alkan, *Dissent*, p. 90 and ch. 4)—yet transcending the traditional believer/infidel dichotomy (see [BELIEF AND UNBELIEF](#)). On the basis of a comparative approach to the writings of Bahā’ullāh and the Ottoman reformers, we can say that certain ideas, such as the criticism of autocratic rule and its substitution by a constitutional monarchy, certainly converged. The approach of Ottoman and Iranian reformers was embedded in the framework of a modernist or revivalist Islam. However, the responses of Bahā’ullāh—and those of his eldest son and designated successor, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā (1844–1921)—can be regarded as supra-Islamic

and universalistic reforms that went beyond the proposals of the reformers in the Ottoman Empire (Alkan, *Dissent*, p. 218). Much the same held true in comparison with the Islamic reforms advocated by Iranian modernists (Buck, Bahā'ullāh as "World Reformer").

In precocious religious preparation for a global society, Bahā'ullāh's signal contribution was to sacralize certain secular modernist reforms within an irreducibly original paradigm of world unity in which peace is made sacred. By designating his son 'Abdu'l-Bahā (Servant of Bahā', d. 1921) as interpreter, exemplar and successor and by establishing elected councils, Bahā'ullāh instituted his [Covenant](#), symbolized as "the Crimson Ark" (C. Buck, *Paradise*, ch. 5). This is the organizing principle of the Bahā'ī community and the means to safeguard its integrity against major schism. Succeeding 'Abdu'l-Bahā in 1921 as "Guardian" of the Bahā'ī Faith, Shoghi Effendi (d. 1957) globalized and evolved the Bahā'ī administration as a system of local and national Spiritual Assemblies. This led in 1963 to the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, the international Bahā'ī governing [body](#), on Mount Carmel in Haifa, [Israel](#).

The purpose of the Bahā'ī Faith, as the religion is now known, is to unify the world through its principles of unity, which range from family relations to international relations. According to a recent survey, some 50 Bahā'ī principles of unity have been identified in the primary sources (Persian, Arabic and English) as follows:

## 50 Bahā'ī Principles of Unity

I. Individual Relationship with God: (1) "Mystic feeling which unites man with God"; II. Family Relations: (2) Unity of Husband and Wife (*vaḥdat*); (3) Unity of the family (*ittihād va ittifāq dar miyān-i khāndān*); III. Interpersonal Relations: (4) Oneness of Emotions (*iḥsāsāt-i vāhida*); (5) Spiritual Oneness (*vaḥdat-i rawḥānī*); IV. Gender Relations: (6) Unity of the Rights of Men and Women (*vaḥdat-i huqūq-i rijāl va nisā'*); (7) Unity in Education (*vaḥdat-i uṣūl va qavānīn-i tarbiyat*); V. Economic Relations: (8) Economic Unity (*ittihād-i iqtisādī*); (9) Unity of People and Wealth (*ittihād-i nufūs va amvāl*) [i.e. beneficence/philanthropy]; VI. Race Relations: (10) Unity in Diversity; (11) Unity of Races (*vaḥdat-i jins*); VII. Environmental Relations: (12) Unity of Existence (Oneness of Being and Manifestation (Arabic: *vaḥdat al-wujūd wa shuhūd*/Persian: *vaḥdat-i vujūd va*

*shuhūd*); (13) Unity of Species (*vaḥdat-i jins*); (14) Unity with the Environment; VIII. Interfaith Relations: (15) Unity of God (*tawḥīd-i ilāhī*); (16) Mystic Unity of God and His Manifestations; (17) Unity of the Manifestations of God (*maqām-i tawḥīd*); (18) Unity of Truth (*vaḥdat-i ḥaqīqat*); (19) Unity Among Religions (*ittihād dar dīn*); (20) Peace Among Religions (*sabab-i ulfat bayn-i adyān/ṣuḥul bayn-i adyān*); IX. Scientific Relations: (21) Unity of Science and Religion (*vaḥdat-i ‘ilm va dīn*); (22) Methodological Coherence; (23) Unity of Thought (*vaḥdat-i ārā*) in World Undertakings; X. Linguistic Relations: (24) Unity of Language (*vaḥdat-i lisān*); XI. International Relations: (25) Unity of Conscience (*vaḥdat-i vujdān*); (26) Unity in Freedom (*vaḥdat-i āzādī*); (27) Evolving Social Unities; (28) Unity in the Political Realm (*vaḥdat-i siyāsat*); (29) Unity of Nations (*vaḥdat-i vaṭan*); (30) Unity of All Mankind/World Unity (*ittifāq-i kull va ittihād-i ‘umūm/vaḥdat-i ‘ālam-i insānī*); (31) Unity of the World Commonwealth; (32) Unity of the Free; XII. Bahā’ī Relations: (33) Unity of the Bahā’ī Revelation; (34) All-Unifying Power (*jaat-i jāmi‘a*); (35) Unity of Doctrine; (36) Unity of Meaning; (37) Bahā’ī Unity (*vaḥdat-i Bahā’ī*); (38) Unity among Bahā’ī Women (*al-ittihād wa’l-ittifāq*); (39) Unity in Religion (*vaḥdat-i dīnī*); (40) Unity of Station (*ittihād-i maqām*); (41) Unity of Souls (*ittihād-i nufūs*); (42) Unity in Speech (*ittihād dar qawl*); (43) Unity in [Ritual] Acts (*ittihād-i ā’māl*); (44) Unity of Bahā’ī Administration; (45) Unity of Purpose; (46) Unity of Means; (47) Unity of Vision; (48) Unity of Action; (49) Unity of the Spiritual Assembly (*yigānigī*); (50) Unity of Houses of Justice and Governments (Buck, *God & Apple Pie*, p. 329; id., Fifty Bahā’ī principles of unity).

Applying a secular methodology to better understand the genesis of these doctrinal, ethical, social and administrative principles, the Bahā’ī religion may be viewed as a distinctive “response to modernity.” From a faith-perspective, however, Bahā’īs hold that the Bāb and Bahā’ullāh were each the recipients of divine revelation (*wahy*), with new social teachings best suited for modernity and postmodernity.

Bahā’ism underwent transformations in ethos and organization throughout three missionary phases: the Islamic context (1844–92), the international missions (1892–1963) and global diffusion (1963–present). The Islamic context was co-extensive with the combined ministries of Bahā’ullāh and

his precursor, Sayyid ‘Alī-Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819–50), known as the Bāb (Gate), the prophet-martyr of the Bābī movement.

The year 1260/1844 marked the Shī‘ī millennium, a thousand lunar years since the occultation of the Twelfth Imām (see [IMĀM](#); [SHĪ‘ISM AND THE QUR’ĀN](#)). On 22 May 1844 the Bāb effected a decisive, eschatological break from [Islam](#) by means of composing, aloud before a guest, Mullā Husayn Bushrū‘ī (1813–1849), that evening, the first sūra (*Sūrat al-Mulk*) of an exegetical work, entitled *Sustainer of the Names (of God)* (*Qayyūm al-asmā’*), often referred to as the *Commentary on the Sūra of Joseph*, an audacious and revolutionary commentary on the twelfth sūra of the Qur’ān (see [JOSEPH](#)). In this work he “proclaimed himself the focus of an Islamic apocalypse” (T. Lawson, *Structure*, 8).

The Bāb’s earliest works exhibit a conscious effort to extend and amplify a Qur’ānic voice, a crucial warrant of revelation. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the *Qayyūm al-asmā’* is its claim to be the “new Qur’ān” (22). To illustrate this audacious claim, two exemplars may be cited: “And verily, had these two Furqans not been from God, they (i.e. people) would, verily, have found in them more disparities” (QA 99, trans. Y. Ioannesyan, *Prophetic mission of the Bāb*, p. 197). And: “Verily, We have sent down this Book as the mystery of the Qur’ān. ... And there is no one except for those who have renounced God, who would question even one of its letters as not being from God. And verily, God hath sent it (i.e. the Book) down by His pre-existent might to His Remembrance (i.e. the Bāb) anew, with a new Truth, in a new way” (QA 41, *id.*, p. 202). N. Mohammadhosseini, confirming this same claim, explains that the Bāb, in QA 3, “mentions three times that the Qur’ān has been revealed to his heart” (*idem*, *The Commentary on the Sūra of Joseph*, p. 8). Similar claims are made in QA 7 and 26 (*id.*). N. Saiedi states generally: “The *Qayyūm al-asmā’* is also frequently called the ‘Qur’ān’ or the ‘Inner Qur’ān’” (*idem*, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 140). In the first chapter of the QA, the Bāb makes the stunning declaration that his religion is henceforth the “true Islam” to which all should turn: “Thus whoso seeketh Islam (submission to God), let him submit unto this Remembrance. ... Whoso rejecteth this true Islam, God shall not accept, on the Day of Resurrection, any of his deeds” (trans. Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 142).

The QA is written in the form of the divine reality speaking to the Bāb, which Cambridge Orientalist, Edward Granville Browne, presumed to be the “Universal Intelligence” (*‘aql-i kull*) (The Bābis of Persia, p. 909, n. 2). Evidence from the QA, according to Y. Ioannesyan (Prophetic mission of the Bāb, *passim*), shows that the Bāb proclaimed his teaching as an independent divine revelation, while Bābism, from its inception, emerged as a post-Islamic, independent religious system. The divine origin of QA Book and its uniqueness are repeatedly emphasized. The Bāb is privileged in the QA as “the Word of God” (i.e. personifying the Bāb as the recipient and manifestation of divine revelation).

The Bāb clearly differentiates between Muslims (“the people of the Qur’ān”) and the Bābis as “the people of this Book,” referring to the QA). Such evidence, and more, prove that Bābism went well beyond any reformist movement in Islam and that the Bāb did not fall into the category of an Islamic modernist or reformer. No founder of a school would ever claim this station for himself as the Bāb did. The QA is so extraordinary as to be revolutionary within an Islamic context. This remarkable text instantly projected the Bāb beyond the orbit of Islam, notwithstanding the QA’s consciously qur’ānic style and discourse.

One of the Bāb’s most distinctive exegetical techniques is his “exploded commentary,” which is an exegetical *tour de force*. In works on Q 108 and Q 103, the exegesis proceeds “not only verse by verse, or even word by word, but also letter by letter” (T. Lawson, Dangers, 179). For instance, the Bāb wrote a commentary on the sūra of *al-Kawthar* (Q 108), the shortest sūra in the Qur’ān, consisting of four lines of Arabic only. Based on the text of a very early manuscript which originated during the Bāb’s lifetime, the Bāb’s *Commentary on the sūra of al-Kawthar* spans over two hundred pages in length, in which the Bāb interprets every letter of every single word comprising *al-Kawthar* in manifold aspects. This highly mystical and original work is full of imagery that serves as a grammar of symbols vindicating the mission of the bearer of a new religious revelation which the Bāb claimed for himself (Y. Ioannesyan, The Bāb’s Commentary on the sūra of *al-Kawthar*, *passim*). O. Ghaemmaghami reinforces this thesis in a close reading of an episode, found midway through the *tafsīr*, in which the Bāb recounts his meeting with the Hidden Imam. After an in-depth analysis, Ghaemmaghami concludes: “In an exquisite performance of storytelling the Bāb is able to carefully present himself as the promised Imam” (*idem*, The Bāb’s Encounter with the Hidden Imam, p. 185). The Bāb’s commentaries on the Qur’ān are remarkable in that, by force of his

prophetic [authority](#), “interpretation became revelation” (T. Lawson, *Interpretation*, 253). In 1848, he produced a new law code (*Bayān-i fārsī*), paradoxically super-Islamic in piety, yet supra-Islamic in principle. According to A. Eschraghi, the Bāb had three primary purposes in producing this new *sharīʿa*: (1) to prepare for the advent of “He whom God shall manifest”; (2) “to provoke the clerical establishment and shatter the foundations of their often-abused institutionalized authority” which “led to the ulama’s hostility and the Bāb’s subsequent martyrdom”; and (3) to prove the independence of the the Bābī religion from Islam (*idem*, *Undermining the foundations of orthodoxy*, 238).

After the Bāb’s execution (1850) by the Persian authorities, Bahā’ullāh revitalized the Bābī community by employing symbolic interpretation as strategy to abolish episodic Bābī antinomianism. In the Arabic *Tablet of “all food”* (*Lawḥ-i kull al-ṭa’ām*, 1854—note that the titles of Bahā’ī works written in Arabic are conventionally given in Persianized form), Bahā’ullāh related the abolishment of the Jewish dietary restrictions in Q 3:93 to the mystical and cosmological realms. While the Baghdad period (1853–63) was eschatologically charged with his own messianic secrecy (*ayyām-i buṭūn*), Bahā’ullāh, in his pre-eminent doctrinal work, the *Book of certitude* (*Kitāb-i īqān*, hereafter *Īqān*), advanced an extended qur’ānic and biblical argument to authenticate the Bāb’s prophetic credentials. This remarkable text was “revealed” (as stated in the colophon) in the span of 48 hours. It was the late Bahā’ī scholar, Ahang Rabbani, who discovered that the *Īqān* was written in January 1861 (Rabbani, *Conversion*, pp. 34–35). Bahā’ullāh’s repertoire of exegetical techniques includes most of the twelve “procedural devices” attested in the classical commentaries (Wansbrough, *QS*, part ii) as well as others.

Bahā’ullāh’s style of discourse is itself exegetical, with frequent pairings, linked by the Persian metaphorical genitive (*idāfa-yi majāzī*), of qur’ānic symbols and referents. Hermeneutically, *Certitude* resonates with five Islamic orientations to symbolism: 1. the semanticism of rhetoric, especially the science of tropes (*‘ilm al-bayān*); 2. the dialectic of theology (*kalām*); 3. reason (*‘aql*) and [analogy](#) (*qiyās*) as a reflex of philosophy (*falsafa*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*); 4. the use of allusion (*ishāra*) and gnosis (*ma’rifā qalbīya*) in Ṣūfī/Ishrāqī mysticism (see [ṢŪFISM AND THE QUR’ĀN](#)); 5. recourse to apocalyptic presentism, adducing prophetic proof-texts to instantiate a realized [eschatology](#), a common characteristic of millenarian sectarianism.

In his *Commentary on the sūra “By the sun” (Tafsīr sūrat wa-l-shams)*, while critical of rhetoric (*‘ilm al-balāgha*) and the cognate qur’ānic sciences, Bahā’ullāh echoes al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and al-Taftazānī (d. 791/1389) in stressing the need to harmonize literal and figurative interpretations (C. Buck, *Symbol*, 91-2, 104). In his *Tablet on esoteric interpretation (Lawḥ-i ta’wīl)*, citing Q 3:5, Bahā’ullāh states that eschatological verses are properly susceptible to esoteric interpretation (*ta’wīl*) whereas qur’ānic laws are to be understood by their obvious sense (*tafsīr*; see [EXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL](#)).

Islamic prophetology is anchored in the received interpretation of Q 33:40, which is widely believed to establish Muḥammad as the final prophet (see [PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD](#)). In what is perhaps his most significant exegetical maneuver, Bahā’ullāh relativizes that claim in order to supersede it, refocusing the reader’s attention a mere four verses later (Q 33:44) on the eschatological attainment to the presence of God (*liqā’ Allāh*) on the last day (see [ESCHATOLOGY](#)):

Even as the Lord of being hath in His unerring Book (Qur’ān), after (*ba’d az*) speaking of the “Seal” in His exalted utterance: “Muḥammad is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets” (Q 33:40), hath revealed unto all people the promise (*va’da*) of “attainment unto the divine Presence (*liqā’-yi khudā*).” To this attainment to the presence of the immortal King testify the verses of the Book, some of which We have already mentioned (*vide* par. 148: Q 29:23, 2:46, 2:249, 18:110, 13:2). The one true God is My witness! Nothing more exalted or more explicit than “attainment unto the divine Presence” hath been revealed in the Qur’ān. (*va khudā-yi vāhid shāhid-i maqāl ast kih hīch amrī a’zam az liqā’ va asraḥ-ī az ān dar furqān zikr nayāftih.*) Well is it with him that hath attained thereunto, in the day wherein most of the people, even as ye witness, have turned away therefrom.

And yet, through the mystery of the former (*avval*) verse, they have turned away from the grace promised by the latter (*thānī*), despite the fact that “attainment unto the divine Presence” in the “Day of Resurrection” (*liqā’ dar yawm-i qiyām*) is explicitly stated in the Book (Qur’ān). (Bahā’ullāh, *Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, Pars. 181–182; parenthetical references added; id. *Īqān*, Pars. 181–182).



In this pivotal passage, although Bahā'ullāh relates back to “verses of the Book, some of which We have already mentioned,” a quick search of the *Īqān* shows that, in par. 148, Bahā'ullāh cites Q 29:23, 2:46, 2:249, 18:110, 13:2. Yet in this passage, Bahā'ullāh also alludes to a Qur'ānic announcement of the “attainment unto the divine Presence” in the “Day of Resurrection” (*liqā' dar yawm-i qiyām*) that comes “after” (*ba'd az*) the “Seal” verse.

Shoghi Effendi, in his dual role as authorized translator and interpreter of Bahā'ī scriptures, provides a word-for-word, literal translation in rendering the Persian so: “And yet, through the mystery of the former.” Then Shoghi Effendi inserts one word for amplification: “verse” (not in the original Persian). This subtle, yet highly significant, gloss disambiguates the text, narrowing the reading from an *episodic* sequence of prophetic/eschatological events (“Seal of the Prophets” followed by “Divine Presence”) to a textual, qur'ānic sequence, i.e. of a pair verses descriptive of this same sequence. This makes perfect sense since the preposition “after” (*ba'd az*) can also mean “next.”

An attractive hypothesis (with strong evidence shy of conclusive proof) is that Bahā'ullāh intended this pair of verses, Q 33:40 and Q 33:44, to be read together. Indeed, the very next verse after the “Seal” verse that refers to the eschatological encounter with God is Q 33:44, which reads: “Their greeting the Day they meet Him will be, ‘Peace.’ And He has prepared for them a noble reward” (tr. Sahih International). A Shī'ī rendering is: “On the day when they will be brought into the presence of their Lord, their greeting to each other will be, ‘Peace be with you.’ God has prepared an honorable reward them” (tr. Muḥammad Sarwar).

Here, cognates of *liqā'* and *yawm* are found in Q 33:44. The Arabic word for “they will meet Him” is *yalqawnahu* (3rd person masculine plural imperfect verb, related to *liqā'*) and “Day” is *yawma* (accusative masculine noun). These terms correspond—conceptually as well as linguistically—to Bahā'ullāh's reference to “‘attainment unto the divine Presence’ in the ‘Day of Resurrection’” (*liqā' dar yawm-i qiyām*).

In 1974, the late Bahā'ī scholar and martyr, Kamāl al-Dīn Bakhtāvar (executed in Kashmar in Khurasan, Iran on 26 July 1981), in his *Risāla-yi Istimrār-i Zuhūrāt-i Ilāhiyya* (Tehran 1974), pp. 101–102, drew the very same connection between Q 33:40 and 33:44 that, in 1995, Buck

independently made in *Symbol and Secret* (pp. 194–98) (Bakhtāvar, *Risāla*, 101 (quoting Q 33:44a)–101 (quoting Bahā’ullāh, *Kitāb-i īqān*, Pars. 181–182/p. 112).

The juxtaposition—indeed, the pairing—not only of two concepts, but two pivotal verses—Q 33:40 and Q 33:44—has dramatic effect. Among Muslims worldwide, the importance of Q 33:40 is universally acknowledged. In the *Īqān*, Bahā’ullāh places Q 33:44 on a par with Q 33:40. Indeed, as paramount in prophetic history as the advent of Muḥammad as the “Seal of the Prophets” surely is, of even greater moment is the eschatological encounter with God, according to Bahā’ullāh’s interpretation/argument.

It now remains to be seen how Bahā’ullāh interprets Q 33:44 and parallels (adduced in par. 48 as Q 29:23, 2:46, 2:249, 18:110, 13:2). Arguing that direct beatific vision of God is impossible, Bahā’ullāh reasons that Q 33:44 anticipates a future theophany who, as *deus revelatus* and divine vicegerent, is symbolically God by proxy. Similarly, Bahā’ullāh, in an earlier Baghdad work, *Gems of divine mysteries (Jawāhir al-asrār)*, explains:

Know then that the paradise (*hadhihi al-janna*, lit. “this Garden”) that appeareth in the day of God (*yawm Allāh*) surpasseth every other paradise and excelleth the realities of Heaven (*ḥaqā’iq al-ridwān*). For when (*ba’d alladhī*, lit. “after”) God—blessed and glorified is He—sealed the station of prophethood (*maqām al-nubuwwa*) in the person of Him Who was His Friend (*ḥabībīhi*), His Chosen One (*ṣafīyyīhi*), and His Treasure (*khiyaratīhi*) amongst His creatures, as hath been revealed from the Kingdom of glory: “but He is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets” (Q 33:40), He promised all men that they shall attain unto His own presence in the Day of Resurrection (*wa’ada al-‘ibād bi-liqā’ihi yawm al-qiyāma*). In this He meant to emphasize the greatness of the Revelation to come, as it hath indeed been manifested through the power of truth. (Bahā’ullāh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, par. 58; id., *Jawāhir al-Asrār*, par. 58.)

Here, a greater “Revelation” is posited. Revelation is a concept familiar to all Muslims. Simply put, Bahā’ullāh, at some length in the *Īqān*, argues that the Qur’ān presages the advent of the Bāb as the “Promised One.” Of even greater moment is what Bahā’ullāh implies. The entire thesis of Buck’s monograph, *Symbol and Secret* (1995/2004), is that the primary

eschatological symbol in the *Īqān* is the Bāb, while, at the same time, a messianic “secret” pervades the *Īqān* as a subtext, charging the work with heightened eschatological tension, auguring Bahā’ullāh’s imminent declaration of his mission, to the discerning, whether before or after Bahā’ullāh’s prophetic mission commenced. By force of explicative logic, *Certitude*—arguably the world’s most-widely-read non-Muslim Qur’ānic commentary—served as an advance prophetic warrant for Bahā’ullāh’s proclaimed mission to unify the world.

Bahā’ullāh’s other Qur’ān commentaries include, *inter alia*, *Commentary on the mysterious* (lit. “disconnected”) *letters* (*Tafsīr-i ḥurūfāt-i muqatta‘a*; see [LETTERS AND MYSTERIOUS LETTERS](#)), which incorporates a discourse on the Light Verse (Q 24:35); *Commentary on “He is”* (*Tafsīr-i Hū[wa]*). As A. Eschraghi notes, Bahā’ullāh “initially engaged in esoteric and allegorical Qur’ānic exegesis” but, from the 1860s onwards, “the prominence of ‘Islamic’ topics clearly diminished in Bahā’ullāh’s writings as he works towards founding a new religion and introduces distinct doctrines” (*idem*, *Promised One*, 112). Moreover, Bahā’ullāh, while affirming the legitimacy of the Imamate in principle, criticizes the popular Shī‘ī belief in existence of a Twelfth Imam. Eschraghi notes that “it became patently clear that Bahā’ullāh did not believe in the Twelfth Imam’s continued presence” (referring to the Greater Occultation), yet “stopped short of explicitly denying his very existence” (*idem*, *Promised One*, 123). In roundly critiquing Twelver Shī‘ī Mahdī doctrines as impossible of literal fulfillment, Bahā’ullāh radically reinterpreted the Shī‘ī eschaton such that the “Bahā’ī Faith” is more aptly characterized as a “de-messianized” religion, rather than a “messianic movement” (*id.*, p. 134). (For a similar analysis, see C. Buck, *Bahā’ullāh as Zoroastrian Saviour*.)

Succeeding his father Bahā’ullāh on the latter’s passing in 1892, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā authored works of *tafsīr* as well, which provide both exoteric and esoteric commentaries. A good example is ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s *tafsīr* on the opening verses of sūra 30. Alive to the priority of spiritual over material realities, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā quickly addresses the exoteric meaning by acknowledging the standard commentary that these verses refer to the overthrow of the Byzantines in 614 CE by the Persian king Chosroes. Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahā gives nine esoteric, or mystical, interpretations in which he sets forth the stages of the soul in the Arc of Ascent (M. Momen, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s commentary on the Qur’ānic verses concerning the overthrow of the

Byzantines, *passim*). See also N. Alkan, “By the Fig and the Olive.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s commentary in Ottoman Turkish on the Qur’ānic sūra 95.

Since the works of the Bāb, Bahā’ullāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā constitute the corpus of Bahā’ī scriptures, the Qur’ān itself, while respected and revered by Bahā’īs worldwide (numbering some seven million, with Bahā’ī communities established in every country in the world except for North Korea and the Vatican City), does not occupy a central place in Bahā’ī doctrine and praxis. However, because of their positive disposition toward the Qur’ān and Muḥammad alike, Bahā’īs have long promoted a positive appreciation for the Book and Prophet *par excellence*. In this regard, Bahā’īs are natural allies of Muslims. A sad irony is that this view of common cause based on common ground is not always reciprocated. The Bahā’ī-Muslim encounter in Iran—the country where the Bābī and Bahā’ī religions originated—continues to be fraught with difficulty (due to ongoing persecution of the Bahā’īs as the largest non-Muslim religious minority in Iran), which topic is outside the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that Bahā’īs appreciate, and will continue to value, their historical and doctrinal Islamic heritage.

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Note: The following inventory of the Bāb's works of qur'ānic *tafsīr* is adapted (excluding the Bāb's commentaries on various *aḥadīth*) from N. Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart. Understanding the Writings of the Bāb*, Waterloo, ON, Canada 2008, pp. 408–9:

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